

The Shifting Policies of Exhibiting Conceptual Art from Yugoslavia Abroad: The Case of the 1976 Venice Biennale

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Abstract For the 37th edition of the Venice Biennale in 1976, organized under the newly established, politically left-wing leadership of President Carlo Ripa di Meana and the Director of the Visual Arts Section, Vittorio Gregotti, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia presented for the first time an exhibition of recent conceptual art practices in the national pavilion. The preparation process of the exhibition became the subject of a rather controversial chain of events, including the censorship by the Yugoslav authorities of original proposal to present the country's earliest and most radical conceptual art practices, which led to the withdrawal of Yugoslav participation in Venice. As a result, the representatives of the Venice Biennale sent a note of protest to Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito, whereupon the exhibition was realized in the Yugoslav Pavilion, albeit with a compromise solution regarding the original curatorial concept. During the same period, however, Yugoslavia officially participated in other international biennials, such as the São Paulo and Paris Biennials, where the exhibitions showing the latest positions in conceptual art were not subject to censorship or similar political interventions. This article presents and analyzes the ambivalent Yugoslav institutional and exhibition policies at the biennials in the 1970s, with a focus on Yugoslav participation in the 1976 Venice Biennale.

Keywords Venice Biennale. Yugoslavia. Conceptual Art. Exhibition History. Cultural Politics.

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For the 37th edition of the Venice Biennale in 1976, titled *Ambiente, Partecipazione, Strutture Culturali* (Environment, Participation, Cultural Structures), the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) presented for the first time an exhibition of conceptual art in its national pavilion in the Giardini area. Curated by Radoslav Putar a prominent Zagreb-based art critic and art historian, this exhibition aimed to showcase recent

artistic positions from Yugoslavia that aligned with the international conceptual art tendencies.¹ The selected artists, including Radomir Damjanović Damjan, Braco Dimitrijević, Herman Gvardijančić, Boris Jesih, Julije Knifer, and Ivan Kožarić, presented works that challenged the conventional modernist notions of art and authorship. In the foreword of the exhibition catalogue Radoslav Putar criticized the market-driven approach to exhibition making and emphasized that the exhibition was not intended to be a representative showcase but rather a reflection of the diverse and innovative artistic practices emerging from Yugoslavia (Putar 1976). The works featured in the exhibition abandoned and dismantled the modernist idioms, such as classical abstraction, surrealist symbolism, and the “dramatic investigation” of figuration. Instead, Putar (1976) based the selection of works for the exhibition on “unconventional representational criteria” as well as the conceptual qualities and innovation of their art practices, with an intention to provide “no statistical information about Yugoslav art” to the international audience.

However, Putar’s curatorial vision initially met with resistance from Yugoslav cultural officials, who preferred established modernist artists to represent the country at the Venice Biennale. The criticism expressed in the exhibition catalogue is undoubtedly Putar’s reaction to a very complex and controversial chain of events that overshadowed the process of preparing and staging this exhibition. The Yugoslav authorities censored the original curatorial proposal to present the country’s earliest and most radical conceptual art practices. This censorship even led to the (temporary) withdrawal of Yugoslavia’s participation in the Venice Biennale. The Yugoslav exhibition at the 1976 Biennale and its political, diplomatic and infrastructural framework reflect the complicated and often contradictory ambitions associated with the international exhibition policy of the Yugoslav state in the 1970s, which form the focus of the analyzes in this article.

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1 Radoslav Putar (1921-1994) was a prominent art historian, art critic and curator from Zagreb. He holds a significant position within the history of twentieth century art in Croatia and the broader Yugoslav context, particularly during the period between the mid-1950s and early 1980s, when his analytical and critical approach to various phenomena of modern and contemporary visual arts provided a substantial framework for the liberalization, theoretical understanding and institutional affirmation of the advanced, radical and new artistic practices. He started his professional career as an assistant lecturer at the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb in 1951, after which he became curator at the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb in 1962. Ten years later, in 1972 he was appointed director of the Gallery of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, concluding his career as director of Museum of Arts and Crafts from 1979 to 1983. His professional undertakings were, nevertheless, not only institutional: he was active as a regular art critic from the mid-1950s for several newspapers and journals in Zagreb, the editor of the *Spot* periodical on photography during 1970s, a founding member of the Gorgona group and a protagonist of the New Tendency movement from its launch in 1961, to name only his most prominent engagements. Since his professional beginnings as an art critic, Putar was very well informed about the currents on the international art scene and showed a rather comprehensive understanding of different art phenomena that appeared on the global scope from the early 1950s onwards. As his activities in the international world of art advanced in the following years and decades through organization and participation in various international exhibitions and art events at home and abroad, he established a branched professional network internationally.

