

ACADEMY OF PERFORMING ARTS IN PRAGUE
FILM AND TV SCHOOL OF ACADEMY OF PERFORMING ARTS IN
PRAGUE

Dušan Josip Smodej

FOTOPUBES

Contemporary Slovenian Photographic Art

Final Theoretical Dissertation Bachelor Degree Project

Prague, 2018

ACADEMY OF PERFORMING ARTS IN PRAGUE
FILM AND TV SCHOOL OF ACADEMY OF PERFORMING ARTS IN
PRAGUE

Dušan Josip Smodej

FOTOPUBES

Contemporary Slovenian Photographic Art

Final Theoretical Dissertation Bachelor Degree Project

Consulting Teacher:

Mgr. Tomáš Dvořák, Ph.D.

I, Dušan Josip Smodej, hereby certify that the thesis I am submitting is entirely my own original work except where otherwise indicated. Any use of the works of any other author, in any form, is properly acknowledged at their point of use.

Abstract

This thesis explores the most contemporary practices in the Slovenian photographic art space and the concept of the photographic. The study is based on the work of eight young artists that call themselves Fotopubes: Jure Kastelic, Bojan Mijatović, Aljaž Celarc, Klemen Ilovar, Tadej Vindiš, Miha Erjavec, Dare Sintič and myself. Following a short description of the current situation in the Slovenian contemporary art scene, which is juxtaposed with the formation and work of Fotopubes, the thesis explores the concepts and processes behind the group's work and their influence on the national art community at large.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	4
TABLE OF CONTENTS	6
1 INTRODUCTION	8
2 SLOVENIAN CONTEMPORARY ART	10
3 SLOVENIAN PHOTOGRAPHY IN FINE ART	14
4 FOTOPUBES: OVERVIEW	20
5 GROUP SHOW OF THE NEW GENERATION OF SLOVENIAN ARTISTS	24
6 FOTOPUB AND OTHER COLLECTIVE PROJECTS	27
7 THE PHOTOGRAPHIC	33
8 CONCLUSION	36
BIBLIOGRAPHY	37
LIST OF FIGURES	39
INDEX	40

1 Introduction

Since the advent of photography, the role of the photographic medium has been central, chiefly due to it being the most technologically evolved for the description of reality. It evolved into a specific art form that was throughout time predominantly quite separate from other classical art forms, always having dealt with the struggle of being the 'least artistic'; this due in part to its reproducibility and the fact that it is done by a machine, as is aptly described by Rosalind Krauss. Following the evolution of technology, it became a mass medium available to anyone, and artistic photography started facing another problem. The group of artists presented in this research dealt with this shift by turning away from photography and towards the research of other media while still retaining the photographic concept as part of their work process. They began using photography to produce art, as opposed to producing art for the sake of photography, as many of their contemporaries and predecessors had done. In implementing this practice, Fotopubes started a new movement in Slovenian contemporary art.

Their specific modus operandi of not only working as artists, but also as producers, whose aim is to present the work of other artists to the public, is also different from what is deemed as conventional in the Slovenian scene. The concept of artist-led NGO's in Slovenia is not a common one, and even the ones that have emerged have not been very successful.

Through their practice, Fotopubes are developing the concept of photographic art that is neither photography nor image based art, but simply art that deals with the concepts of the photographic as part of its process, concept, or idea. This art has been widely produced since modernism, but had, prior to Fotopubes, never been defined by a single term.

Fotopubes raise different questions about photography as an art form, and provides answers to them through their various artistic and production projects. Their goal is to present and implement new approaches to contemporary art away from the modernist and post-modernist norms, and to

change the deeply rooted institutional obsession with the segregation of media that is prevalent in Slovenia.

2 Slovenian contemporary art

To understand the position of photography in the Slovenian contemporary art space it is important to briefly outline the current position of Slovenian contemporary fine art, its recent history and influences, institutional background, funding structure, educational opportunities, and general trends.

The beginnings of Slovenian contemporary art were widely influenced by the sociopolitical changes that affected Slovenia in the nineties; the collapse of Yugoslavia, the emancipation of Slovenia, and globalization. In the last decade we are witnessing two main sociopolitical changes: the financial crisis, the solving of which has been detrimental to the welfare state and the public sector; and the reaction of public cultural institutions and artists that survived the budget cuts and have been forced to search for new survival tactics. While this first shift is based on saving, the other focuses on the depiction of wealth and the general availability of the internet. The neoliberal politics of saving have therefore merely enhanced the attractiveness of the digital paradigm. The story of the technological turnover has thrown a shadow over the more depressive story of the political and economic crisis, but both phenomena are, nevertheless, intertwined.

Artists are responding to the numerous contradictions of the ideological and cultural discourses that surround them in a critical, though often ironic and playful fashion. The analyses and reflections of personal ordinary living experiences in this discourse require the research of wider and more complex structures that define and form those experiences and events. Paradoxically, artists are taking the multi-layered and complex conditions that are traditionally understood as obstacles to their activity and turning them into positive opportunities. This constructive irony thus depicts their own position, as it is spatially and culturally determined in their field of activity, while also illustrating their captivity in the institutional and production machine of the art system, and their borders and necessity as possibility and advantage.

The new generation of artists has exchanged nostalgia with melancholy, banality with pathos, real expectations with ambitions. Despite the apathy and the feeling of powerlessness they are succeeding in the circumstances of the transition to bring into their work a big part of enthusiasm.¹

Today the field of visual arts in the Slovenian cultural space at large is marked by an increasing gap between established institutional practices and new approaches to the conceptualization, presentation, promotion and evaluation of contemporary artistic activity. Approaches that are increasingly difficult to place within rigid frames of established artistic media are, by virtue of their experimental, incomplete, and futile nature, too often subjected to a lack of production space.

In Slovenia, there is a wide range of young creators who are highly educated, extremely capable and charged with creative energy. However, their potential often remains largely unexploited. By identifying projects, initiatives, platforms and institutions that simultaneously promote, educate and consistently develop new artistic production on a local, regional, national and international level, the Slovenian art scene can establish the continuity of strategic lines of the last twenty years, thereby filling the gaps that arise with generational differences. This results in the creation of a new space for the uninterrupted and constructive involvement of young artistic practices into larger completed productions, thus enabling a balanced intergenerational art discourse.

