

J. Slavka SVERAKOVA

ABOUT THE BOOK *BRIDGE OVER TIME. CONTEMPORARY PICTURE OF THE PAST*

The editor, Łukasz Guzek, structured the book's 433 pages into an overview of historiography (pp. 8-73) followed by the Introduction of the core subject (pp. 76-77), followed by research papers from each of the four neighbouring V4 countries (pp. 82-427), Bibliography (pp. 402-416), and a list of Contributors (pp. 418-427). Noticeable is his focus on what was at times called 'conceptual art,' and other times 'con-art' (see *The Oxford Dictionary of Art*, Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 115).

When Conceptual art started, in the 1960s, there were whispers about revisiting Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), perhaps focusing on his statement that he could turn any object into a work of art.

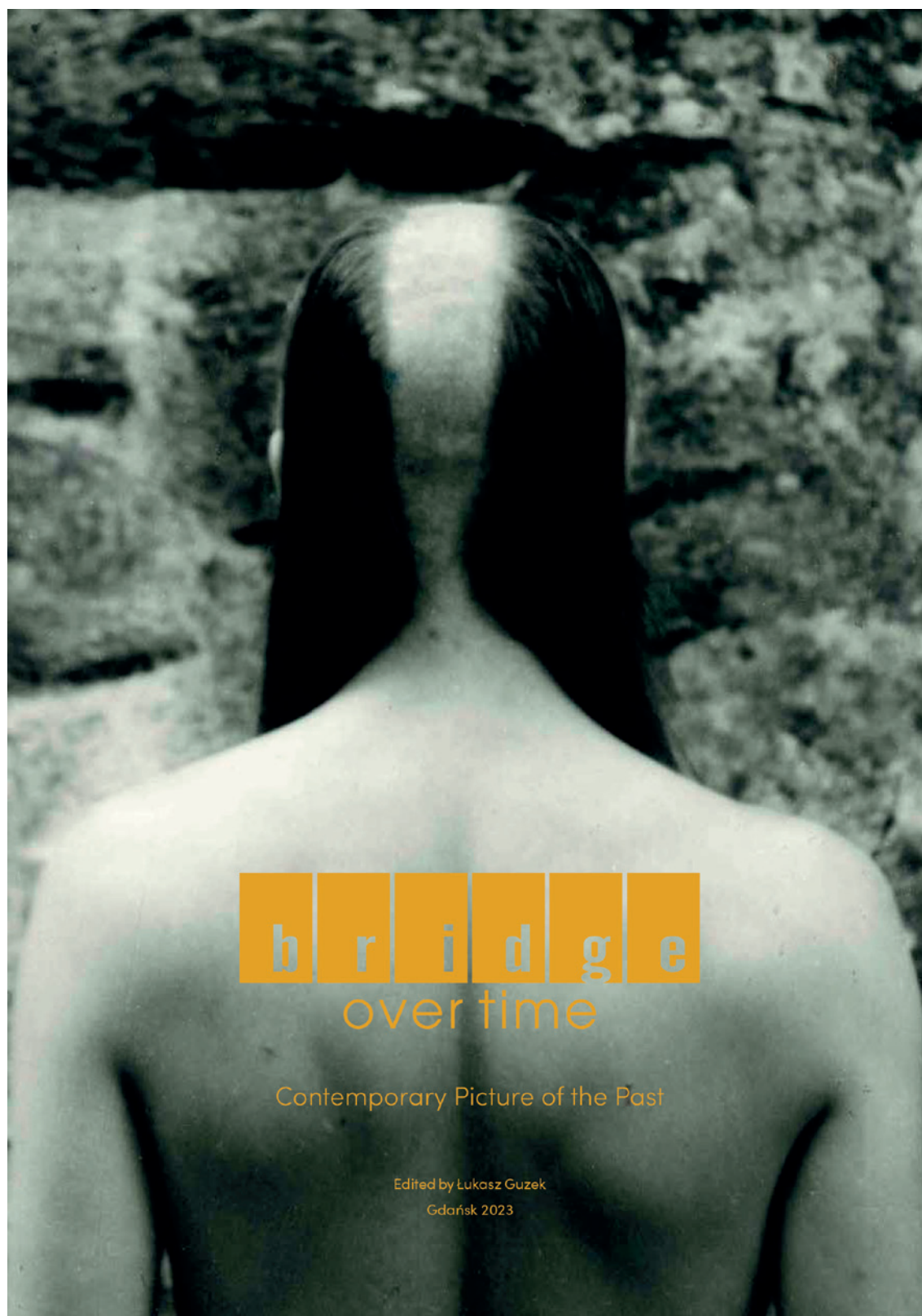
Allow me a detour:

