
GENERAL ALERT

Wars that Have Never Ended

22 October — 13 November 2022

Opening

Friday, 21 October 2022, 4 – 11 pm

Opening hours

Thursday 4 – 8 pm

Friday to Sunday 12 noon – 6 pm

Gleis 21 open only on 21 October 2022

Exhibition venues

4., Wiedner Gürtel 4, 8, 14

10., Erste Campus and ERSTE Foundation,
Am Belvedere 1

10., Stand 129, Viktor-Adler-Markt 129

10., Gleis 21, Bloch-Bauer-Promenade 22
VIENNA

Tours by the curators:

Friday, 28 October, 4 pm

Thursday, 3 November, 4 pm

Saturday, 12 November, 2 pm

Meeting point: Main entrance of the
Erste Campus (10., Am Belvedere 1)

Registration: info@kontakt-collection.org

Selected publications on the exhibition
are available in the ERSTE Foundation
library (Am Belvedere 1, 1100 Vienna).
www.erstestiftung.org

The exhibition venues are connected
through
the tram line D (Quartier Belvedere and
Hlawkagasse stops) as well as U1
U1 Südtiroler Platz and Keplerplatz.

Admission is free.

Further information

at www.kontakt-collection.org

or info@kontakt-collection.org.

Heimrad Bäcker, Sokol Beqiri,
Ştefan Bertalan, Pavel Brăila,
Geta Brătescu, Anna Daučíková,
Róza El-Hassan, VALIE EXPORT,
Tomislav Gotovac, Ion Grigorescu,
Sabine Groschup, Sanja Iveković,
Anne Marie Jehle, Anna Jermolaewa,
Nikita Kadan, Alevtina Kakhidze,
Šejla Kamerić, Alina Kleytman,
Ana Lupaş, Dimitrije Bašičević Mangelos,
Roman Ondak, R.E.P. Group,
Erna Rosenstein, Zorka Ságlová,
Wilhelm Sasnal, Erzen Shkololli,
Mladen Stilinović, Ceija Stojka,
Slaven Tolj, Milica Tomić, Endre Tót,
Zsuzsi Ujj, Jasmila Žbanić,
Artur Żmijewski

General Alert
Wars that Have Never Ended

Russia's current war of aggression against Ukraine makes clear how war, with all of the attendant ramifications that have played a historical role in shaping Europe's geopolitical, social, and economic circumstances, has never truly ended. *General Alert* is borrowed from the title of a work that Sanja Iveković created before the backdrop of the Yugoslav wars in 1995. And in keeping with the Kontakt Collection's concept, this exhibition is focused on works from Eastern and Southeastern European countries as well as from Austria, most of which are owned by Kontakt itself. Their themes are of relevance to the wars in Ukraine and in former Yugoslavia as well as to the Holocaust. Also included are works that deal more generally with the subjective, the existential, and the corporal, including expressions of melancholy, injury, anxiety, and criticism as well as manifestations of tension vis-à-vis political reality.

Heimrad Bäcker

Mauthausen concentration camp, 1970–75

b&w photographs

various formats

Beginning in the late 1960s, the poet, photographer and publisher of experimental poetry Heimrad Bäcker photographed topographic traces left behind by the Nazi killing machine, primarily at the former Mauthausen and Gusen concentration camps. The motifs of these photographic works, often realized as sequences of images, are not the canonized symbols of the Holocaust that have emerged from an iconography of genocide since the end of the war. Instead, the photographer's isolating gaze falls on apparently trivial topographic and architectural traces or on media documentation of the Shoah and related trials on television. But even in his treatment of a familiar motif like the »*Todesstiege*« (a notorious stone stairway connecting the camp with its granite quarry, the site of many accidents and murders), Bäcker keeps his distance from the usual codes of consternation by his use of increasing abstraction.

1925, Vienna / AT – 2003, Linz / AT

Sokol Beqiri

Untitled, 1997

acrylic on hardboard

172,5 x 139,5 cm

Untitled, 1997

acrylic on hardboard

172,5 x 139,5 cm

Untitled, 1997

acrylic on hardboard

172,7 x 138,5 cm

When the war in Kosovo broke out in 1997, Sokol Beqiri spent his time in his studio in Peja and stuck stubbornly to his routines, a strategy that briefly cancelled out the fear and minimized the dehumanizing effects of war. *The Painting Series* consists of five paintings, three of which are part of the Kontakt Collection. For a long time, Beqiri wrestled with painting as a medium: though it accompanied his thought process, it failed to provide him with any resolution. Beqiri has stated that the paintings produced during this

period are intentionally repulsive, defy proportion, disregard the harmony of colors, and treat compositional principles as suspect—thereby rendering painting’s formal conventions obsolete in the face of war. These paintings speak of his fear and his awareness of the danger to which the war subjected not only his family but also society at large.

