Jiří Valoch, "False message", 1973, typewritten text, inv. no. 1845 (1-2), MSU, Zagreb

Title

Here/There and Somewhere Else: The Artistic Connections of Jiří Valoch with Former Yugoslav Territory during the 1960s and 70s

Author
Ivana Janković

Source
MIEJSCE 5/2019

DOI

`https://www.doi.org/10.48285/8kaewzco3p`

URL

`http://miejsce.asp.waw.pl/en/english-here-there-and-somewhere-else-the-artistic-connections-of-jiri-`

`valoch-with-former-yugoslav-territory-during-the-1960s-and-70s/`

Abstract

This case study aims to examine the artistic connections and exchanges of ideas that Jiří Valoch made within the territory of then-Yugoslavia during the 1960s and 70s. The study is based on works and the rich correspondence from the Zagreb-based Marinko Sudac Collection, the Zagreb Museum of Contemporary Art's Archive and Collection, and the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts' Fine Arts Archives in Zagreb.

Introduction

Jiří Valoch (b. 1946, Brno) is someone with several concurrent roles – those of a poet, curator, theoretician, and collector. Such a vast field of interests allows for different methods of

interpretation, which have only recently come to prominence. There is almost no topic with which he did not engage as an artist or curator. These include Neo-Constructivism and computer art, visual and concrete poetry, samizdats, mail art, ready-mades, actions, land art, body art, and other conceptual phenomena, including the pioneering task of artistic networking during the period of the binary geopolitical division of Europe into West and East. His work is inescapable when viewing the art and curatorial practices of the 1960s and 70s, especially in former Czechoslovakia. Furthermore, it is important for a better understanding of certain phenomena on the European neo-avant-garde scene of the time; a significant number of contemporary studies by art historians and theoreticians evidence this fact. Valoch's authorial reviews, theoretical texts from the period, exhibition catalogs of artists whose exhibitions he organized, rich correspondence with notable artists and experts from around the world, and his private collection of artworks provide an important source for researchers. Research should take into consideration the various forms of art activity that are today found in public and private collections. From these, two deserve special mention. These are the Marinko Sudac Collection, based in Zagreb, which is a regionally unique collection of radical artistic practices spanning from 1914 to 1989, and the Moravská galerie [Moravian Gallery] in Brno.

It is interesting that, so far, attempts to present Valoch's oeuvre have mostly been focused on his contribution to experimental poetry. Neither regional nor international experts have given a clear retrospective overview, even after four decades of his activity, despite the fact that he was in touch with leading curators and artists globally. In 2016, the Marinko Sudac Collection, in collaboration with the Institute for the Research of the Avant-Garde, Valamar Riviera Plc, and Poreč Open University, as part of their project *Artist on Vacation 2016*, organized the exhibition *Jiří Valoch – The Power of the Powerless* at the Zuccato Gallery in Poreč. The title came from Václav Havel's essay "Moc bezmocných," which talks about the relationship between power and freedom in Czechoslovakia during the repressive period of normalization. This exhibition was the first retrospective survey that thematically encompassed numerous aspects of Valoch's creative and curatorial activities. The core of the exhibition was a selection of his works and documentation from the Marinko Sudac Collection. The exhibited materials included photograms, series of conceptual black-and-white photographs, action photo-documentations and street interventions, land art, and Fluxus events, continuing to visual/concrete poetry, sheet music, conceptual projects, collages, mail art, samizdats, as well as private correspondence and publications. Helena Musilová, whose book on Valoch has recently been published, determines that these works require a more solid valorization. The same year, the Poreč exhibition was presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, albeit on a smaller scale, which served as the point of departure for this research.

The continuity of avant-garde artistic idea exchange and its legacy

The connection of Czechoslovakian territory with the West and East had already been made during the period of the historical avant-gardes. The Devětsil group, headed by Karel Teige, collaborated with the most important names from European avant-garde movements during the 1920s and 30s. These movements included Russian Constructivism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Futurism, De Stijl, as well as the Bauhaus. Actions by Raoul Housmann (1886–1971), Richard Huelsenbeck (1892–1974), and Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948) were held in 1920 and 1921 at the Urania Theater. The same year, the group established contact with Filippo Tomaso Marinetti (1876–1944), the author of Futurist manifestos. Via individual personal contacts, Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and László Moholy-Nagy gave lectures, along with numerous other acclaimed individuals. This is telling with regard to a certain form of exchange that was not limited just to one mode of the avant-garde movement. The Devětsil group published several magazines, such as *Disk*, *Pásmo* [*The Zone*], and *ReD* [*Revue Devětsilu*]. In them, they included texts and visual sections on art, scenography, cinematography, photography, and architecture, taken from other avant-garde magazines. In return, foreign magazines would publish texts on the contemporary Czech art scene, which confirms the fact that communication went both ways. The Yugoslav *Zenit*, the Hungarian review *MA* of Lajos Kassák, and *Vešč* by Ilya Grigoryevich Ehrenburg (1891–1967) and Lazar Markovich Lissitzky (1890–1941, better known as El Lissitzky), are just some of the numerous magazines that presented the primary means of the group's communication with European capitals. The connection with the Yugoslav territory of the period is interesting in terms of this research. It is a proven fact that Teige collaborated with the artist Branko Ve Poljanski (1897–1947), who held his avant-garde show in Prague. Ve Poljanski was the brother of Ljubomir Micić (1895–1971), publisher of the Yugoslav avant-garde magazine *Zenit: International Revue of Arts and Culture* (fig. 1), on which they collaborated. Poljanski gets credit for the fact that several issues featured reproductions of works by some of the members of the Devětsil group (*Zenit* nos. 6, 7, and 8 from 1921; no. 11 from 1922).

"Zenit: International Revue of Arts and Culture" no. 11, 1922, eds. Ljubomir Micić and
Ivan Goll, Marinko Sudac Collection, Zagreb

In 1934, Karel Teige, along with several like-minded individuals, founded the Czech Surrealist Group. Surrealism, a leading movement of the 1930s, survived the period of the Second World War and its aftermath in Czech intellectual circles, and ties with Paris remained strong. When Marcel Duchamp worked on the *International Surrealist Exhibition* in Paris (1947), he asked Teige to collaborate with him, and thus the exhibition also featured the works of Czech artists such as Toyen, a pseudonym of Marie Čermínová (1902–1980).

The legacy of avant-garde ideas and the productions of the Czechoslovakian circle of the 1920s and 30s were certainly beneficial for the development of experimental anti-artistic stances and expressions, and the "dematerialization of artistic practice" in the spirit of the neo-avant-garde art of post-war Czechoslovakia. Piotr Piotrowski talks about the relatively liberal cultural life of the early 1960s (up to 1968) in Czechoslovakia. This allowed for the spread of neo-avant-garde practices and also enabled international cultural events. During the 1960s in Prague there were exhibitions featuring the French Nouveau *Réalisme* movement, pioneers of kinetic art (the Moscow Dvizhenie group led by Lev Nussberg), and Neo-Constructivism. In 1964, the Merce Cunningham Dance Company held a concert with the leading artist, theoretician, and promoter of 20th-century experimental music, John Cage. At that time, the key figure in beginning the Fluxus movement in the West, George Maciunas, named Milan Knížák the leader of Fluxus East. During the same period, a "soirée" was organized in Brno – a Fluxus event with performances by Eric Andersen and Tony Andersen. In April 1966, at the Reduta jazz club in Prague, there were performances by Eric

Andersen, Tomas Schmidt, and Arthur Köpcke. In November of the same year, with the logistical and financial support of the critic Jindřich Chalupecký and Milan Knížák, there was a Fluxus festival, which featured the most important Fluxus artists from the West. Critics and theorists covered the aforementioned events in magazines (*Výátvarne prace*, *Kvéten*, *Výtvarne Uměni*), along with news from the West.

Documents, programs, and the initiatives of distinguished individuals such as Jindřich Chalupecký (with the Václav Špála gallery in Prague during the 1960s), along with the activity of Jiří Valoch in the House of Arts and other places in Brno during the 1960s and 70s, had the effect, according to Piotr Piotrowski, that:

the gallery's existence revealed a real crisis of commercial and official art institutions. But it also provided evidence, contravening the institutional system and the art market, that the international art scene could function as if the world was not divided into the West and the East simply through the power of private networks and contacts.

With regard to the international artistic networks created in Poland in the 1970s, alongside Chalupecký in Prague and Valoch in Brno it is necessary to mention the artist and theoretician Jarosław Kozłowski with the Akumulatory 2 gallery in Poznan, as well as the theoretician Andrzej Lachowicz with the PERMAFO gallery in Wrocław. Based on extensive research of the private archives of artists and of public institutions, Klara Kemp-Welch reached the same conclusion and proceeded to map out the pioneering feats of artists' networking.