The aforementioned attributes of the Slovenian cultural and artistic space suggest the potential for further development. However, considering the incorrect understanding and lack of awareness regarding the internationalization of the cultural and artistic space, the recurring problems of artists' employment prospects, and the danger and instability of the artistic profession, these characteristics prefer to manifest themselves in environments outside Slovenia that have proved to be more favorable towards artists. Today, as a cause of globalization, we are confronted with the

¹ T.Soban and I. Španjol, *Krize in novi začetki: umetnost v Sloveniji 2005-2015*, Ljubljana, Moderna Galerija, 2015.

degradation of national borders and of their respective cultural and artistic spaces (exempting those related to language). We are, however, unaware of the importance of equalizing concepts, approaches and general institutional action towards the adaptation to the current global cultural and artistic space that functions independently from national borders, as well as local or national financing mechanisms and self-sufficiency.

An examination of Slovenia's cultural institutions reveals a substantial division between the public and non-governmental sectors. The public institutions that manage most large influential presentation spaces work predominantly with well-established artists hailing from the post-modernist era, while in the last five years NGO's have been faced with severe financial problems as a result of the financial crisis. But precisely because of this struggle, a new trend of artist-led, volunteer-based organizations has appeared. Nevertheless, the main presentation spaces that have been in use since the nineties are still the main actors in the Slovene art space: ŠKUC, Alkatraz, Kapelica, P74, Photon, Aksioma, Kibla, MG+MSUM etc. In 2014 there were 121 registered exhibition sites in Slovenia, led by 50 different organizations.²

Most of Slovenia's fine artists are educated at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Ljubljana, which until today is the only public art education institution in Slovenia. While new schools working in the fields of contemporary art are appearing, all of them are private and require the payment of tuition fees. In past years, prominent young artists have mostly been going abroad to obtain their education and are not likely to return to Slovenia.

As is to be expected for an Eastern European country, the art market in Slovenia is mostly centered on modernist and older pieces, while there is almost no demand for contemporary pieces. The majority of the more renowned artists sell their work through foreign galleries or through Slovene galleries that operate on the foreign market while they are themselves living in

² Ministrstvo za kulturo, *Nacionalni Program za Kulturo 2014-2017: Pot do novega modela kulturne politike*, Ljubljana, Ministrstvo za kulturo, 2014.

Slovenia. This trend is especially noticeable after 2012 when the law that granted tax relief to companies investing in art was abolished. As a result, the local art market is very small and almost nonexistent. Artists and art institutions are therefore entirely dependent on public funding, and a very small number of artists can afford to support themselves without resorting to other work, namely teaching, as a means of income.

3 Slovenian photography in fine art

Again, to understand the subsequent topics it is important to quickly research the roles of photography in Slovenian fine art production, and the position of the photograph as a standalone fine art medium.

Photography appeared as part of the Slovenian artistic discourse quite early. In Slovene art, one of the first painters to base his paintings on photographs was Jožef Petkovšek (1861–1898); while the first person to use photography as an actual art medium was Rihard Jakopič (1869–1943), an impressionist and one of the most renowned Slovene artists, followed by Božidar Jakac (1899–1989), who is known to have recorded his travels not only through paintings and graphic art, but also through photography and film. In the sixties, we are already able to witness the first combination practices: photorealism, and the use of photography in performance and conceptual art as a document of the event.



Figure 1 Božidar Jakac: *New York iz 17. nadstropja hotela Manger, maj 1931.*

Photorealism, the art current that developed at the end of the sixties, signaled the beginnings of the importance of photography. Artists would use different painting and graphic techniques to form an image that strived to be as accurate a reproduction of a photograph as possible. The use of airbrush, silkscreen and lithography was common, even photo transfer was used, and since the beginning of the nineties, various digital printers have also been used. Parallel to the advent of photorealism was the appearance of Pop Art that adopted a critical approach vis-à-vis the consumer society. The world of media, the entertainment industry and everyday consumerism created new icons; these have been critically studied through repetition and other approaches to empty them of their significance or convey details. One of the most iconic Pop artists were Lojze Logar (1944–) and Franc Berčič - Berko (1946–), who used appropriated photographs as the base of his works. Later, at the beginning of the seventies, Bogoslav Kalaš (1941–), influenced by the new currents in figuralism, began using an aerography machine to transfer a photograph to canvas or any other base. This technique allowed him to intervene into the image while enlarging it.

Photography played a different role in conceptual art, where the art piece as a mind concept is more important than the object, the art artifact. Photography has been the “broker” between concept and action, as is witnessed in the performative works of the group OHO (1966–1971) that confirm and document actions while formulating a concept. In this instance, photography adopts the role of the document.

Stane Jagodič (1943–) is a graphic artist, caricaturist and general researcher of new fine art possibilities in contemporary media. He uses photography in collages and montages of appropriated photographs of known authors, thus investing them with new meaning.

The biggest merit for the affirmation of photography as a standalone fine art medium in Slovenia can be attributed to Fotoklub Maribor, mostly because of the theoretical and organizational activities of Zmago Jeraj (1937–). In 1971, Fotoklub Maribor formed a group of fifteen artists who presented themselves

at an exhibition entitled *Fotografija mariborskega kroga*³ in Maribor's Rotovž Exhibition Salon. The minimalist photographs with deep grays and expressed blacks that show no traces of later interventions in the darkroom seemed shocking at that time and represent one of the most radical breaks in the development of Slovene photography. Jeraj paid attention to the basic differences between painting and photography. This difference was shown by his transferring motives from his photographs to the painting medium on the one hand, and by photographing his previously painted motifs after finding them in nature on the other. His photographs are often overexposed, dark; they show deserted spaces, their subjects seem tragic and grotesque. In addition to Jeraj, one of the key actors in the conceptual photography of that time is Milan Pajk (1942–). Two more exhibitions organized by Jeraj were extremely significant for the establishment of photography as a fine art medium: *Nova fotografija 1 – Vidiki in usmeritve*⁴ (1973) and *Nova fotografija 2 – Fotografija kot umetnost*⁵ (1976). Both were first exhibited Maribor's Rotovž Exhibition Salon and then travelled Slovenia and the rest of Yugoslavia. The attention that photography received since the eighties was also heralded by two Yugoslav exhibitions on the theme of the Presence of photography in contemporary art in 1979: *Teme in funkcije medija fotografije*⁶ in Belgrade and *IX. Spring Salon* in Banja Luka. In 1979, photography was included in a large retrospective exhibition of Slovenian postwar art in Ljubljana's Museum of Modern Art.

