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From Consideration to Commitment: Art in Critical Confrontation to Society (Belgrade, Ljubljana, Skopje, Zagreb: 1990-2010)

The two decades that have passed since the last large exhibition of Yugoslav art (*Yugoslav Documents*, Sarajevo, 1989) have seen the breakup of the former federation and the formation of new states following the wars of the 1990s, followed by the initiation of the democratization, transition and European integration of the countries in the region. The devastating events of the last decade of the 20th century had direct and indirect impact on contemporary art and culture, having destroyed the shared environment and the exchange of experiences, as well as similarities and differences between members of several generations of artists. The consequences of this destruction can still be felt.

The specific features of the political, economic, social and cultural frame that followed the post-Yugoslav countries through their transition have led to the severing of the former ties between the capitals of the republics, and contacts, collaborations and exchanges have been reduced to sporadic exceptions. The interruption in communication, isolation and fear of influences from the East and West (depending on the geographic position of the cities) are dominant practices in most countries once assembled under the acronym SFRY. If we choose to neglect the uninterrupted links between the crime organizations and the fast-recovering relations between zealous entertainment workers, we find that contemporary artists and cultural workers from the independent cultural scene, in addition to activists, were the ones that did not recant the common past, and whose mutual interests were an indisputable fact. Despite being oriented towards the first neighbours, collaborations within this field have still not become part of systemic and continuous processes, due to the dominant closed-door policies. This has also influenced our awareness of the development of cultural and art scenes in surrounding. Unfortunately it is not that we are unfamiliar solely with events in neighbouring yards, since our local context also featured the absence of records and analyses, as well as critical reflections on cultural and artistic practices. The contemporary cultural and art scene (regardless of whether the subject is fine arts, theatre, film, music or any other art) has so far (considering the past 20 years) not been significantly processed, with few exceptions. This book is our small contribution to filling these gaps, at least in the field of contemporary visual art.

The book was created as part of the regional project *Let's Talk Critic Arts* which was initiated by the cultural portal **SEEcult.org** (the SEEcult.org Civic Association) from Serbia, in collaboration with the **Artservis.org** portal (SCCA, Center for Contemporary Arts – Ljubljana) from Slovenia, **ForrumomSkopje** from Macedonia, and the **Kulturpunkt.hr** portal (Alliance of Associations Clubture and Kurziv – Platform for Matters of Cultural, Media and Society) from Croatia, with support from the European Cultural Foundation (ECF). Through various forms of public events

the project reviewed critical practices in culture, art and media. In addition to roundtables and public interviews which were held in Belgrade, Ljubljana, Skopje and Zagreb, interviews and articles were published on the partner portals during the duration of the project. We conclude the project with this publication which explores practices of critical contemporary fine arts – practices of research, progressive and experimental actions by contemporary fine artists from the 1990s to the present, in four countries in the region – Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia. These are practices which focus on issues such as identity aspects (national, cultural, religious, ethnic), workers' rights, social integration of minorities, global market fluctuation trends and its impact in the local context, unscrupulousness of capital, the position of women, spatial devastation, art institution system issues, and many others.

The publication maps out and theoretically reviews critical and research practices, and contemporary fine arts practices oriented towards the contemporary civilization moment, which have been active in the context of the independent cultural scene since the 1990s, but which have also been present in the institutional frame. The authors provide only drafts of the political, social, economic and cultural changes of the local contexts, through four segments, due to a lack of space. Each segment focuses on the practices and context of a given country, i.e. the capital as the primary focus, and in addition to the introductory word by the authors, it includes interviews (with authors, theorists, curators, organizers...) who contribute to the recording of these artistic practices based on their experience, work and knowledge.

The segments deal with the Belgrade, Ljubljana, Skopje, and Zagreb scenes. All the authors devised their approaches in an effort to present the fruitful and creative production of these cities, to the greatest extent possible. The authors involved in the creation of this publication are **Jasna Jakšić**¹ (Croatia), **Nebojša Vilić** (Macedonia), **Vesna Tašić**² (Serbia), and **Miha Colner** and **Nika Grabar** (Slovenia). It is important to point out that the authors of the segments faced a gruelling task – how to tell the story of a period on only 50 pages (which was predefined for every segment), and how to select only four protagonists for every city, among the many protagonists of the art scene? The authors applied different criteria – they strived to select precisely those respondents who could provide a cross-section of the discipline development, some were selected because their work is a paradigmatic of critical and socially engaging practices, while some were inescapable authoritative and creative minds... We believe that in selecting 16 voices we provided a possible cross-section of the events in the contemporary fine arts scenes of Belgrade, Ljubljana, Skopje, and Zagreb from the 1990s to the present, but it is certainly not the final or only one. We discussed contemporary visual art through the works and experiences of **Igor Grubić**, **Sanja Iveković**, **Andreja Kulunčić** and **Darko Šimičić** (Croatia), **Stevan Vuković**, **Milica Tomić**, **Danilo Prnjat** and **Živko Grozdanić Gera** (Serbia), **Neven Korda**, **Marko Peljhan**, **Marija Mojca Pungerčar** and **Maja Smrekar** (Slovenia), and **Bojan Ivanov**, **Zoran Poposki**, **Mira Gakina** and **Žaneta Vangeli** (Macedonia).

We consider the publication to be a type of platform that we are making available to the public, with the wish to encourage further collecting and evaluation of art and cultural endeavours in the past 20 year in these four cities, as well as in those that could not be included in this project (for

¹ In collaboration with Tihana Bertek, Maja Gujinović, Ana Kovačić, Srđan Latrezom, Petar Novak, Tino Novak, Tamara Sertić and Leda Sutlović.

² In collaboration with Vesna Milosavljević and Mirosljub Marjanović.

financial reasons). The book was conceived as a multilingual publication in electronic form, so we present it in English, in addition to the local languages (Croatia, Macedonian, Serbian and Slovenian), as consider it important in order for the international public to have better insight into contemporary artistic practices in post-Yugoslav cities.

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