

Art critic as hacking cultural institutions

This text should explain us the background context of Tač.ka's recent work entitled "Institutional critic of contemporary art in Bosnia and Herzegovina". Like a sort of side-effect of it, the text should introduce us to the problematic of perceiving of the contemporary art in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially the part we call "independent art critic" and its relation to cultural institutions and artists. Also, all notions will be deliberately determined within its spatial context, in a sort of a case study: Bosnia and Herzegovina.

There are two major subjects for this text which we are going to signify. The first one is Tač.ka group of visual artists¹, which is mostly oriented to experimenting with new formats of institutional critic and digging into psycho-social pathology. The second subject is Zvono award for young visual artists², Bosnian version of YVAA³ (Young visual artist award) and which has been implemented for the last five years in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The aim of this discussion is located in the relation of these two subjects, and some marginally involved subjects, with the focus on year 2011.

Background

In Bosnia and Herzegovina there is generally a negative consensus in relation to art critic. Art critic in this country simply does not exist inside the public cultural ether. We ask ourselves naturally why the mentioned cultural community is trying to avoid the principles of art criticism. One could say, It's because inside this small and closed discursive circle of CA in Bosnia nobody wants to create additional tension among artists, that already have enough problems to survive in the system without art-market. But, if we get closer to this assumption and take better look we will find out that in this country artists are also unusually , we shall realize that artists in this country are unusually unfriendly to each other and envy, which is a thing that normally does happen in a "small swamp full with crocodiles" situation. And indeed, from this level, CA discourse in Bosnia and Herzegovina is full of "criticism", mostly absurd one and on the level of some gossip or anonymous e-forum discussions,⁴ that rarely reaches some wider and more accessible public level.

1 Watch: Tač.ka (Point-Dot-Fullstop), www.tacka.org

2 Watch: The Zvono award, <http://www.scca.ba/zvono/zvono.php?lang=en>

3 Watch: YVAA, <http://www.yvaa.net/#country-3>

4 Watch: <http://www.blogger.ba/komentari/902/1984079>

The second problem of art critic in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a total absence of active theorists and even worse, absence of a public medium where this imaginary critic could be frequently published.

However, “the third” side of the coin called critic of CA in B-H is the most intriguing one. There is a very strong ambition to sabotage art critic that despite all the troubles it has, manages to appear from time to time and in some reduced form in the public rhetorical space. It’s not the matter of an active delegitimizing of the content of a superficial critic, it’s the matter of delegitimizing art critic as a category within an art system. And, this will be the starting point for the introduction in Tač.ka’s work “Institutional critic of contemporary art in Bosnia and Herzegovina”.

Forbidden discourse

Zvono award is “without doubt” the best formulated support to young artist within Bosnia and Herzegovina. It’s launched in 2006 by SCCA (Sarajevo Center for Contemporary Art) in cooperation with the Museum of Contemporary art of Republic of Srpska⁵ in Banja Luka and the Protok Collective⁶ from Banja Luka. They retrieved program from quite successful Jindřich Chalupecký⁷ award that proved itself as a good format. The Zvono award is formally still ongoing project, and it takes a lot of effort and work to keep it that way.

Meanwhile, a controversial aspect of this award is based on motifs for collaboration between SCCA and Museum of contemporary art of Republic of Srpska. MOCA of RS is subject for special analysis, but for now it’s enough to mention that the director of the museum is a person totally irrelevant for the actual issues of CA, and all over, very well known nationalist and supporter of actual regime of Milorad Dodik⁸. The MOCA of RS according to this facts should be the latest place where such award should exhibit the works of the final-four selection of artists carried out by SCCA.

But, obviously, this award is only possible if the cultural institutions in B-H satisfy the model of institutional “national key”, what became a ruling method for reaching the principle of an ideal multi-ethnic society, what B-H is tending to be. This is something what Tač.ka considers as a “devil’s contract” for integrity of contemporary art.

5 Watch: MOCA RS, <http://www.msurs.org/en/index.php?lang=1>

6 Watch: Protok collective, www.protok.org

7 Watch: <http://www.cjch.cz/>

8 Every election campaign MOCA of RS actively participates in promoting regime party SNSD-Milorad Dodik. In 2009 the party election’s slogan was “Our home”, at vernissages what happened in the time of campaign, Mrs Labovic-Marinkovic greeted audience with “Welcome to our home”, directly alluding to party’s slogan. In 2010, for local elections, at vernissage of Goce Nanevski has been offered to audience boxes of chocolate with name of Mirjana Lukac (http://sphotos.ak.fbcdn.net/hphotos-ak-snc4/hs410.snc4/47324_1608594215826_1265312798_1710338_1843323_n.jpg), local candidate of SNSD-Milorad Dodik party.

At this point of satisfying the model of national key there are many handicaps that show up and that make the art scene in this county have the same “plot” as some Hollywood trash movie, where the content of contemporary arts is homogenized through previously prepared models.

This phenomenon is easy to recognize in the very start of the fiasco called Zvono. Direct and quiet censorship were often used by the organizers. In 2007 the work of Mladen Miljanovic called “National key” was removed on request of Dunja Blazevic (SCCA) and Sarita Vujkovic (MOCARS). A part of the work made by Tac.ka and that was dealing with the public reaction on the name of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Republic of Srpska entity was not allowed to be installed in the final Zvono exhibition in 2008. One of the works of Dajan Spiric called “Everybody on his own” that was selected for the finals and that was dealing with the problems of nationalities had to be replaced with a less provocative and more Zvono-ethical work Bosnian minesweeper in 2009. Without explanations.

