

## Umetnička organizacija

Interview with Đorđe Balmazović Žole and Dragan Protić Prota – Škart Group  
Belgarde, July 2020.

### How was Škart Group formed

**Prota:** We both studied architecture and did not know each other. We were from different gangs. And if it hadn't been for this study trip where we met we probably would have never met, let alone collaborated.

**Žole:** We *would* have, probably, but not like that.

**Prota:** We might not even have met each other.

**Žole:** Maybe in Finland.

**Prota:** There was this study trip to Finland, we went to see Alvar Aalto's buildings, and one day during those stopovers there was an empty seat on the bus next to Žole, and I sat next to him. We travelled to Finland together, but we never sat side by side.

**Žole:** It was a congress of architecture students and it occurs every year, and that year there were 50 students from the Belgrade Faculty of Architecture.

**Prota:** Anyway, seat next to Žole was empty, so I sat down, travelling through Finland and we started talking about our interests. Turned out we were totally different. Žole was interested in the Renaissance and a kind of perfectionism in expression and in everything, and I was a supremacist. And then we discussed each other's views. How could you be interested in the Renaissance? What supremacy, etc, etc ... I was also fascinated by this diversity, that total diversity in everything, even in those standpoints in art. Aside from studying architecture, it was something that potentially connected us. That was our first meeting. That contrast that gave me some kind of signal: Aha! It's something worth the effort of getting closer and trying something. That, for my part, was the reason for this kind of beginning of further discussion. Now Žole can talk.

**Žole:** I remember that in college there was a art print studio that Prota had discovered, because he was the bravest of them all - to open a door that no one had ever opened and go see what's in there, the professors didn't see when he did it. There were presses and he suggested that we try to learn print techniques. We asked him whose they were. They said Professor Grujić's, and Prota thought we should go to see Professor Grujić who taught us draft geometry, but it was another Professor Grujić from arts department. So I referred him to this other Grujić. And then we went to see him and he said no problem, clean it up. It took us three days to clean and then he started teaching us classic art print. The craft. And he gave us the keys and it lasted three years. It was there that we started to get to know each other and work together through classic art print, through that crafty part of the business.

**Prota:** You know, when it comes to art print process, almost 80% of products are discarded (škart). It is difficult to get the perfect print, either the deckled edges is bad or the plate is smeared or over-smeared, coated or there was too much acid. And it is never good enough. Only the perfect prints get a number and are valued. Even in that dirty prints, only that perfection is ok. And then we rebelled. As in: how come, and why only those? We both found it interesting that there was this trace of imperfection, that recklessness, that error as some kind of trace of humanity. And we realized in the process that the discarded was what we were about. That we were interested in that remnant, that trash, that poetry of the discarded.

**Žole:** And then from this erroneous poetry I said at one point: We were making discarded art – *Škart*. And we had no idea that there was 'art' in the name. A friend asked us if we had named it because of *art* in it, but it had nothing to do with it then or now. It is Škart as škart. At that moment škart began its life as Škart. I don't know how we formally got to call it *Škart*. I guess when Prota made the stamp that always got on my nerves. Was So big.

**Prota:** We had to decide and we started doing things together somehow. We started, in fact, just as this Škart was a coincidence, so were the first works made on the footprints of some practice, art prints on the one hand, and the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde heritage of that we were then infected with on the other. And the first works were visual poetry. We decided to turn that visual poetry, which was initially on A4-size plain paper, into posters and take them for our street actions.

### Exploring the Non-current Media

**Prota:** That's the legacy of printing. Immediately some multipliers, the self-published silk-screen prints,

but with completely abstract messages like: "Q - a Rare Letter" etc.