The relationship to the photographic medium changed a lot in the late sixties and early seventies. Before that, photography had been thought of as a self-sustaining enclave without any connection to other art fields. In the rare instances when connections were formed, they were merely a result of experimentation with photography's visual effects; this was done by painters

³ Photography of the Maribor Circle

⁴ New Photography 1 - Aspects and Directions

⁵ New Photography 2 - Photography as Art

⁶ Themes and Functions of the Photographic Medium

or graphic artists that were interested in finding new possibilities of expressing the formal and contextual questions of their art.⁷

The field of photography was subject to numerous changes in the eighties. This was the decade of the institutionalization of subcultures, especially of Ljubljana's alternative scene, to which a photographer, named Jane Štravs (1965–), also belonged. His photographs are dark and with strong contrast, showing scenes from concerts, theatre plays and other events. During this time, photography also became part of the academic curriculum, an act that further enforced its significance in fine art. In 1983 photography became part of the curriculum of the Academy of Fine Arts of the University in Ljubljana; in 1984 history of photography was added to Ljubljana's Faculty of Arts; and in 1989 photography started being lectured at the Department of Art Pedagogics of the Faculty of Pedagogics in Maribor. This period also gave us the biggest exhibition project in the history of Slovene photography, a tripartite anthological exhibition, *150 let fotografije na Slovenskem*⁸ in the City Art Gallery of Ljubljana (1989, 1990, curators Mirko Kambič, Stane Bernik and Brane Kovič).

The interest in media images alongside a stronger articulation of the difference between reality and image or representation deepened in the nineties. The effects of new procedures, especially that of digitalization, was formidable. Mass media, popular culture and the world of spectacular images have influenced many artists of the younger generation, many of whom have exchanged the classical method of artistic expression for video, computer, photography and film, while sourcing photographic impulses not only from printed media and television, but also and mainly from the Internet.

The dual relationship to photography is still visible. Its development was based on its functions on one side and the qualities of the medium on the other. Dušan Kirbiš (1953–) has used photography in the sense of integration

⁷ P. Lampič, 'Fotografija in umetnost, fotografija kot umetnost : slovenska fotografija sedemdesetih let', *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, vol. 31/32, 1995, p. 155-190.

⁸ 150 Years of Photography in Slovenia

into a painting. Zora Stančič (1956–) has developed many technical procedures with which she can transform the photographs in her archive into a final graphic print, while preserving the specificities of the photographic image. Sašo Vrabič (1974–) brings photographs depicting fragments of ordinary life into painting; he uses photography to add value to and reflect the plurality of images that both surround us and fascinate him. Miha Knific (1976–) mostly works at the intersection of video and photography, which is nicely shown with the deconstruction of a short film sequence into single photographs that look identical while their essence lies in how they connect into a series that can be brought to life only through movement (*Slow Motion*, 2006, Mala Galerija, Ljubljana). There is an abundance of artists that are appropriating photographic material of different origins; some of them approach the medium in a more contemplative and critical manner, while others accept photography as just another layer of the reality that surrounds us.⁹

The nineties also mark the surge of author positions within discourses surrounding the photographic medium, and a time when photography begins to be accorded more attention from institutions and the market, as a result of the founding of new photography galleries around the year 2000. The most interesting author positions were formed by: Tomaž Gregorič (1969–), whose work could be defined as the continuation of conceptual photography, especially with his series *Periferija*¹⁰ (1998–). It depicts the gray, banal reality of everyday suburbs and cities that are often left unseen. Hence the newly uncovered situations can compete with shiny, exotic, spectacular shots. Tomo Brejc (1975–) achieved success in the field of portrait photography. His specific directed documentarism is conceptually-based, as the subject of his interest is not the world that he catches into the frame, but the specifically-built image as a directed situation (*Rekonstrukcije*¹¹, 2003, Galerija Equina, Ljubljana). The main themes of Goran Bertok's (1963–) work were always bodies that he researched in pathological states. Bertok explores the body, he

⁹ N. Autor, *Fotografija in umetnost*, [website], http://www.pojmovnik.si/koncept/fotografija_in_umetnost/, (accessed 1 June 2018).

¹⁰ Periphery

¹¹ Reconstructions

is obsessed by the singularity of our own bodies, bodies as meat, blood, juice, and everything unconventional, extraordinary, bizarre, morbid, restricted. He shows bodily violence, as well as violence on his own body in the cycle *Obiskovalci*¹² (2006, Galerija Kapelica, Ljubljana). Aleksandra Vajd (1971–) is broadening the reference space of conceptual photography; her work is sometimes directed at the intimacy of the personal relationship and sometimes at the dialogue with art itself and is combined with a deep research of the photographic medium.¹³

In recent years, after photography has established its position as a standalone medium in the discourse of fine art through modernist and post-modernist practices, the new generation of artists have been erasing the lines between photography and other media while presenting different perspectives on topics, such as image making; photographic reproduction; truth, reality or virtuality; manufacturing, production and labor, all affected by the age of blooming technological progress and digitalization. This new form of photographic art in Slovenia is today mostly gathered around and presented by Fotopub. The artists working as part of the group informally named Fotopubes follow the trends of the post-digital age, *“to overcome the borders of modernist and post-modernist practices and to understand photography through the planetary cyber-manifestation of the new technologically conditioned sociocultural space.”*¹⁴

¹² Visitors

¹³ D. Arrigler et. al., *Gremo naprej!: slovenska fotografija 1990-2015*, Ljubljana, Muzeji in galerije mesta Ljubljane. 2015.

¹⁴ D.J. Smodej, 'A look into Fotopub: Introduction', *Yet Magazine*, 2016, <https://yet-magazine.com/post/a-look-into-fotopub-introduction>, (accessed 10 May 2010).

4 Fotopubes: Overview

The group informally named Fotopubes, consists of eight Slovenian artists Aljaž Celarc, Klemen Ilovar, Jure Kastelic, Tadej Vindiš, Bojan Mijatović, Miha Erjavec, Dare Sintič and myself. They first met in the summer of 2014 when Jure Kastelic and I invited the six other artists to exhibit at “fotopub” 2014, the newly recontextualized festival of photography in Novo Mesto. While today the group's main collective activity is the programming and production of Fotopub Festival and of projects associated to it, the collaboration started solely as a one-time group exhibition project.

Fotopubes are not a collective but merely a group of artists gathered around Fotopub—the artist-led NGO that they lead—who are influenced by one another's work. Most of the artist's projects are done individually or in different groups, while the group as a whole represents itself through various group exhibitions and occasional collective projects that are also mostly associated with Fotopub.

