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No one seems to believe in some universal museum model anymore.

Museums are supposed to be spaces of difference and have an active role in their social environment. In this way they are to replace the museum model with virtually identical art collections and a universal history.

As we began to speak about the decentralization of the art world, two things happened: the art of the marginalized spaces gained some degree of visibility, which indeed led to the decentralization of the world in this sense, and on the other hand, this decentralization turned out to be merely a global distribution of already prevalent cultural models. The Guggenheim chain is the most blatant example of this type of museum decentralization.

The MacDonaldisation of museums is unquestionably problematic. No serious critical reflection could possibly support it. Let us nonetheless assume the role of the devil's advocate and say a few words in defence of this museum type.

Formerly, artworks from all over the world built up museum collections in the capitals of the Western world; nowadays, these same museums have begun to relocate some of the content of their overflowing storage facilities to other parts of the world. Thus the Guggenheim has apparently expressed an interest in opening its "branch-office" museums in certain Eastern European countries. In this way attractive museums, collections of works by renowned international artists, and international museum standards are slowly making their way into a world where there still predominate dusty museums with collections of national art. And in case there already exist in such countries institutions busy developing a museum model that is better suited to its environment and the present time, a spectacular museum like a Guggenheim can only add to the diversity of the cultural "supply." Last but not least, no matter how problematic the type of the distribution of Western art is, it nonetheless boosts the migration of art in the opposite direction. And this does contribute to a better intercultural dialogue.

Things seem to be taking a turn for the better: art from the other spaces seems to be becoming more visible and more justly and proportionately represented in important exhibitions, collections, and publications. But even while this is at least in part true, the same cannot be said of the models of distribution and presentation of art. The re-drawing of the map of the world of art seems to resemble franchising rather than decentralization.

In the following I will try to outline in what ways we, at the Moderna galerija in Ljubljana, endeavour to pursue what I call the "authentic museum interest." Under authentic interest I do not mean loyalty to one's own space in accordance with some tradition, but actively changing one's space towards its greater international integration. Such activities require a preliminary identification of priority tasks. One of our priorities is to become the subject in creating our own history of art within the broader Eastern European context. This includes developing a model for the distribution of art and for organizing it within the global exchange in a way that is better suited to our particular situation. We do not wish to automatically adopt the models of the so-called developed world; we think it is essential to think in terms of our past experience.

For this reason I would like to start by saying a few words about the Slovene cultural policy and its history in the time of socialism. This will be followed by a brief presentation of some of Moderna galerija's major projects that have focused on historicizing the art of Eastern Europe, and in the end I will try to outline why it is necessary to develop new models of international cooperation and international solidarity.

Today's leftist-oriented museum curators like to emphasize content that is very close to what was demanded by socialism in its cultural policies. Thus we find it surprising that, given today's interest in the art of Eastern Europe, there is not also more of an interest in this art's cultural and political background.

But Eastern Europeans themselves are the most at fault when it comes to amnesia about the socialist experience. All the more welcome, then, are initiatives between individual artists and curators in Eastern Europe who, in one way or another, are revisiting such topics. There are two primary reasons for this: the first can be found in the increasing pressures of neo-liberal capitalism (which has assumed an especially "wild" form in a number of Eastern European countries), while the second reason arises from the continued growth of the right in Eastern European politics, with a number of politicians going so far as to equate communism with Nazism.

I started working at the Moderna galerija at a time when socialism was nearing its end. It seems to me worth highlighting some of the main concerns of Yugoslav cultural policy, particularly ones that present comparisons with today's thinking about the more socially progressive role of the museum. Let me mention some of the content of this cultural policy. Its declarative goals built upon the role of the individual in society, which meant that it stressed the importance of including culture in the entire socio-economic development and of transforming citizens from passive users into active co-creators of culture. In Yugoslav cultural-policy documents from the 1950s, what we find is, primarily, an emphasis on the educative function of culture rather than on its artistic function. Anti-bourgeois perspectives were aimed at satisfying the cultural needs of all levels of the population. Yugoslavia's cultural policy continually stressed the importance of education, learning and culture in terms of the brotherhood and unity of equal nations and nationalities as well as socialist internationalism.

