

DOUBLE, INVISIBLE, HAND-MADE, EXPERIMENTAL: BOOKS AND MAGAZINES AS WORKS OF CONCEPTUAL ARTISTS FROM FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

ABSTRACT — Examining artists' publications is one of the rare ways of learning about the almost invisible conceptual practice that developed from the end of the 1960s to the early 1980s in former Yugoslavia. Recently, the value of the preserved remaining copies has increased. At the time of their creation, however, magazines and books as works of artists were distributed to friends and fellow artists, while the public seldom knew about them. Limited runs, manual production, and/or photocopying all contributed to the fragility of this material, which nonetheless bears important knowledge about one of the most interesting periods of postwar contemporary art in Yugoslavia. From the anti-magazine *Gorgona*, a medium for the exchange of thoughts distributed to a very limited audience, to the principles of appropriation, collage, and other neo-avant-garde procedures that stem from ethical attitudes and the deconstruction of reality presented in the artists' magazine *May 75*, these authors produced their books and magazines by hand, pasting original works onto sheets or treating them as a ground on which they directly intervened in different ways.

INTRODUCTION — The position of Yugoslavia, located at the crossroads between the politically rigid East and the influences of the West, was rather unique, particularly when compared to other countries of the Eastern Bloc. After World War II, Yugoslavia was the site of various political, social, and cultural changes. The brief dominance of social realism was soon replaced by a reconfiguration of modernist paradigms; links were established to the avant-garde movements of the interwar period, while as early as the start of the 1950s, geometric abstraction revealed the existence of individual (as well as creative) freedom as a kind of symbol of the free world. In Yugoslavia, this decade would witness a reconstitution of modernism, running parallel to existentialism, and abstraction, while ties with the Western world would be much freer and more intense than was the case with other Eastern European countries.

— After the revival of interwar avant-garde movements, such as a renewed interest in the aesthetics of New Objectivity along with influences originating in Russian and German avant-garde tendencies, the 1970s in Yugoslavia were particularly notable for new and

innovative artistic practices. In contrast to the dominance of high modernism which marked the 1950s and most of the 1960s, in the local history of contemporary art, the term *New Art Practice*¹⁾ refers to the expansion of the field of interest, the direction of activity, and the modality in which contemporary art was manifested in the period from 1966 to 1978. It was characterized by post-painting and post-object phenomena, whereby new practices were grounded in focusing primarily on ideas rather than producing a physical object. In addition to the three dominant art centers—Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Belgrade—these practices concurrently appeared in Split (Croatia) as well as Subotica and Novi Sad (Serbia). Although a specific modernist tradition was present in all of these cities, which partly enabled the development of new tendencies, what soon followed was the recognition and unification of trends that led to a change in the language of art and the context in which art operates. Along with photography, video, performance, body art, behavior art, art of doing, art of mental representation,²⁾ and other artistic strategies challenging traditional art forms and their institutions, this new art practice was also characterized by books and magazines as works of artists. These procedures heralded a change of the concept of a work of art and a specific social engagement, mostly owing to the non-institutional expansion of artistic activity into public space and the simultaneous criticism of institutions.

— Examining artists' publications is one of the ways of learning about the almost invisible conceptual practice that developed from the end of the 1960s to the early 1980s across former Yugoslavia. Recently, the value of the preserved remaining copies has increased. At the time they were created, however, books and magazines as works of artists were distributed to friends and fellow artists, while the public seldom knew about them. Small editions, manual production, and/or photocopying all contributed to the fragility of this material, which nonetheless reveals important knowledge about one of the most interesting periods of postwar contemporary art in Yugoslavia.

— My interest in this topic was driven by the process of research and digitization of Ed Ruscha's *Sunset Boulevard*, carried out by the Getty Research Institute.³⁾ Despite impressive technical support provided in that case, noticing the difference between the digitized version and the printed original was crucial. Digitization is evidently a vital method for ensuring long-term, sustainable public access to information about works. However, the simple and modest artists' books and specialized magazines presented in this paper are best appreciated in person, if possible. Neither the basic type of

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This term is simultaneously employed by art historians and curators Davor Matičević and Marijan Susovski from the Gallery of Contemporary Art in Zagreb and Ješa Denegri from the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade to describe the diverse post-painterly and post-objective phenomena in contemporary Yugoslav art between 1966 and 1978. In the catalogue's introductory text, Denegri mentions the changes that started happening on the European scene as early as the second half of the 1950s. Referencing, among others, the experiences of Germano Celant, Lucy Lippard, John Chandler, and Harald Szeemann, Yugoslav curators opened themselves up to new and different phenomena that enabled the formation of specific constitutive elements so that such a practice was able to achieve its own problem identity. More in: Susovski, Marijan (ed.), *The New Art Practice in Yugoslavia 1966–1978*. Exhibition catalogue, Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1978.

2)

The art of doing is a term used for something created with an effect (but not as an event or performance), while art as mental representation designates works (diagrams, series of photographs, texts) in which the processes of imagining or conceiving are presented. Both terms belong to conceptual tendencies and are common in the local critical writings.

