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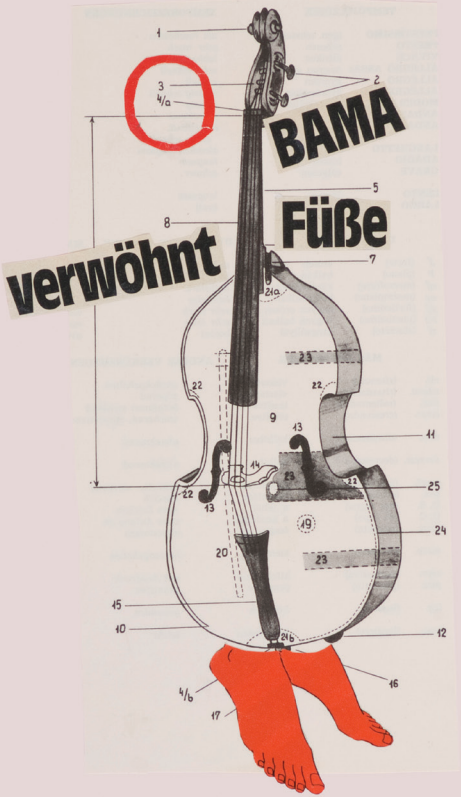

Monuments Should Not Be Trusted

Exhibition Notes

For More Information

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Cover image: Katalin Ladik, Pause in Revolutionary Work, 1979. Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest.

Monuments Should Not Be Trusted

16 January – 4 March 2016

Curated by Lina Džuverović

Built on the legacy of the anti-fascist partisan struggle, the "golden years" of President Tito's Yugoslavia held the promise of a more equal and prosperous society. Beginning in the early 1960s with the rise of consumerism and ending in the mid 1980s a few years after Tito's death, this exhibition illuminates the key contradictions of this single-party state.

The six nations of Tito's Yugoslavia maintained a peaceful co-existence during this period. Following the dispute with the Soviet Union's Joseph Stalin in 1948, Yugoslavia pursued a different route. In 1951, the country began to develop a general policy of "self-management" within a previously state-run economy, establishing workplace democracy and profit-sharing, yet immersed in a growing "utopian consumerism".

This period in the country was marked by a turn to conceptual art (also termed new art practice) particularly in the activities of artists operating around the newly opened Student Cultural Centres in Ljubljana,

Zagreb and Belgrade. There was also a proliferation of artists' moving image ranging from structural film-making to the emergence of black wave film, a movement known for its outspoken critique of the Yugoslav system. Simultaneously, many artists critiqued consumerism in Yugoslav society, creating a range of cross-media works, strongly influenced by hippy culture and pop music as well as pop art.

Four key themes in the exhibition address different aspects of the Yugoslav system through artistic voices "from below" that were rarely listened to at the time, often remaining under the radar. In many cases these voices were subsequently omitted from the history of Yugoslav art.

Artists and groups include: Marina Abramović, Zemira Alajbegović (Gledališče FV), Lutz Becker, August Černigoj, Goran Djordjević, Vera Fischer, Karpo Godina, Tomislav Gotovac, Sanja Iveković, Katalin Ladik, Lojze Logar, Dušan Makavejev, Goranka Matić, Slavko Matković, NSK/New Collectivism, OHO, Dušan Otasević, Zoran Popović, Bogdanka Poznanović, Mladen Stilinović, Sven Stilinović, Lazar Stojanović, Raša Todosijević, Milica Tomić, Goran Trbuljak, Želimir Žilnik.

Gallery 1: Utopian Consumerism and Subcultures

Young Yugoslavs in the 1960s were influenced by Western values. To an older generation who had been dedicated to building a new society, they seemed depoliticised and apathetic. Various subcultures – rock 'n' roll, beatnik, hippy and punk – were expressed in music, video, screen printing and collage, which appropriated popular culture, often humorously. This culminated in the emergence of Yugoslavia's new wave, the country's most definitive form of pop culture, also represented here in 80s music videos and TV programmes. Originally banned for its slogan "swallow LSD", Karpo Godina's psychedelic film The Gratinated Brains of Pupilija Ferkeverk, 1970, embraces hippy and drug culture, whilst the OHO group's experimental super-8 films, a selection of which are included here, use the music of the Rolling Stones or Cream to soundtrack their political content.

Art historian Branislav Dimitrijević has described "two parallel but conflicting forms of cultural logics" – the partisan asceticism inherited from the anti-fascist struggle and maintained in the rhetoric of the Yugoslav state, and "utopian consumerism" linked to modernisation and the idea of progress so central to the Yugoslav project.