If only for the sake of historical memory, we should compare these principles with present-day Slovene cultural policy, which, by the way, is increasingly in line with the European Union. Politicians today primarily underscore the need for Slovene culture to continually affirm itself vis-à-vis with the great cultures of the EU. In the current Slovene constitution there is much less written about science and the arts than there was in the socialist constitution – all we find are assurances about scientific and artistic freedom and the protection of authorship and other rights arising from these activities. With regard to nationalities, it is stated that everyone has the right to freely express his or her own nationality, ethnicity, or community affiliation, and there is also a prohibition against encouraging national, ethnic, racial, religious or other forms of inequality and intolerance. Although both the socialist principles and those of present-day Slovenia are generally beneficial and, for the most part, humanistic, there is nevertheless a certain essential difference, which, I believe, should be noted particularly in this context – namely, socialist views built upon the idea of connecting people, whereas present-day views are based more on the protection of rights and identities. Potential threats and the need for competitiveness are given priority over co-operation and solidarity among people. International integration, whether on a global level or within the EU, aims primarily at economic partnerships and not, for example, at solidarity, which was the basis of the socialist idea of internationalism. While in no way do I wish to suggest that international solidarity has evaporated, we can say it has become increasingly systematized and standardized in systems of social assistance and, indeed, in cultural programs that, at least indirectly, express the interests of capital. I do not wish to trivialize the importance and

effectiveness of such forms of solidarity, but we must ask ourselves: to what extent are we still capable of self-initiated and self-organized solidarity?

The authentic interest of spaces that are only beginning to engage in more intensive communication with the world is, in my view, the very opposite of nationalism or economic or political dominance; it is, in fact, quite close to the conditions that enable equal dialogue with the rest of the world. One of these conditions is the symbolic capital that a particular space can offer in the global exchange of ideas. This symbolic capital may be a certain cultural tradition or local knowledge, which would also include, not least of all, the development of a specific model of the museum. The work we have been doing at the Moderna galerija represents an attempt to establish an authentic interest that resides not only in defining an artistic tradition but also in searching for new systems of knowledge that existing standardized forms of knowledge and cultural politics are unable to absorb.

When a museum attempts to define its local context, it must necessarily contend with the interests of local politics. Having managed to define our authentic interest rather clearly in the 1990s, we at the Moderna discovered that this could have a number of unpleasant consequences. When the museum's interest expanded to include all of Eastern Europe and there emerged a dire need to create a history of Eastern European neo-avant-garde art, a number of very serious problems appeared. These were connected not only with the problematic communist past but also with our rather binding and definite understanding of what is contemporary – which did not please those who advocated the strong modernist and politically influential line of Slovene art historians. What seemed problematic was the fact that, through various projects, we were presenting the neo-avant-garde tradition as the most relevant tradition of contemporary art, while at the same time we argued that this line offered us the best way to uncover the wider socio-political context of Eastern Europe.

The first major project we undertook in this regard was the 1998 exhibition *Body and the East*, which was dedicated to body art from all over Eastern Europe from the 1960s to the present. Next came our Arteast Collection 2000+, which is concerned, primarily, with the Eastern European conceptual tradition and different forms of neo-avant-garde art, from the 1960s to the present. Founded in 2000, this was, in general, the first-ever collection of Eastern European neo-avant-garde art. It was followed by our Arteast Exhibitions, a series of projects linked to the collection through their context and content. Conversely, our Arteast Exhibitions series systematically researches the artistic traditions and specificities of Eastern Europe, which makes its close bonds with the museum Arteast Collection 2000+ so important. The Arteast Collection 2000+ is one of the few collections of Eastern European art, and as such, a rare opportunity for contemporary Eastern European art to establish direct links with its neo-avant-garde traditions. All our exhibitions from the Arteast series focus on contemporary art, but they also try to define the symbolic capital accumulated over the course of time.

So far, there have been four exhibitions in this series. The first was *Form-Specific* in 2003, which sought to synthesize the experience of high modernism, with its striving for pure, autonomous form, and post-conceptual art, with its determination by a specific experience of time and space. The exhibition brought together, on the one hand, works by historical form-specific artists, demonstrating in retrospect that modern art has never really possessed a universal character, and, on the other hand, works by contemporary artists who internalised this fact and built upon the decayed myth of universal form in order to establish its limitations within various contemporary and historical contexts.

The second Arteast Exhibition was *7 Sins: Ljubljana–Moscow*, in 2004, which was curated by Viktor Misiano from Moscow and Igor Zabel and myself from Ljubljana. It presented the “seven sins” that are, supposedly, typical for Eastern Europe and therefore common to both

Russian and Slovene artists. These “sins” are *Collectivism, Utopianism, Masochism, Cynicism, Laziness, Unprofessionalism, and Love for the West*. Although from an outside, presumably Western, point of view, these tendencies are often understood as weaknesses and imperfections, they can also be seen as “virtues”, qualities that Slavic and other Eastern European countries can bring to European culture to make it richer and more diverse. Utopianism, for instance, can serve as an antidote to pragmatism, stressing the dimension of hope and future perspectives; laziness gives artists time to concentrate on themselves and the questions that obsess them; while because Eastern European artists are in many cases not “true professionals”, they are free to genuinely love what they do; etc.

