

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ART CRITICS (AICA)

Congress and 30st General Assembly

August 27 - September 5, 1978 / Switzerland

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THE PRELIMINARY CONDITIONS OF THE MUSEUM'S FOUNDATION

The catastrophic earthquake at Skopje in Macedonia, Yugoslavia, shook the city's 500,000 inhabitants on the 26th of July 1963. The Museum of Contemporary Art of Skopje represents, in all its fundamental characteristics, a part of the strong support of the people of Macedonia for the Museum as an administrative, economic, cultural and artistic center.

Following the earthquake a few hundred Yugoslav and foreign artists spontaneously expressed their solidarity and help by giving works of art to the destroyed city. In October of 1963 the International Association of Plastic Arts (IAPA) held their fourth congress in New York. The association decided to appeal to all of its members to contribute to the Foundation of a collection of works of art at Skopje.

The conditions for the development of plastic arts at Skopje existed before the earthquake but with the success of the immense initiative of numerous artists, organizations, and institutions to form a collection of works of art at Skopje the establishment of the Museum of Contemporary Art was assured. At the suggestion of the development committee of the assembly of the city of Skopje, and after several months of preparatory work, the Museum was founded on the 12th of February 1964.

The nature of the Museum of Contemporary Art

One of the Museum's goal is the development of visual culture in the surroundings in which it takes place. The Museum also proposes to collect, to preserve, and to show works of contemporary plastic and applied art as well as industrial design, etc., which it receives through donations and acquisitions. The Museums keeps abreast of and arranges shows of contemporary Yugoslav and foreign art. It organizes a variety of individual and group exhibitions at the Museum, elsewhere in Yugoslavia, and in other countries. In addition to these exhibitions the Museum organize diverse educational and cultural activities such as conferences, the projection of films, musical evenings, and contemporary poetry evenings, etc.

It should be particularly noted that in Yugoslavia there is scientific activity specially directed to the study of the creative process of the plastic arts. Understandably the Museum is particularly attentive to the history and development of modern art in Macedonia.

A permanent collaboration was established with donor artists who number more than a thousand and represent a few dozen countries. This donation program is continually maintained. According to the declarations of the donor artists, their act is not considered as charity, or as simply an expression of solidarity; rather, they see in their donations the realization of the idea that the Museum of Contemporary Art of Skopje is becoming the meeting place for all the world's artistic tendencies and that this offers the possibility of improving international understanding (by means of participation in a common activity throughout the world). The Museum's ties with donors are kept up through frequent contacts, the exchange of publications, visits by the artists, and exhibitions organized by the Museum at Skopje.

Relations are maintained with a great many organizations, institutions, critics, and curators both within and outside the country. The intention of this collaboration expresses the fundamental character of the Museum: to transcend national barriers and to encourage better international understanding.

#### The Museums activity

Until now the Museum of Contemporary Art of Skopje has tried to conform completely to the ideals of its foundation.

This has led the Museum to occupy itself primarily with the donation program, thanks to which it now owns over 2800 paintings, sculptures, objects, drawings, prints, and a special collection of caricatures.

The Museum of Contemporary Art of Skopje devotes a large proportion of its efforts to organizing different expositions. During its first seven years of operation, and before the construction of the Museum's building, this activity was carried out under very difficult conditions. After the inauguration of the new building on the 13th of November 1970 the Museum's facilities at last permitted the showing of its permanent collection and several temporary exhibitions, extending at times to several hundred works.

Within the scope of its activities the Museum has organized almost 300 expositions in the 14 years of its existence. They were arranged in the Museum at Skopje, in several other Yugoslav cities, as well as in other countries. Individual and collective expositions were often organized in collaboration with several institutions, established annual exhibitions, or organizations from all over the world. It must be repeated that the Museum carries out its promises with great responsibility, and devotes a large part of its efforts to the presentation of international contemporary art, although is of course limited by its means. It is evident that in budgetary terms these activities are unfavorable.

Nevertheless the Museum presented several exhibitions of foreign contemporary art which were of enormous importance to the artistic life of Skopje. I draw your attention in particular to the two exhibitions of the Paris May Salon 1966 and 1972, the exhibition of Bonnard to Soulages in collaboration with the Museum of Modern Art of Paris, the exposition of Picasso prints, and of Hartung's prints, and several exhibitions of contemporary American prints, and contemporary paintings from England, Germany, Italy, Turkey, Brasil, and Poland, etc.

It must be mentioned that practically all the works given to the Museum of Skopje were presented in these exhibitions before being placed in the permanent collection or the Museum's reserves.