Even past the Prague Spring and the start of so-called normalization (from 1972), Czechoslovak neo-avant-garde artists were active (locally and even abroad), but in changed and difficult circumstances, sometimes in alternative spaces, and beyond the secret police's radar. The works of regime-unacceptable experimental artists very frequently resisted via subversive critique of the state, which is, according to Václav Havel, the strongest opposition to repression. Valoch did this in the titling of many of his works of new poetry, samizdats, conceptual projects, and photo-series. He used words such as *memory*, *time*, *freedom*, *silence*, *merde*, and *here/there*, and phrases such as *somewhere else than here*. The titles of these textual constructs or messages sent by mail are indicative for understanding the atmosphere at the time of their creation in the political and social surroundings of normalization. The transfer of ideas between the Eastern and Western Blocs, as well as between the Eastern Bloc and the Non-Aligned states, was mostly by mail art and other ephemeral media (samizdats, photographs, conceptual projects, posters, and others) which could be sent by regular mail, and in that way shown at important exhibition projects abroad. This form of creation was something Valoch also used for exchange with the representatives of visual and concrete poetry and conceptual art, throughout Europe and beyond. Aware of language barriers,

he often wrote in foreign languages, in German or English, which can also be interpreted as his wish to be acknowledged beyond his national borders. Moreover, documents show how, even during that repressive period, Czechoslovak artists personally took part even in international events outside the county. One such event in which Valoch participated, which contributed greatly to the network of the independent European arts scene, played out on the banks of Lake Balaton (*Balatonboglár*, 1972).At the initiative of the leading art historian and theoretician of the Hungarian neo-avant-garde, László Beke, this meeting of Hungarian and Czechoslovakian neo-avant-garde artists was organized as a sign of support for Czechoslovakia after the failure of the Prague Spring. The event also featured some Yugoslav artists (the Bosch+Bosch Group from Subotica – László Kerekes, Slavko Matković, László Szalma, and Bálint Szombathy). The highlight of the *Balatonboglár* event was the action *Handshake*, which has been documented in photographs. The act of handshaking between participants was a symbolic show of peace between Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Publications and magazines also played an important role in the promotion of Eastern and Central European Art in the West. In the magazine *Flash Art*, especially during the 1970s, news about the art scene behind the Iron Curtain was published; an entire issue was even dedicated to Eastern European art. One issue of *Novine Galerije Studentskog centra* [*Newspaper of the Student Center Gallery*] from Zagreb noted how "due to very complicated actions necessary for regular subscription, the editorial board of *Flash Art* decided that they would distribute their issues for free in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Yugoslavia." But one of the earliest and most comprehensive attempts to present the Eastern European scene to the West was Klaus Groh's book *Aktuelle Kunst in Osteuropa* (1972).

Jiří Valoch's artistic connections with the former Yugoslavia region during the 1960s and 70s

Jiří Valoch did not limit his artistic and curatorial work just to the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland because, as a curator at the House of Arts, he was able to travel to Germany, France, and across the entire Yugoslav territory. Preserved correspondence shows that Valoch contacted and worked with critics and poets of concrete and visual poetry; neo-avant-garde and conceptual artists from Czechoslovakia (theoretician Jindřich Chalupecký, artists Jan Steklik, Jiří H. Kocman, Alex Mlynarčik, Stano Filko, Rudolf Sikora, Július Koller, Karel Adamus, Milan Grygar, Petr Štembera, Milan Knižák, Jan Wojnar, Zdeněk Barborka, Ivan M. Jirous, Jiří Kolar, Ladislav Novák, and Jaroslav Malina), Poland (Andrzej Lachowicz, Natalia LL, and Henryk Stażewski), Germany (Bernard Heidsieck, Ferdinand Kriwet, along with theoretician Max Bense), Italy (Adriano Spatola and Ugo Carrega), and France (Pierre Garnier and Henri Chopin); with Fluxus members from the East and West; American experimental composers (Steve Reich); Hungarian neo-avant-garde artists (Tamàs Szentjóby/St. Auby, Endre Tót, and Imre Bak); and with American artists (Christo,

Allan Kaprow, and Seth Siegelaub).

His correspondence shows that he was in touch with artists from the former Yugoslavia, the basis for this case study. These included the Croatian theoretician from the Gorgona Group and the New Tendencies movement, Radoslav Putar; curator Boris Kelemen; the Gallery of Contemporary Art in Zagreb's director, Božo Bek; Croatian concrete poetry theoretician Branimir Donat; the Vojvodina conceptual artist, curator, and lecturer Bogdanka Poznanović; the Bosch+Bosch Group from Subotica; the Slovenian conceptual OHO Group; the curator of the Zagreb Student Center Gallery, Želimir Koščević; Zagreb art historian and art critic Ida Biard; and the curator of the Belgrade Student Cultural Center Gallery, Biljana Tomić.

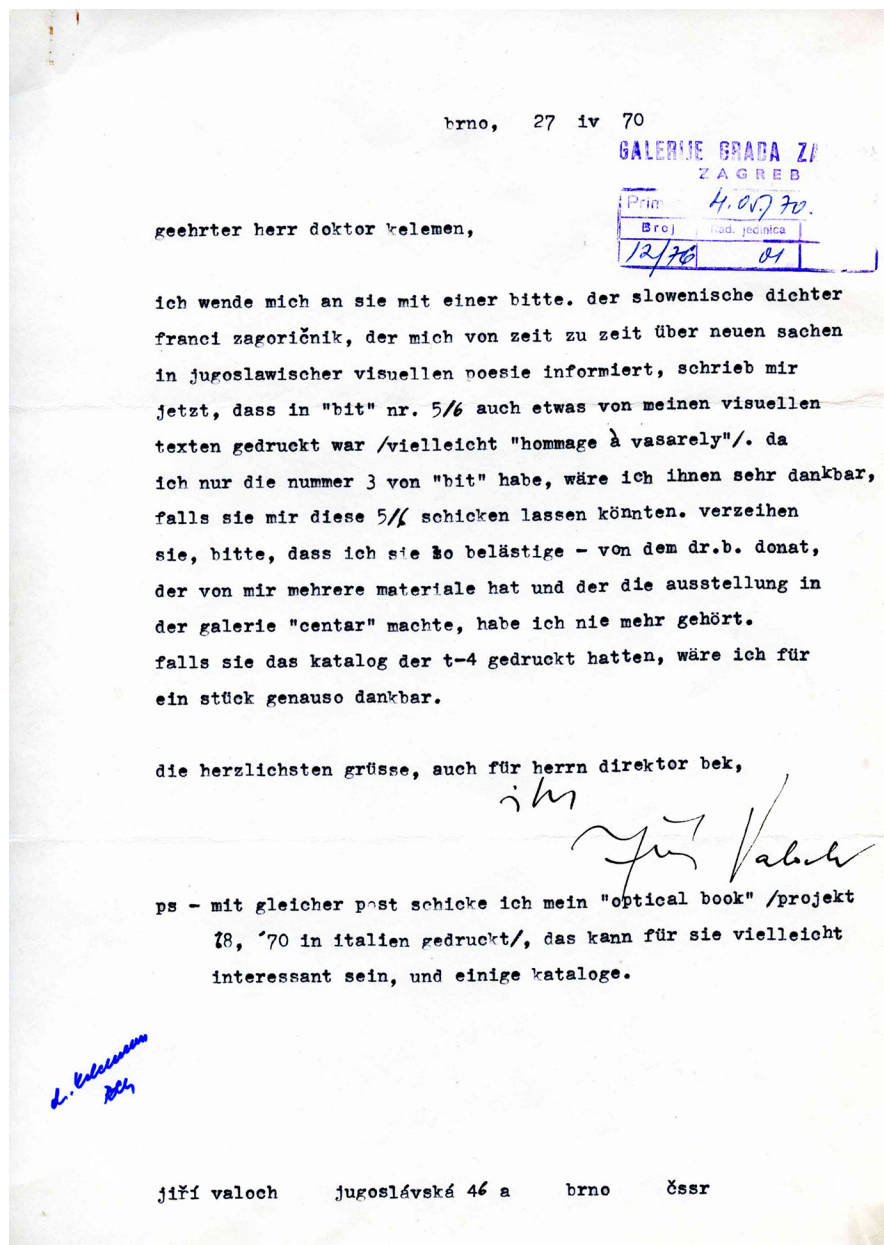B. Donat's letter to J. Valoch (April 4, 1968), Marinko Sudac Collection, Zagreb

J. Valoch's letter to B. Kelemen (April 27, 1970), Zagreb, MSU Documentation and Information Department, NT archive / Authors / Valoch -2

In the Brno House of Arts, where Valoch had worked as a curator since 1972, he organized the exhibition *Computer Graphics* (March 10 – April 5, 1968), which preceded *Tendencije 4* [*Tendencies 4*] at the Gallery of Contemporary Art in Zagreb and the *Cybernetic Serendipity* exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London (August 2 – October 20, 1968). At *Computer Graphics*, Valoch exhibited a total of 81 works by the artists involved, exploring the possibilities of expression using computers. The foreword to the catalog included a text by Max Bense. Helena Musilová states how, in comparison to the Zagreb and London exhibitions, Valoch's research was considered more of a private project.