The eight artists that form the group have all studied photography at different art schools around Europe. Their art practices do not center around one common topic as is customary for a group. They focus on different research fields, and work with different media and forms. It could be said that their artistic practices do not have much in common. Despite that, they are able to successfully cooperate on group projects and present their individual work at group exhibitions. Their main connection lies in their common conceptualization of photographic art.

Aljaž Celarc (Ljubljana, 1989) studied at the Faculty of Arts in Slovenia where he earned his bachelor's degree in geography in 2013. In 2015, he received his master's degree with honors in photography at AKV St. Joost in the Netherlands. The essence of his artistic practice is an investigation of different spatial concepts, topics about ecology, and human responses to the current environmental crisis. At the beginning of his career, he was mostly interested

in fine art photography, which is also the reason he joined Fotopubes. His practice later evolved into research-based performative art, working with various new media to research different sociocultural and natural phenomena connected with the environmental crisis. He lives and works between Rotterdam and Ljubljana.

Klemen Ilovar (Ljubljana, 1989) studied at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Ljubljana where he earned a bachelor's degree in design in 2013. In 2016 he earned a bachelor's degree in photography at Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam. His interest in the photographic medium is often visible in his artistic practice. In his work, he usually refers to vernacular photography and researches the tendencies that change photography in the last phase of digitalization. He is the most photography-based member of the group. He lives and works between Amsterdam and Ljubljana.

Jure Kastelic (Novo Mesto, 1992) earned his bachelor's degree in photography in Brighton. His works employ different digital and physical methods to tackle how photography is perceived. He researches the real and the virtual, reflecting on the development of contemporary technology and the effect of the Internet on contemporary society. Lately, his media of choice are painting and sculpture, through which he explores the topics of the post-digital. He lives and works in London.

Tadej Vindiš (Maribor, 1990) is an artist and researcher on the crossroads between photography, cultural studies, technology and media research, focusing on the field of machine vision—its cultural implication and disruption. He studied photography at FAMU in Prague. In 2016, he earned his master's degree in Interactive Media: Critical Theory and Practice under the mentorship of Graham Harwood and Luciana Parisi. He lives and works in London.

Bojan Mijatović (Ljubljana, 1989) earned his bachelor's degree at VIST Ljubljana in 2016. He works as a freelance photojournalist. His artistic work is the most humorous of the group, researching the interconnections between

the analogue and the digital in the post-digital era. He lives and works in Ljubljana.

Miha Erjavec (Ljubljana, 1985) studied graphic design at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Ljubljana, but never completed his studies. His work connects design, photography, and graffiti. It is an investigation into the broader cultural environment of the graffiti subculture. He explores the formal and substantive links between the dissemination of documentary photography and the processes or ways of presenting graffiti as fine art. He lives and works in Ljubljana.

Dare Sintič (Ljubljana, 1987) earned his bachelor's degree at VIST Ljubljana in 2016. His photography practice was based on large-format images and performative actions that questioned the connection between the living space and the gallery space. Today he works as a director of photography. He lives and works in Ljubljana.

Dušan Josip Smodej (Novo Mesto, 1994) studies photography at FAMU in Prague. In his work that is mostly based on hard materials, sculpture and performative actions he studies the value of artwork in connection with institutional discourse. He is the leader of the group, acting also as the director of Fotopub. He lives and works between Prague and Ljubljana.¹⁵

The eight members of Fotopubes are constantly working with other artists and curators on their projects. Other artists that are most often associated with the group are Nejc Prah, a graphic designer who has been working with the group since the beginning when he designed the poster for their first exhibition, Eva Pavlič Seifert, an art theoretician who collaborated with the group on their first exhibition, curators Živa Kleindienst and Ilaria Speri, who cooperate with the group on Fotopub Festival, artists Reinis Lismanis and Paulo Wirz, who worked with the group on several exhibitions, and musician Gregor Kocijančič,

¹⁵ D. J. Smodej (ed.), *Fotopub 2014 Catalogue*, Novo mesto, Fotopub Association, 2014.

who has worked with the group since the beginning, creating musical projects for accompanying events.

5 Group Show of the New Generation of Slovenian Artists

The very eloquently entitled Group Show of the New Generation of Slovenian Artists, was the first meeting point of Fotopubes. It was the main exhibition of the newly reconstructed Fotopub Festival.

Fotopub Festival was a festival of documentary photography until 2014, when it was taken over by Jure Kastelic and myself, and recontextualized into a form that focuses on exploring the most contemporary photographic approaches to fine art. The exhibition of the eight artists who were later to form Fotopubes was wholly spontaneous; the other six artists were chosen through a subjective selection process and invited by then Creative Director of Fotopub, Jure Kastelic. The eight artists first met a week before the opening of the exhibition. The only information that was given to them before the meeting was a short text by Jure Kastelic:

The concept of the group exhibition that I propose would be based on our various approaches to the media and its presentation. These are very broad concepts that would connect all our experiments, which would not only talk about the content of the photo displayed, but about all the processes and meanings outside photography itself. This approach is comparable to the approach to the image of various websites ala the Jogging, 4chan, Reddit, basically all internet platforms that allow the exchange of memes and "funny pictures". They are not affected by the traditional rules of photography (the concept that a photo is an image of reality), and indirectly investigate what a photo is and how it can mutate. We would similarly test the boundaries of what can be labeled as photographic. In any case, we would not exclude concrete topics that concern our individual interests but would present them in a way that is not normal in the sense of "old" pictorialist photography. In a way, we would deal with ourselves perceiving photography and what we can do with it through the use of different methods. We would work with the surface of print, screen, cut, collage, virtual, realistic, misleading, appropriation, computer, analogue, digital... With everything that tests the boundaries of photography.¹⁶

The exhibition acted as a playground for the work of the eight artists and became at the same time a paradigm of innovation, impulse and quality in the

¹⁶ J. Kastelic, 'Razstava' [email to T. Vindiš], 15 May 2014.

fresh, finally awakened spacial configuration and curatorial practice of photographic art in Slovenia.

The classic presentation and the mainly journalistic nature of the photographic medium paved the way for the new approach to presenting and executing photography. Not only has photography somewhat distanced itself from its traditional content, it has become a tool that helps establish a new ritual, a new field of discourse. The questions it poses pertain to the originality of the creative being, and the support or limitation it confers to the artist. The enhanced awareness of the extensive use of photography as a constructive tool in the visualization of various problems is offered up through the works of young creators—a phenomenon seen in the Slovene environment for the first time. The entire concept of the exhibition was not only envisioned as a reflection of a practice, but as a positive example for future generations.