**Žole:** It is also important to explain how this came about. The stamps that Protá had were also important. He had some old sets of Czech letter stamps with a very nice font, and when pressed, the lettering was imperfect, the typography was good, but as it was a rubber stamp it did not give the perfect print. And that's impressive. Especially when enlarged. And that was, at least to me, one extremely inspiring tool to work with. And Protá wrote poems. And then we combined those stamps and poems. And on a poster it really looked interesting. These were abstract self-sufficient messages. As they'd say *L'art pour l'art*, classic, where we, from those A4 formats, stamped; we enlarged them, I think, into B2 format and then we had them printed by the screen printing workshop in Zrenjanin because it was the cheapest. We winged it, making 50 copies. And every Monday at 4 or 5 in the morning, we'd go out and put them up around town, those posters that said nothing. We asked a newsagent on Republic Square if we could paste one on his kiosk and he agreed, so we put up the 'Q - a Rare Letter' one, and he asked where it was going to take place. The man was very realistic. The posters were completely self-sufficient. They were poetically visual posters. And it was every Monday, depending on how much money we had. Then Protá came up with the great idea of expanding that action by announcing them at Darka Radosavljević's radio show that aired Monday afternoons, right? Or on Tuesdays, I don't even remember which one.

**Žole:** It was a show about culture or something.

**Protá:** *Skizzenblock* was her show on Radio B92.

**Žole:** The idea was to create a jingle for the poster action and let Darka air that jingle, which lasted maybe 15 seconds. She agreed, Protá edited some music and wording was read by Rahela Ferari and Stevo Žigon.

**Protá:** Street-poster, yes, why not. Radio was really present at the time and a very important media, and B92 was just positioning itself. It was great, they had a team open to any cooperation and it had to be utilised, one needed to cooperate, one needed to knit this into our experience, too. On the other hand, again there were some previous build-ups of some previous neo-avant-garde experiences, say *mail art* which was very dear to us. We also sent these tiny posters anonymously to various people and to newsrooms that were of interest to us. Both here and around the world. But one-way, without our address, only with *Product of Škart* on them. So many have learned about us through it.

**Žole:** It was an interesting strategy because it obviously intrigued people. When you get one, then you get another one, so you get three four parcels within a year, which weren't even interesting, obviously. And so some remembered us, and when we met after many years, then it was like, oh, yeah, I remember ...

**Stevan Vuković:** That's how I heard of you. Mileta Prodanović got one poster and then showed us.

**Milica Pekić:** were there any gifts / distribution?

**Protá:** Yes, freebies was a basic principle, that is, equal availability of our products that for everyone. On the street, too. Same to everyone. Or *Nothing for all!* which was the genius Mikrob's slogan. We chose them according to a personal attitude to the art scene.

**Žole:** And not just fine art. You had a wide range of people.

**Protá:** In order to make that list, because there were no official lists, we went to film institutes to ask what the address of this or that director was. So you had to knock on all those doors to get to someone. and

**Žole:** And to people who were important to us.

**Protá:** People who were interesting and important to us, mostly. It was rummaging through those repressed practices as *mail art* was often disparaged by the official scene, even today, even though it now has some other historical value. So was the poetry scene, mostly the provincial poetry scene. Because Yugoslavia was then known in Europe for its number of poetry festivals. Every village, every suburb had its own poetry festival. And it was a nice way of networking and some kind of cultural distribution, but on the other hand, in the late 80s, 90s, I'm talking about the last festivals, literally. Where we participated were literally the last Yugoslav festivals. It was already so tired that it turned into a kind of most terrible bureaucratization that no longer had anything to do with modernity, with breakthroughs and overcoming boundaries of the language, poetry, publishing, whatever. So there was one package that was horrid.

**Žole:** Well ... well, we were twice in Titograd (Podgorica/Montenegro) and I once went to Svetozarevo with those poems. Compared to these three festivals, it was conservative. But experience with that, has absolutely nothing to do with poetry. It seemed like a pretty out-dated form.

**Protá:** Like the readers, somewhat marginalized then but still established. Somehow my colleagues rarely read the *Literary Word* magazine. I did follow that reading; I didn't follow the architectural reading.

There were competitions to apply to in the *Literary Word* and we decided to play with the bureaucratic juries who decided on who would or would not pass. And experimenting was so rare. And only poetry-

poetry had a go. Yet poetry is about making that extra step, or overstep or no step. It seeks new ways. Poetry is new language. But jury had a hard time recognising it.