1964, Pejë / KO (at that time Yugoslavia), lives in Pejë

Stefan Bertalan

Buds are opening for conversation, 1979–89

watercolor, ink

64,7 x 55,3 cm

Stefan Bertalan was a cofounder of the important neo-constructivist avant-garde groups 111 (1966–69) and Sigma (1969–78, both based in Timișoara), from whose scientific and experimental approaches he departed entirely in 1981 along with his abandonment of urban life and entry into an inner emigration that was followed later on (in 1985) by his actual emigration to Germany. His artistic thought and works, whose significance was appreciated and recognized only much later, revolved around processes rather than results. He examined the relationships between natural forms—organic and inorganic—and the constitution of human beings, whose physical and psychological connection with nature he explored. Bertalan’s seemingly irrational self-portraits as anthropomorphic plants are a sensitively vulnerable expression of the existential, of a threat to humankind and the environment, and at the same time embody a symptomatic mirror of society—then as now.

1930, Răcăștie / RO – 2014, Timișoara / RO

Pavel Brăila

Vera Means Belief, 2022

video, color, sound

15 min 45 sec

Moldova is one of the closest transit hubs for people fleeing Southern Ukraine and the area around Odesa. Since the war’s initial days, artist Pavel Brăila has been volunteering at a refugee camp in the village of Palanca next to the Ukrainian border. It was here that he

encountered the 72-year-old pensioner Vera Derevianko from the East Ukrainian town of Pryluky. For months, she has refused to leave the camp despite many offers of better accommodation, explaining that she wants to be as close as possible to home. Brăila's work-in-progress focuses on Derevianko's indefatigable character, her relationships with people in the camp, and her poetry, which she writes in the Ukrainian-Russian creole of Surzhyk. These poems are full of chilling images of loss and destruction, but also full of hope and a love for life—all of which Derevianko comes to embody in Brăila's film.

1971, Chişinău / MD (at that time SU), lives in Chişinău

Geta Brătescu

Censored Self-Portrait, 1978

collage of photographs on canvas

18 × 28,5 cm

Geta Brătescu was a fine artist who began her work in the heterogeneous and provocative intellectual milieu of 1940s and 1950s Romania. In a way that is extremely subtle, Brătescu uses this collage to interweave her criticism of the political system with a critical analysis of the photographic medium, the manipulative possibilities of which she visibly orchestrates in her composition. Censorship of the gaze and of language are symbolized by strips stuck over her eyes and mouth; this same censorship is simultaneously denied, however, in that the strips bear images of what lies beneath—namely her mouth and her eyes. In this *Censored Self-Portrait*, Brătescu quite literally topples the obsolete concept of photography as a medium that is »true to reality.«

1926, Ploieşti / RO – 2018, Bucharest / RO

Anna Daučíková

Ordinary Voyeurism – A Woman, Central Station L'viv, 1995

video, color, sound

2 min 28 sec

For her series *Ordinary Voyeurism*, Anna Daučíková filmed in various locations all over the world during the 1990s and 2000s. Equipped with a voyeuristic camera of sorts, the artist ventured out to capture everyday scenes in a very direct manner. Her series

opens up space for interpretation and for the production of new meanings; in doing so, her intent is to supplant the sexual lust that is attributed to the voyeuristic gaze. She replaces said lust with her desire to embed a quasi-innocent fragment of reality in a political context. Her videos concentrate on the body or bodies seen in public in order to ask how self-assertion and exclusion from the public realm are of significance for women. And in this brief sequence that she shot at the main railway station in L'viv, Daučíková—wielding her camera at close range—focuses on a young woman of rural appearance who is evidently waiting for somebody. Her beautiful face exhibits a wait-and-see expression; she seems worried and uncertain. Passengers and the occasional policeman walked past her. The matters of who she is and for what she is waiting remain open. In light of present-day knowledge concerning the fate of people in Ukraine and the importance of the main railway station in L'viv to war refugees, this young woman comes to symbolize an entire country's vulnerability and unprotectedness.

1950, Bratislava / SK (at that time Czechoslovakia), lives in Prague / CZ

Róza El-Hassan

Stretched Grey, 1995

wood, color, wire, stretching screw

185 x 22,7 x 6 cm

In her series *Stretched Objects*, Róza El-Hassan relates everyday objects such as a glass, a chair, or—in *Stretched Grey*—a box-like painted object to the art form of painting in a critical manner: to the left and right sides of these objects, she attaches steel cables that are then attached to turnbuckles screwed into the wall, thereby placing the respective objects in an intermediate state between three-dimensional sculpture and picture-on-the-wall. It is a state of tension that transfers itself to the human body, involving it physically as well as psychologically. *Stretched Grey* thus becomes an ideal metaphor for a precarious relationship.

1966, Budapest / HU, lives in Budapest

VALIE EXPORT

... Remote...Remote..., 1973

video, color, sound

9 min 49 sec

In her oeuvre, which takes an analytical approach to media, VALIE EXPORT has repeatedly highlighted the political dimensions of structural violence aimed against the body, in particular the female body. *Remote...Remote...* is a political and very personal film reflecting Austria's—and thus the artist's—recent history. EXPORT, sitting at the center of a room, gazes into the camera while holding a bowl filled with milk in her lap. The background is a large, grainy, black-and-white photo of two little girls standing in a cot at what appears to be a children's home. It is a photo from police files on abused children. The camera has its sights trained on the artist: a close shot of her eyes, then of her hands, then of the children in the photograph—whose eyes, seen at such close range shot, appear lifeless. EXPORT, her blank gaze directed steadfastly at the camera, begins to injure the cuticles on her fingers with a knife until they bleed, thereafter dipping them into the milk to ease the pain. *Remote... Remote...* is about the injuries and abuses that were suffered not only by children and that continued even after war's end.

