

AICA JAPAN CONGRESS 1998

Symposium "TRANSITION : Changing Society and Art "

■ Colloquium I *Memories and Visions : From Tradition to a New Identity*

Session 4 : *Western Identity*

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From Gorgona Esotery to Weekend Art Dematerialisation

It would be only a slight exaggeration to say that the birthplace of conceptual art in Croatia is a small hill on the outskirts of Zagreb. Medvednica - as the hill has been called in honour of one of its former inhabitants - the bear (medved = bear) is now a very popular outing spot amongst the tired inhabitants of the capital of Croatia. However, few will recognize the topos which, both in symbolic and in real terms, formed a link between two important groups of artists who left their mark on contemporary art in Croatia in its infancy and are still of relevance today.

Forty years have passed since these beginnings and now, Medvednica, along with its popular summit Sljeme, has good reason to expect to be moved from the geographic atlases and tourist Baedekers into the encyclopaedias of art. This hill, to a far greater extent than the academies and schools, has been the source and the catalyst of daring artistic ideas and projects which anticipated many relevant movements in contemporary art in the world, as well as being important as a place in which energy could be accumulated and good vibrations exchanged in an atmosphere of privacy and solitude. But numerous pages have already been written on the healing effect of nature and the peripatetic character of contemporary art.

At the end of the fifties and the beginning of the sixties, thanks to the activity of the Group Gorgona, Medvednica bore witness to the end of the mega-epoch of modernism and subsequently, at the end of this century, and with the help of the group XXXL and its project Weekend Art: Hallelujah the Hill, it became, not only the scene of a period of art that many call 'After the Wall', but also a participant in this movement. Although these two groups of artists were active in very different historical and political circumstances, what these two periods have in common is transitional agitation - radical social changes in which it is the scrupulous individual who so often draws the shortest straw and remains on the margins of life. In spite of the attempts of both groups to strip art of all ideology and to avoid all social commitment, it is impossible not to notice that their artistic evasion is to a large extent an expression of their rejection of the dictates of the social and political circumstances of the time. Evasion is but another form of participation.