3)

The video of this process was presented at the CAA 109th Annual Conference, New York, 2021 (online).

paper nor the simple ways in which the artists managed to produce books—using scotch tape, tearing pages by hand, making holes in them with nails, gluing analog film tape onto ordinary sheets of paper, using a stapler to bind several pages together, etc.—can be fully experienced by observing it on a screen. The fact that they were produced with cheap materials and without the use of expensive printing services or special finishes, which would be the result of carefully selected materials, also gave rise to the idea of the ecological aspect of these works. At the time they were created, the artists in Yugoslavia were not as thoroughly aware of environmental problems, nor was this a topic of concern of art criticism. However, the above-mentioned aspects of manual production and selection of cheap materials, as well as the avoidance of institutional frameworks, suggest a departure from mass production and a preference for an individualistic approach—which could be interpreted along the lines of ecological awareness.⁴⁾ But foremost, the artists found it necessary to work quickly, managing with what they had on hand, reacting in the moment and without too much preparation. They did not think about economic growth or market value.

FROM THE PROTO-CONCEPTUAL MAGAZINE *GORGONA*, TO *SPOT* AND *MAY 75*

The publication of magazines as works of artists was initiated by the Gorgona Group (1959–1966), which can be characterized as an alternative spiritual phenomenon whose unique artistic approach was for a long time known to only a limited circle of people. Spirituality was predominantly advocated by Josip Vaništa, considered the initiator and leader of the group, whereby this notion is interpreted primarily on the basis of activity inside the mind, through the implementation of mental artistic procedures, invisible to the audience, which transpired exclusively among the members of the group. Many of these “works” were only discovered later, through conversations with Vaništa, who was the only one able to describe the specifics of the “thought protocol.” Sometimes the activity occurred only inside his mind, and sometimes through an exchange between members of the group. It is impossible to subsume this immaterial practice under fixed terms, and we should also take into account the fact that Vaništa himself was prone to mystifying some of his thoughts, which he would return to after some time had passed and interpret anew. Gorgona was a proto-Conceptual group that anticipated the artistic practices of the 1970s, including books as works of artists, behavior art,⁵⁾ language as medium, and art as idea (Gattin 2009: 21). In the words of Josip Vaništa, “Gorgona perhaps deserves to remain in the shadows. If we start

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In Yugoslavia, a particular attitude towards ecology is primarily linked to the activities of the Slovenian artistic groups *Družina v Šempas* and *OHO*, dedicated to, among other things, “healing the earth” and complex research activities on global ecological systems. More in: Miško Šuvaković, *Pojmovnik suvremene umjetnosti*, Zagreb: Horetzky, and Ghent: Vlees & Beton, 2005, 157–158; Marko Pogačnik, *Zmajeve črte, ekologija in umetnost*, Maribor: Založba Obzorja, 1986.

5)

The term *behavior art* is often associated with new artistic practices and Conceptual art, to some extent being close to performance art. In the local context, it is primarily associated with the activities of the Gorgona Group, whose procedures may be described precisely as a specific mode of behavior and immaterial artistic practice, such as going on joint walks or performances that actually veer more towards a specific kind of behavior than performance or happening.

talking about these things, they wither.”⁶⁾ The group was hermetic, prone to irony and maintaining privacy, inclined to imperceptible artistic actions and exchanging information about them, mostly between the members themselves.⁷⁾ Among other things, the actions consisted in sending postcards and personal correspondence as well as the occasional publication of the *Gorgona* magazine, the individual issues of which were designed by members of the group, by artists, and/or by authors Victor Vasarely, Harold Pinter, or Dieter Roth. There were also proposals by Piero Manzoni and Enzo Mari, although they were never realized and exist only as ideas exchanged in correspondences with members of the group.⁸⁾ The magazine was created in the ideologized environment of the 1960s, within the community of authors “engaged in the magazine on the margins, into which we introduced a touch of darkness, some absurdity, and emptiness.”⁹⁾

—— It is considered an anti-magazine in order to emphasize its difference to the standard concept of a magazine (Stipančić 2007: 164), imagined and created as a book as a work of an artist.

—— The first issue of the magazine, published in 1961, today has an almost mythical status. It featured nine photographs, each printed on a separate page, taken according to the instructions that Josip Vaništa had given to photojournalist Pavao Cajzek. Thanks to the artist’s statements (in a conversation with the author), it is possible to reconstruct what caught his attention: “A spatial structure without function, offered for sale.” (Vaništa 2001: 293) For Vaništa, the first issue of *Gorgona* was an empty stage, realized as a series of nine identical black-and-white images of an empty shelf in a Zagreb shop window noted during a stroll. We might interpret it as a critique of the practices oriented towards the production of artworks. This photograph is a sample of unique Gorgonian photography resulting from a procedure of processual, critical, and ironic “compensation”¹⁰⁾ for something that was both ridiculed and longed for. These Gorgonian photographs convey phenomena “that often had something strange and unfamiliar about them,” in Vaništa’s words,¹¹⁾ and depict scenes that exceeded the limits of the standard notion of what an image is, relying on emptiness and meaninglessness.