In the early 1960s I was permitted to have a passport for a trip to Paris and back. By chance - in a gallery (Maeght) there was an exhibition by Marcel Duchamp of ordinary gardening tools and some window frames suspended from the

ceiling, some even ventured out of the door and window. The idea of life-supporting work tools metamorphosing into gallery art is reminiscent of the common experience that a concept, an idea, may trigger an aesthetic experience. Children are masters of that. As we grow older, we lose our playful side. When art attempts to remind us we prefer to straightjacket it into strict terminology.

I recall using the term 'conceptual art' during the 1960s and 1970s and soon replacing it with Fluxus, Happenings, Body art, Installation art, Performance art etc. At times the epistemological categories are applied to art loosely, even wrongly.

... 'Ideas,' 'thought,' and 'intellection' are synonymous with 'concept,' instead of 'percept' I shall often speak of 'sensation,' 'feeling,' 'intuition,' and sometimes of 'sensible experience' or of the 'immediate flow' of conscious life. Since Hegel's time, what is simply perceived has been called the 'immediate,' while the 'mediated' is synonymous with what is conceived (see William James, *Some Problems of Philosophy*, Longmans, Green, and Co, London, 1911).



Cover image: Tomas Ruller, *Był-ci-nebyt*, 1979

This book is a formidable vademecum. Mistakes? Yes, few, the annoying distance (and not just a physical one) between words and the visuals of variable quality.

The first part organises some inherited knowledge:

Project Manifesto (pp. 8-9) interprets the admission of the V4 countries to the EU as a symbolic rebirth, and Conceptual art as the art helping to achieve it. Charles Harrison proposed that Conceptual art is a specific movement which began in the mid-1960s and was effectively exhausted by the mid-1970s (Charles Harrison, “Conceptual Art,” in Paul Smith, and Carolyn Wilde, eds., *Companion to Art Theory*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2022, p. 317). Harrison is aware that “conceptual art is thought of as a kind of holding area to which new and apparently nontraditional kinds of art may be consigned” (ibidem). Guzek’s paper offers a breakthrough by constructing the category of pre-conceptual and by placing the start of conceptual as a movement into the mid-1970s.

Research Exhibitions & Conference (pp. 10-13), and the *Glossary* offer the lean essential data.

The *Context Timeline* (pp. 14-23) proves how historical dynamics varied in the four countries when separated from the rest of Europe.

The Glossary of Terms (pp. 24-30) explains events and terms like: ‘Prague Spring,’ ‘Three Torches,’ ‘Kadar’s Three T: tűr: to tolerate, tilt: to ban, támogat: to support.’ And Poland’s ‘Solidarność’ (August 14, 1980), etc.

Art Timeline(s) (pp. 31-77) are arranged in the alphabetic order of the four countries.

CZECH timescale compiled by Štěpánka Bielešová and Ladislav Daněk, in consultation

with Tomáš Ruller starts with the 1947 surrealist exhibition at the Maeght Gallery in Paris. It ends with Ruller’s *Open Situation* European Project in Prague (1989).