Figure 2 Installation view of the Group Show of the New Generation of Slovenian Artists, Simulaker Gallery, Novo Mesto, 2014.

The aforementioned exhibition represented not only a break in the Slovenian curatorial practice, it also transformed the existing definition of the function of

the photograph itself. Today's photography is mostly presented as a self-sufficient medium, which needs to be explored and freely surrendered to. It is not merely a matter of justifying the notion of what photography is today, but of whether we are able to identify the motives and intentions through which we recognize something as photographic. When we are talking about a tool for visual research, we are thinking, above all, of the multidisciplinary use of the media. This requires a tangible explanation that helps us develop the character of work and with it a preconditioned meaning for the space in which it is represented. The exhibition was clearly in touch with the international art scene. The performativity of the works was noticeable in the interactivity of the venue that also made visible the critique of institutional consciousness which stressed the need for the explorative energy of young artists that is lacking in the Slovenian gallery space.

At that point, the institutionalization of the exhibition happened within its social reach. It has become institutionalized mostly because of the interrelated connection and dialogue between the exhibiting artists. The critical message that Slovenia can organize and present a collective exhibition that does not look back to tradition and bravely walks forward in defense of varied photographic approaches was justified and clearly stated.

The exhibition, outlined above, was the start of Fotopubes, Fotopub, and of their photographic art.

6 Fotopub and other collective projects

After their first exhibition, the group began working on different projects near each of the individual artist's personal artistic activity. Their main ongoing project is Fotopub Festival in which Fotopubes act as the festival's Artistic Committee, with individual members of the group also conducting executive functions in the organizational scheme of the institution. Alongside Fotopub Festival, the group also produces various smaller projects ranging from exhibitions, interventions, and installations, to marketing campaigns and theoretical works.

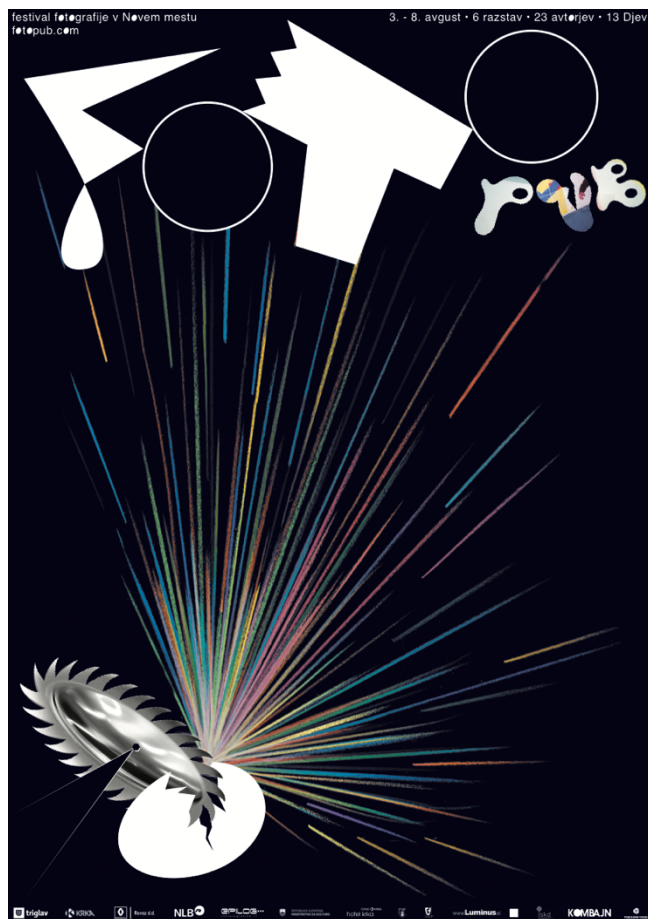


Figure 3 Nejc Prah: Fotopub 2015 Poster.

Since its renewal in 2014, Fotopub Festival has become a young festival of emerging photographic art. The basic premises of the festival that were set by the group in 2015 were the presentation of younger photographic artists, the supporting of Slovenian contemporary photographic art at the local and

international level, and the active integration of the professional and amateur public to develop a necessary platform, aimed at forming links between young emerging artists and their older colleagues, thus evoking a constructive dialogue between them. The goal of the newly founded institution was for it to become a key player in the international development of emerging contemporary photography.

Eva Pavlič Seifert used the following words in her text, published in the Fotopub 2015 Catalogue, *'Institutional phobia is conveniently merging into interpretational phobia, where the number of multiple experiences multiplies; hence, creating a chaos of expectations.'*¹⁷

The group's first intention was the creation of a chaos of expectations. In a show of moderate artistic self-aggrandizement, they all wished to create something new, something contrary to the old. They founded an institution that was meant to fight the institutional through its own institutionalism. In one of their early internal manifestos that was later published in Yet Magazine they wrote:

We are not dealing with photography but with the photographic. We deny the obsession with the medium and explore the photographic in its broadest sense. We are young, fresh and relaxed, and we do not want to grow up.¹⁸

Since its first exhibition in Simulaker Gallery in 2014, Fotopub has changed and grown exponentially. The festival now stages up to twelve site specific exhibitions set in non-gallery spaces by as many fifty artists each year. This makes it the main Slovenian international exhibition to showcase works by emerging artists. The institution formed around the festival has adopted a true institutional form despite it being precisely what the group initially wanted to oppose. Their newest manifesto is published on their website and does not differ substantially from the first, although it has definitely embraced a more

¹⁷ E. Pavlič Seifert, 'Exhibition 1', in D. J. Smodej (ed.), *Fotopub 2015 Catalogue*, Novo mesto, Fotopub Association, 2015, p.5.