—— The photography of Miljenko Horvat, an architect and another member of the group, adheres to the *Gorgona* group’s inclinations and the need to perceive something different and uncanny. [Fig. 1] Two photographs taken on the shores of Skagen on Jutland are vernacular, grainy, and cropped to fit into the magazine format. These photographs, published in *Gorgona*’s issue no. 7 in 1965,

6)

From the letter addressed to me by Josip Vaništa, dated January 8, 2013.

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It consisted of painters Josip Vaništa, Marijan Jevšovar, Julije Knifer, Đuro Seder, sculptor Ivan Kožarić, theoreticians and critics Dimitrije Bašičević, Radoslav Putar, Matko Meštrović, and architect Miljenko Horvat.

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A total of 11 issues were published in the period from 1961 to 1966. We learned about Piero Manzoni’s and Enzo Mari’s proposals from preserved documentation. In 1961, Manzoni sent three proposals, with a fingerprint motif, while Enzo Mari sent his proposal that same year, accompanied by a letter and samples of colored paper, of which he intended to make cut-outs. He planned to publish the magazine without the use of printing. None of the issues were realized, most likely due to financial constraints. For documentation and photographs, see: Marija Gattin, *Gorgona / Protokol dostavljanja misli*, Zagreb: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2002.

9)

From Vaništa’s text “Gorgona, what is it?” in the form of a letter, dated January 8, 2013.

10)

A play on words; I am referring to their procedure of compensation which they applied in some of their works.

11)

Josip Vaništa, “O crtežima, odlascima, filmovima, pričama, inteligenciji. . .” (Josip Vaništa on Miljenko Horvat), comment expressed in the letter dated January 8, 2013.

consider the medium outside of the categories of general accessibility and reproducibility. The limited circulation and unbound original photographs by Horvat, which can be regarded both as independent objects and as an integral part of the magazine, enabled a more direct and intimate relationship with the viewer. This example also prompted a change in the standard meaning and function of the magazine, which thus became a loose framework of photographs ready to be displayed. The concept of some of the issues of the *Gorgona* magazine is distilled down to a representation of emptiness, such as the tautological photographing of the magazine's cover, which is then inserted as a separate piece and the issue's only content (*Gorgona*, no. 11, 1966). The understanding of the specificity of the medium is expressed by an analytical attitude towards the elements that determine the nature of the magazine: the format, name, number, and year are always displayed, while the magazine was distributed by mail and even advertised in the Dutch magazine *Nul* (Stipančić 2007: 169, 171).

— The magazine *spot* was crucial to ensuring the visibility of the changes in photography marking the 1970s. In the context of magazines as works of artists, it stands out primarily for the fact that it is a publication of the Gallery of Contemporary Art from Zagreb, edited by its curators, photographers and theoreticians, as well from several Slovenian and Serbian museums and galleries. From an institutional point of view, this publication is important because it promoted new and experimental photographic works and visual research, simultaneously striving to contextualize them with similar phenomena in other European countries.

— In a certain way, it is possible to interpret *spot* as a kind of enhancement of the particular artistic language initiated by *Gorgona*; a continuation of conceptual thought that began with *Gorgona*, and continues with *spot*. This connection between the two magazines is visible from today's vantage point, in historical continuity, while in the early 1970s it was most likely not perceived that way. Unfortunately, it is not possible to verify this with the original witnesses/participants.

— The 11 issues of *spot* published between 1972 and 1978 heralded an era of significant changes in art, especially its mode of operation, the expansion of the field of interest, and the ways in which artistic content was manifested and mediated, reflecting the effects of political and social circumstances from the late 1960s onwards. The incentive for the publication of the only magazine devoted to photography in the second half of the 20th century in Croatia

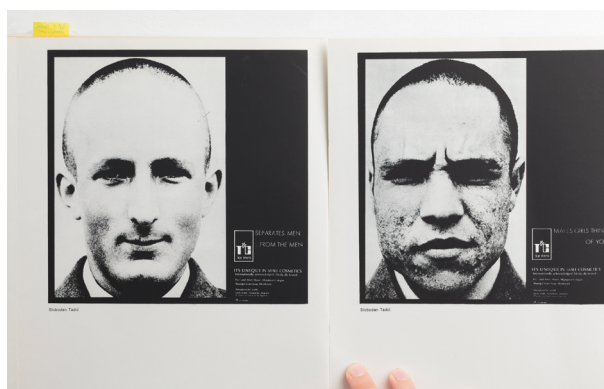


// Figure 1

Miljenko Horvat, *Skagen*, 1963, Anti-magazine *Gorgona* no. 7, 1965, 21 × 20.5 cm, two silver gelatine prints, 20.5 × 20.5 cm each, inserted in folded paper cover, unbound

was expressed by the need for the development of both a general and specific culture of visual communication, whereby photography was interpreted as a unique means of expression, documentation, and communication through images. Photography as a medium helping to define the general cultural milieu and a medium which the artists employed to visually shape their research ideas—here I am referring to photographers and artists active in the medium of photography—was presented in the magazine through a selection of current, innovative, and experimental works. The way in which the photographs communicated with the readership suggests that the aim was to stimulate new possibilities of employing and re-examining the medium. It was used, among other things, to attempt to critically observe the environment as well as the circumstances of the creation and survival of progressive photography.