1940, Linz / AT, lives in Vienna / AT

Tomislav Gotovac

Watch on the Rhine, 1994

photograph

For this performance *Watch on the Rhine*, Tomislav Gotovac spent several hours naked on the roof of the modernist pavilion occupied by the Croatian Association of Artists, gazing towards the ongoing military hostilities that gripped Croatia at that point during the Yugoslav Wars. With his title for this performance, he was making reference to the synonymous 1943 American film starring Bette Davis that has to do with German resistance to National Socialism. He reinforced this reference to a past event—the experience of which, it had long been hoped, would have taught people something that would prevent future wars—by deliberately locating his performance atop a building that Zagreb's Muslim minority had used as a temporary mosque for a brief period during the 1940s. On this, Gotovac commented: »I was a mosque guard.« As such, the artist's naked body appears within eye- and earshot of real fight-

ing—not only incapable of putting up any meaningful resistance against possible attack, but actually seeming entirely defenseless and painfully vulnerable.

1937, Sombor / RS (at that time Yugoslavia) – 2010, Zagreb / HR

Ion Grigorescu

Self I, 1977

b&w photograph

15,2 x 23 cm

Self II, 1977

b&w photograph

15,2 x 23 cm

Ion Grigorescu's photographic self-portraits of the 1970s reflect the artist's observations of the everyday in which his own body always plays a central role, be it in a personal environment or as a site of observation itself. Grigorescu's 1970s body art directs both the male and female gaze onto his own body as a means of self-enunciation during a period of strict controlling mechanisms and political repression. The photos *Self I and Self II* simply portray the artist with his naked body, squatting on the floor or leaning against the wall.

Electoral Meeting, 1975

29 b&w photographs

27 x 40 cm each

The 29-part photo series *Electoral Meeting – March 6, 1975* is of exemplary relevance to the political situation in Romania and Ion Grigorescu's critique of the repressive circumstances of the time. These photos were taken clandestinely during a sham electoral meeting that had been organized by the Communist Party and was strictly supervised by members of the secret police. They are not mere illustrations of an episode from the history of Romanian oppression, but rather selective observations of the inner mechanisms of the evil. The depicted people and objects are all part of an absurd occurrence. With his photo action, Grigorescu showed that there was no other meaning here than that of fulfilling functions determined by an external structure—the discrete but merciless apparatus of power.

1945, Bucharest / RO, lives in Bucharest

Sabine Groschup

Memory Does Not Die (Erinnerung stirbt nicht)

2018

Window box on wall shelf, video projection, paint, clay

14 x 25 x 16 cm, 29 min 53 sec

Sabine Groschup filmed the video *Memory Does Not Die* (*Erinnerung stirbt nicht*) directly in front of the building at Novaragasse 40 in Vienna's second district (Leopoldstadt). This had once been the site of so-called collective flats in which Jewish people who had been thrown out of their homes were forced to live at close quarters before being deported to concentration camps and murdered. At Novaragasse 40, it was around 221 individuals. Groschup, standing on the street with her camera, filmed a single shot directed at this building's open double-door, whose right-hand wing proceeds fall shut with a loud double-click exactly 221 times within the space of just under half an hour. Nobody, however, is seen leaving the building. Here, the rhythmically repeating sound of the closing door becomes a ghost-like and unforgiving signal of the real, of the deadly terror to which Novaragasse 40's residents were subject during their time there as well as thereafter. It seems as if the door were acting on its own in a mechanical compulsive repetition of sorts, bringing that which had been repressed into the present.

1959, Innsbruck / AT, lives in Vienna / AT

Sanja Iveković

General Alert (Soap Opera), 1995

video, color, sound

6 min 38 sec From the very beginning, Sanja Iveković's works focusing on media criticism have dealt with television—and especially with Yugoslav state television. *General Alert* was created in May 1995, as Zagreb was being targeted with missile attacks by Serbian units. With the air raid warnings for Zagreb («OPĆA OPASNOST ZAGREB») appearing onscreen during regular television programming, she had the presence of mind to record selected scenes from films in which the fictional drama interlocked with reality. In the case of *General Alert (Soap Opera)*, it is a Spanish-language series from South America with Croatian subtitles that was new and very popular in Croatia at the time, and the onscreen action features crying women and children.

General Alert (Godard), 1995 / 2000

video, color, sound

3 min 10 sec

For *General Alert (Godard)*, in which warnings of attacks on the towns of Valpovo and Belišće in Northeast Croatia are shown onscreen, Iveković selected a sequence from Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (1959) in which the small-time criminal Michel (Jean-Paul Belmondo) drives a stolen luxury sedan along a typically French tree-lined country road.