¹⁸ Smodej, 'A look into Fotopub: Introduction'.

serious, institutional form that has caused some members to estrange themselves from the group:

Fotopub focuses on generating links between the freshest artistic activity and its wider cultural context. Unlike many other cultural institutions working in the field of contemporary art, our foremost intention is to work actively at the site/place where emerging photographic practices meet unconventional curatorial gestures. We aim to recognize the qualities of young artists and connect them with established professionals in the field of contemporary art, thus enabling future interactions and supporting the development and acceleration of their artistic careers. Fotopub occupies and builds a space for emerging artists in a need of a platform for independent research, experimentation and practice, forming a multigenerational initiative for interdisciplinary cultural integration.¹⁹

In Fotopub, the group collaborates with various artists, curators and other professionals to produce the festival. Today, the active members of Fotopubes in Fotopub are Smodej, Vindiš and Erjavec, while Kastelic, Ilovar, Sintič and Mijatović only work part-time as members of the institution's Artistic Committee. The first three are joined by Ilaria Speri and Živa Kleindienst as Curatorial Coordinators, Anja Zver as Production Coordinator, Gregor Kocijančič as Music Programme Coordinator and Nejc Prah as Designer. The reasons for the estrangement of part of the group vary; while Kastelic, Sintič and Mijatović have become more inactive due to their other professional obligations, Ilovar has estranged himself from the group due to ideological inconsistencies with other Fotopubes. However, the group's *modus operandi* does not allow for anyone to be removed from the group, as nobody is actually a part of the group either. All the members are therefore still a part of the Artistic Committee of Fotopub and have the right to vote on any content-related topics alongside the active members and the joined professionals that work in the executive branch.

Under the same institution, Fotopubes also work on other projects besides Fotopub Festival. Even before Fotopub 2015, the group had produced two group exhibitions; *"fotopub" v GT22* and *Fotopub Goes to Lausanne*. The former was an updated reenactment of their first exhibition and the latter was

¹⁹ *Fotopub: info*, [website], <https://fotopub.com/info>, (accessed 1 June 2018).

an exhibition produced in cooperation with Swiss artist/curator Raphael Faure, presenting fresh works by Fotopubes and three other Lausanne-based artists. In 2016, Fotopubes showcased their new works as part of a group exhibition entitled *Fotopuparty*, to which they also invited the Latvian artist Reinis Lismanis, at the time working with them on Fotopub Festival.

Later in 2016, Fotopubes presented their first larger collective installation entitled *Fotopub Surprise*, an interactive installation consisting of eggs filled with reproductions of works by various artists who had exhibited at Fotopub. The project is to be continued this year with the addition of an egg dispenser, a machine in which the eggs will be sold that will be placed in Ljubljana's Museum of Modern Art.

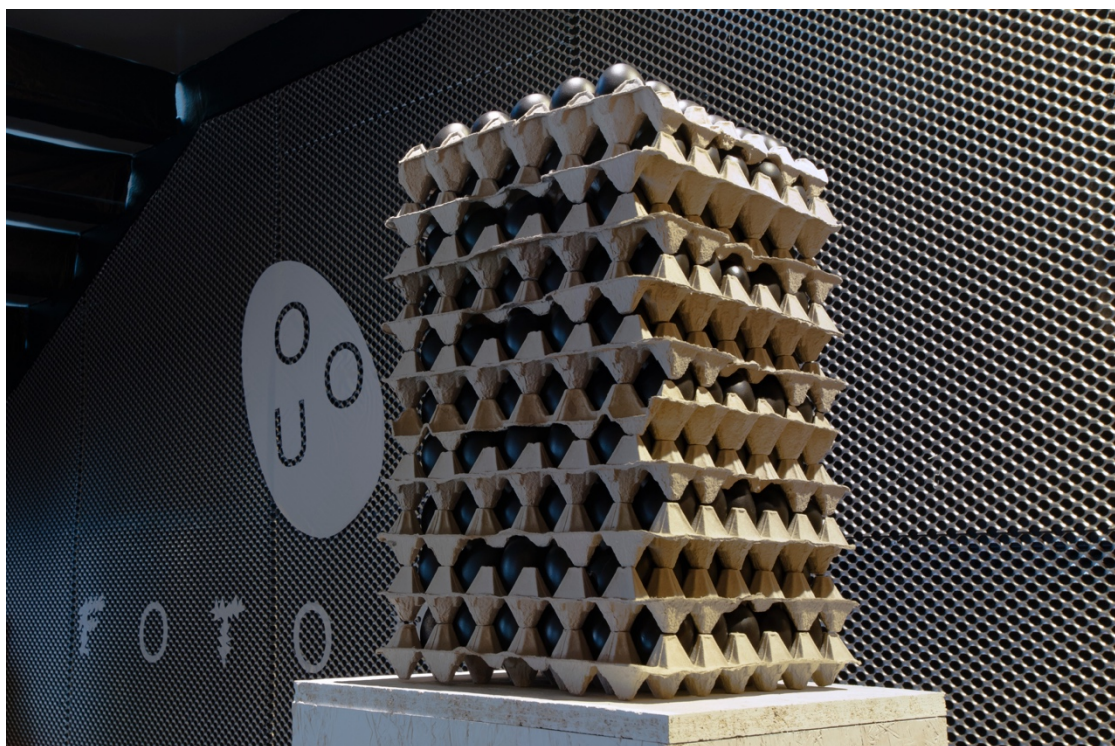


Figure 4 Installation view of Fotopub Surprise, Organ Vida, Zagreb, 2016.

This ongoing project problematizes the concept of contemporary art, its production conditions and the monetization of artistic work and the artistic profession in Western capitalism, while at the same time highlighting the antagonism between the quality of the artwork, its banalization, and the growing subordination of the logic of cultural spectacle.

In late 2016, as the last project of the year, Fotopubes curated an exhibition entitled *Fotokub* at Brighton Photo Fringe. The exhibition presented Fotopub through several different pieces by many different artists merging together into one coherent spatial installation. It alluded to the confusion of the post-digital age, the contemporary sociocultural context, which manifests itself through the cybernetic entanglement of the representational temporality—the place where the photographic image as such becomes translucent or seemingly lost within the immateriality of the constant informational exchange.

In 2017, the Fotopub Collection was presented for the first time in a private apartment in Prague. The collection, curated by Fotopubes, represents them in all of its artistic, temporal and other dimensions. It is the space where various practices and discourses converge, uniting Fotopubes and the artists who exhibited on their projects, as well as artworks by various Slovenian artists from different historical art movements. The Fotopub Collection is a fluid collection that does not only exist in the physical space; part of it is online, not even in the possession of Fotopub, but publicly accessible, while still being part of the collection. It also does not exist in a single space, but is spread around Europe in private apartments of individual Fotopubes.