HUNGARY compiled by Kata Balázs and approved by Zsóka Leposa, Róna Kopeckzy, and László Százados, covers the period from 1945 to 1989, every year, with only two exceptions. There is a thoughtful link to sources: Artpool Archive: <https://artpool.hu/kontextus/project.html>. An Attempt at Chronology of Hungarian Avant-garde Art between 1966-1980 (Dóra Maurer: *Künstler aus Ungarn*, Kunsthalle Wilhelmshaven, 1980): <http://www.c3.hu/collection/koncept/frame.html>. Parallel Chronologies: <https://tranzit.org/exhibitionarchive/chronologies>.

POLAND overview is written by the editor. The timescale of Poland opens with the 1st Exhibition of Modern Art in Krakow, on December 19, 1948. February 12, 1949, the beginning of Socialist Realism in Poland. The Kraków Group in 1957, 1965 first happenings. The Symposium Wrocław ’70. Conceptual and Performance “mark the highest impact moment of the unofficial art institution in Poland which operated internationally based on exclusively private contacts” (pp. 59-60). In 1999 The Interakcje (Interactions) International Action Art Festival was founded in Piotrków Trybunalski.

SLOVAKIA timescale and story by Vladimíra Büngerová starts with the acquisition of the National Art Gallery and a publication of *Výtvarný Život* (1956-1995). In 1961 a new group of artists formed *Confrontations*. Then it focuses on Conceptual art that skidded into performance art etc. (was it not the other way round?), and the Manifesto HAPPSOC signed on May 1, 1965, a theoretical component of Conceptual projects Happsoc I and Happsoc II, to the exhibition *Action Art 1965-1989* at the Slovak National Gallery in Bratislava (2001).

Here the book changes character determined by the editor's decision to correct the selectivity of the research so far, this is his credo:

"Pointing out the differences enables comparison and thus a comprehensive approach to the art of the V4 region. **The key element linking the national histories is Conceptual art:** the way to it, its developed form, and its consequences." As shared by Conceptual art and Action art, "the ephemeral nature of these forms of art determined their par excellence political importance in the totalitarian countries." And specific context, "i. e. other than a regular gallery room. The articles included in the publication elaborate on the activities of the galleries and other exhibition venues that built the unofficial art scene in opposition to the official art promoted by the state authorities."

The idea that aesthetic values may belong to concepts is not new: "Aesthetic delight in the elegance or economy or consistency of mathematical theorems or scientific and philosophical theories has long been recognised." (see in *The Oxford Dictionary of Art*, Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 115). The term 'conceptual art' has some legacy inside an imagined hierarchy of elements that normally appear together. The editor goes further: "The key element linking the national histories is Conceptual art: the way to it, its developed form, and its consequences." "We intend this publication to be **a factual and methodological starting point** for anyone who wants to learn about the foundations of contemporary art in the region. It is addressed to professionals, researchers, as well as critics and cultural journalists. And, last but not least, students, because the aim of the publication is also to constitute a Handbook for education and didactics in the field of contemporary art" (p. 77).

The research papers map the art made after WW2 in each of the V4 countries: Czechoslovakia (2 papers), Hungary (3 papers), Poland (2 papers) and newly formed Slovakia (3 papers).

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Stěpánka BIELESZOVÁ, and Ladislav DANĚK, Olomouc Museum of Art, "Czech (and Slovak) Art in the Context of Normalisation During the Seventies and Eighties (The Sovinec Case)" (pp. 83-108, this paper has generous notes, a bibliography, plus 34 illustrations)

The text opens with the death of both Stalin and Gottwald as if making space for what the authors call "everyday poetry" in lens-based media grouped in terms like fine-art photography. Surrealism and Abstraction preferred to oppose the communist criterion quoted below from Protokol IX. řádného sjezdu komunistické strany Československa (= Report of the 9th Ordinary Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia), Prague, 1949):

"Currently, the criterion is the relation towards the ruling working people, the relation towards the workers, the relation towards socialism" (p. 83). While the wording is open to interpretations, there was no freedom to interpret.

