

SEVERAL SHORT,
“ KILLER ”
INTERVENTIONS

VLADAN JEREMIĆ
SINIŠA LABROVIĆ

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V.J.: Hi Siniša, I hope you're doing well. What did you do at AKTO in Macedonia, and what kind of impression did this festival leave on you?

S.L.: I did two performances, two actions; one was done in Skopje and Bitola, and the other one was only performed in Bitola. The first was related to a performance I had done here in Berlin, in front of media outlets. One morning I stood in front of each of the media outlets, for two hours, and those were media outlets of different profiles, say, from left-wing newspapers, which were the successors to the main newspaper of the German ruling party in the DDR, "Neues Deutschland". I stood there, in front of the "Neues Deutschland" building until they chased us away because we were filming at the same time. Then, I cannot remember now, but that performance might have ended in front of "Spiegel"... and, in fact, I was standing in front of it, with the banner on which were written, approximately, some conditions... so, I introduced myself, Siniša Labrović, an artist from Croatia, who left Croatia, I am now in Germany and I need media attention that would make my sustenance easier. Hence, I'm kindly asking them, if they can, to publish an article about that action, if possible, with a photo.

The only ones who published it were, in fact, Deutsche Welle. In fact, what I wanted to say in that performance, in a slightly ironic way, was that our success, to a certain extent, meaning the artistic success, and it seems to me that also the social, existential and material success depend a lot on the media, from that so-called media presence and then, what, eventually, the refugees get through an apartment, through food, care, education, inclusion in society, they get to learn the language, it seemed to me that, as a kind of, truly voluntary..., and they are people who left or escaped... so from Croatia, OK, I don't have to get food, but if I could a little bit of media attention I should have a starting point that would allow me to survive in Berlin.

And then we remodelled it a bit for Skopje and Bitola, because at that time they were having an on-going awareness campaign, which is of course necessary - the awareness of our region, and that is that we, as artists or cultural workers, should be able to live off our work, because when you put all of this together seems as if we should, in fact, live from thin air, from nothing. Similarly, in that text, I made slight changes to that text, I adjusted it to the Macedonian circumstances, I gave them my support, so in that action, which was again pretty similar, so they are in their country, but when it comes to being able to make a living from their art are not doing very well and then I offered a kind of support with that banner, at that action of theirs. I performed the second action in Bitola and it is an action that I had performed earlier at the World Festival in Motovun. Then the topic was political populism and the whole political constellation of flattery, rousing interest, through some kind of national, cultural, religious community and, of course, always the emphasis that the one who does it is not doing it for himself but for the others. So, I started following that trace, I did some research, and I saw that, for example, Berlusconi likes this a lot. He said he didn't need anything. He had his houses, his ships, his media outlets and if he did something, he did it for the people - some people repeated the same things in Croatia too - if he had done it for himself, he would not steal, he would not be corrupt, he simply wants to advance Italy and then this seven-hour long lecture, seven hours in Motovun, and in Bitola, for some reason, we reduced it, I mean, to three hours, and in Motovun, again, it was in English, while in Bitola it was in Macedonian, but the phrase says: "I'm doing this for you, my beloved people", which, I believe, of course after a while this mantra becomes really toxic, oppressive ...

What I do, I inevitably do it for them, which does not mean that they really have to enjoy it - in fact it becomes disquieting and oppressive. And I love, in fact, that moment where I have to make some effort, effort and concentration on my part, because my focus is trying to escape, and I know that in Motovun, and most likely in Macedonia too, because of the language, I had to watch, I was lucky, because they had put up a poster right in front of me, opposite the venue, on the wall, so I had to remind myself of what I was supposed to say, because I was completely lost for a second or two about what I should do at all... anyway it is very difficult to be dedicated to the other, obviously.

V.J.: Which year was that on AKTO?

S.L.: Well, I think it was two years ago, could have been in the summer of 2019.

V.J.: It was 2019, probably yes, because I participated in 2012 and in 2018, and we didn't meet, that's when Janez Janša was, along with Marko Marković from Croatia. This means you participated in 2019.

S.L.: Well, we considered it a few times, I talked about it to Ivana and to Filip, but it was some sort of an inconvenient time, so I had to thank them for the offer on a few occasions, but of course, in 2019 our arrangement was successful.

V.J.: So, how did AKTO look like to you, was it your first time in Bitola?

S.L.: It's a great festival. They are very devoted and very well organized, they have this local network that they have built over the years, which seems to me to be very dedicated, and that's something that often happens here in the Balkans - you have nothing, but if there is a group of people who like it, you will probably get the best out of it, and here... let's say in the West, the other day I was talking to a younger colleague, who last night actually finished her solo exhibition, and then she was talking about the opening of another group exhibition where we met two or three days earlier, and she was telling me how in that case that she had to do everything herself: the invitations, the press materials, set up the exhibition and clean the gallery, because the curator managed to convince her that she would do it best. And indeed, she did everything. So, that... she was paid a fee, but she had to do a lot of things on her own... or almost everything, so she complained a little bit, so that comes to my mind as a kind of parallel. There, I will say it again, the technical conditions are not exactly, it is very often known that... although they did everything in Macedonia, that was exactly why it was good... but of course, there were people sitting in the cafe while I was doing this, because it was on one of their main promenades and people are in cafes, someone would be taking a nap in the afternoon, and listen to this repetition: I'm doing this for you, my beloved people, and it wouldn't be the best scenario. Terribly irritating.