1 Yugoslav International Exhibition Policies: A Brief Historical Overview

In order to understand the circumstances that were decisive for the organization and outcome of Yugoslavia's participation in the 1976 Venice Biennale, it is important to consider the immediate historical background of Yugoslavia's official relationship with this international exhibition, as well as the country's general exhibition policies abroad. Yugoslavia was given a national pavilion in the Giardini in Venice in 1938 and, apart from the period during the World War II and in 1948, has participated in the Venice Biennale without interruption ever since.² Following the 1948 Tito-Stalin split and the break away from Soviet political influence, Yugoslavia embarked on an independent foreign policy trajectory, skilfully maneuvering between the Eastern and Western blocs. This involved cultivating positive relations with both the Soviet Union and the United States, a strategy that culminated in Yugoslavia's founding membership of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961. This movement served as a crucial platform for developing nations to pursue autonomous foreign policies, independent from the constraints of Cold War bipolarity.

As a socialist state, Yugoslavia's independent stance garnered significant international recognition, particularly within left-leaning political circles, including the Italian Communist Party that had influence over the Venice Biennale during the 1970s. Yugoslav exhibitions in Venice in the 1960s were characterized by the dominant modernist model of representation, which gradually became a subject to criticism in the Yugoslav art world for not daring to reshape and include artist positions that deviated from the mainstream and institutionalized modernist tendencies in the country.³

In the mid-1960s, the so-called moderate modernism and its institutions (museums and galleries of modern art and major exhibitions promoting modernism) became well-established in Yugoslavia as part of the political and economic consolidation and liberalization of Yugoslav society.⁴ By the end of the 1960s, a new generation of artists emerged who reacted critically to the official language of modernism in Yugoslavia as a code of representation of a value system in art that they did not recognize as their contemporary one and inclined toward more conceptual approach to art making.⁵

The Yugoslav cultural apparatus, which was in charge for organizing exhibitions abroad, did not recognize the changes that were taking place in the artistic life, so that new and radical artistic tendencies were either sent to the Venice Biennale posterior to the time of their appearance in Yugoslavia or were not included in the exhibition selection at all. Criticism toward Yugoslav official exhibition policies for abroad was voiced by curators

2 For a detailed historical overview of Yugoslav participation at the Venice Biennale, see Ereš 2020.

3 For examples of such criticism, see Horvat Pintarić 1964; 1966; B.A. 1966.

4 The expression 'moderate modernist art' refers to the art of 1950s and 1960s that relied on the tradition of the Parisian modernism (École de Paris). Moderate modernism became the official state art of socialist Yugoslavia that replaced the paradigm of socialist realism in the early 1950s. The main features of moderate modernism are a focus on pictorial problems, formal laws, and the autonomy of art, as well as maintaining elements of figurative art (Đurić, Šuvaković 2003).

5 For an overview of conceptual tendencies in Yugoslav art during the 1970s, see Susovski 1978; Ilić 2021.

and museum experts in the country.⁶ In 1969, Radoslav Putar, who was at the time the director of one of the leading art institutions in Yugoslavia – the Gallery of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, described the current Yugoslav exhibitions strategies for international audience as insufficiently professional, bureaucratically burdened and outdated, because they “respected (artistic) authorities that have been ‘confirmed’ by tradition or the establishment”, which led to “presenting deceptive artistic greatness” and harmed the interests of “our country and its art in the international context”.⁷

At the same time, the Yugoslav art community was well acquainted with the activities of the Venice Biennale as an international exhibition, which they regularly visited. Some of them questioned the programmatic topicality as well as the obvious political and commercial influence to which this manifestation was subject in the 1960s. Thus, on the occasion of the 1966 Venice Biennale, Yugoslav art critics reported that the exhibition was characterized by conformism, routine and superficial audacity, and noted the institutional crisis in which the Venice manifestation found itself at the time (Gagro 1966; Horvat Pintarić 1966).