**Žole:** In short, there are ways today to present poetry to people, not just to have it read from a piece of paper.

**Prota:** And then we decided to cheat those festivals, and to the first festival we sent poetry under Žole's and my name. My poetry.

**Žole:** You sent it, I had nothing to do with it. He sent it and they phoned me from, Titograd as it was called then, like, you are coming over. I had no idea, he did tell me, and I paid no attention to it and forgot. And it was like ... some festival, I answer yes, yes, yes ...

**Prota:** But it's this little kid's game again. Because you have to put it in the envelope, then to send your code, then every envelope was of different colour, like when you send a fake letter to a fake boyfriend or girlfriend and you put a fake signature. I wrote on Žole's behalf in a different handwriting.

**Žole:** I have to notice something, you are quite critical now, but the very fact that they accepted your poems, which were significantly different from other poets, says that this was not exactly the case. Your poems were really radically different.

**Prota:** Well, well, yes, but still. We don't quite agree.

**Žole:** The poems you performed, all together, last 15 seconds each, no more than that, like manifesto, one to two words in a row. Unusual for everyone else. As we realized that everything looked conservative, on the first night when we came to Titograd, the gathering was in one pub, they came and had half a shot, not even half a shot, but one sip and they were already drunk. These poets feigned being drunk. And then one by one they get up and recite poets from our glorious past, say the type of Ujević, Dis and suchlike, all those bards, yet faking being drunk. It was so ridiculous to Prota and me that we held our noses like this under the table because we couldn't keep the laughs as to how fake it all was. The next day the festival itself seemed pretty classic to me, where I, as a complete outsider, see them coming out, and no one knows the poems by heart, but they hold a paper like this and it shakes, for they have a big stage fright. The sheet shakes. And I am stunned, they do not know their poems; are so afraid; the fear... And we came prepared, thanks to Prota, we prepared the set, the entire performance of our poetry. We broke some vases, glasses, threw confetti into audience, which was revolutionary at the moment. We somehow attacked the audience. And everyone remembered what we had done and by chance we became the performing stars of that festival. So, the following year, Prota felt courageous and sent poems under all possible pseudonyms/names of our colleagues architecture students and eight of us entered the finals out of twenty-four.

**Prota:** Like, a third of the festival were fake poets who read my poems, and nobody knew it but the eight of us. Some were erotic, love poems. Each was packed with enough diversity so that nobody suspected they had been written by the same person.

**Žole:** That was a true punk diversion. And the following year, too, where others read their poems in a classic manner, Prota and I did a performance. I won the third prize, then I appeared on RTV Montenegro and talk for an hour in a radio-show with people who listen to it, about poetry. I had no clue about poetry. That was a good diversion.

**Prota:** He won a prize.

**Žole:** Interpreting poetry through *Poets' Fistfights* has contributed a lot to encouraging people to present poetry differently, in a way that is interesting to those who are not interested in poetry. Get him drawn into it.

**Prota:** Like *mail art*, there is no continuity or nurturing of the performance as such. Then it was completely removed from the poetry scene, for years. And now this was nothing new, performances were done and there were wonderful experiments both here and abroad etc. But then, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it was a truly formal, strictly reading poetry scene.

**Žole:** You have to dissociate yourself regarding the three we saw. There may have been something else, but we don't know.

**Prota:** And the thing Žole mentions *Stamped Kitchen Embroidery Samplers*, and choir, like mail art, they are often neglected and written off art forms. Handiwork, is of course completely written off. Choir art, was of course stuck in the party related arts, and after that, even today it is quite religiously oriented, and somehow patriotic. Patriotic repertoire. Even poetry festivals. Like these '92 poetry festivals, poetry is still one of the unspoiled and promising territories. It is a promising place. And then, even now, in some formats, these were cooperation with children's choirs from ghettoised environment as some small experiments almost resembling workshops, which again pull that group out of their small ghetto to

another city, to another cooperation, to another distribution of power. Because if anything, art has the privilege of being able to say something on one platform and spin it around a little bit. So this carousel of art must actually be accessible to everyone.