The rapid proliferation and embrace of consumerism, glamour and pop culture contrasts with the D.I.Y. approach of the country's conceptual artists and punk rockers who explored the democratising potential of art, striving to apply principles of "self-management" to culture. The artists often chose to distribute their work in cheap and accessible ways through magazines and postcards. The OHO group printed matchboxes with images of The Rolling Stones and The Beatles referencing the fickle nature of consumerism, whilst Slavko Matković's Mail Art Sanduk (Mail Art Box), 1981, is an ironic gesture of artistic nomadism. In the Schwitters-like collages of Tomislav Gotovac, the debris of excessive consumer culture is meticulously ordered into compositions of stamps, cigarette boxes, receipts, and chocolate wrappers.

OHO/Marko Pogaćnik, Beatles matchboxes, 1968. Marinko Sudac Collection

Gallery 2: Comradess Superwoman

Shortly after the formation of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia in 1945, the Government proclaimed that the women's question had been solved. Whilst legislation was passed proclaiming equal rights to education, work and equal pay, little was done to challenge the deep-set patriarchy in the private sphere. Yugoslav women found themselves negotiating between the "public patriarchy" (the state) and "private patriarchy" (the family). Katalin Ladik's collages March for a Partisan Woman, 1979 and Pause in Revolutionary Work, 1979, address the expectations placed upon women to remain primary carers and home-makers whilst simultaneously having a strong presence in the workplace and taking an active role in the rebuilding of the country after WWII.

The proliferation of tabloid magazines, film and advertising meant that women had a new role – the sex symbol. Pinups and the nude female body became ubiquitous in the Yugoslav media. Playing with the boundaries of acceptability and the remaining taboos in the increasingly liberal Yugoslavia, Tomislav Gotovac often appeared naked in his photographic and performance works. He regarded male nudity as an equalising force and part of the genuine liberalisation of art.

Deep-set patriarchy permeated even artistic spheres. It was not until the early 1970s that feminist art authored by female artists began to emerge with Sanja Ivekovic's video and photomontage works. In her Tragedy of a Venus, 1975-76, paparazzi photographs of Marilyn Monroe are paired with the artist's staged self-portraits mimicking Marilyn's poses. Here Iveković emphasises mass-cultural stereotypes imposed on women. Iveković found common cause with feminist artists internationally, but not for many years in her home country.

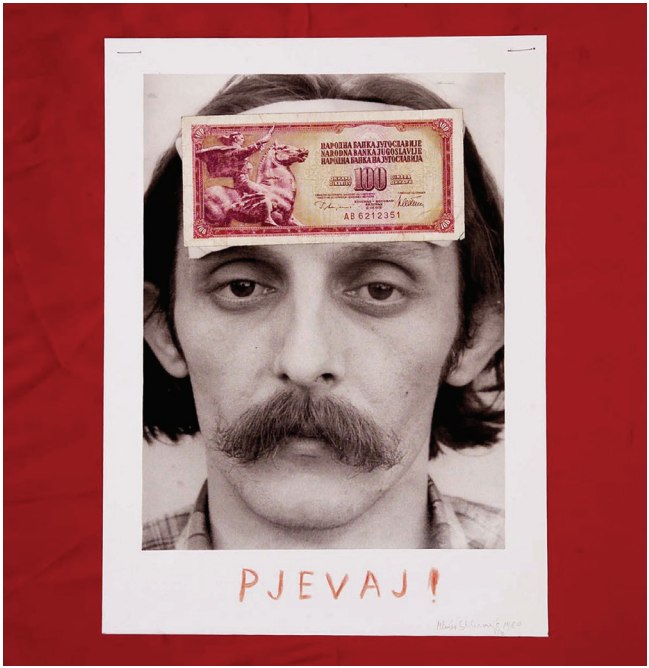
Sanja Iveković, Personal Cuts, 1982. Image courtesy of the Artist and Espaivisor Gallery

Gallery 3: Socialism and Class Difference

By the late 1960s Yugoslavia had high levels of unemployment and rising inequality. Whilst the system did provide free healthcare, education, housing and even company-sponsored holidays for the employees of its self-managed enterprises and their families, by the mid-1960s economic inequalities between the ruling elite and ordinary citizens had become obvious, as had the economic differences between rural and urban areas. Želimir Žilnik's documentary film Newsreel on Village Youth, in Winter, 1967, points to the realities of unemployment and poverty in rural areas.