The paper then mentions some artists' responses to the loss of democracy: "The older generation of artists was further developing the trends of the pre-war avant-garde. Surrealist methods and practices proved to be still fruitful" and "At the end of the fifties, a modified version of expressive and structural abstraction emerged in what was then Czechoslovakia." The authors identify exhibitions like Confrontation I and II held in private spaces as powers for renewal of development towards abstraction, the Czech Informel.

The occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops in 1968 was followed by the era of 'real socialism,' which significantly affected the whole society and, of course, influenced the cultural sphere for the next twenty years, until 1989. The occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops in 1968 started the period of 'normalisation,' and until 1989 art faced strict ideological control by the communist party.

The illegal artistic symposia Plasy (1981) and Mutěnice (1983) are mentioned. During the seventies and eighties, the village of Sovinec became a kind of spiritual centre of Czech and Slovak unofficial culture. The educator, photographer, curator, and dispatcher of the state farm Jindřich Štreit (b.1946) founded a small gallery there. “Sometime, around the mid-eighties, he met the Slovak photographer Ľubo Stacho (b.1953), who had been running a ‘living room’ gallery.” The paper offers a long list of artists in both parts of Czechoslovakia who aimed at some truth in their art - something the regime punished.

The authors' second paper “*Demonstration for All Senses. Documentation of Action Art from the Collection of the Olomouc Museum of Art (a Case Study on the Social Atmosphere in Czech Visual Arts from the Sixties to the Eighties)*” is based on the material archived in Olomouc where the Collection of Action art houses 300 items. It started during the preparation for another project, *Between Tradition and Experiment*. “... abstract and imaginative practices became predominant” (p. 111). Mail art, Land art, Body art, Action art, Project art, and Actual art are listed as their imaginative homes.

My memory woke up reading it: I did not know that the bales of hay I saw in Split at an AICA Congress, had predecessors from Zorka Saglova (1942-2003).

HUNGARY

Róna KOPECZKY, acb ResearchLab, “The Ethics of Abstraction – Un-Official Avant-Garde Artist Groups in Hungary Between 1945 and 1989” (pp. 140-159, a bibliography of 10 items, and 21 illustrations)

“Through the analysis of their theoretical and stylistic antecedents going back to the European School (1945-1948) and the Group of Abstract Artists (1946-1948), the activity of the Zugló Circle (1958-1968), and its resonance in the new painterly wave of the eighties known as the New Sensibility

(1981-1988), the paper aims to highlight how abstract art translated into an ethical position that faced the official cultural politics and aesthetical (sic!) ideology of Socialist Realism” (p. 141)

The focus is on three periods: 1945-1956, 1956-1969, and then New Sensibility 1981-1987. The strict scholarship embraces a flamboyant language that aims to capture the minutiae of the arguments concerning the legitimacy of abstraction considered by the socialist regime as bourgeois, decadent, and elitist.

The quoted major theoretical texts include both support for abstraction and attacks on it. The authors hope that “Through the analysis of their theoretical and stylistic antecedents going back to the European School (1945-1948) and the Group of Abstract Artists (1946-1948), the activity of the Zugló Circle (1958-1968) and (...) the new painterly wave of the eighties known as the New Sensibility (1981-1988), the article aims to highlight how abstract art translated into an ethical position that faced the official cultural politics and aesthetical ideology of Socialist Realism” (ibidem).

The first period *1945-1956: Aesthetical, Theoretical, and Ideological Debates Between Abstraction and Realism in Painting from the War to the Revolution* was rich in innovative ideas both about what was made visible and how to think about it, eg. a publication in 1947 drew a parallel between art and technology (p. 142) and was immediately attacked by György Lukács in *Hungarian Theories of Abstract Art* (1947).

The second period *1956-1969: The Renewal of Abstract Painting Between the Revolution and the Conceptual Turn – the Abstract Activity of the Zugló Circle, the Iparterv Generation, and the Pécs Workshop* (pp. 144-148) bursts in the seams with data and a consistent ethos.

