

BACK TO THE FUTURE: A CONVERSATION WITH A SARAJEVO ARTIST, JADRAN ADAMOVIC

Just imagine a native Sarajevo artist in post-quake Los Angeles, looking, learning, seeing the ocean, feeling the warmth of the sun, staying with artists at the Brewery in Los Angeles, a live-work complex for creative people, participating in an exhibition at M.Y.T.H., a space run by artist John O'Brien at the Brewery, and then speaking to a class at Claremont College.

He reminds me initially that at the same time as the two Germanies were coming together, the joined republics of Eastern Europe were separating. He also lets me know that one of the republics previously unknown that separated from the Union was NSK, the National State of Artists. The passport is in French, English in Slovenian. The passport looks very official, dark green with silver embossing. There is a great deal of room for visas, an official photo, seals and embossments.

In this official passport are five principles of friendship:

- 1) I shall lavish brotherly respect on you if I know you are worthy of it.
- 2) I shall risk danger and hardships to help you in your time of need providing this does not harm me or the organization.
- 3) In my daily activities and when taking on special duties, I shall first mention your name and then mine.
- 4) I shall support you in your work in self-denial and shall help you reach these goals as if I were in your place.
- 5) I shall never do unto you what I do not want you to do unto me unless there is a common reason for that.

There are 32 numbered pages. The application for the passport is very official, as well, and once provided with a passport, the bearer commits himself or herself to the principle that he/she will not abuse this document for any criminal, ideological, artistic, religious or political purpose not in compliance with the principles of NSK, or which would otherwise threaten its reputation and good name. \$28.00 plus two photographs to NSK Information Center, P.O. Box 75, 61117 Ljubljana, Slovenia.

There is also an automobile sticker which replicates the country insignia as NSK, in three languages: "Artists' Fanaticism that Demands Diplomacy." NSK opened its Moscow Embassy with an incredible exhibition including a catalog. Thousands of people came during the course of "how the East sees the East". One of the means of making money is that NSK makes a catalog for each event and puts its money into the next book. Irwin (a collective) is the most prominent name among the artists, but the whole group showed their work in the Apt-Art Gallery; Black Square on Red Square, with much documentation, references, cultural codes of totalitarianism, philosophy, essays, the East meeting the East.

When you get a passport, you get a document that says you are a holder of a diplomatic NSK Passport, and you are a participant in the formation of the first global state, the NSK State. In its fundamental articles, the State advocates the trans-national law. The passport is a document of a subversive nature and unique value. A holder fills in data and collects in it stamps, signatures, etc. Your name is

registered in the NSK Citizens' Directory. Updated material and information must be sent to Headquarters in order to keep up with the body politic. A rubberstamp, postage stamps, but no bureaucracy!

There are embassies in Moscow, Florence, Gent, and in Amsterdam. This year, a big opening will be celebrated in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Vienna, issuing passports, duty customs, visas for states, and presenting all citizens of our State, showing our books and theater, as well as our New Collective Design Group. There is also a Music Department, Painting Department, Theater Department (Red Pilot), the Theory Group and the Design Group.

Umbrella: I understand you curated an exhibition at a Franciscan monastery, which was documented in a very glossy and beautiful exhibition catalog.

Jadran Adamovic: I come from a background of being a conservator, helping restore works of art for the Franciscan Order. At that time, as an artist, I exhibited at alternative spaces, non-traditional places. Then I exhibited in a two-car tram and in a public place. Then after restoring many of the treasures from many monasteries from all of Bosnia-Herzegovina and from Sarajevo, I suggested to the Franciscan Fathers to open up a museum of contemporary art, to develop a collection and allow me to be director. I represent artists from the Balkan area, which carry their identity from this area. There are 15 artists in the catalog, with interviews, statements, chronology and documentation of all the works in color. This is a wonderful way to present artists outside the ordinary exhibition institutions, done formerly. We started this in 1990, and although it is near the front lines of the war, it is still intact, largely because it is on a pilgrimage route to a miraculous Madonna, which brings many tourists and religious pilgrims. It is near Mostar, 100 miles from Dubrovnik, 100 miles from Split, and less than 160 miles to Sarajevo.

U: Do you think you'll ever get back to your city?

JA: I will, because it is my city, but I will never live there again, because most wars need from 5- 20 years to be erased, and since my town has died, I do not want to put energy into something where many of the people have died, where there is a possibility to creating national hatreds, under the pressure and under this destruction of material, because help to Russia is a billion dollars, while the destruction in Bosnia-Herzegovina is \$400 billion until now (March 1994). All bridges, factories houses are destroyed, and all the art is destroyed as well. Now the art is graffiti art which explains the expression of ugliness. There are really no problems with people; there are problems with politics and global interests, or our individuality. And now there is a frontline and no art there.

U: Did all artists leave?

