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May 12 – Aug. 13, 2011:

Kontakt:

Conceptual Art from
Ex-Yugoslavia

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Audain Gallery

SFU WOODWARD'S

Talk by Walter Seidl: **May 11, 6pm** Opening: **Month 11, 8pm**

Walter Benjamin
Gorgona
Sanja Iveković
Katalin Ladik
Kazimir Malevič
Neša Paripović
Raša Todosijević

The Audain Gallery serves as a vital aspect of the Visual Arts program at Simon Fraser University's School for the Contemporary Arts. Its mission is to advance the aesthetic and discursive production and presentation of contemporary visual art through a responsive program of exhibitions in support of engaged pedagogy.

The Audain Gallery encourages conceptual and experimental projects that explore the dialogue between the social and the cultural in contemporary artistic practices.

The Audain Visual Artists in Residence Program and student exhibitions are central to the gallery's programming. The Audain Gallery is curated by Sabine Bitter, working with Gallery Assistant Heidi Meixner.

Thanks to volunteers Vikram Uchida-Khanna and Lórin Vass.

Without the generous support from *Kontakt, The Art Collection of Erste Group*, this exhibition would not have been possible. Thanks go to Christine Böhler, chairwoman of the board; Walter Seidl, curator; and Karolina Radenković, curatorial assistance.

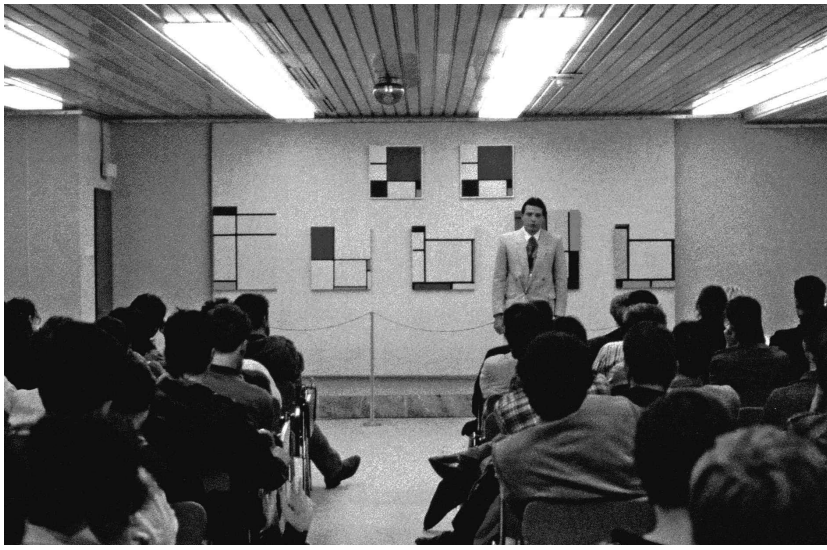
www.kontakt-collection.net

Kontakt: Conceptual Art from Ex-Yugoslavia **Works from the collection of Erste Group, Vienna**

Curated by Walter Seidl and Sabine Bitter

This exhibition gathers works from some of the most important representatives of Yugoslavian conceptual art, which developed in the late 1950s, first on the level of performance, printed matter, and photography. In the 1970s, video was added as a means to document performative gestures and also to question the meta-structures of this device for technical image (re)production. Video's intrinsic quality and the recognition of Vancouver as an important early site for conceptual art practices, led Croatian artist Sanja Iveković to realize the performance *Meeting Points* at Vancouver's Western Front in 1979. This work marks the international connections of conceptualism at a time when political borders hindered mutual artistic exchange. Hence, our presentation at the Audain Gallery showcases conceptual art from the former Yugoslavia that take up performative and conceptual strategies that developed alongside geopolitical restraints. Locating the art of the former socialist countries within an international art context draws attention to not only their wide set of practices, but also the dynamic reciprocal connections and dialogues from which these practices sprung. One major aim of the *Kontakt* collection is also to reflect on forms of conceptual art production within Europe's changing political geographies. Indeed, the changing parameters of time and space particularly made the artists of the 1970s precursors of the political changes yet to come. Without pointing only to phenomena in Eastern Europe, the exhibition reflects the transformed political geographies and the international emergence of conceptual and actionist tendencies that have been developing simultaneously since the late 1960s.