So, I was mainly satisfied, on the other hand, of course, the situation is like in our country when, how could I say it, when you get off the highway and enter real life, it's a little sad, because you can see those streets, those facades, I don't know... you can see that time has been unkind and very often... I don't know, when I go to Sinj, I am a little sad when I go to my village, and then, I don't know, when we talked they say that Bitola is almost halved. So, once there used to be a hundred thousand inhabitants, and now in winter there barely are fifty thousand. Simply, everyone who could leave, has left.

And now, my friend, let me ask you, how did it go in 2012 and 2018 in Macedonia, what did you do at AKTO, and of course, what are your impressions, what is your legacy, so to say?

V.J.: Well, I was in Bitola for the first time in 2012, and I realized how complex the culture of the city is. In 2012, the Turkish government made an exhibition about Kemal Atatürk in Bitola, apart from that I was especially delighted by the rich history, even the ancient history of the city. I found it very interesting that AKTO actually wanted to intervene in the public space of Bitola, and I think that it is why they reached out to people such as you and me, because we deal with the interventions in public space. I really liked that you referred to them as

actions. That's what Rena and I also call them: "actions", rather than "theatrical performances". In fact, I do not even like performance that looks like theatre, it's irrelevant to my practice. I see my work as an intervention and I appreciate that you mentioned the importance of the media today. Rena and I also see that strong connection between media and art and we try to work with the media in many ways. I think that today how you approach the media is very important. You should not allow the media to modify your work, you need to be the one who has a message for the media.

In 2011 I was the curator of an exhibition at Färgfabriken, in Sweden, in Stockholm, with a title "I will Never Talk About the War Again" according to the video performance by Lana Čmajčanin and Adela Jušić, and then the exhibition travelled to Maribor which was the European Capital of Culture in 2012. Lana and Adela presented their piece in Stockholm for the first time internationally, and today, this work is sort of famous. In Stockholm we had the participation of artist from Sarajevo Alma Suljević too. I met Lana and Adela through Alma, while they were still young artists in Sarajevo. In 2010, at Milica Tomić's studio in Belgrade, at a gathering and screening of their works, Alma Suljević came with Lana and Adela and then we talked about their practice. I was together with Sezgin Boynik, cultural theorist, and that's how I got familiar with the new Bosnian and Herzegovinian art scene. I presented "I will Never Talk About the War Again" in Bitola and the topic of AKTO was how to build and approach the audience and what is the audience, what does the audience mean today? What does it mean to show such content in a country such as Sweden which has not been in war for three centuries, and to recognize those contradictions, that, nevertheless, maybe the audience in Sweden does not want to deal with that topic, but we are pushing them into dealing with it.

S.L.: Now, the last thing I curated was in 2019, the Poreč Biennial, and the topic I chose was war. There were about twenty artists and it was international, but due to the production conditions, I will not go into details now, it was mainly based on our post-Yugoslav works, from the post-Yugoslav areas and I really wanted... So, it seems to me that we are living those remnants of the war, that, in fact, we, in essence, live in a post-war situation, that our region is still in a post-war situation in our area and that we have not come out of that situation and it seemed legitimate to me in such a tourist city to show what it is that we really live like. So, not that culture of renting, eating ice cream, which I respect, the people there have to make a living out of something and let them be, everything is fine... And then, in fact, it turned out, if I can reconstruct it well, that the exhibition was not, in fact, reported on more extensively, or even mentioned anywhere. All the previous Poreč Biennials had been covered in the media, but when it comes to this exhibition of ours from 2019, which had set its topic to be the war, I couldn't find nearly anything, at least in the media, especially in what I thought would be the main media outlet. This was just a minor digression, now go ahead...

V.J.: Thank you, it is a valuable comment, because I visited your exhibition. I was in Poreč with Rena in 2019 and I saw it. When I was mentioning “I will Never Talk About the War Again”, I forgot that I had seen yours too. At the time, I thought in a way, we had done similar things. I was in Poreč because a collector, Marinko Sudac, invited Rena and me to his residency “The Artist on Vacation”, so something good came out of that, seeing your exhibition with all those artists who were there, and which I found to be very interesting. In fact, there were two very good exhibitions in Poreč, in that relatively small, touristy, insignificant and boring city. The first one was yours and the other one was the show by the OHO group at the Zuccato Gallery, on three floors. It was a kind of a retrospective of their works from Marinko’s collection, which was also, for me, a discovery. I knew only few of OHO’s pieces, and I didn’t know there were so many different approaches by them, and so on. Those two exhibitions were some of the most interesting exhibitions in the whole region in August 2019, and both happened in this small tourist town, Poreč. That is typical for Croatia, to be able to find amazing things in the smallest cities where you do not expect it. It is mostly because tourist cities have the relevant infrastructure and budget for such activities.