1949, Zagreb / HR (at that time Yugoslavia), lives in Zagreb

Anne Marie Jehle

Untitled (The World), 1980

wood, wool, leather, paper

105 x 53 x 50 cm

Anne Marie Jehle was a native of Liechtenstein, but she lived and worked in Vorarlberg. Particularly her later works were created in total isolation at her house in Feldkirch. It was only after her death that her idiosyncratic, highly political, and critically feminist oeuvre became accessible to the public. *Untitled (The World)* is a subtly intense examination of attributions pertaining to the female body in which Jehle also reflects on colonialist ideals of conquest. She puts a hand-knit sweater over a valet stand and adds a globe to give the resulting figure a spherical belly, the lower third of which is »naked«. Viewed from the front, this female-connoted figure's »pubic area« displays part of North and all of Latin America, with their geographic figurations inscribed like signs on this bodily fantasy. The world can be taken to mean the far-off, a strange and perhaps also dark continent—and in the end, the only thing by which one could attribute this forlorn-looking apparition to the domestic sphere is its (motherly) spherical belly.

1937, Feldkirch / AT – 2000, Vaduz / FL

Anna Jermolaewa

Kiev (after Lumière), 2021

video, color, sound

4 min 36 sec

Anna Jermolaewa filmed *Kiev (after Lumière)* at a double-track rail line in Kiev flanked by a flea market on both sides. The atmosphere seems relaxed, with some people even sitting on the rails, until a signal sounds out: everyone jumps up, immediately after which a seemingly endless 68-car freight train of military appearance and commensurate power thunders right through the flea market with an ear-splitting clangor. Hardly has it disappeared than everybody returns serenely to their places, and the market carries on. (With her reference to the Lumière brothers, Jermolaewa alludes to one of their initial films whose locomotive arriving at the station elicited shock amongst the audience at its première.) Since the beginning of Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine, this train thundering through a peaceful gathering has become something of a metaphor for the terror of the destructive machinery of war that has been let loose upon this country.

Research for Sleeping Positions, 2006

video, color, sound

16 min 52 sec

In *Research for Sleeping Positions*, Anna Jermolaewa projects herself back to 1989 and her arrival at the train station Westbahnhof in Vienna, where she'd landed after her escape from then-Leningrad and her journey through Poland, and where the only place to sleep that she could find was on the platform benches. With just a few positions, alternating between seated and prone, that she assumes on the bench for the camera, which is aimed at her from the front, Jermolaewa brings to bear the entirety of a cold and hostile economy in which the individual body and sociopolitical space are reduced to a brief formula.

1970, Leningrad / RU (at that time SU), lives in Vienna / AT

Nikita Kadan

Gazelka, 2015

metal sculpture

283 x 125 x 33 cm

Nikita Kadan constructed the metal flag *Gazelka* out of parts taken from a model of delivery van affectionately known as the »Gazelka« (little gazelle). These very practical and popular vehicles were manufactured between 1994 and 2010 at the automobile factory Gorkowski Awtomobilny Sawod (GAZ) in Nizhny Nowgorod, initially as a development project of Leyland DAF and Renault. After itself

buying into the project, GAZ developed the GAZela. This model enjoyed great domestic and foreign demand. Shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Gazelka became a veritable symbol of small entrepreneurship and the spirit of innovation. Kadan, whose interest lies with the Soviet era's entropic conditions and unhealed wounds, found this worn-out Gazelka in the city of Sievierodonetsk, where it had been abandoned. Sievierodonetsk, a chemical industry center, was occupied by pro-Russian military forces in 2014 after hostilities had begun in the province of Donetsk, and it has been one of Ukraine's most fought-over places since the beginning of Russia's war of aggression. Kadan's gigantic flag made from the Gazelka's sheet metal becomes a bizarre symbol of the deadly and continually growing destruction and devastation in Ukraine.

1982, Kiev / UA, lives in Kiev

Alevtina Kakhidze

Poster

Alevtina Kakhidze is a performance artist, a creator of drawings (including for comics), author, and activist in the Ukrainian art and cultural scene. She lives near Kyiv and, as she describes, has experienced the abrupt, chaotic changes and uncertain times in Ukraine that began with the demise of the USSR—including the present undeclared war with Russia. In her performances, just like in her perceptive and critical drawings, Kakhidze comments on the phrases to be heard in well-meaning suggestions, manipulative statements, and information regarding the war in Ukraine that are currently circulating in Europe. For the exhibition *General Alert. Wars That have Never Ended*, Alevtina Kakhidze was invited to design a poster for display in the public realm.

1973, Zhdanovka / UA, lives near Kiev

Šejla Kamberić

Bosnian Girl, 2003
poster, b&w
dimensions variable

Šejla Kamberić conceived *Bosnian Girl* (2003) as a poster for display in public space, making reference to its catalyst in the

methodology she employed. The »Bosnian Girl« is Kamberić herself, and the text that appears written on her upper torso in large letters is a word-for-word quotation of graffiti by an unknown Dutch UNPROFOR soldier deployed near Srebrenica in 1995 for the protection of the local populace. On a wall, the soldier had left behind the following words: »No Teeth...? A Mustache...? Smel Like Shit...? BosnianGirl! Kamberić appropriates this sexist and racist message, inscribes it onto her own image, and presents the resulting montage in all its ambivalence. With her penetrant gaze aimed squarely at the viewer, she hurls this violent and fear-ridden male fantasy—which takes on an extreme and terrifying dimension in the context of the war crimes committed in Srebrenica—back at the viewer, with precisely this ambiguity laying bare the civilizational abyss that can open up in more contexts than just that of war.