One of the most striking works of art from former Yugoslavia that takes up the transnational notion of art is Raša Todosijević's *Was ist Kunst? (What is Art?)* from 1976/78. The choice of a Serbian artist to use the German language clearly confronts viewers with questions about Western artistic values and critiques narrow notions of the international canon of art. At this year's Venice Biennale, where Todosijević's work will be installed as the representative of Serbia, the Pavilion still declares, in large letters: Yugoslavia.



Walter Benjamin
Mondrian '63 - '96

The name I took for this conversation relates to the well-known early 20th century philosopher, but it also relates to the Walter Benjamin who gave a lecture in Ljubljana in 1986 titled *Mondrian '63-'96*—a lecture about Mondrian's paintings from between 1963-1996. It is the same Benjamin whose statement “Copies are memories” is being used as a motto for the *Americans 64* exhibit at the Arsenale in Venice (in 2005). From the territory of certainty you enter the territory of uncertainty, and a familiar landscape is not familiar any more. The notion of the modern is somehow associated with the notion of frontier. Modern means looking outward. It is about pushing the boundaries, turning the unknown into the known in the process. You have something you call “known” as a place where you feel good and safe. And then you have the “unknown” as

some kind of dark and dangerous place on the other side of the border. The entire era of modernism could be understood as a process of pushing the boundaries and broadening the territory of brightness by turning this “unknown” into a “known.”

Excerpts from an interview in the catalogue, *What is Modern Art? (Group Show)*, ed. Inke Arns and Walter Benjamin, Revolver-Archiv für aktuelle Kunst, Frankfurt am Main, 2006.

Still, *Mondrian '63 - '96*, 1987, Colour video with sound, 20 min.



The Gorgona Group
Anti-magazine No. 1-11

Consisting of artists and art historians, the Gorgona Group operated along the lines of anti-art in Zagreb between 1959 and 1966. Beside individual works linked to traditional techniques, the members proposed different concepts and forms of artistic communication, ran a gallery, and published the anti-magazine *Gorgona*. Their interest in existentialism and Neo-Dadaism, and also in Reductionism and Zen philosophy, resulted in activities that surpassed the boundaries of the period's artistic media. The anti-magazine *Gorgona* was one such breakthrough. Simply and unobtrusively designed, with works dictated by the form of the magazine, *Gorgona* contained information about artworks that were primary and not secondary. Each number featured the work of only one artist and was itself a work of art realized in the print medium. By repeating the

same photo of an empty shop window, Josip Vaništa emphasized plainness, monotony, and irony in relation to expected reception. On a single page of the magazine, he printed a reproduction of the *Mona Lisa* (No. 6, 1961), thus raising a critical and analytical question regarding the meaning of reproducing a work of art.

Detail, *anti-magazine Gorgona No.1-11*, 1961-1966, Screenprint on paper, glued, cover, 21 x 19.4 cm.