One of the instances that deserve mentioning is Slobodan Tadić's untitled series of photographs published in issue no. 3 in 1973. **[Fig. 2]** It is unique in the Croatian and Yugoslav context in that it raises questions about the way the communication channel that transmits information to the viewers is conceptualized. These photographs are included in the magazine in the form of a leporello. In this case, *spot* both remains a "professional" photography magazine and functions as a magazine as a work of art. The artist intervenes by incorporating his work in between the pages, which requires careful production. The series consists of five black-and-white photographs and the accompanying "advertisement" in the same format. The visual language is reminiscent of images from concentration camps or police mugshots, whose specific "aesthetic" automatically generates the representation of a "deviant" appearance from police files. There is a logo of a fictitious brand (*TeC for men*), based on the author's nickname. Intriguing and ironic, the ad slogans about the unique male cosmetics are paired with dramatic portraits conveying a message that makes a striking impression on the viewer. The photographs were taken during the author's military service; however, no detailed explanation is provided. In the local context, this example is unique because the visual language of the photograph becomes dependent on the advertising text that, albeit, does not explain it. Both the visual and the textual level, inserted into a photographic magazine, enable a variety of individual interpretations and multifaceted meanings. That is, leafing through the magazine, the reader remains deprived of the artist's personal context related



// Figure 2

Slobodan Tadić, *Untitled*, 1973, *spot*, issue 3, 1973, leporello integrated within the magazine, 30 x 23 cm (sheet), 18 x 21 cm (b/w photographs)

to the creation of this work. The specific and powerful visual impression is retained at the level of surprise and uncertainty of meaning, contingent on the knowledge and interpretative skill of the viewer, whom the artist's humor may not even reach.

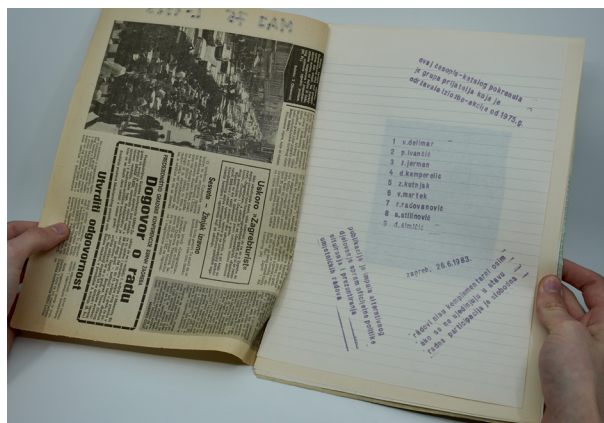
Between 1978 and 1984, 17 issues of the hand-made artists' magazine-catalogue *Maj 75* (May 75) were produced by the Group of Six Artists.¹²⁾ The name of the magazine indicates the year in which the group initiated its public activity, organizing actions and other manifestations outside of the standard institutional framework, mostly in public spaces (squares, streets, along the seashore, and in yards) but also in private homes (Šimičić 2003: 324).

The individual positions of the artists are reflected in the organization of the content of *May 75*, in which each artist is presented as a distinct entity—much like a series of independent exhibitions or statements about their work. Each section reflects the artist's unique practice, using materials that are characteristic of their style. The issues were made out of a wide variety of materials: sometimes daily newspapers were used for the covers, while photos, photocopies, pencil drawings, or films were pasted on the pages. Each artist understood one of the working principles that was stated in the magazine: "The publication is the impulse of alternative action against the official policy of situating and presenting works of art." [Fig. 3] Published in uniform A4 format, in cheap—economical—hand-made runs of 100 to 200 copies, the issues of *May 75* were marked by a letter of the alphabet instead of an issue number (from "A" in 1975 to "LJ" in 1984). What is indicative of the political context in which the artists operated are manifestos, quotations, and other forms of artistic expression, the magazine masthead written by hand or using simple, hand-formed typography, as well as the use of pages of daily newspapers instead of covers. While the covers were often uncommunicative to the wider public, the magazine retained the format of an exhibition space of sorts, enabling the artists to communicate directly with the audience.