### **Collective and Collaborative Practices**

**Žole:** Then we wanted to, because we had a lot of friends who were also interested in disciplines that were not directly about architecture, one was interested in sculpture, another one in furniture, Ivana Filipović in comics, we wanted to work together as a group. It was to gain more visibility, but also to make things more interesting. It is always more interesting to work in a larger group with so many interesting people. The latter were not exactly interested in group work. So in the end, only the two of us remained.

**Prota:** And at the same time, we included Vesna Pavlović, whom we'd met earlier at fine arts, at the FDA - Faculty of Dramatic Arts, because we first worked with Nikola Majdak, her FDA colleague.

**Žole:** There's another aspect to Vesna Pavlović, she was my girlfriend at the time. Prota involved her and now we had group dynamic. This was how we make decisions since we were quite different, we often debated. And in order not to come into this cul-de-sac that would paralyse us, we made an internal agreement for him to put something out, I criticised. And if I do not suggest something better, the suggested goes. And so we outvoted each other in a way. Vesna would come and Vesna was the tip on the scale. That's where Prota mostly got his because he's phenomenal and manipulative and seductive, charming, and Vesna always voted for his proposal, not mine. So the group dynamic at that moment was interesting.

**Prota:** Okay, Vesna was a hurricane, and you were the brake. And then often it was to the advantage.

**Žole:** I wanted to give you a clear reason why, but that often holds things up when you think too much.

**Prota:** We included everyone else in the micro community we knew through *Sorrows*. For example, Mikrob came to Žole's to read *Vreme* magazine for free.

**Žole:** It wasn't a free read, I was there for 12 hours and people came and chatted. Mikrob also came and he loved to read all that political literature. It wasn't just *Vreme*. *Vreme* was the main one. And he sat next to me reading.

**Prota:** And so that exchange with Žole came about. Then Žole told him since he was already coming over and hanging about there...

**Žole:** No, no, no, I didn't say that. Many came over, but Mikrob was sponging, like, for a sandwich, for a beer, etc. Which I or anyone else there would buy for him. And we loved his masks, among the first and only and rare ones at the time. We just really loved them. We even organised his first two exhibitions for him, because he was really drunk. He called us to help him, and then he would get drunk and we would set his exhibition somewhere in a small gallery. I really loved his masks, just as Prota did. And then I suggested one day: Hey, Sale, I love your masks, let us trade, I mean if you like to read *Vreme*, take it home, but you bring me a mask. And agreed with enthusiasm, I did even more so. And so it lasted for a year and a half, I was getting one mask for *Vreme*. Nebojša Milikić is now accusing me of being a lucrative collector even then. It was not my intention, but I am a proud owner of 64 masks. You meet someone at a pub, and you notice that you have things in common, a similar sense of humour, this-that, and friendship develops. And then there is cooperation or no cooperation.

**Prota:** Mostly, this scene, as Žole said, was formed around a Skizzenblock, in fact, and B92 and Darka really made effort for some people to get to know each other. She said from the beginning: You must meet Mikrob. So ever since *Sorrows*, we included everyone we'd met in the meantime, for the year, year and a half of participation. Both Talent and Mirkob participated, Srđan Valjarević, and even Luna Lu participated, a bunch of people, I don't even remember. Each action had its own topic and we asked one of these friends to make a rubber stamp to stamp their little *Sorrows* and distribute it later. And we made this circle of closest associates more complex through that rubber and stamp and street action, and through Vera Pavlović's photography, even the posters we put up in the streets. Which, in fact, now with regard to this widening of the circle, may have been the most radical in '93 when we set up *Reinforcement*, the imaginary anthem of architecture at the Faculty of Architecture. We composed it in collaboration with Ana Karapešić, composer. Mikrob, URGH band, Marc Hawker from the UK, and choir from Josip Slavenski Secondary Music School participated. So it was ... again Vesna Pavlović, photography; Branko Pavić, paper products; Faculty of Architecture as a venue. The event was repeated five times, because the crowd was big and people couldn't get in. It all sort of turned into something we had no previous experience with. One event that was also off. Not in a predictable public and urban space,

but in a new territory. Occupation of new territories.