Sanja Iveković

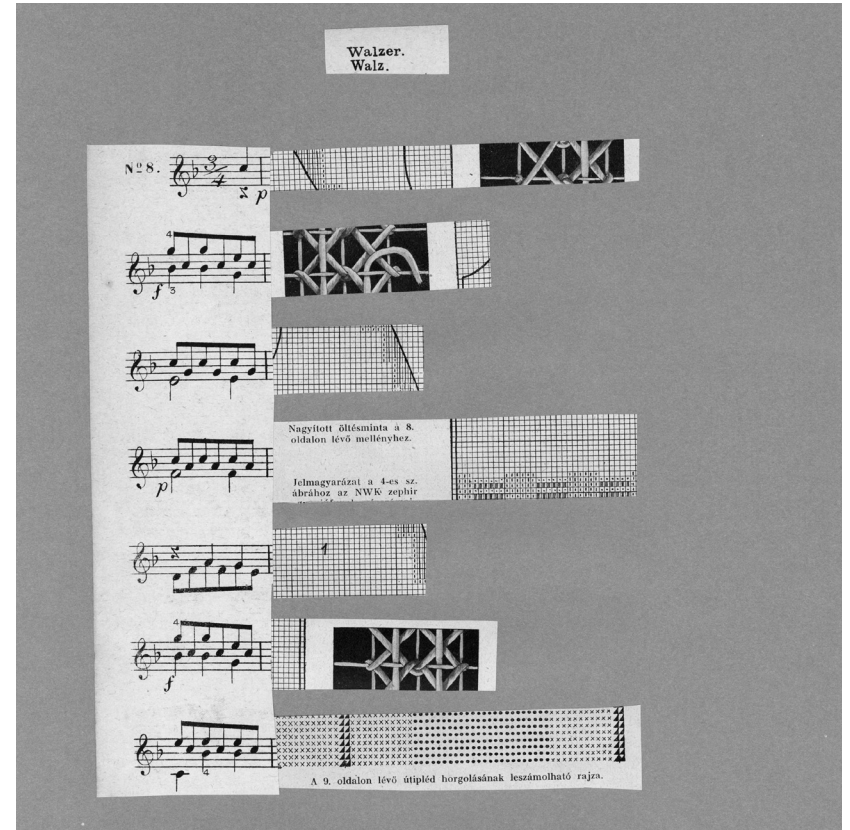
Sanja Iveković began her artistic career in Croatia in the 1970's, just after the emergence of the so-called "New Art Practice," a movement within the context of former Yugoslavia via that embodied various localized radical forms of new art occurring after 1968. She uses photography, performance, video, installation, and actions to probe the ideological apparatus of public space and the politics of the image. As one of the first explicitly feminist Croatian artists, Sanja Iveković's work has been concerned with the social and political aspects of women's place in society.

Triangle (1979) employs a strategy of activism in the form of civil disobedience during a parade in honour of President Tito in Zagreb. In this act of elicitation, the artist assumes a position on her balcony where she sits, sips whisky and simulates masturba-

tion; the performance ends when a policeman rings her doorbell.

The exhibition also features *Meeting Points*, a work produced in Vancouver during a residency at the Western Front in 1979. The performance, that took place over the course of two days, is a planned movement through the gallery space, once while the space is empty and again while an audience is present. By exposing the demarcated path, the artist invites interaction and interruption to her set route through the space.

Still, *Meeting Points*, 1979, B&W Video with sound, 6 min. 6 sec.



Katalin Ladik

Katalin Ladik explores language through visual, auditory, and gesticular models, with her works ranging from collages, photography, records, performances, and happenings in the city and in nature. Collages in her *Ausgewählte Volkslieder* (1973-1975) collection are visual poetry composed of letters, music paper, sewing pattern paper, and clippings from women's magazines, which also serve as the score for her sound poetry for which she is most famous. Since the 1970s she has given numerous performances, most of which are musical poetry events with an empha-

sized feminist perspective. In her 1975 performance *Umetnost razmenne-umetnost promene* (*Change Art*), the artist and her audience exchanged objects, ideas, stories, and—since she is involved in avant-garde music—songs.

Detail, *Ausgewählte Volkslieder*, 1973-1975, 10 collages on paper, 34 x 24 cm.