S.L.: Well, I’d say, yes, there is. But, you know, I said that at the opening, I mean, their attitude towards us was very bad. I mean, the production funds we had were, simply, ridiculous... I mean, it was all ridiculous. And the terms that the city of Poreč imposed in order to give us any funds were ... in order to give us 30,000 kuna, the exhibition would have to be open every day, including weekends, then, in order for them to be willing to pay for it, those funds would be enough, so that, in fact, what Poreč gave money for was not the exhibition, but expanding its tourist offer, that’s what I would call it. Without being aware, in essence, of what the exhibition would be about, but they conditioned it to be... so, I would rather attribute it to some sort of continuation of the tradition, just rolling ahead with it, so, now, an exhibition – a better or worse one, along with the pieces, with the choices, with the possibilities, but the production was very bad, very unstable... For example, in our exhibition, at the opening - which might also be one of those topics - the sound of two of the pieces did not work. So, the sound did not work on that exhibition, and it was terribly important, those were the pieces of Adela Jušić. Later on they probably fixed it, but at the opening it did not work. The sound of two videos did not work, which is terribly unpleasant and, in my opinion, disastrous, because, at first, it was the image that did not work, then Andi Bančić, who works for that cultural centre, reformatted it, and then the image was fine, but the sound did not work. And, these are, approximately, the conditions that we work in, very often, and that is very humiliating, the things we’re facing. But, my friend, let’s go back to 2012 and to what Rena and you worked on.

V.J.: In 2012, I was invited for the discursive program of AKTO, Suzana Milevska was the curator. Participants were Tadej Pogačar from Slovenia, then Branimir Stojanović Trša from Serbia, the Škart Group and many others. The Škart Group were exhibiting a bench, which had been at the architectural biennial in Venice before coming to AKTO. Back then I was fascinated by the AKTO organizers’ desire to make a change in Bitola, especially with the Officers’ House, or whatever it is called, the Army House building, which is still right there in the park. It is much more important to observe AKTO as a community, a cultural framework of how to work within the community, which I found to be quite a relevant experience. I also think that’s the only way for things to survive in the Balkans, unless they try to be highly commercial. In fact, there are too many projects that tried to establish themselves as art market projects, gallery projects, and so on and so forth, and they have failed. In fact, there is no vivid art market scene and there is no such an infrastructure here, this has led to the failure of such projects. The reason why AKTO has existed for so long is that it has focused on building the community and not on the commercial activities.

In 2018, Rena and I performed an intervention on the main street in Bitola, we walked along the main street, with textile-transparent with drawings and masks on our faces. We named that action “Deaf Shoes”. We did such an action in Palermo for the first time, during the Manifesta, for the accompanying program “Politics of Dissonance” at the Manifesta in 2018. We first made it in Palermo, and then we repeated it in Bitola the same year. The interesting thing is that, when we did the performance in Palermo, we worked mainly in the shopping district of Palermo, which looks the same like in every other western city, simply you have the brands, Boss, Rolex and so on. We walked with textile-transparent and masks and we read what we had written. We took the statements from the media, in fact it was a compilation of sentences uttered by textile workers, i.e. the workers from the shoe factories in Serbia, about their position during their work; which were scandalous, like the worst possible thing you can imagine, like being in prison under forced labour and being bullied there. For example, they work at 50 degrees Celsius, they are not allowed to turn on the air conditioning, they are not allowed to go to the toilet and things like that. We found the testimonies of the workers which were real, and we compiled a very short, very effective story from those testimonies, which we read. It was a short piece, consisting of four or five lines which at the end turned out into slogans; and then we stood, from one store to the other of those brands. Our goal was to reach the Geox shop, because of the incidents had happened in the Geox shoe factory. They have production facilities in Vranje, Serbia and they also manufacture in Macedonia. So, Geox opened these sweatshops where for a salary of 150 euros they employ poor workers in the south of Serbia, which is the poorest part of Serbia, and in Macedonia as well, where they also have the same strategy. This is serious exploitation and most of the people who harass them there are from the ruling party. So, the Italians, in agreement with the government, assigned some Serbian managers to do dirty job for them. We walked in Palermo to that Geox shop, and then we blocked the entrance with the textile-transparent for

a couple of minutes, not longer than that, and we handed out an explanation to the buyers of what it was about. We did this intervention in collaboration with the “Clean Clothes Campaign”. It’s a global campaign not to buy from the brands that create sweatshops and bad working conditions for the workers. In Bitola we did something similar, but there AKTO were already working with the textile workers in Shtip, then Filip Jovanovski made the newspaper, together with their Macedonian “Clean Clothes Campaign”, which are very active people in Macedonia. In Shtip they initiated a cultural centre together with textile workers. Filip has published the newspaper “Tekstilec” (Textile Worker), and we distributed that newspaper within our action, on the main street in Bitola, where we also stood next to the shops with brands.

S.L.: Well, now, maybe “Geox” and the like... possibly, but “Rolex” and similar brands, the store there, it is probably just to keep the image, I don’t think it really pays off. You know, they prefer if someone from our region is able to afford it, they can go to Zurich, to Paris, the way they would like it, you know, they wouldn’t... and even if it would open there, those who could buy such things themselves they would not want to buy them there, but would prefer to go to Paris, Zurich or Berlin – that’s where those things are bought, right, so that, in general, you get an aura.