An infrastructural context should also be taken into account when analyzing Yugoslav exhibition policies at the Venice Biennale. In the 1970s a change within the system of organization of Yugoslav exhibitions abroad occurred leading to organization and conceptualization of Yugoslav participation at international biennials, such as those in Venice, Paris and São Paulo, being delegated to directors or curators of museum institutions. The appointed exhibition commissioners, as they were named at the time, were required to send their exhibition proposals to the Fine Arts Commission of the Inter-Republican Coordination Committee for Cultural Cooperation for ratification, which in most cases was just a procedural formality resulting in most of these exhibition proposals being approved. The effect of this change was that the exhibition curator gained a greater degree of independence in the process of decision-making and thus a more significant role in regard to conception of Yugoslav exhibitions abroad, in comparison to the centralized and controlled federal model of exhibition organization that was in effect during the 1960s (Ereš 2020, 175-8).

Before the administrative body of the Inter-Republican Coordination Committee for Cultural Cooperation (ICC) was founded in 1971, a survey had been made among the representatives of museum institutions and art organizations in Yugoslavia about participation at art exhibitions abroad, including the international biennials, with the aim to analyze and summarize Yugoslav exhibition policies abroad, as well as to prepare the strategy for

6 Criticism of Yugoslav exhibition policies at international art events, particularly the Venice Biennale, emerged in the mid-1950s and persisted throughout the 1960s. Prominent figures, including Aleksa Čelebonović (former commissioner of the Yugoslav pavilion), Miodrag B. Protić (Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade), Katarina Ambrozić (Belgrade-based curator), Vera Horvat Pintarić (Zagreb-based art historian), and Radoslav Putar, voiced concerns regarding these policies. Their critique centered on the inconsistency of exhibition selections, which often failed to align with the evolving trends and contemporary artistic practices prevalent at the Venice Biennale. Notably, these critics highlighted the exclusion of significant contemporary Yugoslav artists from the national pavilion, suggesting a disregard for the most innovative and progressive artistic movements within the country. More in Ereš 2020.

7 The Archives of Yugoslavia, Fund 599 (Federal Commission For Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries), Materials for the analysis of participation in international art manifestations (AJ-559-86-194), 8 December 1969.

the future exhibition planning. Radoslav Putar's contribution to this survey was, again, made from a critical perspective. He claimed that a

professional base for organizing exhibitions abroad has not been established yet, that Yugoslav exhibitions abroad had been conceived upon an understanding of culture as a symbol of a certain status and in connection with respect for the authority proven by artistic traditions or the establishment.⁸

He also criticized the tendency for commercialization when conceiving the exhibition policies abroad that resulted in privatization and individual benefiting, asserting that more radical and contemporary artistic positions should be included in these exhibitions. Putar's criticality was not welcomed among the members of ICC, whose understanding of art predominantly followed the more conventional, moderate modernist idiom, and who had diverse approaches and usually outdated knowledge of the current art tendencies, which all resulted in Putar not being able to influence the transformation of exhibition policies in a more significant manner.

Taking all this into consideration, from the early 1970s onward the exhibitions in the Yugoslav pavilion at the Venice Biennale can't be observed primarily as a means of implementing Yugoslav international cultural policy, but rather as the result of various factors that have had an equally significant influence on the structure and physiognomy of these exhibitions. The role of curators (commissioners), their professional preferences and the artistic trends they promoted or inclined toward, represent a much more significant context for understanding the Yugoslav exhibitions at the Venice Biennale than was previously the case, during the 1950s and the 1960s. Furthermore, the new practice introduced by the Venice Biennale in the early 1970s of defining a central thematic and contextual framework for each new exhibition edition resulted in exhibitions set in the national pavilions changing from the survey format (retrospective or group exhibition) to thematically or conceptually conceived exhibitions.

2 Yugoslavia at the 1976 Venice Biennale

The Venice Biennale underwent an important reform on 25 July 1973, culminating a process that had begun five years earlier, in 1968. This reform was marked by the adoption of a new statute that redefined the Biennale as a "democratically organized cultural institution" committed to "full freedom of thought and expression" (Martini, Martini 2011, 126). Its main goal was to foster this art exhibition as an event focused on research, experimentation, and critical discourse. Carlo Ripa di Meana, a functionary of the Italian Socialist Party, was appointed head of the Venice Biennale institution, while the architect Vittorio Gregotti became the director of the Visual Arts Sector.⁹ The new artistic management of the

⁸ The Archives of Yugoslavia, Fund 599 (Federal Commission for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries), Materials for the analysis of participation in international art manifestations (AJ-559-86-194), 8 December 1969.