Kazimir Malevich

A Letter from Kazimir Malevich

I remember that cold and snowy winter in Petrograd in 1915 as if it were yesterday. Everything was in motion. It was a time of great hopes, enthusiasm, optimism, Futurism, and, of course, Revolution. You could even smell it in the cold Russian air. The end of the great century... the new age... huge and cold building at Marsovo Pole (Champ de mars) no.7... The Last Futurist Exhibition 0.10... no heating... Puni running around always asking for nails... Kliun quite nervous, like a bridegroom before the wedding. I must admit I didn't have any previous plan for my, as you now say, "installation." It was purely accidental. I only knew that the Black Square must be in the top corner. Ev-

erythings else was irrelevant. While I was hanging my small Suprematist paintings here and there, it didn't occur to me that the photo of this installation would become so famous and be published in hundreds of books and reviews. And today, one of my colleagues has even "quoted" it in his work! I don't remember now who actually took this picture, but it is just a photo, black and white. No colours! I have an impression that this photo is becoming even more important than my Suprematist paintings! This was the major reason I kept on thinking for years to do the same exhibition again.

Still, *Meeting Points*, 1979, B&W Video with sound, 6 min. 6 sec.



Neša Paripović

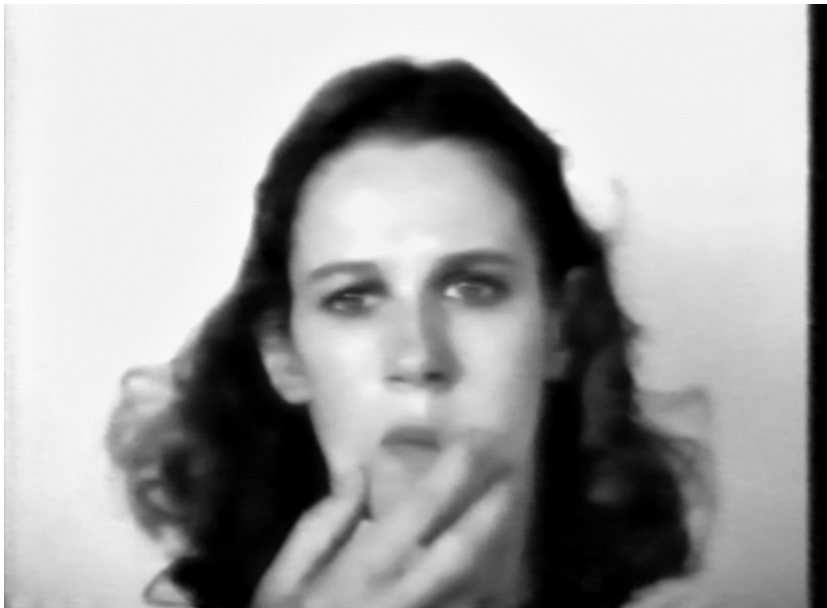
N.P.77

Since the beginning of the 1970's, Neša Paripović has been developing a metavisual language concerning the nature of art and the status of the artist. From a practice in painting, he has developed a specific form of conceptual art in which he applies strategies of deconstruction while working with photography, posters, language works, films, and videos. In these different media he problematizes the life of the artist whose activity consists of documenting and interpreting his or her own existence and behaviour, thus leaving the border between art and life indistinct.

In the mid-1970s, Paripović produced three films using the generic title N.P. (his initials). In the second film from this series, *N.P.77*, the camera follows the artist as he wanders through Belgrade, following an invisible, idiosyncratic path that appears to have been determined at random. The artist,

dressed in a two-piece suit, crosses fences, scales and climbs down walls, nonchalantly smokes a cigarette, and jumps from one roof to another as he cuts across the urban grid, all the while enacting a form of civil disobedience that locates artistic acts within the everyday.

Still, *N.P.77*, 1977, Colour video with sound, 25 min.



Raša Todosijević

Was ist Kunst? (What is Art?) is the title of a series of performances by Raša Todosijević held in the period between 1976 and 1981 in various settings. In the two video versions we only see a silent woman and hear the artist's husky powerful voice whispering, shouting, screaming, pleading, begging, asking the same question over and over again. The literal meaning of the question *What is Art?* is confronted with the absence of its performative impact through automatic repetitions: the indefinite recurrence of the same question which stands for an (elocutionary) verbal act related to the question.

Since there's no response about what art is, we become aware that the idea of the performance lies in the inversion of power relations within the art system. If the semantics of a speech

act includes part of its pragmatics, then Todosijević's aim is to empower the speech position of an artist who claims power to control his own discourse, depriving the art system of its authority to define art.