TENDENCIJE 4
Galerija suvremene umjetnosti
Z a g r e b / Katarinin trg 2

Programme-information
PI-5
April 1968

GALERIJE GRADA ZAGREBA
Z A G R E B

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA | Primljeno | 3. 06. 1968
Broj | Red. jedinica

1. Surname . . . Jiří . . . . 322/70 . . 01.
2. Name   . . . V.A.L.O.C.H. . . . .
3. Place and date of birth . Brno, ČSSR – 6. 9. 1946.
   Brünner
4. Studies . Philosophische Fakultät der Brünner Universität
5. Profession . . Student. . . . .
6. Occupation praktisch; experimentelle Poesie, theoret.; konkrete,pro-
   grammierte Kunst
7. Activities (exhibitions, articles, projects etc) . .
   Teilnahme an etwa 20 Ausstellungen der konkreten und visuellen
   Poesie in Europa und Amerika, Poesie in Zeitschriften und
   Anthologien; theoretische Artikeln über die neue Poesie in
   Zeitschriften; - Artikeln und Informationsnachrichten über die
   konkrete und programmierte Kunst; Vorbereitung und Organisation
   der Ausstellungen in der ČSSR /"computer graphic" 1968/ Austellun-
   gen der einzelnen tschechoslowakischen Konkretisten.
8. Partecipation in groups . . . .
   Gruppe "KLUB DER KONKRETISTEN". - ČSSR ./als Dichter und Theoretiker
9. The works are in the possesion of : . . . .
   Arbeiten /visuelle Poesie/ in Privatsammlungen. . . .
   . . . .
10. Bibliography Austellungskataloge. : ZWISCHEN BILD UND GEDICHT
    /E. Ovčáček, Ostrava/, VARIABILLEN /R.Kratina, Louny/, NEUE
    BILDENDE METODEN /Haus der Künste, Brno/, PROGRAMMIERTE KUNST
    /in :COMPUTER GRAPHIC, Brno/, AKUSTISCHE ZEICHNUNGEN /M.Grygar,
    Brno/. . Mehrere Artikeln in VÝTVARNÁ PRÁCE /=Bildende Arbeit/
    Prag; IMPULS, Prag; MLADÁ TVORBA /Junge Schaffung/, Bratislava;
    SVĚTOVÁ LITERATURA /Weltliteratur/, Praha, etc.

Date
    22 5 1968

Signature

Thank you for the correct filling of this form

Application form for the "Tendencies 4" colloquium, 1968, Zagreb, typewritten text, MSU Documentation and Information Department, NT archive / Authors / Valoch -1

computer – schöpfer oder werkzeug ?
––––––––––––––––––––––––––––––––––––

den anlass zu diesen zeilen, die nichts anderes sein wollen, als eine
bemerkung zu einem der probleme der computer kunst, gab mir das
material tschechischer autoren auf der tendenz iv, nämlich die kreati-
onen von lubomír sochor und zdeněk sýkora, welche in gewissem sinne
zwei von den äussersten möglichkeiten der benützung von computern
darstellen.
durch die ausnützung von computern in der kunstschöpfung kam es auto-
matisch zur entstehung von team–arbeit – mindestens eines zweiglied-
rigen teams / programator – computer+zeichenautomat/. wir sind aber
zeugen auch anderer möglichkeiten; der amerikanische bildner charles
csury ist der "urheber" eines komplizierteren teams /bildner – progra-
mator – computer+zeichenautomat/, usw. in der tschechischen schöpfung
begegnen wir eine folgende situation. im falle des ing. sochor, welcher
mit einem analog–computer arbeitet, ging es um keinen bildner, sogar
um keinen menschen mit aussergewöhnlichen ästhetischen interessen
/wenigstens bis zur zeit der systematischen schöpfung von computer-
grafiken/. sein interesse konzentriert sich dabei auf die erforschung,
wie werden die grafischen erhebnisse aussehen. er programmiert systeme
von gleichungen, deren lösungen und deren derivationen in verschiedenem
verhältniss addiert werden und das ergebniss wird mittels eines zeichen-
automats erfasst. erst bei der auswertung von grafischen lösungen,
die auch teilweise für andere zwecke entstanden sind, befasste sich
sochor mit dem ästhetischen wert der zeichnungen. er begann später
die grafischen lösungen verschiedener systeme zu untersuchen, die
koefiziente zu ändern und den einfluss dieser änderungen auf das
grafische zu verfolgen. die eigentliche ästhetische auswertung ist
aber auch dann bloss eine selektion des gewonnenen grafischen
materials. – zdeněk sýkora ist ein bildner, maler, welcher diesen uns
hier interessierenden teil seiner schöpfung mit statischen geometri-

Jiří Valoch's original text for the "Tendencies 4" colloquium, 1968, Zagreb, typewritten text, MSU Documentation and Information Department, NT archive / Authors / Valoch -2

schen strukturen begann, die aus grundlegenden geometrischen figuren
komponiert waren. allmählich bemühte er sich um eine gewisse variabi-
lität dieser elemente, um die möglichkeit bestimmte statistische
beziehungen zwischen den grenzelementen zu gewinnen. das interesse
um die zufallsorganisation brachte ihn zur wahl mittels eines spiel-
würfels, womit er in die nähe einiger älterer kreationen von morellet
kam. die weitere richtung führte ihn zur ausnützung des computers —
er lässt sich in numerischer ausdruckform die variationen der
beziehungen derx elemente bearbeiten. diese transponiert er dann ins
"bildy d. i. er reiht die elemente und farben an einzelne zeichen und
mit hilfe von schablonen malt er — persönlich — ein bild. das bild selb
ist dann nur die mechanische ausführung, welche der bildner selbst
realisiert, in dem er nur die funktion eines blossen "wiedergebers"
dessen erfüllt, was bereits in einer anderen form vom computer reali-
siert ist.

die situation der beiden tschechischen autoren scheint mir ausserorden-
tlich beispielgebend zu sein; die schöpfung von sýkora stellt eine
gewisse ausnahme insofern vor, als ein professioneller bildner bewusst
den schöpfungsprozess dem computer überlässt. es ist ein gegensatz zb.
zur arbeit von charles csury, der den computer als werkzeug zu eigener
arbeit benützen will. — im falle von sochor reduziert sich die rolle
noch radikaler, da der auswahl, das ist doch die "arbeit" des zuschau-
ers, und nicht des autors. ich gestehe, dass mir die möglichkeit eines
teams, in dem auch ein bildner im tradizionellen sinne "enthalten" ist,
gewisse bedenken hervorruft, die mir eben das beispiel von csury
zu bestätigen scheint. im falle von csury ist der computer bloss ein
gerät, ein werkzeug, welches das zu realisieren hat,was für den bildner
schwer ausführbar ist. der computer wird somit in die reihe moderner
technischer hilfsmittel eingesetzt, die eine vereinfachung xkxx der
künstlerischen tätigkeit oder bestenfalls ihre bereicherung um neue
abarten zur aufgabe haben. das ist bestimmt nützlich und es entspricht

2

Jiří Valoch's original text for the "Tendencies 4" colloquium, 1968, Zagreb, typewritten text, MSU Documentation and Information Department, NT archive / Authors / Valoch -2

der ausnützung von computern in manchen anderen gebieten menschlicher

tätigkeit. es ist jedoch nicht die bedeutendste ausnützung, denn das

ziel werden wir wahrscheinlich viel eher darin sehen, dass es möglich

sein wird eine neue, andere ästhetische objekte zu schaffen. schliessl

ist nicht das ziel der computer-kunst das, womit sie mit der tradizio-

nellen kunst verbunden wird, aber eben das, wodurch sie sich untersche

det. der computer als gerät oder werkzeug ist möglich, als schöpfer

oder mitschöpfer unentbehrlich. natürlich kann man nicht den computer

als ein neues mittel zur realisierung der tradizionellen xxxxxx kre-

ationen ausschliessen. soweit es sich aber nicht um die ersten versuxh

handelt, die voll erstaunen darüber sind, dass " der computer dasselbe

kann, wie der mensch", dann wird man damit rechnen müssen, dass auf

diese weise entstandene objekte eher einen studienwert besitzen werden,

als eine eigene ästhetische geltung. und umgekehrt : ein computer,

der selbst schöpfer sein wird, d.i. der vom programator so ausgenützt

wird, dass seine spezifischen möglichkeiten realisiert werden, gewährt

bedeutende beiträge zur einer ästhetischen organisation , d.h. zu

jener beseitigung der unorganisation, die von a.a.mâles als ziel der

kunst angesehen wird.

deshalb schätze ich die schöpfung beider tschechischer autoren, weil si

sich die grenzen ihrer "menschlichen" möglichkeiten bewusst waren und

da sie etwas realisieren wollten, was über die grenzen ihrer möglich-

keiten war, stellten sie sich freiwillig auf eine zweitrangige stelle

in diesem "mensch – computer" team. sie beweisen damit mehr, als jene,

die sich bemühen die spezifischen möglichkeiten des computers zu

unterdrücken, um sich der tradizionellen schöpfung zu nähern.

                    jiří valoch
                    brno, 5 vi 68

                                      3

Jiří Valoch's original text for the "Tendencies 4" colloquium, 1968, Zagreb, typewritten text, MSU Documentation and Information Department, NT archive / Authors / Valoch -2

TENDENCIJE 4
Galerija suvremene umjetnosti   Programme-information
Z a g r e b / Katarinin trg 2   PI-4
                                                        April 1968

                        NOTIFICATION OF THE WORK

Name of author . .Jiří . V A L O C H . . . .
II/1: Title . . . .
        year of origin . . . .
        technological characteristics . . . .
        size . . . .
        price . . . .

