

POPULIST PROJECT

PIONEERS

I asked a number of primarily international artists, art critics, theorists, and those associated with artistic practice in the former Eastern Bloc to participate in the fourth part of the Populist project, entitled Pioneers. It consists of their portraits taken with a red pioneer scarf, presented in the typical style of socialist heroes, around their necks. As children of 7 or 8, we all had to take-as a kind of collective initiation rite-an oath to join these groups of young pioneers. This baptism in the name of 'progress' resulted in the award of our own little red pioneer scarves, a symbol of our involvement in the quest for progress and a better world. It is not unlike the process of christening, but was rather a political than a religious indoctrination. There was certain euphoria associated with the Pioneer group; it enjoyed a near-cult status. We were radically affected by the complex stories and images of the pioneer martyrs-children and young adults just like us-who died or made some heroic contribution during WWII.

Those photographed in Pioneers are the only ones, however, who kept their promise. They actually sacrificed themselves to their people through this initiation rite. It is a slightly cynical position, given that the entire-largely ceremonial-'fight' for progress and/or a sort of revolutionary avant-garde was kitsch, having been led to this 'fight' by conservative types.

Members of the contemporary visual art world are, however, the real pioneers of today, since they truly fight for the principles to which they swore adhere when they were children. As such, they deserve to have ceremonial portraits taken of them as true heroes of the avant-garde.

At the same time, recent exhibitions and writings from the West that attempted to put Central/East European art into a kind of schema-the West having 'discovered' Central/East European art in the late 90s-resulted in the creation of a highly artificial counterbalance. This dismissal prevented any understanding of the subtle differences among systems, countries, scenes, community standards, individuals, and the like. This typical pigeonholing, similar to the Kulturrasismus of the early 20th century, results not only in the wrong picture, but also promotes a confusion and misunderstanding that should be destroyed after the fall of Iron Curtain. By having members of the Central and East European artistic and theoretical community re-position this pioneer scarf around their necks, and gaining their participation in this Pioneers project, I posit that some of them are experiencing significant ideological or theoretical conflict against this Western misunderstanding. My re-positioning of my Pioneer scarf around their necks is a gesture of resistance against Western stereotypes of (art from) the former Eastern Bloc. The idea is to show a simple fact: that we-members of the Central and East European artistic and theoretical community-have already passed through a kind of social nullification once, in the name of equality, and it should not be continued. The pioneer scarf that they all have on in the portraits is my own. I received it after giving my oath 30 years ago in a place called Pioneer City. It was a huge training camp in a forest with a fantastic building inside it, having a performing hall and other facilities nearing in their iconography to paramilitary organizations.

To date, the participants include: Oleg Kulik, Zbygniew Libera, Lorand Hegyi, Yuri Leiderman, Luchezar Boyadjiev, Braco Dimitrijević, Alexander Brener, Milica Tomić, Alban Hajdinaj, Guia Rigvava, Sokol Beqiri, Nedko Solakov, Mihael Milunović, Sislej Xhafa, Anda Rotenberg, Lea Perjovschi, Dan Perjovschi, Veronika Drahotova, Kiril Prashkov, Martin Mainer, Marina Gržinić, František Skala, Edi Muka, Oliver Musovik, Victor Misiano, Nebojša Šerić Šoba, Vlasta Delimar, Anri Sala, Lev Evzovich (AES), Rassim Krastev, Sašo Stanojkovic, Balint Szombathy, Šejla Kamezić, Iara Boubnova, Tanja Ostojić...

Uroš Djurić
Written in Belgrade
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