⁹ For a detailed analysis of the history of the Venice Biennale and its transformation in the 1970s, see Portinari 2018.

Venice Biennale, with a pronounced left-wing ideological profile, sought to change both the programmatic character and the format of the exhibition in order to clearly distance itself from the market-oriented character of the event in the previous period. Gregotti's programmatic ambitions aimed at a more direct integration of exhibitions in national pavilions into the central thematic frameworks of the Biennale, focusing on the processes of re-examining the social function of art and its institutions, so that the new exhibition format would function as an international platform for initiating critical debate on current issues in visual arts and other fields of knowledge production that goes beyond the classical representational patterns of exhibition practice (Martini 2010; Portinari 2018).

The organizers of the 1976 Venice Biennale sought to initiate a conversation between the Biennale and the international art community during the exhibition preparation process on the topic of the social and technological context of recent art production and particularly the notion of environment. Prior to defining the theme for the Biennale, a series of consultations took place in 1975 and 1976 between representatives of national pavilions and the Biennale administration. Radoslav Putar, being the director of the Zagreb Gallery of Contemporary Art, represented Yugoslavia in these discussions. Since he was familiar with the new conceptual direction the Venice Biennale was taking at the time, Putar was officially appointed as the commissioner of the 1976 exhibition in the Yugoslav pavilion and was invited to submit a proposal for the exhibition concept to the ICC, which at the time advocated that Yugoslavia (being a socialist country) should officially support the new leftist orientation of the Biennale's management through participation in the event. As answer to the general theme of the 1976 exhibition *Ambiente, Partecipazione, Strutture Culturali*, which aimed at fostering a dialogue between visual arts, the notion of the environment and the current social concerns, Putar proposed a survey of the recent development of the so-called 'new artistic practice'¹⁰ in Yugoslav art, an exhibition that would map a chronological development of conceptual art in the country since the late 1960s. His exhibition concept was elaborated as follows:

Considering the possibility of a Yugoslav presence in this exhibition, we believe that an effort should be made to document and present the phenomena that have raised fundamentally new questions about the appearance and function of contemporary language in art after 1970. It is well known that in recent years, both in the world and in our art, there has been a series of very complex processes that have led to one of the most radical changes in the appearance and status of the artwork (the path

10 The term 'new artistic practice' was introduced to Yugoslav art criticism and curatorial practice by art historian Ješa Denegri on the occasion of the exhibition *New Artistic Practice 1966-1978*. The exhibition gave an overview of the various tendencies of Conceptual Art practices in Yugoslavia and was opened in 1978 in the Gallery of Contemporary Art in Zagreb. The term itself originated from the title of the last subsection of the text by Catherine Millet, *L'art conceptuel comme sémiotique de l'art*, originally published in *VH 101* (Millet 1970), and published in 1972 in Serbo-Croatian in the magazine *Polja* (Mile 1972). As Denegri explained, this term seemed more appropriate to encompass the diverse phenomena of the new art of the seventies in Yugoslavia than the more concrete and specified term Conceptual Art (Denegri 1978, 5-11). *Artistic practice* emphasized that despite its heteronomous features, it is always about art conceived as a process, action/activism, transformative, and performative act, comparable with the philosophical term 'praxis'.

towards the dematerialization of the art object, the further expansion of media, the emphasis on the mental component of the artwork over its visual appearance, etc.), which has been conditioned and accompanied by equally visible changes in the behavior of the artist himself, who actively and critically positions himself in relation to many social and cultural structures that determine and evaluate his work. In Yugoslavia, these general processes found their specific manifestations, which in our opinion have a certain place in the international context, and therefore we propose an attempt at their reappraisal and presentation.¹¹