JA: It's strange. I was just in New York for four months—two months before the war and two months during the war, and after you get in this madness there, everyone reacted by

creating something against this. I want to be here, I want to be against this global destruction. It just eats you up. As an artist, it is better to go away, because you really don't have a choice. You will become a victim. It is better to be here, also because I do not belong to any of these nationalities and it is more of us than of them, because they are Serbian, Muslim or Croatian, but my mother is Croatian and my father is Serbian. What should I do? They tell me I should decide which side. To me, when I come into some restaurant and I see fighting, I must decide on what side I should fight? So I just change restaurants and leave the problem to them.

U: How can you call yourself anything now?

JA: I am ex-Yugoslavian, but I do not know how to call myself. Since the war recognizes only Serbians, Muslims, or Croats, and I can tell you honestly that most of the people are from mixed marriages rather than exclusively Serbian or Muslim, they do not recognize us as anything except a "national" and this national feeling we know from the past in Europe, which creates a conflict. Ironically enough, this NSK gives you a certain affiliation with a proper passport, etc.

We as artists have a tough idea from the Communists that we as artists cannot change anything, but we can correspond to situations in a serious way. This is a project which we do as a State with positive energy.

U: If you are not from Sarajevo or Mostar, which seems to make headlines, if you come from Belgrade or Ljubljana, is life all right?

JA: In those areas, you have a completely normal life with 1.7 million people there. You have Croatia at war and in Serbia, you have nationalists in power. And the people know that if I don't hear, if I don't see, I don't talk, because it is better if one is quiet. If you do anything wrong, you will have the nationalists on your back who can do anything they want.

U: So there are safe havens, if you are not in the heart of war?

JA: Yes, Slovenia and Serbia are safe, but you have daily inflation there up to 120%. You have a criminal element which is in power. It's a kind of growing national art--just put a small flag on top of the building.

U: Have you found any other countries responsive to the ex-Yugoslavia artists who are seeking refuge?

JA: We all must find our own way. We all have to have documents, visas, etc. Some have friends, some try to sell work. All over Europe some of them are successful, some are starving. Some have been quite successful as national artists from other countries. With good artists, they go far away to promote in an individual way new places to live, new documents. But you really don't start from scratch, because you need documents as refugees.

Frankly, many want to leave, but they cannot leave because of lack of documents and because of restraints by the government, which keeps them back. I am sure if they open the borders, most of them will leave, because no one wants to stay in a place where hatred reigns. Sarajevo is like East Berlin--they will divide it between Serbians and Muslims, like a new East Berlin. This will generate cooperation from the U.S.: Split the town and create hatred among

250,000 people--and if people lost things, they are angry, and they are all angry. I am also angry. I lost my studio, my home, but I do not correspond to their meaning, because according to them, I do not belong to them, because I do not feel comfortable with them because I am not on their side completely, and because I am not "ethnically pure".

I am lucky, because I am an artist and my profession is universal. Everywhere when people finish law, economics, or the like, they must stay. I can move anywhere, try to find new papers, passport, a new country, a new home for me and my family. And we all have the same problem. My status of "refugee" from Slovenia is such that I need special papers to travel and to return, and then I have to carry a sack of papers with me but there are so many people who cannot even get these papers.

U: You know English very well. Not all of your fellow artists know English as well as you.

JA: I think they have been obligated to learn, forced to learn to survive. They are all over the world and have had to learn where they live the native tongue. Now there are new states, new rules, new countries. It is a very complicated situation--we are like new Palestinians.

U: In the United States, it is so hard for Americans to understand their animosity among people for more than 800 years. It is so hard to understand why people cannot get along together.

JA: Well, I was also surprised, because this was a different kind of education. Through our education, we know the history of Europe very well, and now we call what is happening **Back to the Future**, because this conflagration now reflects the Italian nation-states vying with each other in war, area vs. area, and national matters cannot correspond to international matters which we artists want to be. When you have this national conflict, it is also discussed how in the 16th century the Ottoman Empire stormed Serbia, and they fight over the 16th century. I tell them that we are in the 20th century, but they retort that we don't want to make the same mistakes as they made in the 16th century. And then they become abstracts of reality, not of material but completely abstract. This war is their cause, it's not a war in order. Communists kept people under order and anyone who declared himself a nationalist, they put him in prison. I never understood why, but now I understand because when people used to talk "brotherhood", I said everyone is the same, you love everyone. It is simply a crossroad of the culture and an interest zone, and then you have a new sharing of Europe again.

You know, you don't have a "Muslim nationality", like Serbia or Croatia. Serbia is a nationality, religion Orthodox; Croatia is a nationality, religion Catholic; but Muslim is not a nationality. It is completely mixed.

U: But Yugoslavia was not really a country--it was a compromise.

JA: Yes, it is a compromise between East and West. That's why we live well--better than Russians, because we were more open. And we should have gone through this compromise as a good experience, but we have come through a bad experience.

U: When I was in Yugoslavia in 1965, I found that the youth knew many languages, sometimes better than English.