The third project in the series was *Interrupted Histories*, which took place in the spring of 2006. It focused on the issue of self-historicizing, that is, the need for artists to create their own histories, which is something that artists from Eastern Europe have generally had to deal with. Many Eastern European artists today are attempting to reconnect with their interrupted artistic traditions and seek meaningful links between their work and the social and political context of their localities, as well as international connections. Because they have for so long lacked a suitable collective history, Eastern European artists have been forced to search for their own historical and interpretive contexts. Because in the past the local institutions that should have been systematizing neo-avant-garde art and its traditions either did not exist or were disdainful of such work, the artists themselves have had to become their own art historians and archivists – a situation that in some places still exists even today. Among other things, this show presented a series of artists’ archives, which provided considerable insight into the history of neo-avant-garde art and the conditions of its production in various Eastern European countries. One of these archives, for example, was that of the Polish artist Zofia Kulik. Reaching back to the early 1970s, it documents the history of Poland’s unofficial, underground art. Along with her partner, Przemysław Kwiek, Kulik managed to preserve evidence of an important segment of Polish art that had been relegated to the margins by the official art establishment.

Then there was the Artpool archive of Hungarian art, which György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay have been assembling since 1970. Since the early 1970s they have sought ways to create and present (mainly in Galántai’s studio) new forms of art, such as conceptual art, mail art, visual poetry, kinetic art, land art, actions and happenings, all things that could not be shown in Hungary’s official art venues of the time.

In Romania, meanwhile, Lia Perjovschi has been building her Contemporary Art Archive/Centre for Art Analysis ever since 1985. At our exhibition, she appeared as a detective searching the exhibited materials and documents for meanings, seeking out hidden and lost ideas, works and artists from local, regional and international histories of culture and art.

The Slovene group Irwin has been developing its project *East Art Map* since 2003. Its purpose is to connect artists from throughout Eastern Europe in a unified scheme, lifting them out of their national contexts. For this project, Irwin has produced, among other things, an interactive website presenting over fifty years of Eastern European art history, an exhibition of Eastern European art from 1950 to 1970, a symposium on the project, and a large book entitled *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*.

The most recent exhibition in the series was *Arteast Collection 2000+23*, which took place in the fall of 2006. This is also the only one of the group that was focused on the future. We invited the collaboration of nearly fifty artists, all of whom had at some time or another been written about in the journal *Maska* over its past 100 issues. This journal, which is one of the most active participants in the contemporary Slovene art scene, brings together various

contemporary art practices, from contemporary theatre and dance to the visual arts. For the show, each of the invited *Maska* artists selected one work from the Artest Collection 2000+ and at the same time proposed a work of their own, which was intended to be realized before the year 2023, when *Maska* would be publishing its 200th issue.

When we think about different museum models, we must not forget that, whereas in the West modern art was, so to speak, historicized as it happened, in the East we have to do it retrospectively. It is understandable, then, that the historicization of Eastern European art is one of the priorities – one of the authentic interests – of museums of Eastern European art.

In the past 15 years, as the Moderna's work has strengthened dramatically through projects concerned with the contemporary age and its art, our building has become too small; for this reason, in 1994 we were given the use of one of the buildings in the complex of the former Yugoslav army barracks in Ljubljana's Metelkova street. Later, with the formation of the Artest Collection 2000+ and all the activities surrounding it, the need for a second building became vital. So we presented the Ministry of Culture with a plan based on dividing our activities into a museum of modern art, on the one hand, and a museum of contemporary art, on the other. The former (which would remain in our present building) was to be responsible for the tradition of modernism, while the latter (which would move to the Metelkova building) would be responsible for contemporary art and its tradition. The Metelkova museum, with its emphasis on contemporary work, would also serve as a place for testing out a new museum model that historicizes the past and the present of spaces that exist outside the canonized history of art.