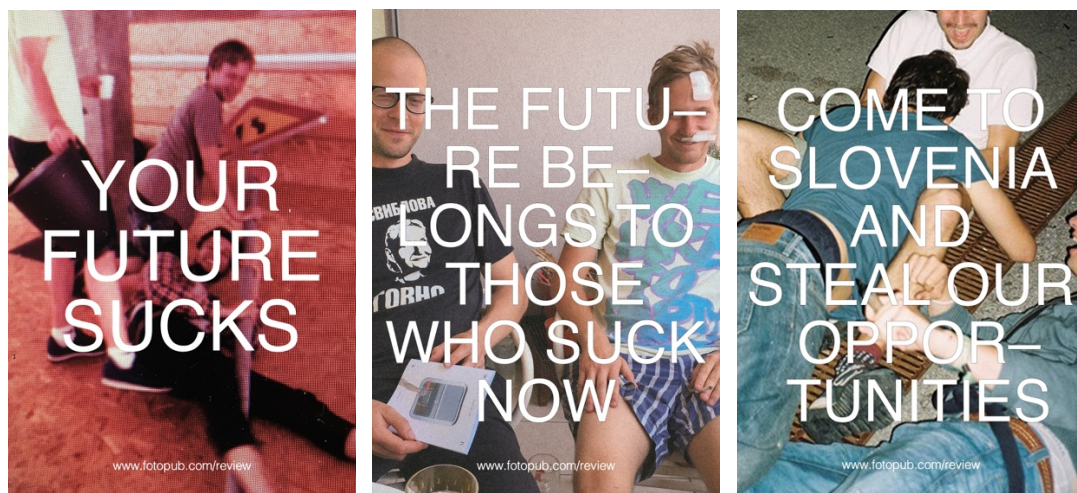


Figure 5 Fotopub: Come to Slovenia and Steal Our Opportunities, digital marketing campaign, 2017.

Other projects of Fotopubes are mostly advertising-based. They create campaigns for their respective activities and work on commercial projects. As an example, the campaign for the Fotopub 2017 Portfolio Review entitled *Come to Slovenia and Take Our Opportunities* was based on the political slogans of the recent Brexit campaign that were combined with the word 'suck' and with photographs gathered through the years of Fotopubes' activity.

In their activity, Fotopubes use various media to present their concepts and ideas, not focusing solely on photography, while all their projects, be they artistic or commercial, are photographic in their nature. This same photographic is discernible in their personal works as well, e.g. Celarc saved a piece of ice from an alpine glacier and replicated it into its original form with the help of 3D technology and a freezer for his project *In Vitro*; and Erjavec's project *Nič ni večno*²⁰ involved him drawing a graffiti out of dust and then vacuuming it out of existence.²¹

²⁰ Nothing is Forever

²¹ M. Colner, *Nič ni večno*, Ljubljana, exhibition catalogue, Ljubljana, Muzej Arhitekture in Oblikovanja, 2017.

7 The Photographic

The central point of Fotopubes' research is the quest for the photographic in any form of art following the liberation from the obsession with the medium, even more common in photographic artists than in artists working with other media. Artists working with photography have been strongly limiting themselves to the medium of photography since the outset, as photography always felt the pressure exerted by the rest of the fine art world to prove its worth as an authentic medium, standing *pari passu* with classic media such as painting and graphic art. Tadej Vindiš wrote on the qualities of photography in his Bachelor thesis:

Photography almost does not have any dispensable characteristics, or anything to reduce to, like painting and sculpture does, and therefore photography could never completely be a modernist art form, or cannot fit its idea of reductivism. It does not have anything to reduce from; a depiction is its final form. Photography cannot change or mould or eliminate previous depiction, because a picture from a machine is the only depiction, a final result which photography can achieve. Therefore, as much as photography tried to fit or establish itself within modernist art it never fully could because its own technique never permitted it. It is neither a product of hand nor a product of tradition. For photography there is no other way than depicting reality through its camera as its only tool and reproducing it.²²

Because of that, photography-based artists were never very eager to use other media in their artistic practice, unlike other fine artists who often included photography in their artistic process. The practice of photography-based artists, or of artists educated in photography using other media, has developed exponentially in the era of digital art, where photography has taken a stance as the conceptual or even ideological basis for a large part of image-based art produced. The reproductive nature of photography has stopped being a weakness in respect to classical media, but has rather evolved into a

²² T. Vindiš, 'What To Do With Photography', Bachelor Thesis, Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, Prague, 2013, p. 13

strength. Hence, a large part of digital and post-digital art uses photography's own concepts in its process, ideas or concepts, and is therefore photographic in its nature. Furthermore, after realizing the photographic nature of post-digital art, one cannot help but to realize that similar concepts are visible in many other artworks and art movements since modernism. Even works that are not image-based can be photographic. Even works that are not visual can be photographic.



Figure 6 Installation view of Hussein Nassereddine: *Grass Grows in the Mouth When You Talk About It*, Fotopub, Novo Mesto, 2017.

For one of the latest exhibitions curated by Rachel Dedman, Fotopub commissioned a sound installation entitled *Grass Grows in the Mouth When You Talk About It* by Hussein Nassereddine. Although obviously non-visual, this artwork was extremely photographic in its nature. It explored the possibilities inherent in images built verbally, formed in mind by language, unlimited by periphery, materiality of stillness. In the sound piece, Nassareddine imagines his natal village in Lebanon, a place marked materially by political unrest, caught in a cycle of destruction. The generations of village architecture are preserved only in testimony, channeled through the

voice of the artist, reminding us of the ambiguous nature of memory in contrast to the ubiquitous nature of photography, arguing for the precise potential of the invisible image.

The photographic in the above described work presents itself in the descriptive function of photography as the most 'objective' medium in contrast to the subjectivity of the spoken word. Other photographic concepts that are often found in works produced by Fotopubes are also reproductivity, copying, digital imaging, scanning, printing, the reduction of three dimensions into two, value-connected concepts, and any technological processes evolved from or connected with photography. In the theory of Fotopubes, the term photographic art therefore describes all art that is somehow connected with those concepts or uses relevant processes in its process or concept.

8 Conclusion

Fotopubes are an informal group of eight artists classically educated as photographers that deviated from standard photography practice based on the belief that photography is nothing more than a medium in a sea of media which can be used for the expression of their artistic research. In their practice as artists and producers they merge photographic approaches with other media and concepts to create what they call photographic art.

Most of them having been educated abroad, Fotopubes presented a new approach to photography to the Slovenian cultural space. This approach is characterized by an opposition to the modernist and post-modernist perception of the medium as a singularity. A perception deeply rooted in the institutional leadership of the Slovenian art community. This is one of the reasons why Fotopubes' work is often disapproved of by certain members of the Slovenian art community, particularly the ones working with the medium of photography in the classical, modernist way.