II/2 a) Computer graphic
        title . . . .
        year of origin . . . .
        technological characteristics . . . .
        size . . . .
        computer . . . .
        print . . . .
        where was the work produced . . . .
        PLEASE INCLUDE WITH EACH WORK OR SERIES OF WORKS THE
        PROGRAMME QUOTING THE RANDOM ELEMENTS, THE PRINCIPLE
        OF WORK, THE MODEL APPLIED, EXPLANATION OF THE MODEL
        THE PRESENCE OF INTUITION.
        b) Other materials
II/5,7 Theme " COMPUTER - EIN WERKZEUG ODER EIN SCHOEPFER ? "
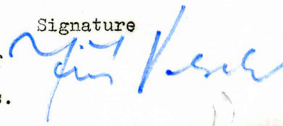   year of origin . 1968. . . . .
II/6 Title . . . .
        year of origin . . . .

 1. Photography of the exhibit
 2. Photography of the author

I accept all the conditions named in the invitation and PI-2
Please return the exhibits to this address: . . . .
. . . .
This form should be sent to the secretary's office of T-4
till May 25. 1968.

Date 21 v 1968   Signature
        Thank you for the correct filling of
        this form. If the room in this form
        is not enough, please add more pages.

Jiří Valoch's original text for the "Tendencies 4" colloquium, 1968, Zagreb, typewritten text, MSU Documentation and Information Department, NT archive / Authors / Valoch -2
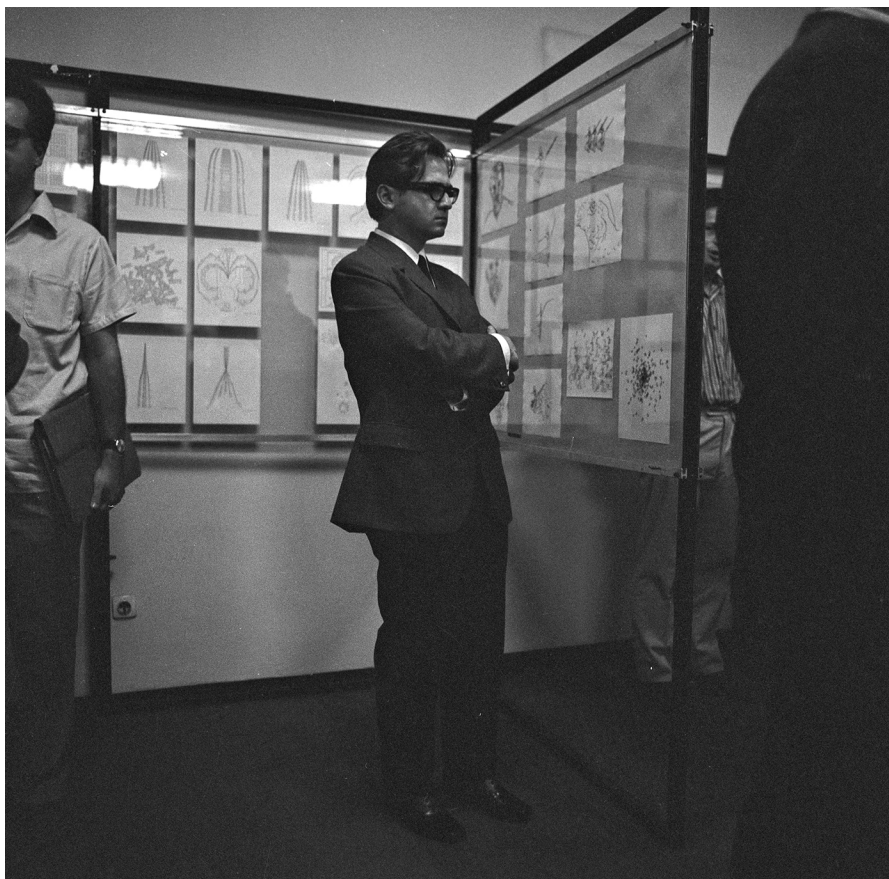
Jiří Valoch at the "Tendencies 4 – Computers and Visual Research" exhibition, KIC, Zagreb, 1968, b/w photograph, MSU Documentation and Information Department, phototeque / NT / T 4 / KIC / Valoch -1

According to Valoch (fig. 2), via theoretician Radoslav Putar's invitation, in April of the same year he participated in the international colloquium *Computers and Visual Research* in Zagreb (August 3–4, 1968). The colloquium was part of the international event program of *Tendencies 4,* comprising five exhibitions and side events of the New Tendencies movement (1961–1973). The New Tendencies international movement (or network) was created on the initiative of several influential artists and curators from Zagreb in 1961. These included artist Almir Mavignier; theoreticians and members of the Gorgona Group Matko Meštrović, Radoslav Putar, and Dimitrije Bašičević; architect and EXAT 51 group member Vjenceslav Richter; EXAT 51 group member and designer of all New Tendencies publications Ivan Picelj; the Zagreb Gallery of Contemporary Art curator, Boris Kelemen; and the Gallery of Contemporary Art director, Božo Bek.

Over a period of fifteen years (1961–1975), as part of the activity of the then-Gallery of Contemporary art and with the collaboration of several other institutions, five exhibitions (1961–1973), symposia, and round tables were organized. These were followed by many studies and magazines (*bit International*) on the topic of contemporaneous art, including and at the same time discussing different styles of Neo-Constructivist, kinetic, optic, computer and conceptual art from around the world, regardless of its division into East and West.

"bit International" no. 3, Galleries of the City of Zagreb, 1968, Zagreb, MSU Library, inv. no. 1604

Valoch's application for and his original text presented at the colloquium *Computers and Visual Research* were both written in German. The application, received on June 3, 1968 (fig. 3), besides the usual biographical information also contains information about his artistic creations in the field of visual or experimental poetry ["experimentalle poesie"], many exhibition activities ("20 Austellungen der konkrete und visuelle kunst in Europa und Amerika"), and the already-strong curatorial and critical discourse directed toward "konkrete und programirte kunst." The text (fig. 4) titled "computer – schöpfer oder werkzeug?" [Computer – Creator or Tool?], in the application titled "computer – ein werkzeug oder ein schöpfer," was written on a typewriter and published in the New Tendencies publication (fig. 5) *bit International.* The significance of this is witnessed by the colloquium participation of the authors of theoretical texts. These included the theorist Abraham Moles, and artists Marc Adrian, Herbert Franke, and Frieder Nake (alongside Valoch, with whom he had previously collaborated in Brno). Valoch was also on the organizational board for the *Tendencies 4* exhibition held in 1969, for which Helena Musilová claims that he couldn't participate in the jury, as at the time he was organizing the *Partitury* exhibition, the first of its kind in Eastern Europe.

The Marinko Sudac Collection holds a letter that points to Valoch's contact with Branimir Donat (fig. 6), the Croatian poet and theoretician of visual and concrete poetry, in which Donat's work on collecting artworks for a "book" on concrete poetry can be seen. The "book" he mentions in actually *bit International* magazine (no. 5/6) from 1969, New Tendencies' publication (fig. 7), which includes the essay "Konkretna poezija – poetska kozmogonia tehnološke ere" [Concrete Poetry – Poetic Cosmogony of the Technological Era], in which Donat gives a comprehensive overview of achievements in the medium, both European and worldwide. For Czechoslovakia he found that there was "a relatively large number of artists who try to point to the poetic value of the sign materiality of written language […] J. Hiršal and B. Gregorova should be mentioned here, who were oriented to writing semantic poetry, then J. Valoch, E. Ovčaček, J. Kolar, and V. Havel." *Bit International* published the works of the most important poets of the time, as well as the most important texts on the topic, such as the one by Max Bense titled "Concrete Poetry."

Almost a year later (April 27, 1970), Valoch wrote to the director of the Gallery of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, Boris Kelemen, (fig. 8) with a request that he send *bit* 5/6, which included his "visual text" – a reproduction of *Hommage à Vasarely*. In the same letter, he gave thanks for the third issue of the revue, which he had received, in which his text "Kompjuter–stvaralac ili oruđe" [Computer – Creator or Tool] had been published (previously presented at the *Tendencies 4* colloquium). Valoch also stated that it had been a while since he had heard from Branimir Donat, who still had some of his works, which he had exhibited at the "Center" gallery. This reference is to the international anthology exhibition *Vizuelna poezija* [*Visual Poetry*], held from March 21 – April 3, 1969, at the Centar Gallery in Zagreb, 12 Gundulićeva Street. The exhibition's title was adapted to *Vizuelna i konkretna poezija–fenomen suvremene epohe komunikacija* [*Visual and Concrete Poetry – Phenomena of the Contemporary Communication Epoch*] when printed in the catalog and as a poster (fig. 9). The list of exhibitors gives many names of visual and concrete poets worldwide, such as Pierre Garnier (France); Ernst Jandl and Heinz Gappmayer (Austria); Eugen Gomringer and Ferdinand Kriwet (West Germany); Ugo Carrega (Italy); Alain Arias Misson and Paul de Vree (Belgium); Bob Cobbing (United Kingdom); and Jiří Valoch and Eduard Ovčaček (Czechoslovakia). Yugoslav exhibitors included Branimir Donat and Josip Stošić (Zagreb), and Iztok Geister Plamen, Matjaž Hanžek, and Vojin Kovač-Chubby from the OHO Group (Ljubljana). The works Valoch exhibited (fig. 10) were *Typogram* (1965), *Triady* (1964), *Untitled* (1967), *Untitled* (1967), *Untitled* (1968), and *Verba Movent* (1967).