**Žole:** In '99 after returning from Belgium, I think we were provoked by the video art works that started to pop up in Serbia then, which annoyed us a bit, and at one point I told Protá that the works of the artists dealing with issues, like minorities, didn't even matter then. So, who benefited from it? Only the artist who created that work has the benefit, yet these objects of it - they are nothing. They're still a minority, they're still poor, they're still nowhere. And a few of the works we saw were just irritating. And then I said to Protá: If we worked with a group, I wish it were not like this. I want everyone who participates to have a common interest. I didn't want to make a profit or have benefits, which is the case with most works of art around the world. And so we came up with the idea of the choir when the Pavilion invited us to present our work for the first time in ten years. And we assembled it and said: We shall make an audition for a choir, to present our work in a different way. So there were these 50 people, after the radio announcement, and we stood before them expecting there'd be an audition. And we stood before them, Protá said: There's no audition, you're all admitted. And they were surprised, and we started working with the choir. Out of the 50, one third had music background, two thirds did not. They came there just like that. And that's how the choir started, and that's where we formulated the way we would work in the collective and realised our wish that it should be the same for everyone. The two of us did not want to travel and represent the choir around the world, with them singing locally. Because if we go, we all go together. And other things are formulated here. The first couple of years we had problems, it's not easy to work with younger people, the dynamics are different. You schedule rehearsals at eight o'clock, they start arriving at half past nine or nine. The rehearsal cannot end before midnight, and Protá and I had a completely different schedule, and they were all teenagers or uni students, having an infinite amount of time. And then we quarrelled. I said to Protá that sooner or later they had to become independent from us unlocking the space; that we should not brew coffee for them and treat them like children. We needed to empower them to introduce self-governance at one point, i.e. to let it be their own choir, without us two seniors nagging all the time. And now we prepared the ground for the choir to become independent at one point without us. So we could leave. And that's the story with *Horkerškart*, which has become *Choirchestra*, something I am most proud to have done, because at first we wanted to ... we didn't want to leave our mark in the beginning, which would forever say it's Škart. I'd rather people lived their lives and continued without us,

**Protá:** You had no methodology to follow, no strategy. Secondly or thirdly or fifthly, it's self-funded. All our previous self-publishing, projects were self-funded, as is the choir. Žole and I were doing graphic design and set aside monthly sums to pay the conductor who was making arrangements and conducting the choir. The moment it moved on a little, a girl who could play the piano jumped in instead of the conductor, and she is in charge now. And that wonderful machine has been created, a machine that works on its own, a *perpetuum mobile*. The thing is self-renewing. And then people from the choir started writing songs and arrangements, and then the conductors changed. The choir has been in existence for nineteen years now, about ten conductors have changed. And it works great on its own.

**Žole:** What matters in the collective is that people learn from each other. It is one of the choir's accomplishments that we have learned from them and they from us. Despite being twice as old as most of them. And I realized in the meantime, working with them, that it is very important that there is no centre of power. Because we experienced it with conductors, mostly that when someone is a conductor then we have a scheduled concert and if the conductor gets sick 50 people are paralyzed. And I didn't like it, that idea at all. And then I realised that there had to be alternatives. And then when we had a rehearsal, a similar thing happened and that made me learn how to play the guitar. Once Danilo had an exam so he couldn't go and the concert was about to be cancelled and Milica jumped in as an alternative. Then I realized it couldn't work this way. We had to reach this, I think you-kuda.org made the exhibition with Oliver Ressler, and those 11 alternative economies, and that one American, Michael Albert mentioned in his text *Participatory Economics: A collective should include as many people who have the knowledge.*

**Žole:** In Belgium, well, that's an interesting period. Six months we were there with *Migrative Art*. It was such an interesting experience, but there were issues.