V.J.: Then we had a discussion at AKTO, where I participated and where I told the story of my detention, which happened in Belgrade in 2017, when I was detained in front of the Museum of Contemporary Arts, because of the performance we did with the masks of the president’s face. Well, Janša was in Bitola too, he had something similar as me because the real Janša was suing them for stealing his name. So, we discussed together some of those liminal practices. For example, I did not expect to be detained because of my performance, because in Belgrade, Serbia, there is no such a law, on using the image of the president. They first arrested a girl from Denmark. Just after we made the performance the security approached this girl, she was still having the mask in her bag. Then I approached the security and said, wait, leave her alone, give her passport back! It’s my mask, I gave it to her, she just happened to be here because we handed out masks for people to wear them. Many of the passers-by put on those masks, and we also handed out photocopied images of the sandwiches. Well, you have to take into account that politicians and ambassadors came there, so, there was no cultural scene involved. It has been done really glamorously, an event for the political and economic elites, they wanted to show how they opened this museum and how good they are. Very few artists had been invited, politicians promoting themselves, practically. With this intervention we wanted to show that politics has occupied that museum, and we wanted to counter that, in some way. Then the security let a girl from Denmark go, but invited the police who took me to the side, they took my ID card and told me that they could not decide whether our performance was okay or not, and that they have to ask the state prosecutor. As if they knew nothing; I said, well, people, this kind of performance is allowed in our country - no, no, no, you have to come with us they insisted...

S.L.: Wait, how do you mean ask the state prosecutor, why didn’t they, for example, call your lawyer, and ask him. I mean, the state prosecutor is a party in a dispute, he/she’s not the one to ask whether what you’re doing is ok or not ...

V.J.: It is very strange, they insisted that I have to go to the police station, in police vehicle behind bars, and my ID card was taken away. I went to the police station and there they asked the state prosecutor. They took a photo of the photocopied mask and the photocopied sandwich with their phone. And that was, anyway, on the poorest quality A4 paper..., and then the state prosecutor told them to let me go, because I did not break any law.

S.L.: That was the whole point, to get rid of you... I mean, now, it’s a very broad issue, in general, of their fear from themselves, in fact, to what extent they really do know, but you must not offer them a mirror, you must not give them a picture of themselves, to what extent is the whole story, in fact, fragile somewhere, as is often the case with those autocracies and dictatorships, right? No cracks should appear anywhere. It all has to be compact and when someone like you comes in and makes a small incision, in that shiny picture, to show what things are like, in fact, truly, nothing holds water any more, in terms of reality, behind that picture, I mean, what... Well, they shouldn’t be reminded of that, in any case everything must always look glorious, not like the mask of the mask that you offered, but just the mask, just like that, the mask must remain firm. Great.

V.J.: In fact, with this it became obvious how autocratic the regime is... until then, somehow, it was not so clear that it is going in such an autocratic direction; and during the coronavirus crisis, it became clear to everyone. It was too late, because Vučić has completely destroyed the opposition, and the Serbian political opposition hardly exist. Today, when it is clear to everyone, the opposition is scared, because they live in this system. So, it’s literally one man’s show which is exclusive to the members of his party. It’s quite frustrating for many young people. Because of that, many of them are still leaving Serbia and art here is now reduced to a commercial business and a sphere which doesn’t stir anything. Now, we’re moving on to this other segment of our conversation, tell me, how are you getting by in Berlin?

S.L.: Well, you know what, I can’t really say that I’m getting by, as far as Berlin is concerned. I performed this action, five months, maybe six months after I came, and now I can’t position it, maybe even more, maybe a year after I came, sometimes I can’t pin when I did something in time; and that’s as far as Berlin is concerned, I can’t say that I’ve done, in situations like this, something that’s really important. I don’t have... I am not someone whose name is popular in those curatorial, organizational positions of people who run the institutions, who run galleries or even in the public... but, of course, it would be important to put myself out there more, to communicate, just to mingle, to use that strategy of socialization that I have not relied on too much... and even when, in fact, as a sequence of some... an artist from Turkey asked me, because she was doing her

performance for the first time, in a situation, if I could, possibly, go with her through what she had prepared, so we went to her apartment and went through her work; and then, there, at that performance, I met a woman who is a professor in Kiel, among other things she is a performer, later on she had a solo exhibition in a gallery here. So, her name is Antje Majewski; and then we started talking, about some possibilities, she says that there aren't too many people there who are mainly working with performance art - because of what you were saying at the beginning, that you are not so fond of performance that is too theatrical - what I saw here, there is too much of what could be called a theatrical performance, much of it is based on dance... Probably in any art form there is work that's better and work that's not so good, this way or that way, anyway, meaningful or meaningless... I saw some of those pieces and I have to admit - as improvisations, where it is visible that people are improvising, they say something, maybe they went somewhere - those improvisations did not look good to me, they did not go down well with me. Of course, I also saw some other, performative choreographies that were great. But, that's not the form I deal with and I mainly suggested it and I guess it seemed interesting to her and she wanted to run it by her colleagues from the academy, to have me give a course to the students, to do a workshop at the Kiel Academy, which was important to me, to get an opening somewhere in Germany, to mingle a little, since I'm already here, both physically and existentially, to enter this cultural space as well. And then, you know, Covid broke out and then we started with some other contacts, namely I was in Buenos Aires... and it turned out that some people there knew some people in Berlin, so we were to recommend, to see if I have something up my sleeve somewhere, in the past of mine, or some sort of opening, a window of opportunity, to start doing something, but it all stopped because of the Corona. So, in fact, it's all on hold now, and even this performance festival, which was now in the spring in Berlin, it took place online. Like many other things. Only my things definitely do not fit, and not only my things but also things that are much more theatrical and much fiercer do not fit... because... what we talked about, what I love about that this work, which is called action, performance, whatever we call it, is, in fact, that moment of life, moment of encounter, moment of openness, moment in the present, which seems to me, to a good measure, to have been annihilated... So, performance can, sometimes, maybe function on a camera, on the Internet, but what I do, in any case, would for the most part look like some kind of a representation, that is, a representation of the work, not the work itself. However, that kind of career, anything that would be called a career in Berlin, is on hold, but I can't complain, I've worked a lot, on a series of projects even in Covid time, something with the Croatian institutions, something with the Slovenian institutions and with Slovenian organizers, with the "Bunker", with the Modern Gallery and with the Museum of Contemporary Art, which then included me in a museum cluster called "L'Internationale", so we worked on one sequence, one of those pieces was mine. We worked for the internet, in a way what their topic was, was this new situation, which has been studied... it served as their inspiration, so this was the work by Sanja Iveković, when she is standing on the balcony, while Tito is