AND WHAT ABOUT THE BOOKS? A book as a work of an artist is a concept of the avant-garde, neo-avant-garde, and post-avant-garde, realized in the medium and shape of a book. These artwork-books function as a means of formulating, communicating, and embodying the ideas of artists who shifted away from traditional creative processes. We can differentiate between a book-as-an-object, book-

12)

The activities of the group, which was never formalized, began on May 11, 1975, with an exhibition-action at the city bathing area on the Sava River in Zagreb. The loose, informal community of individuals, whose artistic strategies were largely shaped by the attitudes of 1968, including greater civil and artistic freedom to comment and participate in public life and especially in public space, consisted of Vlado Martek, Mladen Stilinović, Sven Stilinović, Boris Demur, Fedor Vučemilović, and Željko Jerman. Their attitude towards art and the deconstruction of reality stemmed primarily from ethical viewpoints and needs to be regarded in the context of the phenomena recognized as spearheading the neo-avant-garde, which also included the Working Community of Artists Podroom (1978–1980) and the Expanded Media Gallery (PM), founded in 1981. The PM functioned as a kind of training ground, a place for meeting and socializing, presenting works and workshops. It was a place open to experimentation and based on the principle of self-organization.



// Figure 3

May 75 (L-1983), A4 format, different kinds of papers, news-paper as cover, content: "This magazine-catalogue. . ." in rubber stamps

as-a-work, book-as-a-document, and book-as-a-theoretical object (Šuvaković 2005: 300–301). The majority of examples created by several artists in the 1970s are considered books-as-works of artists. Mladen Stilinović, Vlado Martek, and Željko Jerman, among others, produced their bookworks in a tautological manner, preserving the essential semantic characteristics of the book as their core elements. In addition, the books by Stilinović and Martek sometimes feature interventions in the body of the book, most visibly when they work with previously printed editions of other authors, or simultaneously create and destroy them (for instance, by drilling, cutting up and/or tearing them). Sometimes the artists confront the formal aspects of the book-as-an-object with the formal aspects of the book-as-a-medium, incorporating political messages that simultaneously deconstruct everyday language and assume a critical stance in relation to ideological discourses (Šuvaković 2005: 300).

— One of the earliest examples of a book-object is the second issue of the magazine *Gorgona* from 1961, realized by Julije Knifer (Stipančić 1995: 117). The artist folded the motif of a meander—to which he devoted his painterly oeuvre—down to the size of the magazine, into a leporello, creating the “endless flow” of the sign, i.e., an object that requires space. In the 1970s, Vlado Martek realized several books-as-theoretical-objects, in which, by means of shape and function as well as through visual and written content, he contributed to the problematization of nature, language, and mental presentation in art. All of these are hand-made, created in small print runs, sometimes even one-of-a-kind or having only a handful of copies, often produced using photocopying as a printing technique or cheap offset printing.

— In the local context and during the period covered by this research, the only exhibition of artists’ books was organized in 1980 in Zagreb. [Fig. 4] The exhibition review asserted that a *bookwork* (*knjigarad*), as it was called and written as one word, is typically the work of an individual who is committed to its realization through labor and process, who does not depend on institutions, whereby the whole process is assembled and realized according to the wishes of one person (Ivandić 1980: 10). It was the concentration on individual effort that most often determined the morphology, structure, and content of an artist’s book. At the same time, the decision not to depend on an institution—as a producer and intermediary in distribution—limited and oriented the artist to modest material



// Figure 4

Vlado Martek, Marijan Stilinović, *knjigarad* (bookwork), book-catalogue, Student Centre Gallery, Zagreb, 1980, pencil, pastel, silkscreen, collage, eraser and pencil on paper, stapled, 21.2 × 29.7 cm

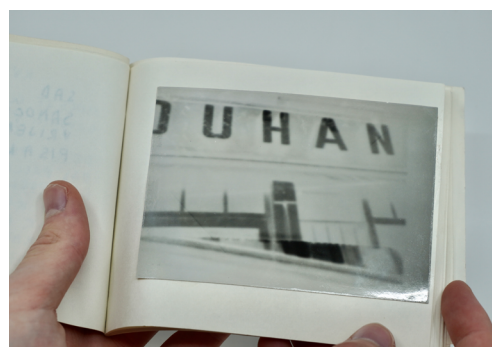
investments for the realization. Consequently, the choice of material became wide and varied, while the format of the book as a work of an artist was completely arbitrary, retaining only the most elementary features of a printed publication, such as content cohesion, folding, a smaller or larger number of pages connected to one body. The material did not even have to be paper, because the artists also intervened in the body of already published editions (e.g., Vlado Martek with nails in the poetic object *Just tell me, please, on which shelf should I put the heart* (1973)), [Fig. 5] or sometimes used plastic foil for pages, as done by Mladen Stilinović. — *Unique Book. Consciousness* (1978) by Željko Jerman consists of four folded A3 sheets of paper, on which the artist typewrote short lines of text, similar to visual poetry. The book even contains the artist's biography and a colophon. A similar procedure could be seen in the publication *Books* (1976) by Mladen Stilinović, who produced 30 hand-made copies of a small-format book-catalogue connected to the exhibition *Books*, which presented only his books, at the Student Centre Gallery in Belgrade in 1976. The introduction was co-written by the artist and his partner, art historian Branka Stipančić. Inside, there is a short introduction and the table of contents, while each book is presented in the form of an individual artwork consisting of a fingermark, torn pages which were glued back together, and original photographs. He also included a colophon. [Fig. 6]