1976, Sarajevo / BA (at that time Yugoslavia), lives in Sarajevo

Alina Kleytman

Responsibility, 2017

video, color, sound

6 min 24 sec

In her video *Responsibility*, Alina Kleytman uses the title to raise the question of who here, if anyone at all, bears or has assumed responsibility. Five years ago, when she produced this video, there had already been three years' worth of war in the oblasts of Luhansk und Donetsk, and the situation in Ukraine was one of great uncertainty. Here, Kleytman herself appears as a young woman who, in darkness, walks down a scantily lit and scary-looking street. Kleytman herself is likewise of an unsettling appearance, with theatrical clothing that seems as if from another era, smeared makeup, and cheap white plastic bags in her hands with products from the grocery from which she emerged at the beginning of the video. The ugly garments that she wears convey a disconcerting impression of her. She continues on, fighting against her shame. The plastic bags symbolize the shortage of resources available to her, be they material or otherwise in nature. They also contain her goals, desires, and dreams, and they seem difficult for her to bear. With great effort, Kleytman carries them forward into uncertainty.

1991, Kharkiv / UA, currently lives in Milan / IT

Ana Lupaș

Identity Shirt, first generation, 1969

fabric, threads, needles

54,9 x 68 cm

The textile works by Ana Lupaș are at once bodies and body coverings onto which diverse stories are inscribed. In her *Identity Shirts*, the fabric metaphorically becomes skin and vice-versa. Lupaș uses a sewing machine to work on this material as a type of automatic handwriting, also applying pencil or fake blood or ripping out individual threads. The shirt becomes a bodily image-carrier on which powers external as well as internal leave their traces. Lupaș is concerned with the identity of the individual vis-à-vis imposed industrialization and mechanization. But even so, and in a way reminiscent of Kafka, she also shows how the individual cannot evade their effects.

1940, Cluj / RO, lives in Cluj

Dimitrije Bašičević Mangelos

Paysage de la Mort, 1971–77

tempera on chipboard

164 x 146 x 7 cm

Dimitrije Bašičević Mangelos belonged to a wartime generation that grew up in times of occupation, violence, poverty, concentration camps and moral collapse, a generation whose schooling was interrupted by—and only to continue after—the Second World War. Until the mid-1960s, he kept his artistic activities strictly private. In »Introduction to No-art« (1980), he wrote about his beginnings, claiming that his »no-art« evolved from the landscapes of death that he documented in his notebooks during the Second World War. (...) »there was a time when people were dying but there were no ideas ... in this time of dying, the books smelled of death too, and reading smelled of dying. the books did not agree with that which was left of breathing, so you could hear the rustling of their paper lies in the silence of steps disappearing into death. I leafed through the notes I made in my youth. what I heard was only the rustling of pages covered with empty words. in confusion I began to record death between the lines. deaths. whenever I heard the news about neighbors, friends, cousins, acquaintances going away never to return, I would mark it in black ink, a black ink stain between the lines, without thinking, without purpose, without explanation ... later I put

the same inscription on all those anonymous graves. paysage de la mort.« Mangelos repeated some of his works later on in his career; these renditions are mostly in smaller formats.

1921, Šid / RS – 1987, Zagreb / HR (at that time Yugoslavia)

Roman Ondak

Announcement, 2002

sound installation

»As a sign of your solidarity with recent events in the world, we ask you not to interrupt the activity you are engaged in for the next minute.«

This *Announcement* can be understood as a call to behave in a certain way and hence oneself become part of the exhibition via this performative act. It is an appeal that seeks to break the usual routine of everyday perception, whether at an exhibition or elsewhere. Here, Ondak stages a game involving meaning, context, and imagination in which he attempts to form an intimate connection with people in order to address their thoughts and emotions directly and thereby elicit empathy or attention concerning events that transpire outside the realm of art.

1966, Žilina / SK (at that time Czechoslovakia), lives in Bratislava

R.E.P. Group

The group R.E.P. (Revolutionary Experimental Space) formed in Kyiv as a collective subject during the protests of 2004's »Orange Revolution« and the fight for a democratic Ukraine, and it met its eventual demise in the complex and contradictory revolutionary reality of the 2013/14 Euromaidan demonstrations—the »Revolution of Dignity.« These graduates of the National Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture joined forces as a loose group amidst the Orange Revolution's general tumult to stage interventions and actions that they retrospectively called the »Carnival.«

We Will R. E. P. You, 2005

video, color, sound

11 min

On 7 November 2005, R.E.P. appears on Maidan Nezalezhnosti, Kyiv's Independence Square, to introduce itself as an independent

political organization: with banners and quotations by Joseph Beuys and Andy Warhol, the group proclaims the slogan »Every-one is an artist.« The R.E.P. artists' appearance here in white protective clothing with welder's goggles promulgates this and other statements by these two heroes of the international art world as an aggressive gesture against the nationalist, communist, and clerical political forces in Kyiv. It is shortly before the arrival of the nationalists that the R.E.P.s first occupy the Maidan, beating drums and shouting slogans like »Andy Warhol is our president!« The reactions of the crowd are mixed—running from curiosity about the situation to scornful contempt.