This exhibition proposal featured a retrospective of the OHO group, a collective recognized for its pioneering contributions to the development of neo-avant-garde and conceptual art within the Yugoslav art scene that emerged between 1966 and 1971, alongside works by younger contemporary artists who have gained international recognition in the recent years, including Radomir Damjanović Damnjan, Marina Abramović, Goran Trbuljak, and Braco Dimitrijević. The proposed exhibition featured artistic experimentation beyond traditional modernist media, encompassing installation, video, photography, text-based works, and performance documentation. The inclusion of these conceptual art practices, previously absent from official Yugoslav representations at the Venice Biennale, signified a notable shift in established exhibition norms. This exhibition proposal, however, was not accepted by the Fine Arts Commission of the ICC, the official federal authority in charge for organizing Yugoslav exhibitions abroad. As a result, a series of bureaucratic obstructions accompanied the process of alteration of the original exhibition proposal under the request of ICC, finally leading to the cancellation of Yugoslav participation at the Venice Biennale only one month before the official opening of the manifestation.¹²

The Yugoslav withdrawal from the participation at the Venice Biennale had several effects. A prominent Yugoslav art historian Ješa Denegri sent letters to Enrico Crispolti and Tommaso Trini, leading figures of the Italian art world involved in organizing events at the Venice Biennale, as well as to Vittorio Gregotti, the director of the Visual Arts Sector at the Venice Biennale expressing his disappointment with this incident. Denegri argued that the ICC responsible for approving the Yugoslav participation had rejected Putar's proposal without providing any clear explanation, attributing this to intolerance and distrust within the political and administrative bodies of Yugoslav state towards the proposed artists and their innovative artistic practices. Given this situation, Denegri's intention was to recommend the Yugoslav artists for inclusion in the exhibition *Attualità internazionali '72-76*,

11 The Archives of Yugoslavia, Fund 465 (Federal Institute for International Scientific, Educational, Cultural and Technical Cooperation), Radoslav Putar's Proposal of the concept of Yugoslav participation at the Venice Biennale, 16 February 1976 (AJ-465-1455).

12 For a detailed reconstruction of the process of withdrawal from Putar's conception and Yugoslav participation at the 1976 Biennale, see Ereš 2020, 196-203.

a central event organized within the framework of the Venice Biennale.¹³ Ultimately, Marina Abramović was included in this exhibition, showcasing her work alongside other international contemporary artists.

After the official decision that Yugoslavia would not participate in the Venice Biennale, the Biennale president Carlo Ripa di Meana sent a protesting telegram to Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito inviting him to intervene so that Yugoslavia could participate in the Biennale.¹⁴ In response to this telegram and under probable political pressure from the Yugoslav leadership, an emergency meeting of the ICC Fine Arts Commission was called, resulting in the decision to send a Yugoslav exhibition to the Venice Biennale (after all). This sudden change in decision echoes the recent reproachment in diplomatic relations between Yugoslavia and Italy. The two countries had signed the Treaty of Osimo in November 1975, resolving long-standing border disputes on the coast near Trieste that had lasted since the end of World War II, paving the way for closer political and economic cooperation (Mišić 2013). Given Yugoslavia's interest in maintaining good relations with the neighboring Italy, the absence of socialist Yugoslavia from the reformed Venice Biennale under the left-wing leadership would represent an unnecessary misunderstanding for the newly established favorable bilateral political climate.

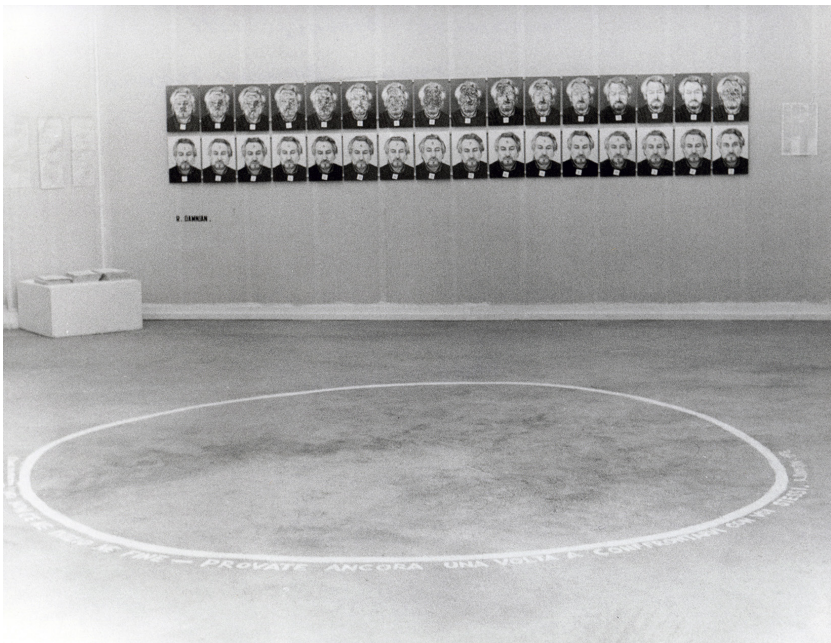
The final outline of Yugoslav exhibition that took place in Venice included, however, an intervention to the Putar's exhibition proposal and included works by two post-conceptual painters from Slovenia (Boris Jesih and Herman Gvardijančič) instead of the retrospective of the OHO group, partly corresponding to the originally designed framework for presentation of conceptual tendencies in recent Yugoslav art.¹⁵ The final contextualization of the Yugoslav exhibition, as presented at the beginning of the article and in Putar's preface in the exhibition catalogue, followed the initially conceived framework that focused on showcasing new artistic trends from Yugoslavia, which