The third period *1981-1989: The Comeback of Painting after Conceptual Art and its*

Unresolved Formal Questions from the Sixties subtitled *The Hungarian New Sensibility Between Zeitgeist and Introspection* links Hungary to the rest of Europe.

The sincerity of this scholarship is seductive: it notes that Miklós Erdély himself renounced the asceticism of Conceptual art and began to make paintings with bitumen and drawings with indigo in 1980. In 1982, Ákos Birkás arrived at the same witty conclusion: “In the West, avant-garde ceased to be because its demands were fulfilled. Here – I don’t want to say in Eastern Europe – it ceased to be because its demands were not fulfilled” (Birkás 1983, 31). A rare insight into how reality can make a style redundant.

The second paper on Hungary:

Zsóka LEPOSALÁ, Art Museum in Hveragerði, South Iceland, “Channeling Ideas: Institutional Background of Semi-Official Art in the Sixties and Seventies” (pp. 160-176, 16 pages followed by 14 items of the bibliography, and 10 illustrations)

It is a unique text: it shadows the Marxist theory that art belongs to the ideological superstructure that is determined by the economic structures of the given society - by pointing to a sophisticated entanglement: the closer to the industrial setting the freer art became. “The essay focuses on the subtle ways of transition that made it possible for abstract art to find its way from being banned to tolerated and – in some cases – even **supported** by the authorities in state socialism in Hungary” (p. 161).

That is different from the totalitarian regimes in the then Czechoslovakia and the USSR, where I witnessed both thoughtless oppression and deep fear and listened to similar testimony from China. So - Hail Hungary! Another Hungarian invention was Kadar’s slogan “Whoever is not against us is for us,” compared to the threatening

Czechoslovak and Polish versions “Who does not follow us is against us.” In 1957 the abstraction appeared publicly for the first time since the early fifties in the Spring Salon and continued its reliance on newly built architecture.

Changes in Economics contains insights by György Aczél who gave a Delphic answer to the problem: “If not by other means, it should be declared through a government” in a memorandum that anyone can create abstract artworks, as creativity is free in this country... but, at the same time: “abstraction should not be funded from public money.”

New Economic Mechanism and Its Influence on the ‘Westernization’ of Applied Arts (p.163) presents a development of artist’s presence in industrial setting. Most documents from 1966 onwards refer to new demands with regard to industry, commerce and art due to the economic reforms. In 1967, a proposal for the establishment of the Institute of Industrial Aesthetics was made.

Artists’ Workshops: Platforms of Free Experimentation and New Design (p. 165) is a list of factories offering their equipment to artists to use: eg. Stone-Sculpting Artists’ Workshop in Villány in 1967, the enamel factory in Bonyhád from 1968, and the ceramic symposium in Siklós also in 1968. Popular with the public “more than forty thousand people have seen one exhibition in the countryside” (p. 166).

Artists’ Workshops and Symposia in the Service of Society (pp.167/8) offers a quick survey of the involvement of artists in factories and symposia. *Abstract Art Becomes Widespread in Public Buildings*: “In the second half of the seventies, abstract geometrical artworks on public buildings did not need any special explanation anymore, as the demand for them became mainstream” (p.170). A lively, somewhat precise, paper on a busy art scene.

The third paper about Hungary by Kata BALÁZS, and László SZÁZADOS, acb ResearchLab / Central European Research Institute for Art History, “Venues and Publicity, Experimentation and Symposia. Notes on the Interconnectivity of Neo-Avant-Garde Tendencies and the Symposium Movement in Hungary” (pp. 178-223, a rich glossary, notes, bibliography, further reading, and around 50 illustrations, not numbered consecutively)

“We aim to present the symposia focusing on one medium, material (fabric, iron, steel, wood, enamel, ceramics etc.), or a technical genre (sculpture, graphic art etc.) that operated with state support and were connected to the handicraft traditions of a profession as a field for experimental art. The locations to be analysed – without mythicising their role – or rather the ‘types of shelter’ with less ‘representational potential’ and ‘recognition’ were situated mostly in less exposed places outside of Budapest, in rural Hungary (...)” - and in some comparison to “The Biennial of Plastic Forms in Elbląg was initially planned as the First Biennial of Socialist Art, but eventually realised as a major event of postwar Europe, especially its first edition in 1965. (...) In 1966, the Hořické Sochařské Symposium in Czechoslovakia followed the example of Elbląg, as well as the larger-scale Mezinárodní symposium prostorových forem / International Symposium of Spatial Forms in Ostrava.”