JA: My education, after 1950, when Tito split with Stalin, we had German, French, Russian and English. And then there was a French-English school, or German-Russian, or English-German. People used to go where the children felt comfortable. That's why I feel rich, because I know the Muslim culture, the Orthodox culture, Catholic culture, and the Mediterranean or mountain cultures, a true crossroads. Food, architecture, music, mentality, folk art are all different as a crossroads of many cultures.

U: Well, if you move to another country, will you absorb that culture and will that change your art, or do you have enough of your "roots"?

JA: Well, I have roots from everywhere to find a universal language that will correspond to everyone's understanding. I pick up aspects from every culture such as food, philosophy, theory to help me communicate. My ex-states have given me alot, but the new place will change me too.

RESOURCES

The 1994 Book Arts Directory, a sourcebook for paper-makers and paper decorators, calligraphers, printmakers, fine printers and bookbinders, is available for \$6.00 plus 50 cents postage from Pae Two, Inc., P.O. Box 77167, Washington, DC 20013-7167. **Book Arts Classified** is also available on a bimonthly basis from Page Two. Send \$2.00 for a sample of the current issue.

An Introduction to the Book Arts and Their Community by Janet Maher is the beginning of an up-to-date view of the field, including Maher's take on the "stars" and the outlets. Corrections must be made, chronologies must be examined, but this is an interesting first step since Joan Lyons' book. Of course, **Umbrella** has always kept you up-to-date without anthologizing it, but "book arts" includes artists who make deluxe and precious works, which really do not include artists' books. As a result, this is still a mixed bag, but an interesting one. A bit high price, \$12.00, plus \$1.50 for the first copy and 50 cents for each additional copy to Janet Maher, My Million Monkeys Press, P.O. Box 4926, Albuquerque, NM 87196.

Leonardo Electronic Almanac published by MIT Press is now available online monthly chronicling current worldwide applications of science and technology in the arts. Via the Internet, MIT Press publishes and distributes the Almanac to international artists, scientists and other subscribers interested in high-tech arts.

Each month the **Almanac** features artists' words on their own work, profiles of media arts facilities, art-science-technology theoretical and technical perspectives, and reviews of major art-science-technology events. There is also high-tech arts news, Call for Papers announcements, and notices from subscribers and readers. Annual subscription rates are \$25.00. For ordering information, contact the MIT Press Journals circulation department, (617)253-2889 phone, or fax: (617)258-6779, or journals-orders@mit.edu.

Artist's Fellowships: Women's Studio Workshop is accepting applications for its' 1994-95 Fellowship Programs in intaglio, water-based screen printing, photography, papermaking and letterpress. These fellowships are designed to

allow time for artists to explore new ideas in a dynamic and cooperative community of women artists. Fellowship awards, which subsidize a portion of the studio operating expenses, include on-site housing and unlimited access to the studios. Artist's cost is \$200 per week. Applicants should submit a resume, six to ten slides, a letter of interest and a SASE for return of materials to: WSW, P.O. Box 489, Rosendale, NY 12472. **Deadline: 1 July 1994.**

Timbres d'Artistes exhibition catalog from the Musee de la Poste, Paris, 14 September 1993 - 20 January 1994 is now available for cost at \$75.00 from Dogfish, 3235 Fairview East, Seattle, WA 98102. This 246-page soft-cover stitched and perfect bound book/catalog contains an essay and interviews with Ken Friedman and Galantai by J.N. Laszlo, essays by Pierre Restany, Patrick Marchand, Peter Frank, Jas. W. Felter, and Ed Varney which are all presented in French and in English. 76 artists are represented in two-page spreads, 1 page for a text (in French only), and one for a reproduction of a sheet of their stamps. 56 are in full color, 20 in black and white. A must for anyone interested in the field of Artis-tamps! For Europe, write to Musee de la Poste, 34 blvd. de Vaugirard, 75015 Paris, France.

PhotoNominal '95: Call for work that utilizes any photographic process--from traditional silver printing techniques to the latest in technologically generated imagery. A catalog will accompany the show to be held 24 January - 25 February 1995. No forms or entry fees required--send a maximum of 10--35mm slides of your work (include your name, dimensions of the work, title, and media on each slide) a resume, and related support material with a SASE large enough for the return of your materials to: PhotoNominal '95, The FORUM Gallery, 525 Falconer St., P.O. Box 20, Jamestown, NY 14702-0020. **Deadline: 2 August 1994.** For more information, contact Dan Talley or Michelle Henry at (716)665-9107.

INTERNSHIPS: Fall and Spring 1994/95. Visual Studies Workshop Press. Applicants should have experience with Macintosh computers, and/or design, and typography. To apply, please send a letter of intent, a resume and the names of two references to Joan Lyons, Coordinator, Visual Studies Workshop Press, 31 Prince St., Rochester, NY 14607. Opportunities for two people who can work independently, take initiative, and be willing to share in the routine chores and maintenance that are part of a Macintosh lab. For more information, write to VSW Press, 31 Prince St., Rochester, NY 14607. (716)442-8676.