Common to the work of Raša Todosijević, which is frequently provocative and aggressive, is a persistent and uncompromising position that encompasses performance, video, installation, and painting as a means of provoking and questioning the structure and ideological function of both art and society in general.

Still, *Was ist Kunst, Marinela Kozelj?*, 1978, Colour video with sound, 16 min. 20 sec.

Biographies

Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) was a German-Jewish intellectual who has made enduring contributions as a literary critic, philosopher, sociologist, translator, and essayist. Many years after his tragic death, he reappeared in Ljubljana in 1986 to give the lecture *Mondrian '63 - '96*. Subsequent activities include publishing a theses, giving interviews, and co-curating the exhibition *What is Modern Art?* at the Kunsthau Bethanien in Berlin (2006).

The **Gorgona Group** was active in Zagreb between 1959 and 1966. Conjoined by a search for intellectual and artistic freedom, members included Dimitrije Bašičević Mangelos, Miljenko Horvat, Marijan Jevšovar, Julije Knifer, Ivan Kožarić, Matko Meštrović, Radoslav Putar, Đuro Seder, Josip Vaništa. Influenced by oriental philosophy, Yves Klein's transcendental monochromes, the music of John Cage and the Fluxus movement, the group embraced the absurd and used monotony and emptiness as aesthetic strategies. Activities included exhibitions at Studio G, Zagreb, the anti-magazine *Gorgona*, and projects such as arranged walks, discussions and intellectual games.

Sanja Iveković was born in 1949 in Zagreb, Croatia where she attended the Academy of Fine Arts between 1968 and 1971. Since the 1970s she has worked in a variety of media ranging from photography, performance, video, instillation, and actions in the public domain. Her work has been exhibited at Documenta (1987, 2002, 2007), the Tate Modern (2005), the Secession Vienna (2005) and the Gwangju Biennale (2010). From 1999-2001 she was teaching Contemporary Women's Art Practice at the Centre for Women's Studies. She is a founder of Electra Women's Art Centre in Zagreb, where she lives and works.

Katalin Ladik is an actor, author, and a member of the Bosch & Bosch Group, which was active in Subotica from 1969 to 1976. Ladik was born in Novi Sad, Serbia in 1942 and has lived in Budapest since 1992. In addition to a number of books in Hungarian, her poetry has been published in Serbia, France, Italy, and in the USA. Recent exhibitions include at the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Bracelona (2009); the Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna (2010); and the Zachęta National Gallery, Warsaw (2010). In 2009 Ladik received the National Award for Culture of the Republic of Serbia.

Kazimir Malevich (1879-1935) was a prominent Russian painter and art theoretician, the founder of Suprematism, one of the key movements of the modernist avant-garde. Exhibitions since 1985 have taken place at the New Museum in New York (1994), the Kunsthau Dresden (2004), the Sydney Biennale (2002), and the Venice Biennale (2003).

Neša Paripović was born in 1942 in Belgrade, Serbia. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade and in Zagreb and participated in conceptualist groups. Following an engagement in geometric abstract painting in the early 1970s, his enduring interest has been deconstructing the identity of the artist, a process that continues in his current work, which focuses on the site of the body, painting, sound, and architecture. Often mentioned as one of the key protagonists of conceptual art in Serbia, he has exhibited at Centre Pompidou, Paris (2010) and the American University Museum, Washington, DC (2009).

Raša Todosijević was born in 1945 in Belgrade, Serbia where he studied at the Academy of Fine Arts. He lives in Belgrade and is an important member of its conceptual art scene. His practice involves research in diverse media, including performances, actions, video, three-dimensional installations, and a consideration of the medium and practice of painting. His work enacts political and social criticism through a questioning and examination of art and cultural systems. Todosijević has exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art Belgrade (2002), the Łódź Biennale (2004), and is representing Serbia at the 2011 Venice Biennale.



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