“This study can serve as a supplement to the more canonised, largely processed, and already published information about the unofficial art venues of the seventies. Earlier, in the sixties, private apartments had fulfilled the role of the reference points for unofficial culture (...). The first happening took place in a private cellar in 1966” (p. 180).

These symposia included a wide range of visual art from what William Morris called “Lesser Arts” to land art (*The Lesser Arts*, 1877). The Symposia claimed their freedom quite successfully

until the police ruined Signboard Forest half an hour after the installation (p. 193). Mail art, knitted fabric, performance art, and prints - all embraced by the Symposia at different times. It feels like a heroic period in art history, all done under that communist dictatorship.

“A bilingual book was published every second year (...)” (p. 198)

Amazing people - so many breakthroughs ...

POLAND

starts with the editor’s paper, Łukasz GUZEK, Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk, “The Development of Contemporary Art in Poland in Post-Yalta Conditions” (pp. 226-301, plus notes p. 266, a generous bibliography p. 267, and visual documentation pp. 268-302)

Highly structured it starts with *Assumptions and Methods* “This study presents a selection of art facts, works, and events characterised by the most radical artistic assumptions” (p. 227). Followed by *Timeline of Contemporary Art* the period from the mid-sixties to the collapse of the Communist state in 1989.

“Action art, happenings, and events, along with space-based, environmental Installation art, and site-specific art. The type of object art that was of key importance was based on the use of a ready-made. All these were pre-conceptual forms that constituted the basis for the development of Conceptual art.” Please, note the point: *a basis for CA*.

The author suggests the date when Conceptual art appeared in Poland as a movement in the mid-1970s, i.e. more than a decade after its first appearance. (*The Oxford Dictionary of art*, p. 115). The reason is said to be determined by the oppressive Soviet regime. After the growth of ephemeral, time-based work: “the process of changes leading to the *redefinition* of art culminated in Conceptualism as a broad trend encompassing many forms of artistic realisation.

Along with Action art, it was socially grounded as an alternative, independent, de facto, unofficial art institution” (p. 228).

Guzek is aware that the definition of Conceptualism (his preferred term) covers “a whole range of ephemeral practices related to installation in various spaces including landscape, ready-made objects, sound art, or Performance art.” As new art requires a new medium for new art forms, Conceptualism was defined mainly by the use of photography and film (and then video), with performance for the camera constituting the main artistic means. Making this kind of art was highly political. “I think Joseph Beuys would agree, although, he preferred other terms, eg. performance, multiples, social sculpture etc.” Conceptualism was political because of its ephemeral nature and because it occurred in unofficial institutions (p. 234).

The Dynamics of Art Trends in Poland offers an overview of the de-Stalinisation in Poland, of abandoning Socialist Realism. It was quickly replaced by connections to the earlier 20th C (= the Kraków Group), Foksal Gallery and Abstraction Creation. It recognises the pivotal role of happening, focused on the personality of Tadeusz Kantor. It is a beautiful chapter (p. 236 -) that includes Borowski’s *Syncretism*, Andrzej Matuszewski (1924-2008) in Poznań, Jerzy Bereś (1930-2012) in Kraków ... The art of the Sixties is said to be *turning away from object-making and towards more ephemeral art forms*. (ibidem)

Guzek structured his excellent research into consecutive decades: pre-conceptual art followed by *The Seventies*, *The Eighties*, and *The Nineties*. Every chapter starts with political and social context, followed by *Art Facts*, given in some detail, including a passage on *Feminist Art*. Superbly researched and written, the text inspires disagreement as well (pp. 236-265).