passing through Zagreb, I think her work... maybe it was called a "Triangle", or ... they wanted us to thematize those spaces. So, the proposal was to thematize public spaces, in fact, that go along that line, along that distinction between the public and the private, i.e. balconies, facades, roofs and so on. And then I did sort of a performance on the balcony, so I stood for a while on the balcony and held a banner that said YU. So there, I'm standing alone on balcony, on the second floor, it was also here, somewhere between Wedding and Mitte, yes, somewhere on that side, so I think the place might be under Wedding too, because it was close to Gesundbrunnen, and I did it at a friend's house. So, we had to find a place, everything had to be organized. This happened during the period of large lockdowns and similar, both in Croatia and then it started spreading everywhere, it was very tight, so it was necessary to find a balcony where I could do the performance so that it could be recorded... It was a single photo, it was presented through a single photograph. I am holding that big banner on the balcony, and nothing but "YU" is written on the banner, and a cyclist is passing by... And I was lucky because this was filmed by Vanja Juranić, a filmmaker... So, at that very moment a cyclist was passing by and he looked at me, and in fact, this moment when communication was established between me and the cyclist was captured. That was one of the things I did, there were a number of others, and then when the situation opened up a bit, then I worked on one, I moved the Assembly (Parliament) by a single millimetre; and now, therefore, I have put the Croatian Assembly in a completely new constellation. I hadn't worked on this topic of relocation, of things like buildings or houses, so this was the first time, I collaborated with Domino in Zagreb, and I was, how should I put it, glad, because I really respect what they do a lot and, in fact, I think we should send out a booklet to all the members of the Assembly, in which they would be informed that the Assembly is no longer Franjo Tudjman's Assembly, but it is now Labrović's Assembly. Because now it is in a new, cosmic constellation, with that shift, with that one millimetre shift to the East. In fact, it has now been turned, adjusted and harmonized and we are moving towards a new destiny, no longer towards Tudjman's Assembly, which promoted chauvinism, nationalism, looting, corruption, obedience, etc., now we have moved to promoting freedom, creativity, respect and etc. So, some new values, and just like those who did not comply with the previous values, to literacy, were punished, and now there would be a punishment for those who will not act in accordance with the new values of Labrović's Assembly... I think, when we put it like this, it may seem egomaniacal to put or declare the Assembly, a new age of the Assembly, under one's own name, but I think it makes a lot of sense. It is not about... Precisely in the absurdity of naming the Assembly with my own name, I want to say what I wanted to say, that, in fact, that the Assembly could have been called by any name, because that is its function, to represent each and every one us, in that sense, everyone has the right to swear that the Assembly is his/her own. Otherwise, the Assembly does not make any sense, it is not just Tudjman's replacement with someone new ... and in terms of value, it truly belonged to Tudjman... its function was neither freedom nor independence, of those representatives, it meant nothing, they were just a voting machine and a machine

of obedience, executing decisions that had been made elsewhere. By some political elite, mafia, corrupt, bandit elites... and, Croatia, by the way, started its separation from Yugoslavia with one of those phrases "above God...", "Only God above the Assembly", meaning that the Assembly, in fact, was one, as it were, an empty shell, void of meaning, an executor, a mechanism, an instrument, completely instrumentalized, there was no free will there...

Well, now, by giving it the prefix "Labrović's", in fact, it does not mean that it is in possession of Labrović, but I wanted to give that absurdly comic note, that it belongs to Labrović as much as it belongs to anyone else, right? In that sense, it is not Tadjman's or anyone else's. It's just the meaning of this prefix, which is important to me to clarify, within that action. That was it. And then I did some more performances. So, on that performance, while fishing, in Zadar and Rijeka, and now I am preparing a walk in Rijeka, we did the same thing in Zagreb recently. That action is called "A Walk with the Abandoned", and then, because the call, the competition I applied for, was announced by HDLU, i.e. the Croatian Association of Fine Artists, and by an organization, "Q-art Ilica", an organization that deals with and thematizes the new situation with Ilica, i.e. Ilica looks completely abandoned, too many shop windows are now empty and full of dust... so, it has all degenerated a bit, and it is one of the main Zagreb streets ... and then, on top of that abandonment of Ilica, after the earthquake that happened again, when the centre of Zagreb was most affected, due to the dilapidation of those buildings, Ilica was again terribly affected... Something that could be metaphorically expressed - Ilica and the people felt abandoned, because the government did not reach out to them with concern, and the people felt particularly left behind, so it was also another form of abandonment.

