

CULTURE AND ART

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Politics, art, money and envy have always existed in close proximity. Often they have competed with each other, repeatedly they have created their own world and value system but at times they have been intertwined with each other and functioned in a bizarre symbiosis of mutual interdependence and attraction. Sometimes politics is all-predominant; sometimes everything is reduced to the market and accumulation of wealth. At other times, arts serve the powers that be, money serves as a surrogate of a utopia and envy sets the standard for human relations yet all this takes place not when violence, war and terror set the stage but rather in peace time. Then, sometimes, art through its imagery of words, pictures and tones gathers a force to become a reminded of human vanity and desires or exposes various forms of individual bravery and heroism. At such moments, arts shapes society's culture, exposes its failings, and often laughs at it or even stands in direct opposition to a prevailing atmosphere. Although art does not change society, important political changes, like the falling of the communist regimes, are directly or indirectly effected by various creators of art.

Paradoxically, subsequently no one thanks artists for the deeds done. Perhaps the reason is that they were also part of the past political squalor. In addition, the masses might be haunted by a bad conscience while the ruling elite rarely wishes to review the contingency of its own emergence from muted or collaborating masses.

Not surprisingly then, art in our post-communist culture remains marginalized and unappreciated. After all, art, the same as for the whole of society, seeks its own new appearance and place. Artists, the

same as anybody else, voyage through the whirlwind of politics, temptation of wealth and the curse of envy. To this add sometimes their distinctive crisis of identity and creativity. Naturally, their transformation is slower than those who are at ease in politics, business, showbusiness or in the company of crooks. Still, society expects commendable achievements, bestsellers and super hits from artists. What society expects from them are "goods", some kind of kitschy entertainment rather than soul-searching reflection, portraying own failure or the elite's ascent to power and wealth. No analysis by sociologists, psychologists, or political scientists can supplant the artistic creativity that exposes and enriches, and thus creates culture. True artists, fortunately, do not perceive their work as a mission or a duty to society; rather their positive input often arrives as an unintended product of their creativity.

Art today appears in different new codes and expressions that we have to relearn and comprehend. It is neither easy nor simple; besides complex vocabulary and the degree of abstraction, our attention is sought by pretenders and imitators of art who attack our senses through the beat, gushing blood and lewdness. In this transitory age without an end in sight the survival of art – fragile and complex – is in danger. Our own culture, exposed to all these pressures and post-communist turmoil, has ceased to view art as a means to navigate and probe our values and intellectual endeavours. The appeal 1000 words about Values and Culture issues in Bratislava by 33 intellectuals in May 2005 tried to focus on these alarming developments in our society. Hence the stress in the appeal on responsibility of us all regarding the state of

our culture even if it mean that some might argue that where everyone is responsible, no one is responsible.

The appeal 1000 Words ends with the following words: "Let us make clear...that we need culture in our lives.... Let us find a way to show that we are not indifferent to culture in Slovakia!" I can add to this quote everyone according to his or her means, reflection and will. One of the reactions and responses to this appeal is the content of this issue of *Kritika & Kontext*. Our aim was not to provide the current state of various arts in Slovakia. Rather, it is a subjective review of these arts by seven authorities in these fields.

I do admit that the idea did not emerge spontaneously as a reaction to the appeal 1000 Words but gradually it fit perfectly for this purpose. A former student of the Society for Higher Learning (co-publisher of *K&K*) and now a young art historian, Daniel Grúň, offered us a finished interview with a senior art historian Tomáš Štrauss. I have not rejected it outright, although an interview about the art of painting in Slovakia does not fit the strategy of publishing dossiers about books, thinkers, themes and problems mostly related to social sciences and humanities. To publish a sole interview in addition to thematic blocs did make sense and so we approached specialists from other fields of arts. Thus emerged seven texts and interviews about painting,

music, literature, film, theater, scenography, and architecture with seven prominent Slovak theoreticians in these fields. We were not interested in a free discussion about these arts and thus we suggested to the authors a chronological and thematic scheme in order to achieve meaningful comparative studies in various fields of arts. We suggested covering three periods – the 1960s, the so-called Normalization period (1969-1989) and the period after the fall of Communist regime in 1989. We also recommended that in these three periods the authors should, among other things, discuss important works in their field, compare them with developments abroad and provide some outline about the relationship of artists to the powers that be. Certainly, this scheme was only a suggestion and authors and interviewers could choose their own approach. Some authors provided a coherent text (literature), with others we conducted the interviews (architecture, scenography), another narrowed the focus even narrower than we had hoped (theater). I want to express gratitude for the efforts of all the authors and to those who conducted the interviews. Be the judge of the result. In any case, testimonies and dialogues about arts in different media with other individuals and a different focus can be done in the future. It would be a positive addition to our absent social-cultural self-reflection.