R. E. P. Party, 2006
video, color, sound
3 min 43 sec

The artists of R.E.P. place their tent between tents of the various Ukrainian political parties and proceed to promote themselves. Their tent is white, as are their protective suits and the flags that they carry. Black and white are colors that were not part of the color spectrums used by the advertising agencies and technocrats of the political parties active during the Orange Revolution. R.E.P. conceives of its art as space for social communication. To create it, they quite deliberately employ the means of conventional politics and parody the other parties' promises. Megaphones in hand, they deliver their manifestoes at a loud volume—which awakens curiosity and interest but indeed also rejection in passersby. Some of their slogans are paraphrases of existing ones, while others embody obscure demands or nonsense into which they nonetheless insert seriously meant agitation for themselves as artists.

Untitled Action, 2005
video, color, sound
3 min 12 sec

At sunset, the R.E.P.s gather in an empty field near Kyiv for a political manifestation. The parliamentary election campaigns, which are in full swing downtown, take no notice as the group enthusiastically waves banners bearing terms like »culture« and »sports« ... and black-and-white flags. A drummer leads the way, with the R.E.P.s shouting out slogans as well as fragments of verbiage and rapped lyrics. The group calls for a different understanding of culture, of sports; their concern is freedom as well as their opposition to the hollow rhetoric of the election battle. The effect is to situate art in a new understanding of the political. What is being

staged here is a powerful and enthusiastic game of countercultural self-empowerment. R.E.P. intended for *Untitled Action* to function as a commentary on and countermodel to Ukraine's elections: an election is understood to be a democratic instrument, but this instrument is of no significance if the available selection of parties fails to offer a serious alternative.

Artist collective active 2004–2014, Kiev / UA

Erna Rosenstein

From the Very Bottom of Silence
(from the series *Homeless Paintings*), 1986
guache on plywood and wood
55 x 50 x 7 cm

The art of Erna Rosenstein is situated at the very heart of European postwar modernity as a radically autonomous answer to the question of culture after the Holocaust. Born in 1913 and educated before World War II at the art academies in Kraków and Vienna, Rosenstein belonged to a generation of artists whose biographies were interrupted and transformed by the war. Imprisoned in the L'viv ghetto during the war, she fled to hide and dodge, changing names and addresses. *From the Very Bottom of Silence* belongs to the series of *Homeless Paintings* that refers to the artist's traumatic wartime experiences. It is composed of pieces of plywood painted with abstract landscapes that overlap one another. The composition is built around the image of an extended hand—a motif repeated in many works of Rosenstein. It seems to be a gesture of a hopeless beseechment.

Zorka Ságlová

Tribute to Gustav Oberman, 1970
6 b&w photographs
each approx. 67 x 100 cm

Gustav Oberman was a shoemaker from the Czech town of Humpolec who wandered the surrounding hills at the outset of the Second World War in order to protest the Nazi occupation in an unusual way—namely, as a fire-breather. On one of these protest-hikes, he was arrested and locked up by the police. Zorka Ságlová belonged to a group of young artists who, during the 1960s and '70s, ventured out into public space with actions. It was in March 1970 that, together with a small number of friends, she paid

tribute to Gustav Oberman. On a snow-covered field, around 20 large pieces of cloth soaked in gasoline were distributed around the nocturnal landscape and then ignited. The traces of these fires stayed visible for as long as the snow remained.

1942, Humpolec / CZ (at that time Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia) – 2003, Prague / CZ

Wilhelm Sasnal

Hitler, 2019

oil on canvas, wood

40 x 35 x 6,5 cm

With his miniature painting *Hitler*, Wilhelm Sasnal took on a symbolically difficult theme— and he describes working on it as an experience unto itself: “Painting *Hitler* was a peculiar experience for me. I was trying to find out what it means to paint and spend time with an image of such evil. It was confusing and, in a way, I couldn’t stand the intact portrait of Hitler that I had just painted. Therefore, I smeared the paint and nailed the wooden beam diagonally to refer to Oskar Hansen’s project for an Auschwitz monument.” Sasnal’s somber painting evokes thoughts of the death, depravity, and crimes committed either by Hitler or in his name. Auschwitz stands for a historic and absolute break with civilized culture. The unrealized project *The Road* (1959) by Polish architect Oskar Hansen would have placed a gigantic swath of asphalt diagonally through the entire camp premises in memory of the horror and terror experienced in this murderous extermination camp.

1972, Tarnów / PL, lives in Warsaw / PL

Erzen Shkololli

Pejë, Kosovo, 1998, 1998

patchwork, canvas, postcards

approx. 90 x 2080 cm

Pejë is the Albanian name for the city of Peja, in which Erzen Shkololli, as a very young artist, went into hiding together with his family during the war in Kosovo and the associated ethnic cleansing. On the banner, schematically drawn figures hold up their hands. They are just as reminiscent of children’s drawings as they are of houses and flowers and, ultimately, of caskets, standing out from the background

with their intense colors. A further part of this work consists of post-cards of drawings made during the weeks immediately following the war by children at a childcare facility. There, Shkololli worked together with them on overcoming their traumatic experiences.