Zlatko Tišljar, exhibition flyer for "Vizuelna poezija [Visual Poetry]", Centar Gallery, 1969 (March 21 – April 3, 1969), Marinko Sudac Collection, Zagreb
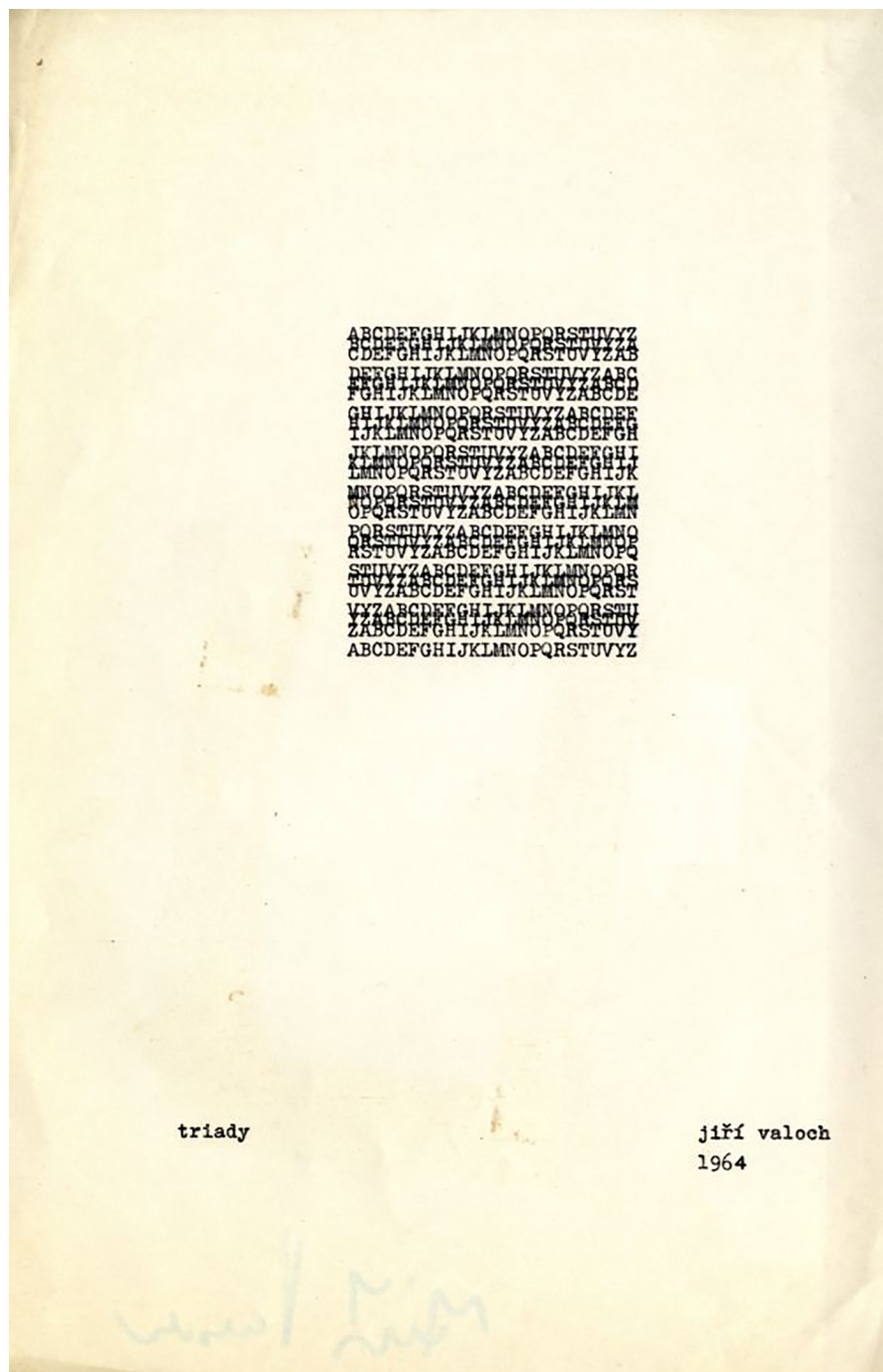
Jiří Valoch, "Triady", 1964, typewritten text, paper, Marinko Sudac Collection, Zagreb

The aforementioned works are part of the Marinko Sudac Collection, as well as all the other exhibited works, which were part of Branimir Donat's bequest. In 2011 all the artworks from Donat's bequest were presented at the exhibition *Branimir Donat i vizualna poezija* [*Branimir Donat and Visual Poetry*] at the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts' Glyptotheque in Zagreb. In the same letter, Valoch asked Kelemen to send him the *Tendencies 4* catalog (fig. 11) if it had been printed, and in exchange sent one of his publications, *Optical Book* (printed in Italy) and a smaller catalog. In the letter's introduction he states how he has "occasionally" received information on "Yugoslav visual poetry" from the Slovene poet Franci Zagoričnik.

Several letters that Zagoričnik wrote to Valoch during the 1970s confirm this fact, and show his direct link to the Slovenian conceptual OHO Group. In one of them (fig. 12), coincidentally, he once again addressed the topic of *bit International* no. 5/6 as part of the shipment, along with *Katalog 2*, a publication by the OHO Group.
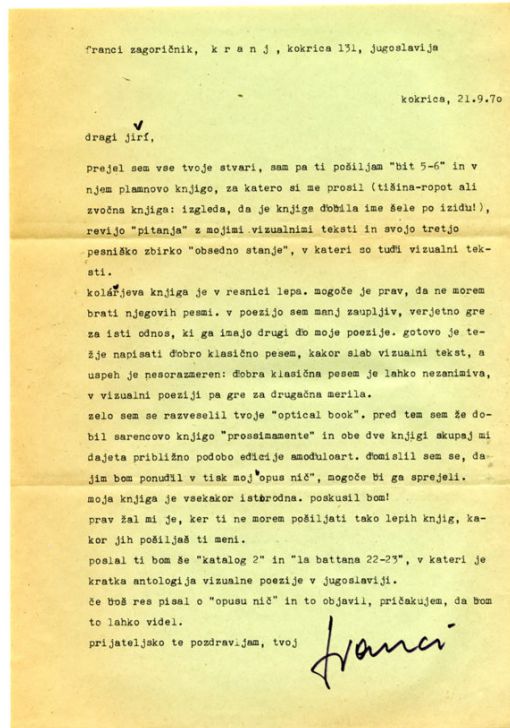

F. Zagoričnik's letter to J. Valoch (September 21, 1970), Marinko Sudac Collection, Zagreb

During 1970, Valoch made a series of actions and interesting land art works together with members of and collaborators with the group Young Friends of Visual Art MPVU [Mladí přátelé výtvarného umění]. Given the idea and instructions for rendering each land art project, the members realized projects following the instructions but also had some freedom in their performance.

The catalog foreword of *Realizované projekty* (fig. 13), written by Valoch, states that: "these actions belong to the Arte Povera domain; by some characteristics they are close to land art, and have certain qualities of the visual activities of the Yugoslav (Slovenian) OHO Group [...]. This publication documents the first phase of experiments (linked to actions and actions-poems from 1968 to 1969), which we will try to develop in the future." Valoch (or some of the collaborators) devised most of these actions. A year later, in 1971, Valoch organized the exhibition *Umění bez formy: projekty – koncpty – akce* [*Art without Forms: Projects – Concepts – Action*] (fig. 14), which featured many world-renowned artists, including the Slovenian OHO Group and conceptual artist Braco Dimitrijević as participants from former Yugoslavia. The OHO Group participated in another