So, not only in the sense of abandonment of space, but abandonment of people happened as well and then I wanted to add a third form of abandonment, to those two, which for me is a sort of, sort of, somehow, absolute abandonment to me, because it is not deserved, so to say, to some extent, and that is the abandonment of animals, the abandonment, in this case, of dogs, so we got these dogs as some symbols of abandonment. Those spaces may find their new purpose or use again, people will stand on their own two feet again, hopefully they will rebuild their houses (homes), their things, and even their life, but dogs without, really, without some human help, without the help of someone else, it would be very difficult, even impossible, for them to thrive, so we took some dogs from the animal shelter in Dumovec, eighteen dogs, and we walked them with volunteers for three hours through Ilica, and while this broader event lasted in Ilica, traffic was stopped as well and so on. We would like to repeat that "Walk with the Abandoned" in Rijeka now, so we would invite the workers who have been fired from various factories to join us, we would pay them some fee for this, meaning monetary compensation, to join us, so that we can perform that action again, of walking the asylum dogs in Rijeka. So, it should be done by workers who have a standard practice in Croatia, simply, the factories are closed, either because of the attractiveness of their locations or, allegedly, because of the

technological progress in the work processes and other various reasons, but I know for a fact that some other societies try to fight that situation by providing people with opportunities for new education, in a different area... for example, my friend, who was born, so they both are originally from Belgrade, his wife got a doctorate in biology, but she could not find a job and she is now taking a course that costs the German state 10,000 EUR, a course in software development.

Still, Germany is trying not to turn people into some kind of waste and surplus, and aims to include them again instead... and during that time you must not even shout... And what I find to be horrible in this, in fact what we are dealing with, since our work has a political undertone, a political standpoint, very specific and very often include living examples, exactly practices that are broader. You talked about the "Geox" thing and what you did afterwards, which means that not only you suffer, but you must not complain either, because whining is not dignified and the right to complain, the right to scream for help in public has also been abolished. Both at the individual level, at the cultural level, and, for Christ's sake, at the organizational level too, let's say trade-union level for example, there is no right to such an organization.

But, tell me what it is that you are doing now, I saw some things, one of the things that... at least what I managed to keep up with, Rena and you... you're doing an action, which could be roughly translated as "How to draw from the perspective of nature" - "Painting en plein air", so is it the only thing you're working on now and that you are occupied with, what is new and what is this action about?

V.J.: Before we move on to that, I would like to ask you one more thing, about your practice, to tell me briefly, because I have always been surprised by how many actions and pieces you have done. You are not one of those artists who have ten works of art, and then they are constantly reshuffling those same ten pieces. There are some, very famous artists, that have done only two or three things, and you have, I would say, about fifty or sixty actions or some sort of micro performances or some micro actions. What is your viewpoint on this? Is this just my impression, which might be wrong? Are your smaller actions part of something larger, broader, that extends into something of longer duration in the sense of doing it for years on a given topic, consisting of this multitude of micro actions?

S.L.: You know what, I was just thinking about it last night and today, because right now I am preparing an offer, for some galleries in Berlin, which should speak exactly about a thematically and physically limited piece of work, which could permeate the upcoming work, I believe - so this piece requires complex reflection, which then means financial production assistance. I do not know if I will be able to get that kind of support from anyone, whether anyone would show interest to embark on this project with me and walk the walk. Then I reflected back on my past work, which very often seems particularly eclectic... I have to admit that it is not possible to fully define what I was doing, but I am very satisfied with

it, because I am not ... So, my life was a bit scattered, and myself, I as a person, am a bit nervous and scattered and I have, let's say, some breadth of interests and breadth of different frustrations and joys, but I have never wanted to channel neither the frustrations nor the joys, to some extent, into a single recognizable, as I would say, corpus... On the other hand, I was never afraid to do, which terribly frustrated me, some things I could not do, because of the very poor production conditions and some of my works looked like copied copies of the copied copies of something that should have looked a certain way. But, through the process of filming, editing, etc. very often we need some objects, certain set design, etc., and this could not be done, and then at some point there were serious psychological consequences for me, I've been quite close to the edge, staring at the abyss... at a clinic, let's say, a clinic for rest and self-improvement, but on the other hand, there really are pieces that were quite bad even when they were first performed, but I wanted to test the limits of what is possible and how it is possible and whether it is possible and how it all looks together, because very often the repetition of a work did not seem as appealing as the performance of something new that did not have to turn out well in the end, and I am not bothered by it; of course, I would like to have had only great work and always do great work, but I am not bothered by this; and I have to admit, I do not have that ... So, when I started working I was in Sinj. It is a town of about 15 thousand people and during that time, from 2000 to 2007, I was out of work for seven or eight years, in Sinj. So, without live contacts, I worked as a substitute teacher in schools, as a teacher of Croatian, I made some attempts with the land I own, at agriculture, but that was completely impossible. Otherwise, agriculture in Croatia would not fail so massively, apart from those who are connected, apart from those who are part ... in fact, they have to be, it does not mean that people just want it that way, but simply that people want to do something and, they simply have to be part of that corrupt circle, of clientelist party circles, in order to survive. Thus, I simply could not even provide the conditions in which I would have that single body of work. So, to set a topic that I would follow, do research on and dig, at least I myself have failed to create it; and then I have that series of pieces that very often, I cannot say exactly to what extent now ... but they are very thematically broad.