1976, Pejë / KO (at that time Yugoslavia), lives in Priština / KO

Mladen Stilinović

Time 1, 1977

video, b&w, silent

6 min 58 sec

In the conceptual art practice of Mladen Stilinović, the factor of time plays a central role. The film *Time 1* shows the hand of a clock on the wall as it wanders forward and backward, making several jumps between minutes. These jumps back and forth extend the original six-and-a-half minutes of footage to total seven minutes. After the second minute, the hand of the clock goes to minute five and then back to minute three, followed by four and finally six until the end. In this, the artist references the three dimensions of time. While the first two minutes refer to the present, minute five denotes the future, followed by three and four as the past and then six again as the present. During the editing of this film, not a single frame was removed from the time shown. It is in the context of those wars that never end that these shifted dimensions of time take on their present, historical, and future significance.

Images – graveyards, 1988

acrylic on cardboard, 19 parts

sizes variable

Images – graveyards is an emphatic and deeply sorrowful criticism of the capitalist system. Mladen Stilinović arranged his *Images – graveyards* like a tableau on the wall, positioned so as to seem like a small town consisting only of graveyards. To each graveyard, Stilinović has given a name—each one being a term from business world and the language of banking. They are: exploitation, inflation, purchasing value, commodity use value, profit, market value, money, production planning, investment, production assurance, market surplus value, interest rate, planning, and devaluation. Here, the artist found death to be an apt symbol of a system of power that blithely assumes others' complete ignorance and/or destruction.

1947, Belgrade / RS (at that time Yugoslavia) – 2016, Pula / HR

Ceija Stojka

The Truth, 1994
acrylic on cardboard
65 x 50 cm

They're the last, 1998
ink on paper
38 x 24 cm

The last day, 1944, 1944, 2009
ink on paper
29,7 x 41,6 cm

Untitled, 2011
ink on paper
29,5 x 42 cm

Untitled, 2002
ink on paper
42 x 29,5 cm

Untitled, 2011
ink on paper
39,8 x 49,9 cm

Ceija Stojka was an Roma writer, painter, activist, and musician who survived three concentration camps under National Socialism. This acrylic painting on cardboard represents one of the many scenes from the concentration camps in which Ceija Stojka was imprisoned beginning at age ten. The vast open field with its uniform trees fenced off by barbed wire denotes the isolation and oppressive atmosphere as well as the emptiness of everyday camp life, a representation that is supported by somber, monotone colors. Stojka's take on the hidden forces inside the camps—forces invisible from without—emphatically articulates themes of Roma art such as the ongoing quest for liberation from hegemonic power structures, inequality, and discrimination.

The ink drawings by Ceija Stojka allude quite graphically to the atrocities inflicted upon concentration camp inmates. The emaciated, closely packed bodies of these human beings are represented only via their contours, and the faces' partial lack of features demonstrates how individuals disappeared within the masses. The ubiquitous motif of barbed wire as a symbol of pain is constantly present, as are the drawn silhouettes of the overseers with their

tools of punishment along with quotations of their outrageous utterances.

1933, Kraubath / AT – 2013, Vienna / AT

Slaven Tolj

Valencia-Dubrovnik-Valencia, 2003

3 b&w photographs

32 x 45 cm, 20 x 30 cm, 11 x 50 cm

Slaven Tolj's artistic practice was directly shaped by his experiences during the Yugoslav war—and, in particular, by the conquest of his hometown Dubrovnik by the Yugoslav army in 1991–92. In this performance, he has just returned from Valencia and looked as if he had recently returned from the battlefield. Tolj strips down to the waist, peeling off 12 layers of clothing. Each layer has black buttons attached, as mementos of perished friends. From the final layer, he tears off one black button and attaches it directly to his chest as an ironic medal. In contrast to the image of the invincible hero-soldier, he reveals himself as a (male) subject in mourning, an object/victim of events that the body cannot control.

1964, Dubrovnik / HR (at that time Yugoslavia), lives in Dubrovnik

Milica Tomić

I am Milica Tomić, 1999

video, color, sound

9 min 58 sec

Milica Tomić, who experienced the wars that began with the breakup of Yugoslavia from Belgrade, addresses the themes of identity, nationality, and political terror as well as how the private and political are intertwined amidst their various effects. When she appears in her videos in order to reconstruct memories or historical events, she refrains from doing so from a supposedly objective external perspective and instead makes herself part of the scenario. In *I am Milica Tomić*, she stands on a rotating pedestal and—in a total of 64 languages—states her name and her belonging to the respective ethnic groups and/or countries. Her face remains calm and relaxed, but with every newly named identity, a wound seems to appear on her body—with her white dress ultimately being spattered all over with blood. As a stylized and

symbolic scenario, this video raises questions about tolerance, acceptance, and persecution.

xy ungelöst – Reconstruction of the Crime, 1996/97

video, color, sound

13 min 57 sec

With this work's title, Milica Tomić refers to the German television show *Aktenzeichen xy – ungelöst*, in which unsolved criminal cases are reconstructed. The crime of which she speaks in this video installation is the murdering of Albanian citizens of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. On 28 March 1989, these citizens had demonstrated against the elimination of political autonomy—which they had been guaranteed by the federal Constitution—forced through by President Slobodan Milošević. 48 people ended up being shot by the police. In Tomić's video, individuals from Belgrade's art and cultural scene stand as representatives of those murdered seven years before. Her work is an attempt to preserve the memory of this crime—a private memory that avoids the pitfalls of virtualization and mediatization.