While some of the Fotopubes currently live in Ljubljana, most of them did not return to Slovenia after finishing their studies. For most of them, this group and its projects are the only reason to return to Slovenia a few times a year, as the local reception of their *modus operandi* is still more negative than it is in the countries where they studied. This brain drain is also one of the main problems currently plaguing the Slovenian cultural space. Nevertheless, Fotopubes work on bringing the most contemporary trends in so-called photographic art to Slovenia to present and educate their contemporaries and raise the plurality and the quality of local artistic production.

The first exhibition of Fotopubes in 2014 was a breaking point in Slovenian photographic production and the beginning of new Slovenian contemporary photographic art. This movement, gathered around Fotopubes, is, in spite of the negative feedback received from many well-situated members of the Slovenian art community, growing in size and gaining followers, especially among the younger generation of Slovenian artists.

Bibliography

Arrigler D. et. al., *Gremo naprej!: slovenska fotografija 1990-2015*, Ljubljana, Muzeji in galerije mesta Ljubljane. 2015, ISBN 978-961-6969-20-8.

Autor, N., *Fotografija in umetnost*, [website], http://www.pojmovnik.si/koncept/fotografija_in_umetnost/, (accessed 1 June 2018).

Benjamin, W., *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, London, Penguin Books, 2008, ISBN 978-0141036199.

Berger, J., *Ways of Seeing*, London, British Broadcasting Publications and Penguin Books, 2008, ISBN 0-14-021631-6.

Colner, M., *Nič ni večno*, Ljubljana, exhibition catalogue, Ljubljana, Muzej Arhitekture in Oblikovanja, 2017.

Fotopub: info, [website], <https://fotopub.com/info>, (accessed 1 June 2018).
Katelic, J., 'Razstava' [email to T. Vindiš], 15 May 2014.

Krauss, R., 'Photography's discursive spaces: Landscape/view', *Art Journal*, vol.42, no.4, 1982, p.311-319

Lampič, P., 'Fotografija in umetnost, fotografija kot umetnost : slovenska fotografija sedemdesetih let', *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, vol. 31/32, 1995, p. 155-190, ISSN 0351-224X.

Ministrstvo za kulturo, *Nacionalni Program za Kulturo 2014-2017: Pot do novega modela kulturne politike*, Ljubljana, Ministrstvo za kulturo, 2014, ISBN 978-961-6370-20-2.

Smodej, D.J., 'A look into Fotopub: Introduction', *Yet Magazine*, 2016, <https://yet-magazine.com/post/a-look-into-fotopub-introduction>, (accessed 10 May 2018).

Smodej, D.J., (ed.), *Fotopub 2014 Catalogue*, Novo mesto, Fotopub Association, 2014.

Smodej, D.J., (ed.), *Fotopub 2015 Catalogue*, Novo mesto, Fotopub Association, 2015.

Smodej, D.J., (ed.), *Fotopub 2016 Catalogue*, Novo mesto, Fotopub Association, 2016.

Smodej, D.J., (ed.), *Fotopub 2017 Catalogue*, Novo mesto, Fotopub Association, 2017.

Soban, T. and I. Španjol, *Krize in novi začetki: umetnost v Sloveniji 2005-2015*, Ljubljana, Moderna Galerija, 2015, ISBN 978-961-206-118-0.

Steyerl, H., 'In Defense of the Poor Image', *e-flux*, no. 10, 2009, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/>, (accessed 20 May 2018).

Vindiš, T., 'What To Do With Photography', Bachelor Thesis, Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, 2013.

List of Figures

Figure 1 Božidar Jakac: <i>New York iz 17. nadstropja hotela Manger, maj 1931.</i>	14
Figure 2 Installation view of Group Show of the New Generation of Slovenian Artists, Simulaker Gallery, Novo mesto, 2014.	25
Figure 3 Nejc Prah: Fotopub 2015 Poster.	27
Figure 4 Installation view of Fotopub Surprise, Organ Vida, Zagreb, 2016.	30
Figure 5 Fotopub: Come to Slovenia and Steal Our Opportunities, digital marketing campaign, 2017.	31
Figure 6 Installation view of Hussein Nassereddine: <i>Grass Grows in the Mouth When You Talk About It</i> , Fotopub, Novo mesto, 2017.	34

Index

3

3D technology33

A

Academy of Fine Art and Design in Ljubljana 12, 22, 23
airbrush15
Aksioma12
AKV St. Joost22
Aleksandra Vajd19
Aljaž Celarc4, 21
Alkatraz12
art market13

B

Bogoslav Kalaš15
Bojan Mijatović4, 21, 23
Božidar Jakac14, 15
Brighton Photo Fringe32

C

conceptual art14, 16
contemporary art10, 12, 17, 30, 32

D

Dare Sintič4, 21, 23
documentarism19
Dušan Kirbiš18

E

Eva Pavlič Seifert24, 29

F

FAMU23
figuralism15
fine art10, 14, 16, 17, 20, 22, 23, 25
Fotoklub Maribor16
Fotopub9, 20, 21, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 35, 39, 40
Fotopubes ..4, 8, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37
Franc Berčič - Berko15

G

Gerrit Rietveld Academie22
Goran Bertok19
graphic art14, 34
Gregor Kocijančič24, 30

H

Hussein Nassereddine35

I

Ilaria Speri24, 30
image-based art35

J

Jane Štravs17
Jožef Petkovšek14
Jure Kastelic4, 21, 22, 25

K

Kapelica12, 19
Kibla12
Klemen Ilovar4, 21, 22

L

lithography15
Lojze Logar15

M

MG+MSUM12
Miha Erjavec4, 21, 23
Miha Knific18
Milan Pajk17
Moderna Galerija11, 40
modernism8, 35

N

Nejc Prah24, 28, 30

O

OHO16

P

P7412
painting15, 16, 18, 22, 34
Paulo Wirz24
photographic art4, 8, 20, 21, 26, 27, 28, 36, 37
photography8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 29, 33, 34, 36, 37, 40
Photon12

R

Rachel Dedman35
Reinis Lismanis24, 31
Rihard Jakopič14

Rosalind Krauss 8

S

Sašo Vrabčič18

screen print15

Simulaker Gallery 26, 29

ŠKUC12

Stane Jagodič16

T

Tadej Vindiš4, 21, 22, 34

the photographic 4, 8, 17, 18, 22, 26, 29, 32, 34,
35

Tomaž Gregorič19

Tomo Brejc19

V

VIST23

visual arts11

Y

Yet Magazine20, 29, 39

Yugoslavia 10, 17

Z

Živa Kleindienst 24, 30

Zmago Jeraj16

Zora Stančič18