V.J.: Yes, it's the form that unites it, and this interventionist, I'd say... I wouldn't want to call them provocations, because it might sound banal, and I don't see your work as provocation. I see your work as some sort of a wake-up call, the call to think, for me it is a call to start thinking.

S.L.: Mind you, be careful, if your action, say the one with the masks from the opening of the museum, if they want to reduce it, it could also be reduced down to a provocation. So, as a provocation, it would be, in fact, as if you're shouting out "You idiot!", to someone on the street or in a bar. But in a bar, it is also legitimate, whether you want to provoke someone into a fight, whether you want to tell someone that he really is an idiot in the context of the bar, the gathering, or because of what he just said. But, it is your right, in front of the museum, at

the opening of the museum, so in that context, to perform an action by which you tell the other, provoke him... you offer him his own image, and later this is declared as an act, it is just a provocation. But if it is just a provocation, then why did it lead to so much anxiety and if it is just a provocation, then why did the police intervene and call the state prosecutor? I mean, if it is just a "something", and then the state apparatus deals with the "something" that is nothing but a provocation, come on, give me a break. They are dealing with something that's very serious and they know that it's very serious, that's the point... It was very funny to me, two things are terribly funny to me, you mentioned at the beginning of how important the media is. I am one of those people who, perhaps, is often recognized as someone who, in a bad way, is present in the media, supposedly being in the media as an artist is a simple thing, now I don't know whether this is true, but maybe just like any other starlet, like anyone, I do not know, a filmmaker or an actor or anyone else, is, in quotation marks, a "popular figure". Well, it also depends in what way you are present. But for me and for the starlet, even if this is a media world, meaning that it produces material conditions for someone's survival, with due respect, if the starlet has something to offer, something that is of interest to the modern world, then we can't rob her of the right to want to survive. I think, in that context, in that whole complex I do not understand why it would be dishonest for her to show her tits and her ass, but it would be honest to keep her mouth shut and work for 300 euros at the cash register or in a supermarket warehouse. You know, she feeds someone just like the other one, she's also a great worker, only this one works with her tits and ass, she works through photography.

V.J.: One of early problems I had when I was the curator of the gallery of the Youth Cultural Centre in Belgrade (Dom omladine Beograda) was with the work of two artists, who worked together at the time, Ondrej Brody from Prague, and the other is originally from Finland, Kristofer Paetau. I do not know if you remember them, they did funny action "Licking the Curators' Ass". So, they would run to the curator, take off his pants, hold him, and then start licking his ass. That would be one of their works 15 years ago, sounds like two very clever guys. Now they have calmed down a little bit, but back then they were quite wild, Ondrej was doing some kind of self-immolation action in Prague in front of the Government. So, I brought them to the Youth Cultural Centre Gallery, the City Hall of Belgrade paid for their trip, this was in 2009. They told me they want to work with the porn actors from Serbia. I found a few Serbian porn actors and one director, but that is a very precarious occupation in Serbia. So, if you are from Serbia and you want to deal with the porn industry on a serious level, then you go to Budapest, the next stop for you is Prague, then the next stop are the serious industries such as in Florida or California. In Serbia, really, everything related to porn movies production was very rudimentary. We organized a workshop on how to make a porn movie in the gallery, but the focus was actually on the condition of labour of porn actors in this industry. So, we raised the question of sex work in the context of labour rights, the focus was actually on labour rights. Our event was perceived in a very negative way, I even came to be suspected by some local people of

renting the gallery to porn makers, because topics dealing with sexuality are still taboo in Serbia. I understood that porn, because a huge number of men see it, is still a taboo. I mean, pornography is related to art from the very beginning... we know that it is true, from the frescos in Pompeii, in ancient Rome, half of them are pornographic. That's clear to someone who knows art history.

S.L.: What about the graphic novel? What has happened to that story, is it about to be published, is it being finished or is it on stand-by?

V.J.: Rena and I are now working on something new, a kind of drawing YouTube intervention, and we share a similar outlook with you of working on various things in parallel, sometimes we do not even think that it is a finished piece, but rather we think that it is some kind of our longitude practice and process. On YouTube, we made "Performative Drawing" channel, although it does not have to be called like that. I mean, it's just a name for that channel. We have shot fifteen video tutorials on some traditional topics, drawing, painting, although I have not been involved in painting for a long time, I have not held a brush in my hand for many years.

Well, the graphic novel is still waiting. There are a lot of things that I have only started... So, I still haven't managed to get to it, but I have too much, because we perceive that type of drawing as an intervention, and as a caricature. And in that sense, it is interventionist. I tried to adopt the style of news cartoons, but for it to be, in a way, be a kind of a game in any given form. You know what is interesting on that channel, the possibility in different media to establish an institution that does not depend on the classical institution of art. That's very tricky, because we know very well that the institution of art does not consist only of the institutions such as museums or galleries, but the institution of art is something much broader, it is also the tradition of art and many other things which are the institution of art. So, in fact, you can't even leave that institution. In a broader sense, it is not a building, it is not a museum or a gallery, but the tradition as art is...

S.L.: Well, yes, you work, I think, especially now, when... that, with the avant-garde, with the modernisms, with the overstepping and denial. So, with that kind of denial of Dadaism, just as capitalism thought it had the power to swallow everything up, even the most radical objects of that denial, it is clear that art is moving in that direction. To put it simply, which may not be the worst thing, it has the ability to swallow its own denial or provocation or overstepping...