of Valoch's exhibitions, the first to present photo-documentation of land, body, conceptual, and mail art in Eastern Europe (fig. 15). As a networking mediator for Eastern European artists, Valoch played a vital role in the emblematic publication *Aktuelle Kunst in Osteuropa* (1972). It was he who introduced Klaus Groh (artist, and author of one of the earliest summary books on the topic) to Marko Pogačnik (OHO Group member), who then sent material on Yugoslav artists to the publication (OHO Group, KÔD Group, and (∃ Group). The Yugoslav artists published in the book are Goran Trbuljak, Braco Dimitrijević, and Bogdanka Poznanović, with whom Valoch would later collaborate.
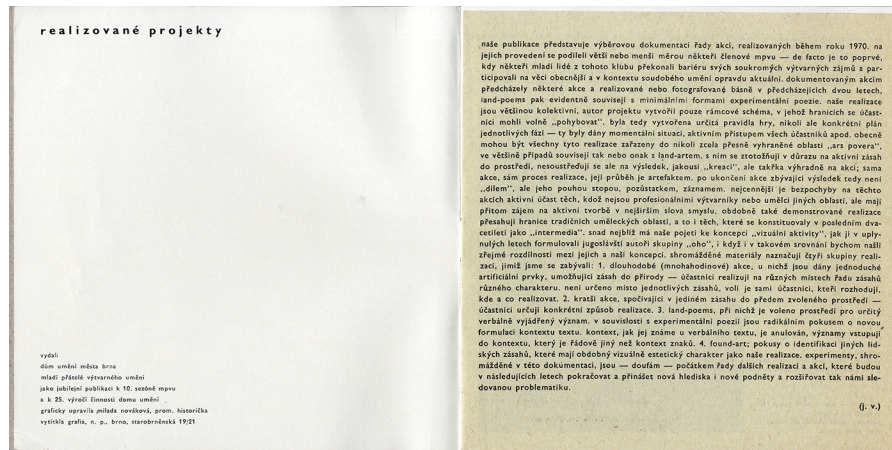
Jiří Valoch, "Realizovane projekty", Dům umění města Brna, 1970, print, paper, Marinko Sudac Collection, Zagreb
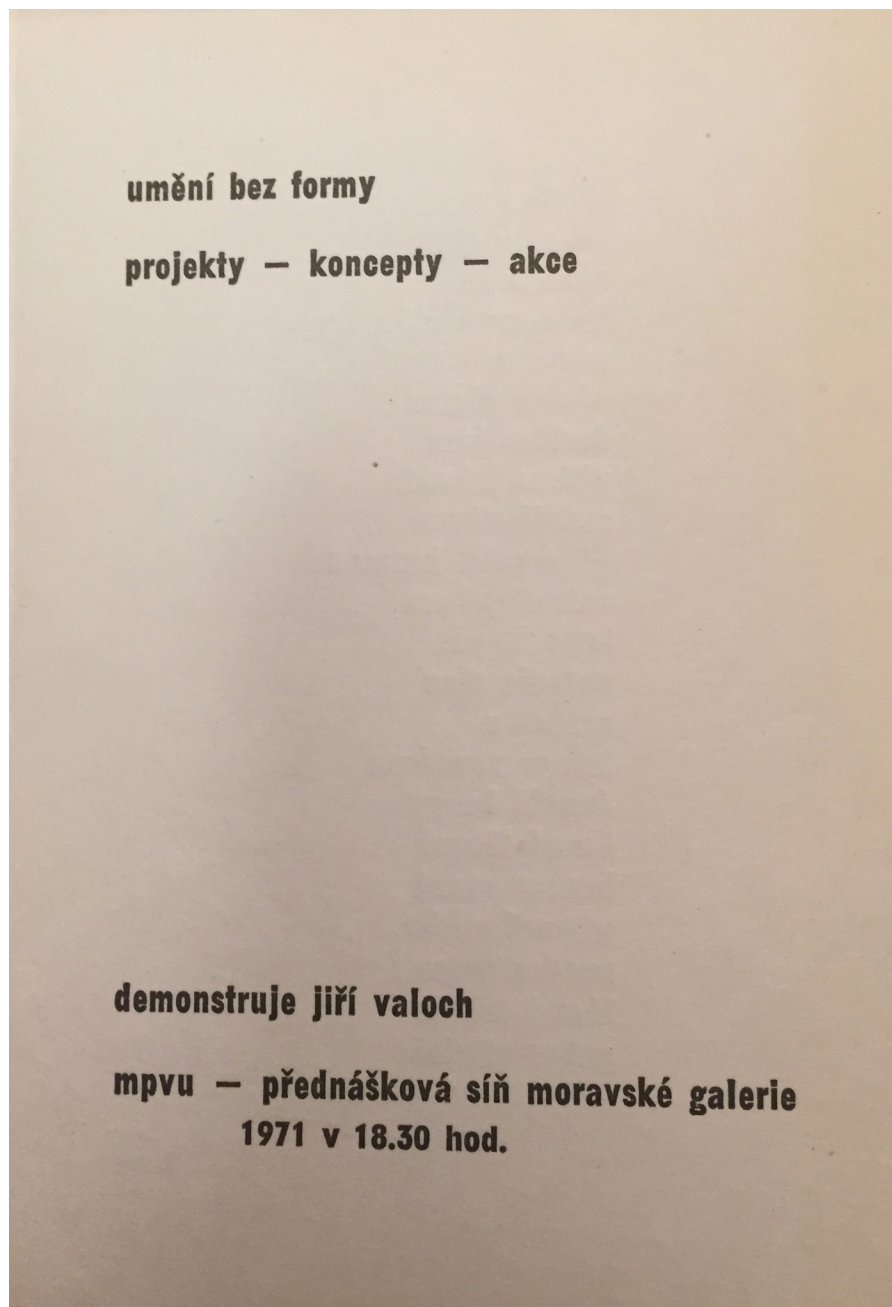
Jiří Valoch, exhibition booklet for "Umění bez formy: projekty – koncpty – akce" ["Art without Forms: Projects – Concepts – Action"], Dům umění města Brna, 1971, print, paper, Marinko Sudac Collection, Zagreb
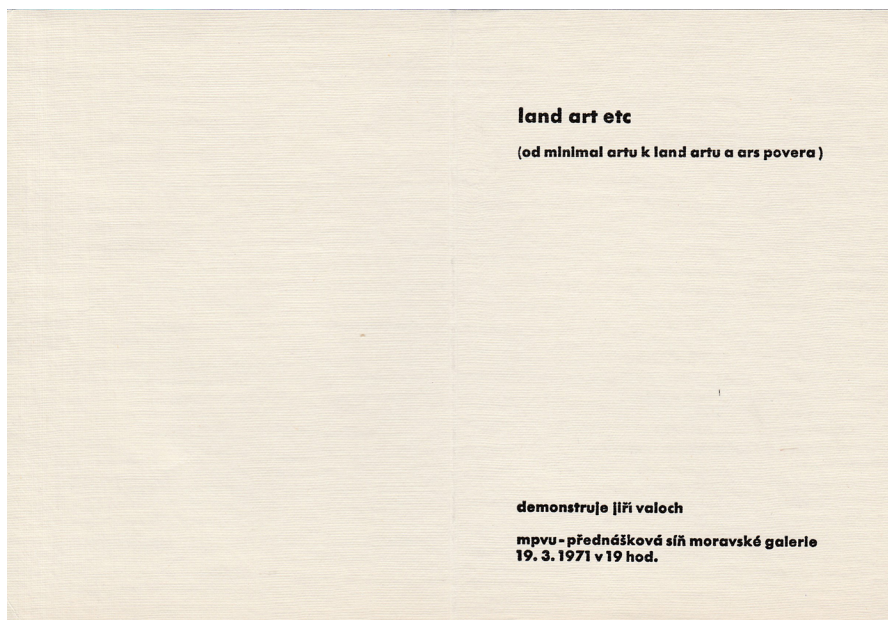
Jiří Valoch, exhibition booklet for "Land art etc (od minimal artu k land artu a ars povera)", Moravska Galerie, March 19, 1971, Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts' Fine Arts Archives, Zagreb, XEROX exhibition archive / 16.6.1973 / SC-31A


Jiří Valoch, exhibition booklet for "Land art etc (od minimal artu k land artu a ars povera)", Moravska Galerie, March 19, 1971, Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts' Fine Arts Archives, Zagreb, XEROX exhibition archive / 16.6.1973 / SC-31A

One of the most agile curators of the Zagreb Student Center Gallery during the 1960s and 70s (and the creator of numerous exhibitions of progressive art) was Želimir Koščević, with whom Valoch also had contact. Koščević organized the *XEROX* exhibition (June 14–30, 1973), which presented 68 artists (fig. 16) from around the world. The exhibited works were reproduced in *Novine Galerije Studentskog centra* no. 44 (fig. 17), and *Spot* magazine no. 5 (fig. 18) – specializing in photography – alongside the curator's text. The magazine was edited at the time by Radoslav Putar. The Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts' Fine Arts Archives holds a letter (fig. 19) in which Želimir Koščević asks Valoch for collaboration. Valoch subsequently sent his