The Moderna conceived its programme for the museum in Metelkova primarily around its Artest Collection 2000+, with the idea that the exhibition programming would follow the concept of this collection. Metelkova was intended to be a space for the production of art and knowledge in which the museum would take on a new social role. This programme was presented to the former minister of culture, who in 2004 approved it in various official documents. Last year, however, the new minister of culture decided to review our programme for Metelkova. This led to a very negative stance toward our programme and a new proposal for a programme that would be created in conjunction with other institutions in the city. The minister would like to see a livelier and more dynamic programme in the space. Among a number of rather inarticulate objections to the programme we presented, the only thing that can be discerned with any precision so far is a nearly explicit ban on presenting the Artest Collection 2000+ in Metelkova. At the present time, it would seem, Slovene cultural policy sees no need to give Eastern European art its own space in Ljubljana. The museum has, yet again in history, become an indicator of political interests. In the view of the current political constellation, led by the Slovene Democratic Party, the future of Slovenia is united with the world of Western neo-liberalism. An art collection that reflects the social reality of Eastern Europe from the 1960s to the present is, apparently, not the appropriate way for Slovenia to present itself to Europe. Given the fact that various European cultural programmes have often listed the art of this region as one of their priorities, the real reason for this negative attitude can be found only in the Slovene right's opposition to anything that smells of continuity with the communist past. Since renovations on the building in Metelkova have not yet even started, there is still hope that in the end the political interest will nevertheless be able to recognize the authentic interest of the space.

Next year, Slovenia will hold the presidency of the European Union. To embellish the capital Ljubljana for that time, the government has decided to renovate some cultural institutions in

the town center, including the Moderna galerija. One of the restrictions of renovation is that, while it is being carried out, the museum has hardly any exhibition programme since the funding the museum otherwise receives for realizing its programme goes toward the rent for the temporary offices and storage spaces. The preparations for the move and for the beginning of renovation have been underway for several months now. We have taken down the permanent display of works from the museum collections and we do not stage any new exhibitions. While waiting for the renovation to actually start, we suddenly thought of a plausible explanation for the constant delays: possibly, the current political set-up might be finding this specific situation – the silence of the spaces of contemporary art – most suitable. A similar thing has happened – for ostensibly objective reasons – to Slovene cinema; this year practically no films are being made.

For this reason we decided to break this silence and think of some way to produce a show without any financial resources whatsoever. We thought it only fair that, since we could not offer the exhibitors anything but the exhibition space, we do not impose any curatorial decisions or concepts on them either. Thinking back to Duchamp and the Independents' Exhibition in 1917 in New York we decided on a totally unselected show and entitled it *Every Man Is a Curator / Jeder Mensch Is ein Kurator*. The idea was that it would serve not only as a public forum on art, but also on other current issues. I attempted to define some of these issues in a public letter I addressed as the director of the Moderna galerija to all persons interested, inviting them to participate in the show by presenting their works and their views on the role of a museum of modern and contemporary art today and by organizing public debates. Over a hundred participants responded. Most of them were artists, there was also a classroom of children and a number of people of various professions who either commented on the current state of affairs in Slovene cultural politics and on the renovation and the reorganization of the Moderna galerija or who simply seized the opportunity to present their works in public.

Similarly as Duchamp in 1917 we were intrigued by the question of self-definition; all participants had the option to choose what to be: artists, curators, or the interested public not indifferent to the role played by a museum in their environment. Obviously, unselected exhibitions are always risky and the result completely unpredictable. And how should one evaluate such a project? I am inclined to say that its success or lack thereof can be measured by the extent to which it has become an indicator of the connection previously established between the institution and its environment, or, the degree to which the institution has already come to realize its authentic interest in this way.

Let me say in conclusion that, even though I do not believe in some universal type of museum, I nevertheless think we should preserve some common standards that make comparisons between museums and evaluations of the authentic role of the museum possible. The best way of adjusting universal standards to local needs has been worked out by global capital. In India, MacDonald's restaurants have beefless burgers on their menus. Various franchise businesses make allowances for the authenticity of a given space as long as it contributes to an unproblematic picturesqueness of their supply and helps create an image of a harmonious world. The standardization of the world, which is simply a precondition of its progress, is largely based on making its otherness passive. And it is art and its institutions that have the potential to maintain an active otherness also within standardized forms. Let us consider this on the example of the exhibition *Every Man Is a Curator*, which could easily become a licensed concept show. Various museums around the world could issue a similar call for participation and in this way become not only indicators of the cultural and political climates in their own environments but, by contrasting the results obtained in different spaces, also of the wider international community. Such "licensed" projects could also lead to

developing more quickly and directly an actual insight into the different contexts, and, based on the conclusions drawn from that, some new forms of international solidarity. A museum's authentic interest essentially means an active otherness in a long standardized world.

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