The same interest is shown in contemporary Yugoslav and more particularly in contemporary Macedonian art. The Museum has displayed in its exhibitions the works of several eminent local artists. Attention must be drawn to certain retrospective exhibitions of a large number of Macedonian artists. With these exhibitions the Museum proposes to create a solid base for scientific research concerning the history of modern and contemporary Macedonian art. These expositions are also devoted to the study of the relations of plastic art today to the Macedonian artistic tradition, and to the tendencies of the art of our time in Yugoslavia and in the world.

A number of exhibitions organized by the Museum are didactic in character and are specially conceived for audiences of students or workers. They are shown locally within the framework of the workday of these social groups, and are often followed by conferences and other means of communication.

An international manifestation devoted to caricature has been a permanent feature of the Museum since 1969, the International Gallery of Caricature. Every year a few hundred caricatures from all over the world are displayed at this exhibit. An international jury awards prizes and diplomas. This was followed by other events connected with caricature, and by a reunion of the participants of the manifestation to choose the theme for the following year. The Gallery has become one of the world's most important exhibition of caricature.

The Museum prepared several publications connected with its work, catalogues, reports, monographs, etc. They often contain either the integral text in a foreign language or an abridged version. These publications are the objects of exchanges with many institutions in Yugoslavia and outside the country.

#### The Museum's collection

The collection is mostly composed of works received as donations from artists of different cultural milieus, aesthetic backgrounds, and generations. The Museum's collection, completed by a few purchases (rather modest ones, it is true), is an open field to all tendencies of cultural and of contemporary art, without the influence of any prejudices of a non-aesthetic character.

The collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art of Skopje includes numerous works of high artistic value and displays rather different plastic and stylistic tendencies. Certain countries are very well represented, considering the number and value of their donations. Many of the artists represented in the collection already figure in the history of twentieth century art, others are the eminent representatives of numerous contemporary tendencies and participate in important exhibitions throughout the world. They include for example, the Yugoslav artists: Lubard, Hegedusić, Petlevski, Velicković, Rihter, Džamonja, Radovani, Picej, Oto Logo, Ruzić, Damjanović, Hadzi, Boskov, Percinkov, Sijak, Mica Popović, etc., and foreign artists: Picasso, Hartung, Vasarely, Soulages, Bazaine, Mésagier, Lam, Bryen, Zao Wou Ki, Aléchin, Gromaire, Pignon, Survage, Singier, Charchoune, Burri, Guttuso, Alviani, Carra, Baj, D'Arangelo, Christo, Stazeveski, Mortensen, D.Hockney, Millares, Canogar, M.Pan, Calder, Kemeny, Hajdu, Jacobson, Stahly, Basaldela, Calo, Atila, Veis, Domoto, etc.

The first selections of the permanent exhibition shown to the public seek to create a synthesis of several principles: to present as broad a range as possible of the contributions of certain countries and artists within the means at the Museum's disposal (the space devoted to the permanent collection allows approximately three hundred and fifty works to be exposed); to create by means of the permanent exhibition an - aesthetic unity, composed as a homogeneous exposition made up of works of artists from different countries and cultural traditions; to conceive of Yugoslav plastic art as an integral part of world art as represented in the permanent collection, etc.

The permanent exhibition allows recognition although rather partially of the characteristics of the most important tendencies of the plastic arts, particularly those of the 1950's and the 1960's. The artistic works of Yugoslavia, France, Italy, Czechoslovakia, etc. comprise the bulk of the Museum's collection. The contributions of Spain, The United States, England, Greece, Brasil, Switzerland, Holland, Belgium, Denmark, etc. are less numerous.

#### The Museum's building

The Museum was constructed from plans drawn up by three Polish architects: W. Klyzewski, J. Mohrnzynsky, and E. Wierzbicki who won the first prize of a competition organized by the Polish government. The building was based on contemporary principles of museography: the different parts of the whole suggest the desire to create a unity of space based on modern architectural concepts and with the use of adequate materials. This building, accomodates a variety of activities conforming to the needs of the society in which the Museum operates.

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The collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art of Belgrade includes numerous works of high artistic value and displays rather different plastic and stylistic tendencies. Certain countries are very well represented, considering the number and value of their donations. Many of the artists represented in the collection already figure in the history of twentieth century art, others are the eminent representatives of numerous contemporary tendencies and participate in important exhibitions throughout the world. They include for example, the Yugoslav artists: Lipkovic, Hapševic, Velickovic, Ribic, Dusanovic, Radovanovic, Prica, Ota Jozic, Ristic, Gajdosovic, Radulovic, Rostov, Vucelja, Blazic, Miroslav, etc., and foreign artists: Picasso, Braque, Vassily, Bonaparte, Koonin, Masson, etc., and many others.

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