conceptual works *Three Words Only* (fig. 20) and *False message* (fig. 21).
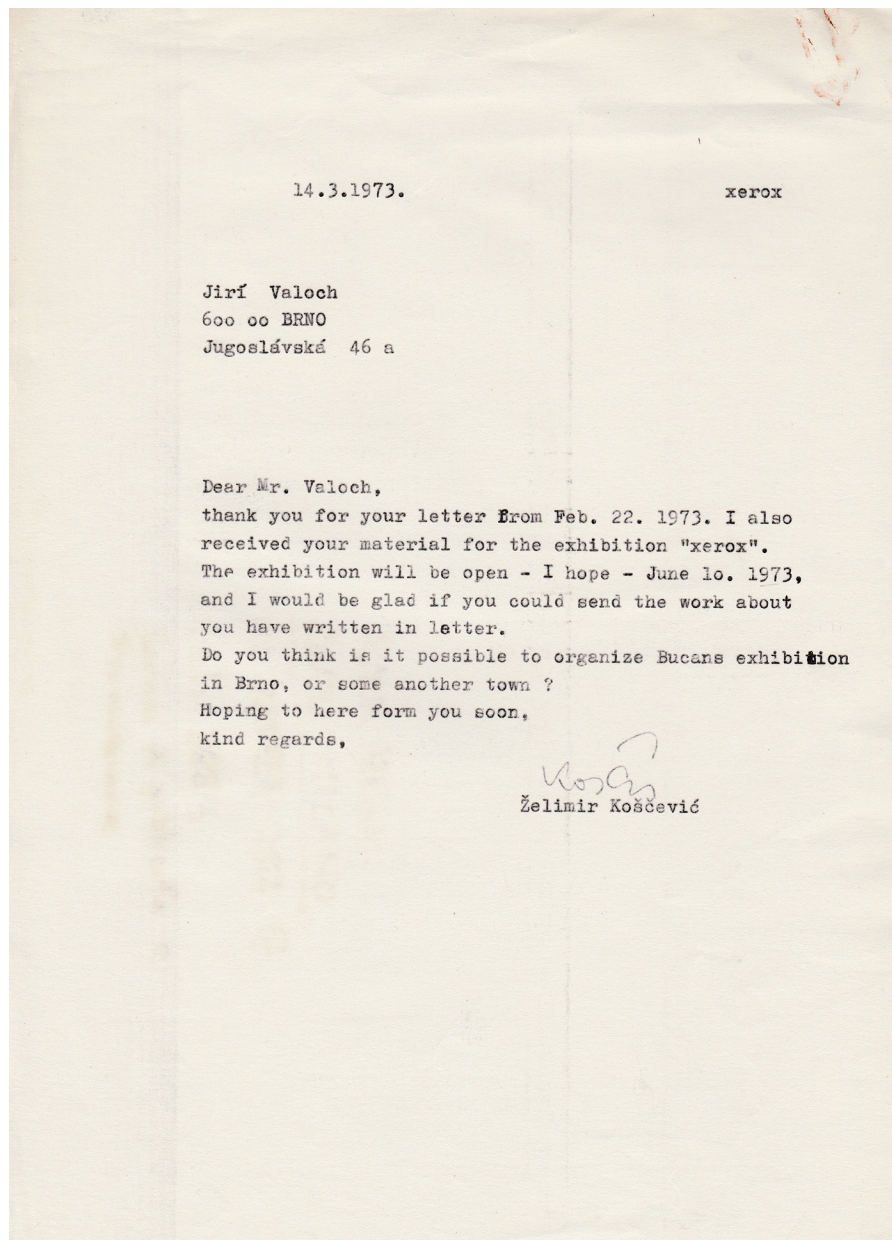
Ž. Koščević's letter to J. Valoch (March 14, 1973), Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts' Fine Arts Archives, Zagreb, "XEROX" exhibition archive / 16.6.1973 / SC-31A
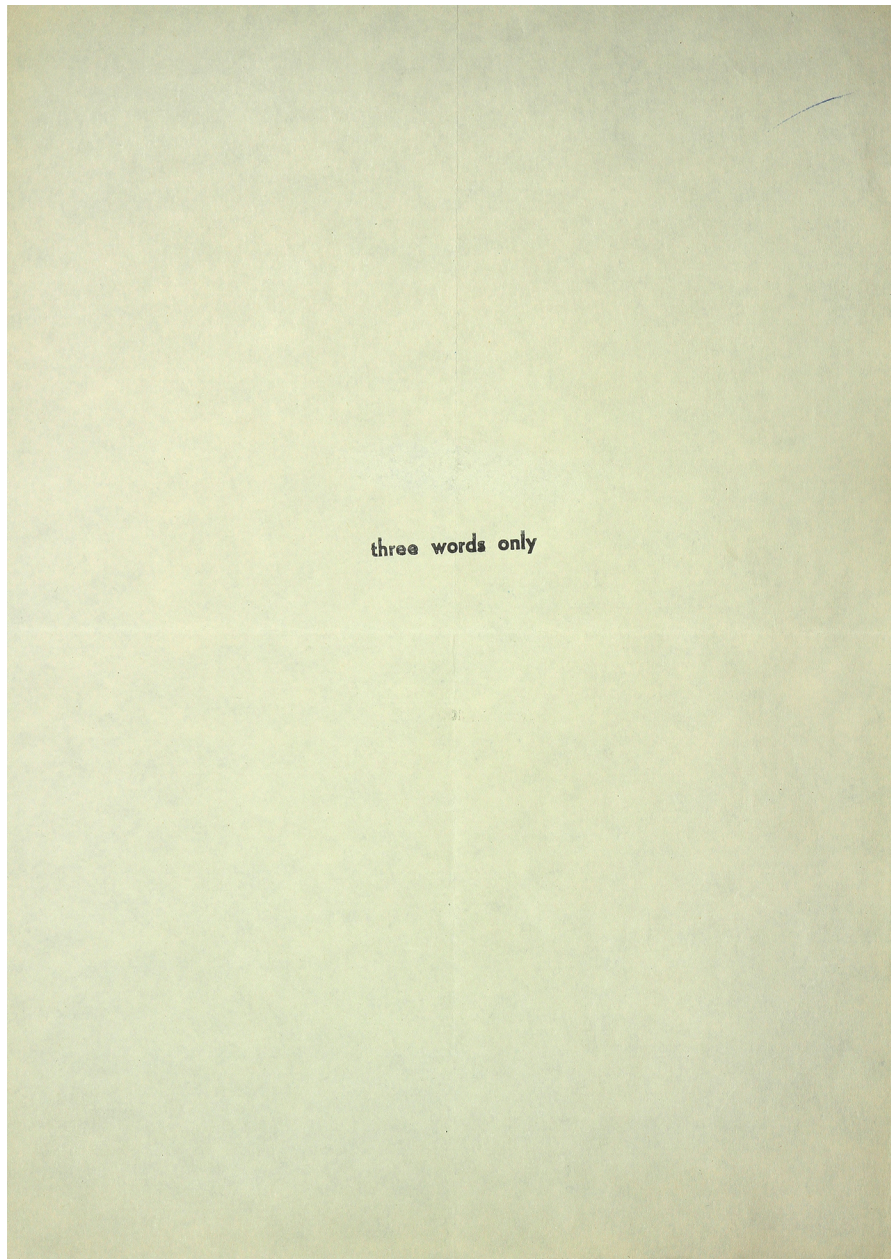
Jiří Valoch, "Three Words Only", 1973, typewritten text, MSU Documentation and Information Department / SC Archive / Xerox / Valoch / 1

In the same issue of *Novine Galerije Studentskog centra*, the Student Center Gallery thanks the experts – acknowledged European curators of the time: "Ida Biard, Klaus Groh, László Beke, and Federike Pezold for their help in realizing the *XEROX* exhibit, and to all its friends who spread information about this action." The exhibition's purpose was to present the possibilities of the then-new technology of the photocopying machine, utilized by many artists with differing artistic expressions and approaches. The exhibited artists were from West Germany, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands, USA, Canada, and Japan. They included individuals such as Bruno Munari, and a significant number of conceptual artists who had worked in the medium since 1968.
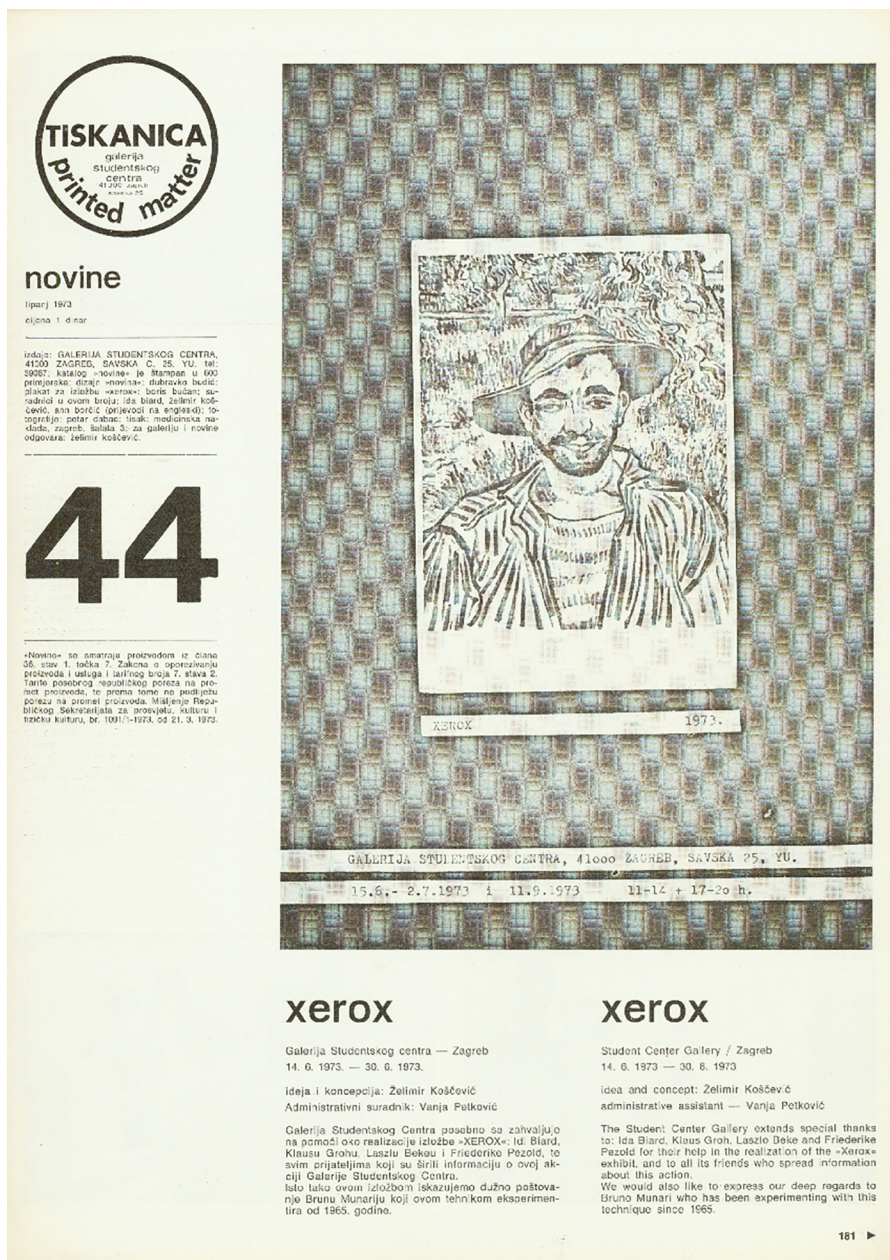
"Novine Galerije Studentskog centra" no. 44, eds. Ida Biard and Želimir Koščević, Student Center Gallery, 1973, Zagreb, offset print, MSU Library, inv. no. 1515

