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• A Short Guide to Contemporary Art in Slovenia ("Short Guide Series") (Article)
• Barbara Kukovec (Online Gallery)

events

<< Mar 10 >>

Calendar table for March 10th showing days of the week (Su-Sa) and dates (1-31). The date 31 is highlighted with a red border.

ARTMargins Home >> Exhibitions >> "Subversive Practices: Art under Conditions of Politi

"Subversive Practices: Art under Conditions of Political Repr 1960s -1980s / South America / Europe" in Stuttgart (Exhib. Review)

Exhibition Reviews

Allan Siegel (Budapest)

Tuesday, 01 September 2009 16:37

SUBVERSIVE PRACTICES: ART UNDER CONDITIONS OF POLITICAL REPRE 80S / SOUTH AMERICA / EUROPE, WÜRTEMBERGISCHER KUNSTVEREIN MAY 30 - AUGUST 2, 2009

This summer, the exhibition Subversive Practices: Art under Conditions of Repression 60s-80s / South America / Europe was presented at the Kunst Stuttgart. As the organizers Iris Dressler and Hans D. Chris state, the exh describes "a multidimensional cartography" in which the many faceted cor spanning periods of time and geographical categories appear anew, often, the margins of skewed art discourses.

Subversive Practices assembled practices and theoretical positions within joining countries of Europe with counterparts from South America. Its crit achieved not simply by the quantity of works drawn from the last four dec twentieth century or the Kunstverein's spatial dimensions but rather beca to enjoin artistic work, indeed endeavors and obsessions, challenging the assumptions and definitions that often view the art world with a decidedly American bias.

Thirteen curators participated in a project that contained more than 300 v eighty artists from nine countries (two of which no longer exist). The inter overview is not to highlight one work versus another, which would negat importance, but also to challenge the constraints of those discourses marl criticism often nestled safely within borders drawn by the exigencies of ar

According to Dressler and Chris, these are works in which, "body, languag space represent the pivotal instruments, of resistance, symbolic and perfc equal measure." This covers a broad terrain, not simply the landscape of stagnated socialism with its authoritarian variants, but social environment forms of repression in which the most minute social deviations can trigger with the police or military.

And thus, what could be seen were the articulations and topographical out 'power relations' that appeared under various forms of authoritarianism at

Foucault states, "attack everything which separates the individual, breaks others, splits up community life, forces the individual back on himself, and own identity in a constraining way." Consequently, 'resistance' here emboc forms of conceptual strategies to establish or re-confirm links and maintai identity amidst a societal fog that blurs both individual desire and collectiv

The Brazilian curator Cristina Freire tells us that in "those days the postal privileged medium of communication in this extended circuit, unaware of t and the concerns of the hegemonic art centres." This circuit linked artists with those in Eastern Europe who "were in search of strategies with which the censorship imposed by a dictatorial regime." The strategy extended be Brazil-Eastern Europe postal circuit but included public interventions, disci actions and other ephemeral activities. Often the existence of a particular project was maintained only through photographs or other forms of docum



Artur Barrio's installations and performances in Rio de Janeiro took place i and then slowly disappeared. Similarly, in Hungary, Gyula Pauer's 1970 pr *Sign Forest* pre-figures the type of public interventions that would appear West. In this example of Pauer's completed works, covering an area of ab lasted for barely a day and was eradicated immediately before anyone col work. The sole record of its existence are Pauer's photographs.



Begun in 1976 twilight of the l in the Soviet U performances l group *Collectiv*

employed a comparable strategy in order to explore "an alternative space communication in Russian-Soviet culture during late communism" accordi Hänsgen, this section's curator. Like INDIGO in Hungary, *Collective Action* and continues to transform its original concepts in order "to comprehend c processes of globalization."

Related tactics appeared in the German Democratic Republic where artists, facing serious repercussions, used their cleverness, as described by Anne Thurmann-Jajes, "to continue their artistic



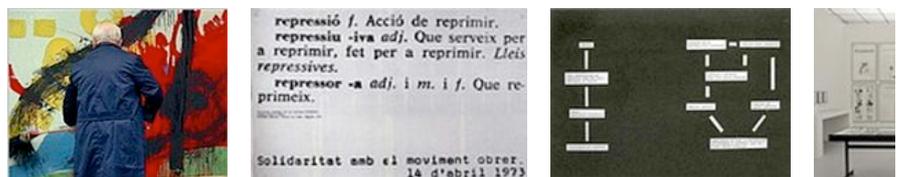
activities, indeed with very enigmatic, astute, and ironic allusions to the s these instances, discretely organized raves or happenings were not simply but reaffirming events. Equally, the appropriation of abandoned or empty and windows created exhibition venues outside the normal channels.



A daring example of this circumvent channels was the "First Leipzig Aut the summer 1984. In his record of 1 Damm recounts how a group of pa sculptors and filmmakers "employe partisan tactics to occupy a trade-fair building at the heart of Leipzig's inn they produced and curated their own group exhibition in an area of more



Beyond central and eastern Europe, in Catalonia, during the closing years dictatorship, the appearance of associations like *Grup de Trebal*, with its n members, signaled a surfacing of repressed cultural identities and a "mov conventional artistic practices and joining a critical current where art had function." Alternative exhibition spaces such as COAC (Association of Arch Catalonia) and Sala Vinçon appeared and became sites both for presentat meetings. In spite of the state of emergency declared in 1975, artists from range of disciplines, including Pere Portabella and Antoni Muntadas, were circumvent constraints and explores new vocabularies. Thus, in a highly re cultural atmosphere, new public spheres on the boundaries of the permiss activities that came to maturity at later dates.