— Several hand-made, unique leporello (or concertina) books by Željko Jerman belong to his autobiographical concept of recording one's own existence in space and time and the belief that the existential and artistic realities are one and the same. His most famous example, *My Year 1977* (1997), is an artist's book with a simple concept. [Fig. 7] In order to create it, Jerman took photographs of himself every day throughout the year while doing completely ordinary, everyday things: drinking coffee, sitting at a table, hanging out with friends, often in his own backyard or somewhere in Zagreb. The locations are not indicated with the photos. The resulting material is 365 pages of A4 paper with one, rarely two or more, standard 7 × 10 cm black-and-white photograph(s). Each page is dated and includes a short piece of text written by the artist in felt-tip pen. Some of his statements, "I exist—I leave a mark," "Intimate pain," "I read a lot," "Elementary methods," function as a kind of instruction manual which he wrote for himself,



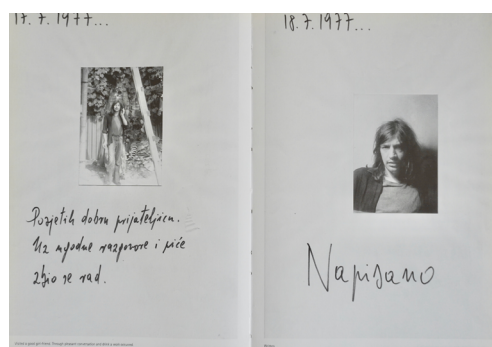
// Figure 5

Vlado Martek, *Samo mi recite molim vas na koju policu da stavim srce / Just tell me, please, on which shelf should I put the heart*, book-as-a-poetical-object, prepared books, paper, nails, 19 × 14 × 9 cm



// Figure 6

Mladen Stilinović, *Knjige / Books*, 1976, publication from the solo exhibition at the Student Cultural Centre Gallery, Belgrade, text: Branka Stipančić, Mladen Stilinović, felt-tip pen, pastel, blood, rubber stamp, collage (photographs, printed paper, xerox), 19 sheets, stapled, 10.5 × 13.5 cm



// Figure 7

Željko Jerman, *Moja godina 1977. / My Year 1977*, A4 format, bound, Zagreb, SCCA, 1997

while at the same time explaining to potential observers¹³⁾ what he was thinking about or how he felt on a given day; it appears as if he wanted to clarify some of his thoughts. At the same time, it is a type of diary, similar to his other works, in which he often indicates the date, time of shooting, and even some technical details, alongside his personal notes.

— In the same period during which he made *My Year*, Jerman documented his life in a series of other works, for instance, in *Untitled (One Day / New Year's Eve)* (1977). **[Fig. 8]** He did not do it analytically, instead openly displaying his own emotional and physical intimacy, private space, and daily life, like sitting at a table, drinking coffee, or taking a bath, carefully recording the chronology of events with notes around the photographs. The recordings are connected to a leporello book, which artists could easily produce themselves. Although the choice of the recorded moments seems arbitrary, it is evident that, in this work, Jerman's artistic procedures (inscribing text on the surface, doing collages, setting up the work, posing in front of his work) occupy most of the recorded time. The artist simultaneously stages himself as the creative subject and the object of the work. This type of book is based on the consideration of analytical and procedural processes which are the cornerstone of Jerman's artistic work. At the same time, they raise the question of the capacity of photography to mediate the complex emotional and mental states of the artist, who mainly reaches for the non-representational properties of photography, making the interpretation of what is expressed by the medium all the more difficult. Furthermore, the artist allows the camera to "think for itself," exacerbating the understanding of the image, which most of the viewers would deem to be closely related to realism. Many of the short comments and notes that he wrote next to the photographs, even when they consist of only the date, are borrowed from the idiom of the diary, whereby Jerman uses everyday language, without abiding by any (linguistic, ethical, or political) rules. He uses this strategy of supposedly honest literature when writing his diary-like notes about his everyday life, which today might reveal elements of the context on which the artist focused.

— The majority of books as works of an artist created by Mladen Stilinović in the 1970s and 1980s serve as evidence that the book in particular and text in general are the central media of his artistic practice. His overall practice has an aura of poverty, a term the artist often used with regard to (cheap, easily accessible) material, size, and language (meaning could often be "squeezed into" only a

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This series was published as a book 20 years after its creation, while the originals today form part of the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb.