"Novine Galerije Studentskog centra" no. 44, eds. Ida Biard and Želimir Koščević, Student Center Gallery, 1973, Zagreb, offset print, MSU Library, inv. no. 1515
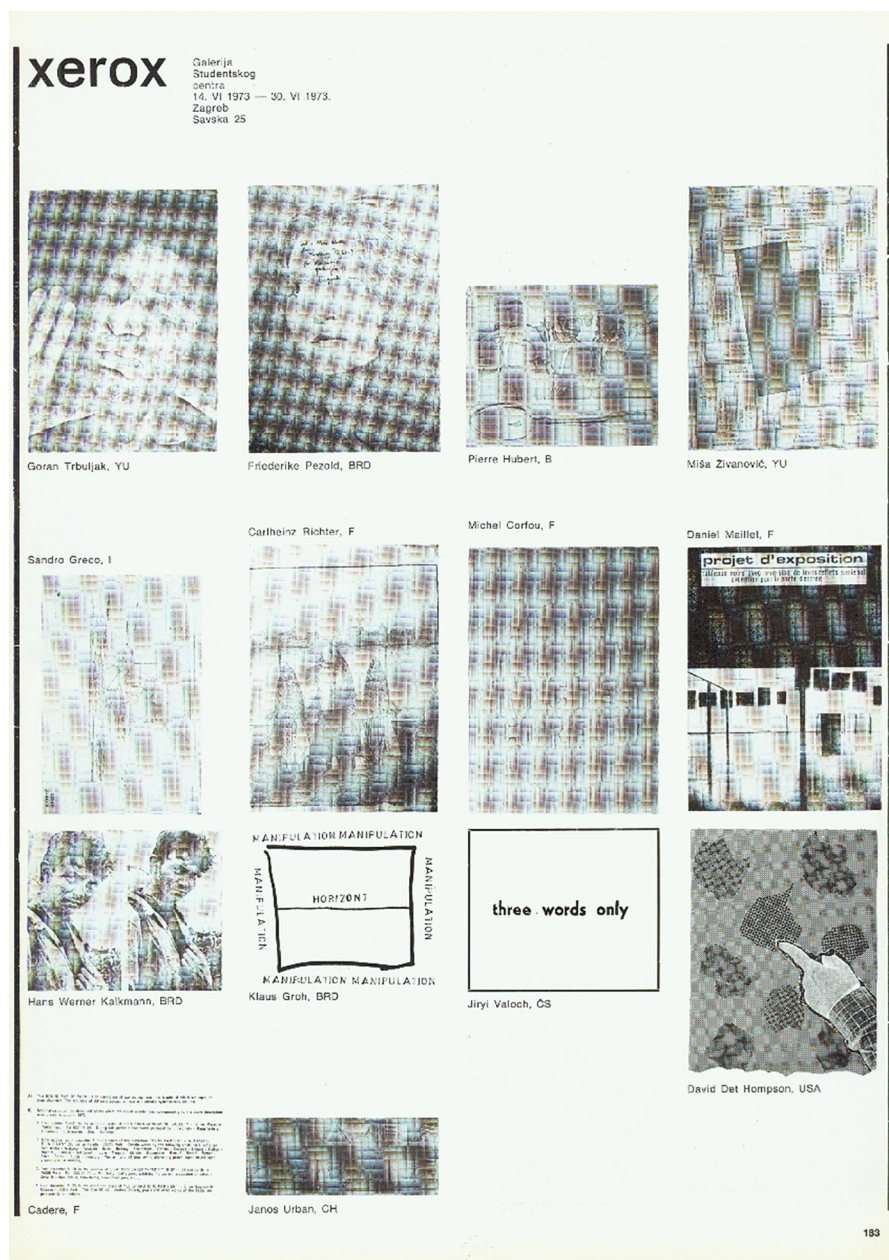
"Novine Galerije Studentskog centra" no. 48, ed. Ida Biard, Student Center Gallery, 1973, Zagreb, offset print, MSU Library, inv. no. 1515
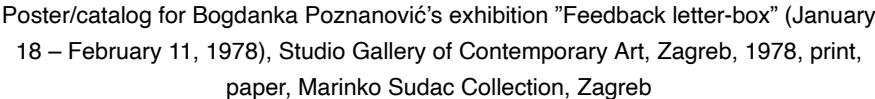
"Novine Galerije Studentskog centra" no. 48, ed. Ida Biard, Student Center Gallery, 1973, Zagreb, offset print, MSU Library, inv. no. 1515

Valoch showed his works at another exhibition in Zagreb that gathered many artists from across Europe. This was organized by the noted Croatian conceptual artist Goran Trbuljak, was titled *Još jedna prilika da budete umjetnik* [*Another Chance to Be an Artist*], and was held at the Student Center Gallery in Zagreb (fig. 22) from December 7–12, 1973. For it, Valoch made a series of nine black-and-white photographs (fig. 23). In them, he takes scenes from certain Zagreb streets and intervenes with them in his usual manner by adding the phrase *Something else, and not…* (*Something else, and not Savska Road…*).

Jiří Valoch, "Something Else, And Not", 1973, 9 x c/b photographs, text, inv. no. 1853
(1-9), MSU, Zagreb

Besides these events, he accepted an invitation to participate in mail art, specifically the communication project *Feedback letter-box, information-decision-action* (1973–1974) by the influential artist and lecturer from Novi Sad, Bogdanka Poznanović. Poznanović began the project on September 13, 1973, by "[…] sending to 45 addresses worldwide, to all the artists she had contact with, a photocopy of a photograph of her mailbox, alongside a request that the recipient send her, within a year (24/08/1971 – 20/07/1974), a photograph or drawing of their mailbox." For the *Feedback letter-box* project, she received 38 art responses to her address – Atelje DT 20 / FAVIT 00010 (Atelier DT 20, founded in 1972). Besides Valoch, the project featured many Eastern European artists, such as Zdisław Sosnowski, Andrzej Lachowicz, and Natalia LL, who all sent works (fig. 24). Valoch's photographs were also exhibited in 1976 at the international exhibition *Nf2 Fotografija kao umetnost* [*Photograph as Art*], organized by Biljana Tomić, together with many other Eastern European artists. The exhibition was focused on photography as a method or tool of mediating an artist's ideas.

Poster/catalog for Bogdanka Poznanović's exhibition "Feedback letter-box" (January 18 – February 11, 1978), Studio Gallery of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, 1978, print, paper, Marinko Sudac Collection, Zagreb

Conclusion

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, many exhibition projects were organized. They, alongside numerous publications, opened discussions on the valorization of art from the Eastern Bloc. But it is only in the last ten years or so that experts have managed to observe Eastern European art phenomena more objectively, and to amend the Western view of dissident, marginalized, and isolated art. Newer research shows that it is no longer possible to speak about the marginalized position of Eastern Bloc countries in relation to Western art centers. Sources and studies further confirm that the flow of information and the exchange of artistic ideas were not reserved solely for East-West relations, and in this case for East-Non-Aligned relations (the Eastern Bloc and the Yugoslav territory). The given examples show the numerous themes of exhibitions, projects, and events in Yugoslavia in which Valoch participated or collaborated, and also his interests: visual and concrete poetry, computer art, mail art projects, conceptual projects, and conceptual photo-series. The exhibitions included in this paper demonstrate that Valoch exhibited at almost every significant international project that improved media and curatorial practices in Yugoslavia during the 1960s and 70s (starting in 1968). Equally, based on the vast correspondence and other documents preserved in three institutions (the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts' Fine Arts Archives, the Collection and Archive of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, and the Marinko Sudac Collection), what can clearly be noted is the sheer amount of Valoch's *presence* in the scene behind the Iron Curtain, the continuity of his exhibiting activity abroad (*somewhere else than here…*) and in Yugoslavia, as well as the conditions and obstacles before and after normalization

in Czechoslovakia, regardless of the area of activity he was then engaged in, as an artist,
a curator, or a theoretician.

Ivana Janković

Ivana Janković graduated in Art History and Archaeology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb. She is curator at Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb. Her field of interest is in archives and private collections with focus on Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde Art practices in former Yugoslavia and Central Europe from 1950s until 1980s. She participated in several Museum's retrospective exhibitions of Croatian artists like Vlado Kristl (2007) and Aleksandar Srnec (2009), and was curator of many exhibitions such as *FOR ACTIVE ART – New Tendencies 50 Years Later 1961 – 1973* (2011) and *Antun Motika Experiments* (2012 and 2013), and exhibition projects organized in collaboration with the Marinko Sudac Collection / the Institute for the Research of the Avant-Garde like *Jiři Valoch The Power of Powerless*, projects *Artist on Vacation* (2016,2017,2018), *Rudolf Sikora, Julius Koller and the First Open Atelier* (2017). She is one of the authors of Gorgona group monograph (2018).

ISSN 2450-1611