The tenor of this research is the truthfulness of Conceptual art *vis a vis* the context in which it is placed. I may prefer other labels for the same art, I take labels as abbreviations of explanation, however, they wiggle out of intentions “Thus, an art system was created that met the artistic, institutional, and social conditions necessary for the development of new trends. It was a political force that the authorities in Poland had to reckon with. In the other V4 countries, contemporary artists were severely repressed for creating Conceptual works” (ibidem).

The essay is followed by two dozen items in the bibliography and 32 pages of illustrations. The paper inadvertently points to a weakness of Conceptual art - it is difficult to document, and when live, it is usually seen by a small number of viewers. It also prefers to change its name. The closing passages introduce the Contextual art story (pp. 250-), contacts with Joseph Kosuth, Jorge Glusberg *inter alia*. It inspires further research not only on the slippery definition of Conceptual art, on its strengths and weaknesses, but also its accessibility, documentation, competition with other concepts of visibility, the role of material, and the role of the concept in other art as compared with Conceptual art.

Paweł LESZKOWICZ, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, “Circles of Friends: Notes on the Queer History of Art Under Communism in Central Eastern Europe” (pp. 302-332, notes and bibliography pp. 325-326, followed by 14 visual documents pp. 328-301)

“The text examines how the Polish, Hungarian, and Czechoslovak counterculture and contemporary art in the sixties to eighties opened space and possibility for queer artists to express their different sensibilities and embodiments and to project an alternative vision of love, subjectivity, eroticism, and gender. It constitutes a part of a bigger research project consisting of tracing the homoerotic expression in art behind the Iron

Curtain in Central and Eastern Europe, and the crucial role of counterculture and art spaces concerning such subversions. The focus is on Polish queer art during the People's Republic of Poland with a comparative perspective applied as well as tracking of similar developments in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Performance art plays a central role in this study" (p. 303).

It is the first time since the black and red figures on Greek vases 6-4th C BC the subject is given systematic attention. The issue of artistic / stylistic significance of the difference between two naked bodies of the same sex and say images of Adam and Eve and the various tortured saints in whatever style the image requires more work than is invested here. The distinction is political, ethical, and ideological as it is life not just an image of life, that is a subject here. Unless their sexual orientation is publicised, it may not become a part of the aesthetic experience of their work. Whereas this paper insists that it does. I expect other people to have different experiences. Yes, it is back to Timaeus.

This beautifully organised thorough paper is full of precise thoughts, careful choice of words, and disciplined belief that its subject is so extraordinary that it needs to be on a pedestal of perfection... very like the ancient Greeks...

"It is Performance art and its photographic and film documentation that captured the complex nature of sexual and gender identity and explorations of individual embodiments in Central Eastern Europe in the twentieth century." It is a primary research turned into a narrative of who, where, when, and what. In some cases even what it looked like. I may recognise someone's sexual preferences in real life, but not in their art whether they are visual artists or poets or actors or musicians... Maybe you can?

SLOVAKIA

Vladimíra BÜNGEROVÁ, Slovak National Gallery in Bratislava, "Together but Separately Group Exhibitions in Slovakia from 1968 -1989" (pp. 336-355, attached is a bibliography, 21 photographs, and two drawings).

"This study maps the turning points in the Slovak art scene in the years 1968-1989 through the lens of historically significant exhibitions of official and unofficial art with the common feature of a collective or group character and the presentation of progressive tendencies in art. Among the selected exhibitions there are various types of presentations, such as international biennials, thematically, curated exhibitions, independent short-term collective performances and multi-annual cycles of thematic exhibitions, which will allow us to look at the development of the studied phenomenon through presenting a few of these shows."