// Figure 8

Željko Jerman, 31. XII 1977, leporello (11 black-and-white square photographs on cardboard, segments connected with fabric strip), 107 × 11 cm

few words). Although these practices could be connected to a kind of mental ecology, it remains unknown whether he thought about this during the creation process. Ecology is therefore primarily associated with the economy of language and the number of words he used in his artistic expression, which was often reduced to (seemingly) terse statements. The modest materials he used to create his works included various objects of everyday use, such as textiles, dishes, notebooks, cardboard pieces, daily newspapers, and plain sheets of paper. **[Fig. 9]** He often appropriated photographs from mass media or obtained them at flea markets. He took some pictures himself, while the rest were taken by others following his instructions, for instance, art historian and curator Branka Stipančić, who was his partner, or his brother Sven, a photographer. Photographs were elements which helped him to build specific compositions, grafting onto them statements based on language as artistic material, as well as drawings and objects. This allowed him to explore the main themes of his oeuvre: political ideology, ideology of art, manipulation of language, position of power, economy and money.

Stilinović published his books in very small runs, using them as a medium for realizing and distributing his ideas, despite the limited audience. Occasionally he would create a leporello, which in a certain way simulates a photographic sequence (as a potential substitute for film), while at the same time serving as performance documentation. In such an instance, he is the performer of an action, a performer, for example, who kicks a loaf of bread with his foot, simultaneously acting as object and subject—“an artist in the first person,” as they used to say in the 1970s (Stipančić 2008: 12). He was attracted to printed material, its simplicity and functionality, immediacy and democratic character. Page sequencing was necessary for the textual and photographic works, which were often created in series, united by the topic in his focus—work, colors, disorder, condition—which were some of the titles he gave them. He created the first books on plastic bags, consisting of only a few pages, each a unique piece composed of collages with elements of poetry that Stilinović was still writing in the early 1970s. In them, he combined photographs, small objects, and drawings in felt-tip pen, and thanks to their transparent sides, the entire content could be glimpsed simultaneously. When turning the pages, the content of the book grew smaller and smaller.

In many of his more than 130 different hand-made books which were created in several versions, in different sizes, and



// Figure 9

Marijan Stilinović, *Govorili su mi su ti / They Told Me Told You*, 1973, cover binded in jute, felt-tip pen, pastel, polycolor, letraset, collage: photograph, photogram, matches, sugar, comic, tobacco, scotch tape, envelope, newspaper, tram ticket on paper, different materials and objects on textile, on plastic foil, on sandpaper, 34 sheets, 21.2 × 30.7 cm

with varying number of pages, it is noticeable that each page is visually arranged in a different way, except when he works with photographic leporello editions connecting photos in a series. He describes the procedure as follows:

I made the books by hand, because I don't think anyone would print them, and even if they did, I would spend more time looking for and convincing a publisher than I need to make such a book. I make as many individual copies of the book as I sell. The books are mostly made [...] with simple means and minimal forms, so I can easily repeat them. (Stipančić 1976: 16)

Although he gave away many of his works, especially in the 1970s when there was little interest in buying the works of conceptual artists, he did sell the books. He felt that he had to sell them, because if they were merely given as a gift, people would not perceive their artistic value.¹⁴⁾ However, it is worth mentioning that the price of one such book was equal to a pack of cigarettes. Today, the situation is starkly different.¹⁵⁾

One of his most impressive works, for which he decomposed the Oxford English Dictionary (and we may therefore consider it a book-as-a-decomposed-object), is *Dictionary—Pain* (2000–2003), an unbound book consisting of 523 pages. [Fig. 10] In this work, the original alphabetical order in English is still visible, but the explanations of the words are concealed under several layers of white paint. Next to each entry, Stilinović wrote “PAIN,” a term that was the focus of several of his works. By means of this simple procedure carried out in solitude, he was able to question the meaning of each word in terms of pain. The theme of pain appeared earlier in Stilinović's works as well. In addition, he believes that “during the time of socialism, in the seventies, questions of power and lack of power were important. This lack of power is a constant pain.” (Milovac 2003: 15). He started with the *Pain Game* (1977), throwing a die with the word pain written on all sides. Later, pain became connected with the war on an emotional level, while globalization caused him pain that was more abstract.

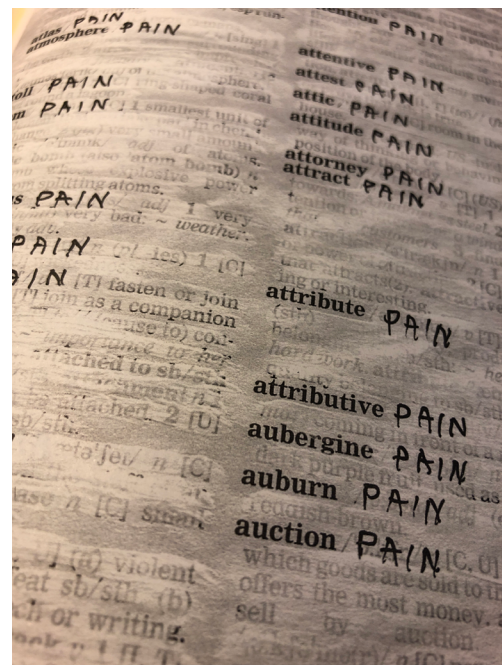
CONCLUSION The widest use of what is termed a book and/or magazine as a work of an artist in former Yugoslavia—its pages regarded as an alternative exhibition space, especially for the

14)

I thank Darko Šimičić for this information.