The same year the artwork “There. Here. There. - questioning the absence in the state of need and isolation” by Bojana Tamindzija that was brutally crippled on the command of Ljiljana Labovic Marinkovic, the director of the MOCARS, only for the fact it didn't comply with her own opinion on war crimes and responsibility in relation to the latest armed conflict in Bosnia.

A part of the work of Mladen Bundalo called “Critical intimisms of the mental archives”, after it was even produced by SCCA was inexplicably denied the practical realization and the artist was deprived from any reasonable answer about this problem. The only thing he “won” was the promise for a “live chat” with Dunja Blazevic and that “he should already know where the problem lies”. After an internet action called “Critical autism” where this problem was publicly announced Bojana Tamindzija joints the discussion and invites all the others to do so. The only person interested in discussion was the Protok Collective director Radenko Milak but eventually keeping the conversation on the more intimate private channel level which in the end made this attempt for an open discussion stay as some sort of “dilettante rebellion”.

The Tac.ka Artists Association “fights” against such principles imposed by the authorities of cultural institutions since 2007 and is primarily focused on the speculations and political instrumentation of Ms Ljiljana Labovic Marinkovic's behavior.

For better understanding of Tac.ka's engagement in the practical institutional deconstruction that this group started realizing in 2011 it is necessary to take a short insight in the two basic principles or tactics that are used in sabotaging any attempt to publicly actualize the discussion on these “problems”.

The first one is Ignoring, by avoiding any attempt for discussion the existing critic becomes invisible, auto-centric, and irrelevant for the local culture. This can be seen above all in the attempts of Tac.ka to initiate a rhetorical approach to the perception of Contemporary Arts. Cultural institutions simply don't bother answering the mails taking

the Tac.ka artists as “a group of provincial artists”⁹.

Second one is the aggressive present use of regime medias for de-legitimizing any attempt of the criticism to enter the public space. This was the case with Mladen Miljanovic's attempt to attract more attention to the fact Bosnia and Herzegovina Institutions still didn't get to any compromise in relation to Bosnian presence at the Venice Biennial. This problematic found its way in the public space first time in 2007 when the Tac.ka group started the so called Imaginary Pavilion of Bosnia and Herzegovina project. Using the regime newspapers (Glas Srpske) Ms Labovic publicly accused as a “badly informed and rude person that dares to publicly misinterpret the cultural situation (of his country).”¹⁰

For all this, the Tac.ka group has decided to take a more radical approach and to move towards more practical, guerrilla field of action.

“Trojan horse”

Unpleasant side of any institutional critic is that great probability that the “attacked” institutions will not get the point. There is also always the dilemma that the critic is irrelevant and based on wrong assumptions.

Therefore we decided to test our critical approach formally and according to the principles employed by the Zvono award but starting from our dilemma on “homogenization of the contemporary arts discourse in Bosnia and Herzegovina” that happens inside the complex and perverted relation between the dominant cultural Contemporary Arts institutions in Bosnia.

A video document filmed in June 2011 shows the members of the Tac.ka group trying to figure out, to hack so to say, the artistic models of the Zvono award and, with much sarcasm, to create a cliché called “Zvono artwork” that would be suitable for the first 4 finalists.¹¹ At the time they do not know names of the members of the jury nor have any internal or external recommendation in any sense.

At the moment Tac.ka already has a sort of bad reputation inside institutional cultural circles and therefore the group decides to apply with a work under the name of Igor Sovilj, also Tac.ka's member. There were several practical reasons for this decision. Igor is known for his periodical gay and feminist activism which is very popular inside today's “uniformed contemporary arts discourse” and is one of members of the group that still weren't “in the finals of Zvono award”.

9 Unofficial statements of Mrs. Labović-Marinković, actual director of MOCARS.

10 Watch: <http://www.glassrpske.com/vijest/9/kultura/55786/cir/Netacna-uvredljiva-i-nedostojna-izjava-Mladena-Miljanovica.html>

11 Read more about the action from Igor's point of view:

http://tacka.org/img/projects/bad_stupid/interview_for_6yka.pdf

Watch videos: http://tacka.org/htm/projects_bad_stupid_eng.html

The work itself is a trash story about Igor's personal guilt that mostly relates to some media manipulated questions like inappropriate behavior during the war, gender issues, social responsibility etc. More detailed explication on superficial cognition of this work is to be found in the official statement sent in the application for the Zvono award.¹²

After applying with this “simulated artwork” for the Zvono award 2011 it was selected for the finals with other three artworks, as we planned.

What is critic?

Since the moment this artwork was selected as representative for the Bosnian and Herzegovina reflection on contemporary arts there is an avalanche of new possible readings of the institutional critic and the methods it works with.

The most significant point of this type of action is the elevation of a formal rhetorically based critic on the completely practical level. It is no longer some “collateral writing”, a separate category inside some general cultural body that is easy to ignore and sabotage from the establishment's standing point. It is a Hacking of an Institution realized by Tac.ka group that proves the previously conceptualized critical terms and brings in the traditional discourse of art critic an unexpected interactivity between both sides.

The paradox is contained in the fact that Tac.ka group, generally, contributed to the character of the Zvono award. In four of past six editions of this award, Tac.ka or some of its members appeared in the final selection. Zvono award is indeed something we really take care of and we will feel honestly sorry if others will not understand this type of approach as positive and appropriate for building the active and functional discourse of Contemporary Arts in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is not possible to build such a discourse without deep self-questioning and self-positioning.

To conclude, I will remind you that in the discussion filmed before the Zvono winners proclamation the Tac.ka members foresaw all the 4 finalists for this year. The main question for the starting discussion is: do we really need such predictable and uniformed local contemporary arts scene?

Tač.ka group, August 2011

12 Link on text: http://tacka.org/img/projects/bad_stupid/av_dnevnici_eng.pdf