Danuvius 1968

"Although it was primarily supposed to be a display of painting, sculpture, printmaking and drawing, it was not limited to traditional media. It initiated the creation of large-scale environments and works that transcend traditional ideas about art....contributors counted 71 Czechoslovak artists and 49 international artists from 16 countries other than the Soviet Union. During the preparation of the exhibition at the Bratislava House of Arts, the Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia." (p. 338)

The second case study is *Polymusical Space* meant not only the synthesis of all muses but also the synthesis of modern industry, science and technology. Land art and Action art were included.

The case study on *First Open Studio* in Bratislava is healing to recall, but difficult to share. The last subject is the collaboration of archaeology with visual arts (*Archaeological Monuments and the Present*).

According to the authors of the concept, the past should lead to an understanding of the present, and "the concept of the project created space for the implementation of interdisciplinary overlaps between different types of art, as well as art and science" (Geržová 2006, p. 344)

The group exhibition *Basement* took place in April before the revolutionary events of November 1989. For Slovak art, it programmatically discovered a new medium – the site-specific installation.... For the history of visual art in general, group exhibitions as temporary exhibiting communities have represented and still represent a remarkable model of connection, communication, knowledge, confrontation...

Ján KRALOVIČ, Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava, "Exhibition as a Form of Cultural and Artistic Resistance" (pp. 356-370, followed by a bibliography of 14 items, and 33 illustrations, not all equally legible)

This is a superb overview of facts as they happened. I fail to make any abbreviation of this powerful research paper covering the whole of Slovakia not just Bratislava and environ. It is structured in subchapters:

Social and Political Context (pp. 357-)

Opens the rich overview of the exhibitions in the 1960s and following decades until Perestrojka! Diligent, careful, attentive collector of facts.

Artistic Alternatives - Searching for Spaces For Realization (Interior – Exterior) (pp. 359-)

Covers the facts you may know from previous papers on Slovak art but this time in more detail.

Private Apartment Exhibitions and Presentations in Semi-Public Space (pp. 368-)

It overflows with names, places, and types of exhibits - riches of art everywhere.

But was it so different from the reality artists faced in other parts of Europe? Yes - most of it was "unofficial" - carried by personalities involved as being equivalent or better to the art approved by the communist party. A sort of mini-Gorbacevs... dreaming of enlargement of the freedom of thought. Even the reading about it raises the heartbeat.

This is a rich research almost pedantic and a source for further research. It is not only diligent and honest, but it is well written too. Unmissable. It slightly overlaps with the paper titled "Together but Separately."

The last paper in this book is by Daniela ČARNÁ, Ernest Zmeták Art Gallery in Nové Zámky, "Forms of Land Art of the Sixties and Eighties in Conceptual and Action Art in Slovakia" (pp. 386-391, a bibliography of 8 items, and 28 illustrations follow)

"In Slovakia, Land art existed within the framework of Conceptual and Action art tendencies, and reactions to nature and the suburban landscape had a firm place in the work of many artists. For some, the turns to nature were only occasional, but for many, the 'studio in nature' became a lifelong choice."

"It represented not only an escape from the city and civilization, a 'Henri Rousseauian search for a lost paradise,' but also 'a form of protest signalling the danger that this civilization brings' (Šmejkal 1990, 16)" (p. 389).

"The artistic approaches to nature at the turn of the sixties and seventies were significantly anthropocentric, with an emphasis on the physical passage to different landscapes" (p. 391).

We may also recognize these entries as an invitation to define our attitude and dialogue with the environment in which we live. Despite the many reasons for concern, they are a call to halt

and transform. For example, by simply accepting this invitation of Michal Kern written in his diary:

Touch a dewdrop with your finger and connect to a miracle with purity. This is not a 'scientific' description or a discovery in nature. It's a guide to the experience I had when I invented this situation. To write a proposal for millions of people to touch the dew and live in harmony with the law of nature.

The author closes with:

“Perhaps it is naive or maybe it is prophetic. Everyone is welcome to verify on their own”
(p. 392).

I agree. I appreciate the poetics of it all. Play and poetry.

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Cover image

Tomas Ruller, *Byt-ci-nebyt*, 1979

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