**Protá:** It wasn't the easiest thing. It was a valuable experience in every collective. With *Migrative Art*, we began to conquer format of workshop for the first time. So it was no longer the collective that has that prefix - the art collective, which has some necessary product as such, half self-imposed. The choir sings and has concerts, etc., in workshops there is this endless process wherein you can experiment realistically without being conditioned by the product at all. And that somehow, later it empowered us and inspired us

to initiate and extend some other collectives besides the Choir today. Workshops are more or less a practice parallel to graphic design which we make a living of. It is a kind of new distribution of knowledge that Žole talked about, and a new lesson.

**Prota:** Except *Radio B92*, which I mentioned as an important beacon around which a lot of people we met gathered, another important segment were *Women in Black*. With whom we began to work in '92. Also through whom we were introduced to a wide circle of various activists, combatants, etc. And now when we go back to 2000, through *Women in Black*, we see a group of women, single mothers, refugees who were in Zemun at the time, because one of the *Women in Black* was the founder of that group of single refugee mothers. And then we got into action with them.

**Žole:** We wanted to translate that traditional language into a more modern language and push those handicrafts to the market. It was the first time we'd tried to push the art works to the market to make money from sales. *The Kitchen Embroidery Samplers* helped them survive. We were just intermediaries. We didn't take any fee, nothing. That's it, ah *Poets' Fistfights* was a completely different story, where with these booklets we introduced a 100 dinars entry fee, where we persuaded people to finance the booklet with 100 dinars and whoever came in October paid 100 dinars, received a booklet from September and paid a booklet for November. And people knew that they would get the booklet in November when they entered *Poets' Fistfights* having given the money in October. And this way we shortened the path. Because usually the state takes all of our taxes from us, then puts it in the budget, takes such a small part from the budget and then decides who will receive those leftovers, and here it just went more directly.

**Žole:** I would say one other thing, what is the beauty of working together. For example, I come from team sports, basketball, and I have already experienced how beautiful it is when you share something with people and win and lose, etc. I've always leaned towards group work, because it seemed valuable to me, because I am quite insecure and then I really need that voice from the outside. Someone to help me, someone to say this is good, this is not. And those voices that complement each other in a collaborative business is something that is extremely pleasing to me. So, at the same time, we do designs and live off that, and having another friend here Pera and that studio of the three of us, all totally different people in one place, was one of the nicest combinations we have ever had. I really enjoyed having a joint studio with people. Teamwork thrills me.

**Žole:** It was a learning process. With various people, the learning process. And it is very important to break that monopoly of artistic authority with people. And when you work with someone, you can learn something from everyone. And it is mutual learning that is valuable. So on that side, I have always found this collective dynamics a very important thing where there has to be equality, where everyone's voice is heard and respected. I believe that the collective wisdom reaches further than the individual one. There is a saying: If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to get far, go with a group.

**Prota:** Or as our poet friend said: Those who breathe together do not lose their breath. And that is a love stanza, or a manifesto one.

**Žole:** In the collective, otherwise, I also learned this aspect in *Migrate Art* where I learned how constructive quarrels are. We had so many powerful rows. Ivana called it constructive conflict, something like that. It can be exhausting, but it matters a lot. I learned that from the choir as well, and kept saying to Prota, who preferred the silent members, and I liked the criticising ones. And I kept saying that criticism keeps telling you something is wrong. Like when something hurts in your body, it's a signal telling you something's wrong. And I kept telling Prota we needed to listen to those who are constantly criticising, because something is obviously wrong. So that's valuable. In today's political sphere criticising is generally seen as an insult. But criticism is terribly valuable.

**Žole:** We can talk about that till the cows come home, but here's the key thing: we got a bid for the Venice Biennale and there were three votes in the group- mine, and I was against participation, Prota's who was for it and Pera's, who said *If there is money in it for me I will*. Because Pera did need money. Very simple. I was against it because I thought that the Venice Biennale's out-dated form involved national pavilions. It's the like 19<sup>th</sup> century. I said: Going to Venice to represent the state of Serbia - I don't feel like a national team. I don't see why I would do that. Prota was in favour of it, I don't know why, he will explain, but there were those three votes and Pera's vote sealed it. And I said, well, if you two think that way... Of course, the moment we made the decision, I was a legitimate member then, I was

not saving myself. I think it's really important to be loyal at that point, but, hey, I was against it. If it were today, I would not agree under any circumstances. In 2010 it was under the circumstances that I could stand, but now I would not represent us under any conditions.

