

Vuk Ćosić

DEAR KARL

26 April–25 May 2024

artKIT

Before and Here

Last year we hosted Vuk Ćosić in the international group exhibition *Hypocrisy and Vanity*, which ran until 8 February 2024 at KIBLA PORTAL as part of the KIBLIX 2023 International Festival of Art, Technology and Science. Due to overwhelming interest it has been extended. But this major exhibition in Slovenia's largest exhibition center for contemporary art and in the largest "autonomous" – or independent or non-governmental, for further clarification – space was probably also the last one on 2,000 m² of space. KIBLA PORTAL opened in 2012, when Maribor and its partner cities were awarded the title of European Capital of Culture, and thirteen years later it bids farewell to the scene as one of the brightest, most varied in programme and substantively coherent spots of artistic, cultural, research, social, European and global, national, regional and local infrastructure dedicated to all creative, curious, explorative and socially conscious people.

Vuk Ćosić erected, or rather hung, a monumental sign "VOLIMO TE" in the exhibition *Hypocrisy and Vanity*, made of more than 1000 paper squares attached to a string, which, at a height of 3.9 m and a length of 25.5 m, alternating between white and black, formed the aforementioned expression. It could be understood ambiguously, either in Serbo-Croatian, translated as "WE LOVE YOU", or in Slovene, referring to the elections, "WE VOTE FOR YOU". With this mosaic, Vuk re-enacted the inscription as it was composed by the youth on 25 May 1972 at the celebration of Josip Broz Tito's birthday at the JNA Stadium in Belgrade. In the SFRY, such performances were witnessed every year on the occasion of the Relay of Youth and the speech of the best young man or woman in Yugoslavia at that time. Living traffic lights, when everyone in a part of the stadium raised their square and together they created an inscription or a picture, were a compulsory part of the set design and dramaturgy. For him, they were also a proto-pixelization and a reflection of the transition from the analogue to the digital world. With the help of a living force, which had its own whims, and a black square was incorrectly placed among the white ones, or vice versa, so that the words were not perfect. Human error, sloppiness, carelessness, rebellion...? Human nature.

The first work by Vuk Ćosić that I saw was the sign "Hollywood" for the blind in 1995. He translated the word into Braille and installed it in the form of large round signs under the Ljubljana Castle. Of course, when we look at this monumental sign, if we know what it expresses, we smile and think about its ambiguity. Ljubljana is also Los Angeles, and it has its own hill and "watches" its own films. Anyone who didn't know what these circles were saying probably at least asked, if not looked into it. The sign stood there for several years and became a symbol of Ljubljana, one of the city's landmarks.

Now "an internet veteran and internationally renowned classic of internet art", as one website puts it, is appearing in Maribor for the first time with a solo exhibition. He first appeared at

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artKIT, Glavni trg 14, Maribor
Opening hours: Tuesday to Friday from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m., Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

an event presenting then new- or multi-, but today intermedia artists from Ljubljana at the Multimedia Centre KIBLA in 1998, when he and Matej Andraž Vogrinčič did a performance with dressed bananas, who, like models at a fashion show, “entered the catwalk” with the announcement of each model, wearing different clothes for various occasions. This is how Slovenia got its bananas, its pop with a distance to one of the most common art objects. Maribor's intermedia artists then presented their work at Kapelica Gallery and K4 Club in Ljubljana. Unfortunately, a similar two-way artistic exchange between Maribor and Ljubljana never happened again.

“Dear Karl” is on display at artKIT as another Vuk exhibition premiere, which has been in the making in the past. For the first time, we are publicly presenting a series of fourteen images created during the collaboration between Karl Lagerfeld and Vuk Ćosić, which was established in 2011 on the initiative and through the mediation of the Berlin-based Digital Art Museum. A complementary website was planned at the time of the publication of *The Little Black Jacket*, but after initial preparations the project was stopped and never published.

The creative exchange was planned around a series of photographs of celebrities from the worlds of fashion, music and film wearing Chanel's iconic La Veste, known as one of the most canonical fashion achievements of the twentieth century.

Ćosić added a counterpoint to these photographs based on the Google image algorithm in operation at the time, which acted as a basis for associatively complementing original photographs with visually and semantically coherent internet photographs.

The resulting parallel images offered the observer a glimpse into the so-called Minotaur's authorial collaboration between the human being and the machine, where the intellectual and creative horizons of both are intertwined. This seemingly simple and even amusing visual game also contains an early instance of the now ubiquitous critique of the prejudices inherent in AI solutions.

Vuk Ćosić “updates” the works conceived and created at the time with a “disclaimer”, “protecting” the visitors of the exhibition from possible copyright infringements by the fashion designer Kaiser. The safely packaged photographic duplexes are presented alongside their substitutes, as interpreted and described by artificial intelligence in the form of text.

Vuk merges times, the past with the present and beyond, into the future, switching the analogue into the digital once and now. He is essentially an “intermedia archaeologist” (which he is by profession), always looking for a way of dealing with contemporary technologies in a human being – and not just user – friendly way. To make works that are at once enigmatic, mysterious and understandable, and serious. But also humorous. And more. It depends on perception and acceptance.

His images are individually vignettes of a period, which, when placed together, accentuate a unified and comprehensive artistic conception and, in dialogue with the past, highlight our time through Vuk's creative history, as he reveals it to us again and again as he picks through his attic. With them, he establishes social reality in a public multilogue of its own with various participants, and shows history in its present readings and relations with his touch. In reality. Through personal experience, knowledge and knowing, he takes us into a dance of ideas and sentences, forms and contents, archaeological and contemporary, analogue and digital. He digs up “myths” and tells stories with reference to them, which he enlarges, transforming them with “modern technologies” into a peculiar paradox, which lights his spark. The works become “alien” or incomprehensible to us, unreadable, visible (even if hidden).

Vuk Ćosić is an archaeologist of intermedia art who engagingly interrogates our analogue nature

and the technologies that are constantly evolving and new ones emerging. Outrunning nature has so far not turned out to be a good thing, given the state of the world and the situation in it. Will this time be different? Can it be different at all? Some believe that we have not yet encountered a higher intelligence” in the Universe, because “higher intelligences” always destroy each other at some stage. At the same time, with the exhibition “Dear Karl”, he somehow kindly dedicates his star, calling copyright and the perception of it then and now. So his mining can also be seen as either rudimentary or sophisticated. From then to now. Before and here.

– Peter Tomaž Dobrila

BIOGRAPHY

Vuk Ćosić, born in Belgrade in 1966, lives and works in Ljubljana. He is an internationally renowned classic of web art.

Using poetic media archaeology, he creates exhibitions, videos, books and monuments that explore the social implications of the relationship between the genesis of media technologies and art.