13 Venice. Venice Biennale. Historical Archive of Contemporary Arts (ASAC), Fondo Storico (FS), Arti Visive (AV), b. 255: an excerpt from the original letter from J. Denegri to E. Crispolti and T. Trini, 31 May 1976, reads as follows (originally written in Italian): "Perciò quando Putar presentò questa concezione alle commissioni socio-politiche che decidono del finanziamento del progetto sorsero diversi ostacoli che portarono alla bocciatura della proposta. A quidicare dallo stato attuale delle cose il padiglione jugoslavo, quest'anno, rimarrà chiuso. Le ragioni di questo rifiuto non ci sono state comunicate, ma è chiaro che all'interno di quei corpi deliberanti esistono insofferenza e sfiducia, non soltanto verso gli autori proposto ma anche nei confronti della nuova arte nel suo complesso. Noi, naturalmente, nel nostro paese, cercheremo di chiarire questa situazione eccezionalmente grave e sintomatica, evitando scandali di ogni tipo. Proprio per questo non desideriamo compiere alcun atto di protesta davanti all'opinione artistica internazionale. Tuttavia per consentire agli autori menzionati di presentare le loro opere alla Biennale di quest'anno, in qualità di vicesommario, per quanto non in forma ufficiale, cerco di trovare il modo di dare anche a loro la possibilità d'inserirsi nella mostra *Attualità '72-76*".

14 ASAC, FS, AV, b. 255: telegram from C.R. di Meana to J.B. Tito, 19 June 1976: "Gentilissimo Presidente rivolgo un caldo invito ad intervenire autorevolmente perche Repubblica Federativa Jugoslava proprietaria di un Padiglione ai Giardini della Biennale di Venezia sia presente anche quest'anno come con grandi et positivi risultati lo est stata per molti anni stop l'assenza della Jugoslavia nel pieno della ripresa et partecipazione internazionale alla Biennale di Venezia risulterebbe per noi inspiegabile et dolorosa stop la ringrazio at nome consiglio direttivo et mio personale per ogni suo decisivo intervento Carlo Ripa di Meana Presidente Biennale Venezia".

15 The inclusion of Jesih and Gvardijančič in the exhibition selection, instead of the OHO group as initially intended, followed a suggestion by the Slovenian delegate on the ICC Fine Arts Commission. While no archival documents directly explain this shift, it is plausible to hypothesize that pre-existing tensions between the OHO group and the leadership of the Gallery of Modern Art in Ljubljana may have influenced this decision. This situation bears a potential resemblance to the group's exclusion from the 1970 Venice Biennale, as recounted by OHO member Marko Pogačnik in a later interview (Žerovc 2013).

emerged parallel to the appearance of fundamental conceptual changes in the understanding of art and the re-examination of the artist's position on a broader international level. However, the compromise solution that resulted from the given circumstances deviated from the original concept, which had envisaged a more radical and compact exhibition narrative [figs 1-2].