**Prota:** After all, it says Yugoslavia on the Pavilion.

**Žole:** The idea was to put a Serbian flag and stuff, Jovan Mitrović was a great, excellent commissary and we wanted to avoid it in every possible way and then just in case we had a burek and we smeared the flag a little to make it dirty, we wanted this to be this Yugoslavia.

**Prota:** And it was the Architecture Biennale, so this was again a step back from the official art scene, which would probably never ... Anyway, no comments. And it was nice, this kind of a craftsman's treatment. We were like architects who are not architects.

**Žole:** That was extraordinary. You had a team of architects out there who were in the jury and they knew how to do an exhibition, no kidding, this thing went smoothly. If there was a technical problem, they solved it. Jovan was phenomenal in handling everything. Whenever there was something about the money and things, he would do it very well with the organisers. There were a million people out there who wanted to skimp on something, but Jovan kept it under control fantastically.

**Prota:** Jovan Mitrović and Branko Pavić were in the board, and let me just say that it was a valuable experience for us again, applying poetry in a new context. Poetry as a kind of embodiment of slightly surreal objects. So we played with it and we did it. It was really great. Again, we invited the choir to come with us, again instead of the two or three privileged ones, it was the siege of Venice.

**Žole:** But Stevan, it was a valuable experience, for the first time at that level, the state level. You are literally representing the state at the Venice Biennale. And one thing I have to say, before us, I don't know who had been there before us in the pavilion, and of course they didn't clean up afterwards. We peeled, for the first five days we peeled glue off the floor, there were some carpets, there. And I said, this must not happen to us. I want to leave clean walls for the next ones. Of course, when we proposed it and finished it, we said that we wanted to go and paint the walls white, they said: No, it doesn't matter, those who come next will do it.

### **Relationship to the Institutional Work Framework**

**Žole:** I remember Kassel 2005 well, they invited us, we'd met a year before and we were invited to that exhibition where WHW/What, How and for Whom (curators collective Zagreb, Croatia) made an exhibition about collectives. The very feeling at the exhibition was extraordinary, because they were all collectives and there was far less of artistic ego than usual. So those few days in Kassel were fantastic. I remember the first collective exhibition we had at ŠKUC (Ljubljana, Slovenia, since Slovenia became independent in 1991), when realized *Dibidon* event, And this is the same unforgettable experience where a bus full of artists from Belgrade comes to Ljubljana, artists entered ŠKUC Gallery and about as they entered they occupied the space in five minutes looking at the walls, threw backpacks and said: this is my wall, this is my wall. Both Prota and I stood like this, as we couldn't manage such situations. And I went to the toilet and I told Prota that the toilet was not so bad, we could do our thing there, nobody had booked it with their backpacks yet. And so we put up our poster in the toilet. Interestingly, I went to ŠKUC two months ago and the poster was still there. It's a poster from 1994.

We were first confronted with the artists' egos, creepy. *Collective creativity* was the first exhibition, maybe not the first, but, I remember well the impression from that exhibition, how fantastic it was. They were all people from the collective; somehow it was a very relaxed, wonderful atmosphere.

**Prota:** And at the same time, the ingenious willingness of the WHW collective to invite a whole choir to come to Germany and perform their programme. So for our choir, it was a huge challenge to travel that far. And after that we went to ...

**Žole:** Wherever we were invited for exhibitions, we suggested the choir should come.

**Prota:** And we played a little trick, because we were supposed to sing in Kassel one day, then we decided to go to Castle Solitude, since we were already in Germany. And then we suggested to my colleague Monsieur Jolie to go to Castle Solitude, the fifty of us, that's 69 rooms now, to which Jolie said it was crazy, he didn't want to deal with that, they wouldn't accept it for sure.