The fact that Yugoslav citizens were able to travel visa-free to most countries were privileges that were beyond the reach of most citizens. Critical voices began to emerge amongst artists and intellectuals whose works criticized the Yugoslav system. Best understood from the perspective of his anarchist views, works by Mladen Stilinović in this gallery address the role of the artist and the value of labour under the Yugoslav "self-managed" socialist system. In his ironic text-based work, An Attack on My Art Is an Attack on Socialism and Progress, 1977, Stilinović points to the discrepancies between the rhetoric of socialist ideology and the place of art in Yugoslav society by paraphrasing a common political slogan.

During the student protests in Yugoslavia's larger cities in 1968, one of the key reasons for dissatisfaction was the League of Communists (since 1952 the new name for the Communist Party) failure to embrace culture as a central element in the creation of socialism. Instead, it was relegated to an illustrative role. Politically engaged students, including those studying at the art academies, felt sidelined and misunderstood.



Mladen Stilinović, Sing, 1980. Courtesy of the artist, Zagreb

Students took to the streets chanting slogans such as “down with the red bourgeoisie”, in reference to the lavish lifestyles enjoyed by the political elite, who were seen to have betrayed the original promises of an egalitarian society. The demand for culture to be accessible to all resulted in the creation of Student Cultural Centres in Yugoslavia’s larger cities, galvanising a generation fuelled by a genuine belief in the emancipatory potential of art as an agent of social change. Lutz Becker’s, Kino Beleške (Film Notes) focuses on a group of artists in Belgrade’s Student Cultural Centre. The Centre was also the site of Marina Abramović’s first performance Rhythm 5, included here in the form of photographic documentation.

Throughout the 1970s the idea of brotherhood and unity amongst Yugoslav people began to dissipate. On 4 May 1980 President Tito died. In 1981 problems in the Serbian province of Kosovo began to emerge, spelling out the beginning of the end of the Yugoslav experiment that resulted in the bloody wars of the early to mid 1990s.

Gallery 4: Public Space and the Presence of Tito

Referring to the 1970s, Sanja Iveković has said that "self-censorship was the most powerful institution in our socialism...those who were active on the countercultural scene at the time took the socialist project far more seriously than the cynical governing political elite". Iveković addresses this directly in Triangle, which documents an eighteen-minute performance from May 10, 1979, in which Iveković simulates masturbation as the President's limousine and motorcade pass below her apartment balcony. Knowing the surveillance teams on the surrounding roofs would detect her, Iveković's act of political dissidence called into question personal freedom under the Yugoslav system.

The relationship of artistic practice to power, ideology and the state apparatus was expressed in a wide range of individual positions. Sven Stilinović's critical, anarchic approach can be seen in his series of subversive collages entitled Flag, 1980-85, which reconstruct the Yugoslav flag from a range of materials associated with pain and discomfort, testing how far criticism of the establishment could go without provoking repercussions. Strong criticism of the state is also apparent in Lazar Stojanović's infamous Plastic Jesus, 1971, best known as the work that led to the demise of black wave film due to Stojanović's arrest. The film features artist Tomislav Gotovac in the leading role as a bearded anarchist film maker. In perhaps the most famous scene, Gotovac

runs naked down a street in Belgrade shouting “I am innocent!”. The film’s comparison of Titoism with Stalinism resulted in its censorship until 1990.

The situation was further complicated by Yugoslav people’s complex emotional relationship to President Tito. In many cases artists were reluctant to directly depict or critique the President, or the political system, in their work. A set of unarticulated rules dictated the acceptable boundaries. An instinctive sense of “just knowing” where to draw the line functioned better than any form of direct censorship. In effect censorship “from above” was replaced by censorship “from within”.

Sven Stilinović, Flag, 1984/85. Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb

Tito's mythology was endlessly proliferated through mass spectacles that aimed to affirm Yugoslav people's appreciation, gratitude and respect for his achievements. Known as a charismatic leader with a taste for the finer things in life, it was not unusual to see Tito's image gracing the cover of Time or Life magazines between the late 1940s and 1970s. His public image was carefully cultivated to present him as a sophisticated connoisseur with a cultural and leisure life not unlike that of his Western counterparts.

The many thousands of gifts sent to him were an orchestrated form of appreciation and devotion. Objects from the collection of late President Tito include gifts made by factory workers or ceremonial relay batons that were carried across the country for Tito's birthdays. All these artefacts contributed to the cult of personality of the President.

The title of the exhibition is taken from a work by filmmaker Dušan Makavejev.

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New Collectivism. Youth Day poster. 1987. Courtesy of New Collectivism.