Figures 1-2 Exhibition in the Yugoslav Pavilion, XXXVII *La Biennale di Venezia*, exhibition view.
Photo courtesy of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb

The case of the Yugoslav participation at the 1976 Venice Biennale reveals ambivalence and inconsistency as main characteristics of the Yugoslav international exhibition policies. The refusal of Putar's original exhibition concept and its complex political consequences exposed not only the strategic ineffectiveness of the vast Yugoslav infrastructure of cultural bureaucracy, its conventional and somewhat anachronistic viewpoints on exhibition policies in terms of understanding the transformations that the sphere of visual arts underwent during the 1970s, but also an evident polarization between the cultural administration and modern art institutions/art professionals in the country.

3 Conceptual Art and the Shifting Policies of Representation in Exhibition

The contradictory policies of Yugoslav exhibitions abroad in relation to conceptual art paints an even more complex picture when we consider the country's official participation in other international biennials in the 1970s, such as the Biennale des Jeunes in Paris and the São Paulo Biennial. The inclusion of the latest positions in conceptual art did not seem to be subject to censorship or similar bureaucratic interventions at these international exhibitions, in which Yugoslavia had participated since its foundation. Examples such as the 7th Biennale des Jeunes in Paris (1971), where the Yugoslav participation included very radical, conceptual positions of young artists,¹⁶ as well as the 15th São Paulo Biennial (1979), where the Yugoslav selection showed an overview of the latest experimental, analytical and post-conceptual painterly practices,¹⁷ show that conceptual art positions were the central thematic framework for the representation of contemporary art from Yugoslavia at the international exhibitions other than the Venice Biennale.

The discussed ambivalence in policies of exhibiting conceptual art becomes even more apparent if we take the strategies of institutionalization of conceptual art in Yugoslavia into consideration. The two leading museum institutions for modern art in the country – the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade (MoCAB) and the Gallery of Contemporary Art in Zagreb – hosted and organized several exhibitions of conceptual art tendencies since 1971 such as: *Examples of Conceptual Art* (Salon of the MoCAB, 1971), *Possibilities for 1971* (Gallery of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, 1971), *Young Artists and Young Critics* (MoCAB, 1972), *Documents on post-object phenomena in Yugoslav Art 1968-1973* (Salon of the MoCAB, 1973). In 1978 a large-scale retrospective of conceptual art practices in Yugoslavia *New Artistic Practice 1966-1978*, accompanied by a representative publication, was held at the Gallery of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, confirming that conceptual art was relatively institutionalized in Yugoslavia by the mid-1970s, and that presenting a survey of conceptual artistic practices in the national pavilion

16 The curator of the Yugoslav section at the 7th Biennale des Jeunes in Paris was Ješa Denegri. The selection of artists included: Braco Dimitrijević, OHO Group, Group E, Group KÓD, Pensioner Tihomir Simčić (Braco Dimitrijević, Goran Trbuljak), Vladimir Bonačić, Boris Bućan, Sanja Iveković, Dalibor Martinis, Zoran Radović and Gorki Žuvela, all protagonists of conceptual art tendencies in Yugoslavia.

17 Yugoslav artists selected for the 15th São Paulo Biennial were: Boris Bućan, Radomir Damjanović Damjan, Julije Knifer, Ivan Kožarić, Andraž Šalamun.

at the Venice Biennale in 1976 would not present a discrepancy with the institutional policies of the leading museums in the country, nor with the exhibition strategies of participation at other international art biennials.

What do these contradictions in policies of exhibiting conceptual art from Yugoslavia expose? In reference to the terminology proposed by the thematic framework of this publication, the case of the Yugoslav participation at the 1976 Venice Biennale reveals the conflicted desires of different protagonists that shaped the complex dynamics of art world in Yugoslavia. Whereas the cultural administration and cultural diplomacy aimed at maintaining the familiar model of centralized national representation at international art biennials that didn't problematize the authorities of modernist tradition in art, the art professionals – foremost museum curators specialized in contemporary art – required the transformation of the existing structures of exhibiting local art at global exhibition events that would critically disclose the challenges of contemporaneity in both Yugoslav art and society to the international audience. The shifting policies of exhibiting conceptual art from Yugoslavia at international biennials during the 1970s therefore reflect the instable art infrastructure in the country that could no longer regulate nor control the image of Yugoslav art for the foreign view. With the emergence of conceptual art in the late 1960s, a gradual process of redefining exhibition practices in Yugoslavia began, both for the international and local contexts. This process fundamentally challenged the established cultural model of Yugoslav modernity and its practices of representation.

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