**Žole:** But they did.

**Prota:** And then we tinkered a bit and the man accepted. Then we went to ZKM, too. These little pranks are nice, if you are invited somewhere, give a little extra space for people to really experience something. We had already been there, let someone else see it. Let someone else hear it. So we were very pleased to be on the show and we remained permanent associates with WHW. And now in this regard we are

cooperating with the collaborators and WHW are actually, a very collaborative collective. Every year we do something new with them.

**Žole:** We learned one nice thing about the Choir, the reporters come in to ask what the Choir is singing, I tell them to ask the guys from Choir. Then they went there. Because I want and I think everything should be distributed equally. Journalists came to them and now these choir members came to me asking: What can we tell them? And I realised that this was where the hierarchical model was to be broken so that everyone participates more in song creating. And I said everyone should propose the songs, not only the two of us. And so people start suggesting songs and becoming independent.

### **Half Time at the Museum of Applied Arts**

**Prota:** To me, the exhibition was unimportant, it was an opportunity just to get some things out of our boxes and show them. There was no strategy there, we didn't have time to write the legends, but we decided to do a guided tour every night, and again, like conquering the Faculty of Architecture, etc., to conquer the Museum in a new way. And we called it the Balkan Wars. Balcony Wars, sorry. Where we did some poetic performances on the balcony every night, so that was interesting. That meeting with the audience every night where people could directly ask what it was about. And then we sometimes had guests who talked about themselves.

**Žole:** On the one hand, Prota said it didn't matter, in that sense we wondered why all this, I think it's important because we are terribly irresponsible to our own work. And one must not be. We don't maintain it. And this was the first opportunity for us to shake up that work and to systematize it in some way. And it is very important for everyone to organize what he does. With us, it's all a bit of a mess, doing things everywhere, and it's irresponsible. If we just don't respect our own work, it's hard to expect others to respect it.

**Prota:** We even lived for a while at *CFCD* (Centre for Cultural Decontamination) and it first opened the door to us institutionally. Before that, we had a common studio in various venues, holes, and then Borka Pavičević suggested that we go there. They had a little room above the coal room at the time, and that's where we came in.

**Žole:** That was a fantastic deal.

**Prota:** We spent days and nights there.

**Žole:** They gave us the studio and we gave them design. Extraordinary.

**Prota:** It was that good swap, straightforwardly, as Žole says: everyone gets everything. So we were the inside designers and in time we participated in various actions. *Vouchers* were part of one action we did together with Dušan Makavejev and a number of other authors. It was called *Lust for Life*. And that's one of the products that started from there.

**Žole:** And *Listen, Little Man*. That was one action that continued within that festival and then they continued their lives.

**Prota:** And secondly, one product we did with group *Apsolutno* in '96 in Mostar. *Mikrob, Apsolutno, Kazimir* and *Škart*, where we created one book *Fission*, actually again the format that is underrated. It was book art, a 50-issue edition, where we combined our experiences in Mostar. Because again, in cooperation with *CFCD* and *Women in Black*, we were part of a flying classroom / workshop, which was called FCW, which went to the former war zones immediately after the war, in 1996, and gathered interested parties from various EX YU territories. So, through *CFCD*, new networking and new practices occurred that we hadn't had before. And it was one wonderful outstretched hand telling us we could be there; we could use that space and initiate various other things ourselves. So we actually started the Choir there, *Horcherškart*. On the other hand, *REX* is also an institution that we have worked with since the beginning of '94, where we have done a number of things in cooperation with them. Inter alia *Poets' Fistfights* is one *REX* format, which lasted for about 5 years, every month. Which meant that there was cooperation with the institutions as well, but you said nicely that both the *CFCD* and *REX*, above all, were independent cultural centres of the 1990s,

Non-governmental institutions,

Self-organized institutions.

**Žole:** We work with cooperative. It's not a rule, but I would say one more thing, it's not easy to say no. And as we get older, if someone invite us then we look at what's in the background.