1960, Belgrade / RS (at that time Yugoslavia), lives in Graz / AT

Endre Tót

I am glad if I can read a newspaper, 1971–76

b&w photograph

9 x 14 cm

I am glad if I can read a burning newspaper, 1971–76

b&w photograph

11 x 18 cm

Endre Tót, who had achieved great success in Hungary with his abstract painting, abandoned this area of work in 1971 and turned to the international Fluxus movement and conceptual art, both of which he viewed as being forms better suited to his artistic criticism of political and institutional systems. In his series *Gladness*, he adopted a seemingly positive tone (which, ironically, made him unassailable) and proceeded to formulate all manner of platitudes such as *I am glad if I can draw something nice*, *I am glad if I can do like this*, or—even more direct and aimed at state censorship—*I am glad if I can read a newspaper* and *I am glad if I can read a burning newspaper*. With verbal wit and performative activity, Tót succeeded in undermining the repressive rules imposed by the state.

1937, Sümeg / HU, lives in Cologne / DE

At the Tram Stop I., 1986

b&w photograph

13,1 x 18 cm

At the Tram Stop II. (a), 1986

b&w photograph

13,1 x 18 cm

With a Round Mirror, 1986

b&w photograph

23,9 x 18 cm

Flying II., 1986

b&w photograph

21 x 15,4 cm

Flying VII., 1986

b&w photograph

22,3 x 15,2 cm

Corner I/a., 1985

b&w photograph

20,7 x 13,7 cm

The photographs by Zsuzsi Ujj show performative nudes that she staged with no audience present. The observer that she confronts with her nakedness is the camera itself, with which she enters into a reflexive and ambiguous relationship. She counters the power of the camera's eye as it observes and documents with her mascara-line gaze and the threats emanating from her body paint. The spaces that she allows herself and the documenting camera are dismal and also difficult on account to the light-dark contrasts outside and the cramped situations inside, the latter of which result in perspectival distortions that cause her head to appear either too large or too small. In her mid-20s, Zsuzsi Ujj made waves as a successful and radical singer-songwriter thanks to her extremely powerful but also vulnerable expression of the complex, emotionally existential, and sexual crises of her generation of women— crises that her photographs, produced in very small formats, formulate visually in a eminently fitting manner.

1959, Veszprém / HU, lives in Budapest / HU

After After, 1997

video, color, sound

16 min 52 sec

In her first film, which she produced as a young student, Jasmila Žbanić visited a preschool class in Sarajevo together with a psychologist. For four long years, Sarajevo had been besieged and bombarded by the Bosnian Serb Army, remnants of the Yugoslav National Army, and paramilitary forces. A full 1,600 of those killed had been children. When the psychologist asks the preschoolers what they were afraid of, their vigorous reactions show what horrible things they had been forced to experience during the war, giving one a sense of the traumas they have been left with. One girl, the gentle six-year-old Alma (who shyly denies being afraid), is accompanied home by the psychologist and filmmaker, where the catastrophe that hit Alma and her family is heart-wrenchingly revealed: her mother fled from her mixed marriage with a Bosnian man, and Alma lives in severe poverty with her father and her aged grandmother. She finds solace in playing with her dolls.

Red Rubber Boots, 2000

video, color, sound

18 min 12 sec

Jasmila Žbanić has devoted her entire filmic oeuvre to the war in Bosnia and its horrific and tragic consequences for the people in this country. In *Red Rubber Boots*, she accompanies Jasna P. on a search for the mortal remains of her two children Amar (who was four years old) and Ajla (who was four months old). The Serbian Army murdered her children and buried them in a mass grave. Accompanied by investigatory commissioners, Jasna P. travels from one mass grave to the next in hopes of finding her son's red rubber boots, which he had worn when the children were taken away from her.

1974, Sarajevo / BA (at that time Yugoslavia), lives in Berlin / DE

Artur Żmijewski

KR WP, 2000

video, color, sound

7 min 11 sec

Artur Żmijewski's video *KR WP* features former members of the Polish Honor Guard. (KR PW is an abbreviation of Kompanii Repräsentacyjnej Wojska Polskiego / Representative Honor Guard Regiment of the Polish Armed Forces). Żmijewski had these men perform drill exercises in the prescribed sequences in a gym—doing so naked, but wearing field caps and carrying guns. In this way, he sets up a provocative contrast between ceremonial military discipline and anarchic departure from prevailing morals and values with the aim of symbolically liberating these soldiers from the compulsion of obedience to the nation and its political system. Their display captivates the viewers as voyeurs and reflects the sadism inherent in this ritual.

1966, Warsaw / PL, lives in Warsaw

SERIES OF CONVERSATIONS

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Vasyl Cherepanyn
Ekaterina Degot
Michael Kerbler
Renata Salecl
a.o

Saturday 5 November 2022
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VIENNA

The conversations between renowned artists, art historians and theorists refer to the exhibition *General Alert. Wars that Have Never Ended*. They discuss the possibilities of how to visualize the current reality of war from the perspective of art and cultural theory.

The series of conversations is a cooperation between the Kontakt Collection, Vienna, and Gleis 21.

www.kontakt-collection.org
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Imprint

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