15)

Even though I am not close to the local art market circles, I have noticed that, for instance, one issue of the *Gorgona* magazine sold for around €1,500. It is difficult to find out how much someone paid for a hand-made book and magazine issue, and collectors are not inclined to share this information. In Croatia, there are only a few places where it is possible to buy original items, and buyers mostly purchase them directly from the artists and/or their relatives and friends.



// Figure 10

Marijan Stilinović, *Dictionary—Pain*, 2000–2003, tempera on paper, 523 × 18 × 13 cm, fragments A, B, C (114 pages)

“dematerialized practices of conceptual art” (Allen 2011: 1)—can be traced to the 1970s and conceptual artists. During that period, the artists’ books and magazines were created in the context of changing artistic tendencies, whereby the focus shifted from the physicality of the artwork to its semantic aspect. From today’s perspective, we could partially attribute such publications to a special kind of activism—the principle of non-surrender and operating outside of the conditions designed and implemented by art institutions. The recent canonization of such objects speaks to the market’s interest in this segment of artistic activity, which was underappreciated for a long time and survived in rare preserved copies thanks to the individuals who, recognizing their importance, privately collected them during the events. The fact that in many instances the artists provided precise information about each individual edition, numbering and signing them, suggests they were aware of their value. During the 1970s, the Student Centre Gallery in Zagreb enabled the printing of a certain number of publications, although most of them were published as individual editions. Unique works made by hand, such as the books by Stilinović, Martek, Jerman, as well as editions by Goran Trbuljak, Vladimir Dodig Trokut, Ivan Ladislav Galeta, Josip Stošić, and others, some realized in miniature format, but mostly in the standard A4, are cited in rare critical reviews published in the domestic press as a sort of extension of the space of artistic activity. This aligns with the views of the well-known Swiss curator Harald Szeemann and his curatorial team in the context of *documenta 5*, which refer to “mixed media and inexpensive editioned multiples and explorations into language,” as well as the idea of “engaged spectatorship” (Arnar 2017), which was only partially realized in the 1972 edition of the exhibition.

— An important shift on the European scene would take place at the next edition, *documenta 6* in 1977, where the presented conceptual artists’ books to a great extent corresponded to those created in Yugoslavia at the same time. Although artists’ books and magazines were largely an unknown concept in the local context, and the first (and, for a long time, only) *knjigarad* (bookwork) exhibition was held as late as in 1980 at the Student Center Gallery in Zagreb, the exploration of and encroachment on typical book conventions as one of the focuses of *documenta 6* undoubtedly affected the activities in Yugoslavia as well. From today’s perspective, it is not easy to reconstruct the routes of how (and if at all) the information about the Kassel exhibition reached Zagreb, but the possibility of reading “as a personal act,” in the words of Rolf Dittmar (Sigrídur 2017), and the artistic procedures that re-examine the limitations of the book

as a medium, reveal an important shift in which the mentioned artists participated. In this regard, the artistic research they performed revealed that the common denominator of many of them was the complex examination of the book/magazine as a medium and a critical understanding of the term book/magazine itself. In doing so, most of them engaged in the creation of unique publications that explore the possibilities and limitations of the printed medium, sometimes creating unique copies, such as in the case of Željko Jerman's *Unique Book*, limited in content and expression, designed for a single reader lucky enough to end up possessing such a rare copy.

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Figure 3: Private collection, photo by Nenad Roban.

Figures 4, 5, 6, 9: Collection Darko Šimičić, photo by Nenad Roban.

Figure 7: Photo by Nenad Roban.

Figure 8: Private collection, photo by Marko Ercegović.

Figure 10: Published in: Milovac, Tihomir, Stipančić, Branka (eds.) (2003): *Mladen Stilinović. Pain*. Zagreb, Museum of Contemporary Art. Photo by Sandra Križić Roban.

// About the Authors

Sandra Križić Roban holds a PhD in art history and is a critic, curator, lecturer, PhD mentor, and writer, who focuses on contemporary art, the history and theory of photography, post-war architecture, and the politics of public space and cultural memory. Križić Roban is a senior scientific advisor in tenure at the Institute of Art History (Zagreb) and Assistant Professor at the Academy of Fine Arts, Zagreb. She is the head of the Office for Photography, a non-profit association dedicated to contemporary photography (Zagreb).

Križić Roban authored a number of books, scientific articles, and book chapters, published on photography, especially women's, cultural migration and conceptual photography, trauma and alternative ways of memorization, most recently in the edited volumes *Formats of (Non)Seeing*, Institute of Art History, Zagreb, 2024, and *W.G. Sebald's Artistic Legacies: Memory, Word and Image*, Amsterdam University Press, 2023. Together with Ana Šverko, she edited the volume *Watching, Waiting: The Photographic Representation of Empty Places*, Leuven University Press, 2023. She hosted a number of retrospective exhibitions, as well as extensive thematic exhibitions, recently focusing on women's photography and conceptual photography.

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