This was certainly the case in Hungary. Annamária Szóke and Miklós Peter Hungarian curators, recall how in the late 1960's, "in opposition to the off public sphere of artists, another 'second public sphere' began to take sha stratification, which manifested itself in various forms in all the countries i the exhibition, typifies the conflicting realms of an 'official' culture and its outlets and a more socially embedded vein of cultural activity emerges lin currents but also to present realities and aspirations.

Working within this second sphere, the INDIGO group, emanating from from classes led by Miklós Erdély, challenged not only pedagogical boundaries but also the nature of an interdisciplinary praxis. INDIGO's examination of the social responsibility of the artist reflects a multi-faceted thread that appears throughout the exhibition. A thread not coloured by one ideological strand imbued the diverse challenges of each society.





The complexity of situations in which cultural p into subterranean channels appears in the Chile curators Ramón Castillo and Paulina Vara recou language of art was turned into a silent—silenc In 1979, five years after the military coup, *CAE de Acciones de Arte* began initiating actions wh human necessities and gave voice to 'silenced'

project *In order not to die of hunger in art* consisted of half-litre bags of n distributed in a barrio in Sanitago de Chile and then used the recycled bag projects. They also initiated the slogan NO+ which appeared on walls thro city. The slogan became a sign of resistance to the dictatorship.

Analogously, in Peru the eight members of *Taller E.P.S. Huayco*, a group which lasted from 1980–1982, utilized 'found materials' and well known images. In the piece, *Art on the Way*, they copied a popular fast-food image and used it to form a carpet composed of painted resembling the dots in Pop Art paintings. Following this project, they produced the likeness of a Sarita Colonia, an *unofficial* saint adored by many on the margins of Peruvian society. The large image was constructed on a hillside adjacent t traveled Pan-American Highway.



In contrast with the ensembles or collectives whose innovative activities n resilient unofficial culture, strong individual voices persisted in defining fo expression to negate the authorized vocabularies of the official culture. Fr Chilean, Guillermo Deisler used the vehicle of mail art to maintain contact homeland and at home Carlos Leppe used his own body as a metaphor fo nation. In Peru, Employing a different strategy, and also with the support government, Jesús Ruiz Durand transformed North American pop styles tc new industrial and agrarian policies. Francesco Mariotti's intervention *Artif Basin for Special Use* Intervention was intended for installation in a restro Banco Continental gallery in Lima in 1975. The piece never appeared and before it could be seen by the public. An updated version of the piece wa: Stuttgart exhibition.

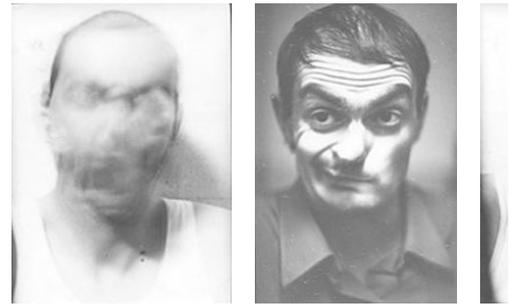


In Brazil, Peru e the artist's body of investigation living canvas. U portrait' and 'idi documents as ti Burga created a where Face Rep Report, Blood R

the headings for the display of related data which she collected over the c

single day. In Letícia Parente's eleven minute film, the artist sews the word "Brazil" on to the sole of her foot. Seen in close-up, the branding becomes self-referential to the artist's status and the broader social realities.

Not surprisingly, in environments with stringent cultural regulations, the body as the focal point of activity, appeared in Romania also, where "several artists tried to make up "survival" techniques [imbued with] ephemeral forms, at irony and social



criticism." Making use all possible sites in order to, as Ileana Pintilie Teleag says, "evade censorship." A case in point is Ion Grigorescu whose "visual research" projects emerged from within the artist's private space and self-confabulations. These filmic "happenings" both pre-figure and appear in parallel with other forms of performance which were able to find semi-private or more public venues. As in much of this exhibition, their existence is only corroborated by different forms of documentation which in many cases were integral to the work.



In this context, and the exhibition's discursive frame, a subversive practice is not a transgressive or experimental work or act but rather an affront to authoritarian political power. Thus, as seen here, artistic expressions, like other exigent forms, are very much manifestations of individual necessity, regardless of the political circumstances. Yet, whether brought to life by an individual or group, they are representations of the moment and refractions of the cultural forces within which at that moment its spatial and temporal realities.

What is striking then is the manner in which these efforts eluded the traditional boundaries and drew upon interdisciplinary connections defined by membership in a collaborative or by a vocabulary not restricted by an imposed formalism. In this framework, conceptualism can be seen as a much broader methodology, a project that is not grounded in its 'conceptual thingness' but rather emanates from a conceptual orbit or field of activity that both crosses and utilizes multi-disciplinary boundaries evolving from its idea as well as the social and political realities within which it operates.

The exhibition thus reaffirms a truism perhaps: that even under the most restrictive conditions and beyond the glosses of socialist realism or a neutralized and 'modernism' that were the official palliatives other solid forms of cultural expression were always flowing beneath the surface and searching for their outlets.

In any event, what becomes apparent are the false terms, the one dimensionality of the types of discourse promulgated by Lucy Lippard when she discussed "art" which is different from or in opposition to "mainstream" art. In these

formulaic descriptions, emanating from conditions in which cultural activity within a framework of a highly developed art market, labels can only tell us where we are entering or leaving. What is called for is a further exploration of the possibilities of various forms of expression which rupture an obtuse commodified form which in a sense demystify the cultural forces of highly commodified advanced societies. What is perhaps symptomatic of this discourse, or rather its limitation, is that it omits, either from ignorance or lack of interest, the body of work which has been excluded from exhibition.

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