V.J.: Exactly. We have launched the YouTube channel and we are aware of fact that there are millions of YouTubers... Our channel is an attempt, a kind of an artistic form to be carried out within that channel. That's still an experiment, because YouTube is a very wide world. However, there you have to focus to only one category. The biggest category on YouTube is, in fact, the "How to"

category; how to repair your car, how to paint your window, do it yourself, especially software, games. It has hundred-thousands of channels and some are very popular, especially cooks – they are widely watched. There is some grandmother who has billions of views, who cooks Arab cuisine and so on... It is very interesting because in practice, it ultimately comes down to a television show. YouTube channel is nothing innovative in that sense. Do you know who Bob Ross is? He was an American painter who painted kitschy landscapes live on television for 30 years. He started painting it in the seventies..., and he is an icon of the genre of TV painting. Through it, the style of painting those landscapes was established. I name it "commercial landscapes". But that one... the spatula style, you will often see. It was established in the past 40 years, along with the oil paintings that can be found in many trivial places. Bob Ross simply managed to paint something appealing in real time. In fact, it is very difficult to paint oil on canvas in 15-20 minutes without a break, and for it to make any sense. It is almost as a sports discipline. So, the question here is what would you paint in such a short time? Our last video, oil on canvas is 17 minutes long. So we worked on that en plein-air, for 17 minutes and the result was oil on canvas... It's like some kind of sports skill. The problem is in the YouTube medium itself. Whatever you have to say, here you have to say clearly, in a very focused manner, in five or six minutes. Because no one has time any more. Young people do not have time to watch you, no one has time to waste on it. And deliberately, we said, let's see what it would be to go into it completely, to show what we know, but to accept those ridiculous neoliberal restrictions within that framework. So, this was a type of self-experiment. We have a YouTube clip that lasts for a seven minutes, it is entitled "How to paint a crocodile?", I mean, it just sounds simple. I do not know if you have looked at it..., and now, naturally, when you start experimenting with that medium, then you realize that there are too many wrong expectations in it.

It packs the product always within the confines of corporate space. So, we have left the traditional institutions of art - the museum, the gallery, etc., we went to YouTube. But there you're faced with a setting that's profoundly corporate, based on marketing, corporate setting, a neoliberal bureaucratic surrounding. This setting has been created by the same marketing idiots during the past twenty years. Well, the question is whether anything can be done there at all? For us, it still is an experiment in the mid of the pandemic crisis.

S.L.: I got very scared, you know, terrified when it started, I thought I was done for, if it lasts... But I don't know, so I say to myself, some other channels have opened and so on...

V.J.: I think people will just get used to this situation which will probably last for a very long time, unfortunately. In that sense we are very interested in the social media experiment, because the reaction of an acquaintance of mine to what we are doing was: "Well, well, what is it? It is neither a theoretical lecture, nor is it a good painting, nor, finally... it's something, I do not know what?" I said, it's

none of that, but it borrows from everything, it takes a segment from all those disciplines, it is also not a performance, it takes some sort of a framework from all those disciplines, it takes one form and it tries to insert it into a new form. So, now the question is how new is this form?

S.L.: I'm still very old-school... if I happen to have time, I prefer a good story, poetry or novel, to watching some thrash for an hour, I even used to feel ashamed of this. I don't know if I ever got down to watching a reality show. That form aroused something in me, not something judgmental, but shame... There are many new aspects there with those new media that I do not understand very well, and maybe not at all, maybe it would be interesting to me, here, now, I have never thought about it, what I could do on "Tik-Tok", you roused my interest now...

V.J.: Yes, I even think that it would be possible in that form, because exactly you have those short killer interventions.

S.L.: I'm very open... when I talked about how I felt about the reality show, I didn't really feel so ashamed by those people, but by the people who organized it and of the television for doing what it does. So, I am very open, to a certain extent I respect human idiocy, but the non-destructive kind, which is not, in a sense, oppressive, which is not violent, which is some kind of joy, just some kind of a respite from meaning. My performances move along that edge, they are absurd. When I fish for cans in an aquarium for six or seven hours, it cannot be said that there is some great meaning there. That nonsense and that absurdity, I mean, that halt on meaning, and yet, maybe, there is something inside, because, whether you like it or not, we are animals depending on meaning and we will find meaning in almost everything, because nonsense makes us feel anxious. And that, too, on the one hand is a lucky coincidence, and on the other... let's not go too far, it is very bad and maybe "YouTube" and "Tik-Tok" is not, precisely because of my openness, I say, whatever it's called, let's say, for me it does not have a predetermined value, as long as there are no violent moments, in that idiotism, I am really interested in whether I would find some form of internal stupidity that I could turn into something that would be meaningful in terms of Tik-Tok. So, this is a serious challenge for me, so maybe I will go and peek here and there...

This text is a transcript of the audio recordings of the conversation between Vladan Jeremić and Siniša Labrović. It was recorded in Serbo-Croatian and transcribed in Macedonian, later on translated into English.

Photo of Siniša Labrović: Keti Talevska, Teoden Nale, photographers at AKTO 14

Photo of Vladan Jeremić: Keti Talevska, photographer at AKTO 13

