

Prismatic Memories:

Comparative
Visual Politics in
Post-Yugoslav
Countries

došla sam

u Bosnu

Conference organized by
Hella Wiedmer-Newman, eikones

Collage of presenter case study images created by Leonardo Raviola.

Program

Thursday, May 22 – Keynote Lecture

18:15–19:00

Uroš Čvoro

“Accidental Postmodernism”

19:00–19:30

Q&A

19:30–21:30

Apéro riche

Friday, May 23

Histories & Narratives, Moderator: David Bucheli

09:30–09:45

Short intro

09:45–10:35

Gal Kirn

“From Erasure to Reconciliation to Emancipation: Contested Memory of Women’s Antifascist Protests in Ljubljana”

10:35–11:05

Coffee Break

11:05–11:55

Arban Mehmeti

“The Handke Project: Unheeded Lessons in Memory Culture and Neglect in Western Cultural Discourse”

11:55–12:45

Hella Wiedmer-Newman

“Punking the Protectorate(s): The Montaged Critique of Bojan Stojčić and Mladen Miljanović”

12:45–14:15

Lunch

Friday, May 23

Exhibitionary Politics, Moderator: Olexii Kuchanskyi

14:15–15:05

Nataša Jagdhuhn

“Transitional Metamuseology: Memorial Centre Lipa Remembers”

15:05–15:35

Coffee Break

15:35–16:25

Jovanka Popova

“All that Happened Will Happen Today: The Museum of Contemporary Art – Skopje and its Solidarity Collection”

16:25–17:15

Qëndresa Ajeti

“Shifting Narratives: Contemporary Visual Memory Projects in Post-War Kosovo”

Saturday, May 24

Activating Publics, Moderator: Anna Hodel Laszlo

09:30–10:20

Ana-Maria Milčić

“From Commemoration to Confrontation: Monument to Red Rijeka and Yugonostalgia in 2020”

10:20–10:50

Coffee Break

10:50–11:40

Melody Robine

“Counter-Mapping Memory: Maja Bajević’s and Hristina Ivanoska’s Feminist Interventions in Urban Space”

11:40–12:30

Hana Ćurak

“Here For Now: The Post-Yugoslav Diasporic Condition”

12:30–13:00

Final Discussion & Wrap-up

Abstracts and Bios

Uroš Čvoro, UNSW Sydney

Bio

Uroš Čvoro is an Associate Professor for Art Theory in the department of Arts, Design and Architecture at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia. He has authored numerous books, such as: *Turbo-Folk Music and Cultural Representations of National Identity in the Former Yugoslavia* (2014), *Images of War in Contemporary Art* (co-author, 2021), *The Trump Effect in Contemporary Art and Visual Culture* (co-author, 2022), *Transitional Aesthetics: Contemporary Art at the Edge of Europe* (2018) and *The Politics of Artists in War Zones* (co-editor, 2023). He is also on the editorial board of the journal *ArtMargins*, where he publishes and edits work about art and culture from post-socialist countries.

Gal Kirn, Univerza v Ljubljani

Abstract

The lecture will first address a fascinating political phenomenon, the rise of the women’s protest movement during the fascist occupation of Ljubljana in 1943. I will show in what way that movement presented a rupture and contributed to new forms of female subjectivity. At the same time these women-led protests have been remembered in ambivalent and even antagonist ways in times of (post)socialism that made visible an ideological struggle among the Communist Party, the Catholic Church and female civilians. The 1990s transition had various regressive detours, one of those being an attempt to eradicate the memory of and a monument to, women-led protests, while also triggering a new wave of women’s memory activism.

Bio

(*Qualified as an Assistant Professor of Cultural Sociology, Slovenia) Gal Kirn is a research associate at the Chair of Cultural Philosophy/Philosophy of Cultures at the European University Viadrina. He primarily works in the fields of cultural sociology, critical memory studies, and theories of decolo-

nial, ecological, and social transformation. One of his main research areas is Southeast Europe, which he attempts to place within broader postsocialist and decolonial currents. Most recently, Gal Kirn led the research group „Protests, Art Practices, and Memory Culture in the Post-Yugoslav Context“ (University of Ljubljana, 2021-2025). His publications include *Partisan Ruptures* (Pluto Press, 2019), *The Partisan Counter-Archive* (De Gruyter, 2020), and *Nights of the Dispossessed: Riots Unbound* (edited with Natasha Ginwala and Niloufar Tajeri, Columbia Press, 2021). His new book *Memory of Liberation* (Ljubljana University Press, 2025) is forthcoming.

Arban Mehmeti, Humboldt Universität, Berlin

Abstract

The absence of an official memory culture from the 1990s has created a void not only in the Western Balkans, particularly regarding the post-war periods in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, but also in Western Europe. This work examines artistic efforts and theatre plays from the Western Balkans that challenge the „official“ memory culture centred on „strong men“ and historical revisionism, focusing instead on civil victims and missing persons of the recent wars. It also questions how these wars are remembered on a global scale.

The presentation highlights the work of Austrian writer Peter Handke, whose book on the Balkan wars is seen as pro-Serb. The Kosovar theatre play „The Handke Project,“ featuring an international cast, offers an artistic critique of Handke's work. Additionally, it addresses the perpetuation of ignorance in Western cultural circles and the void created by the absence of an official collective memory in the Western Balkans, which fosters a fertile ground for continued conflict.

Finally, these points prompt us to consider how the lessons learned from these scenarios might be applicable to the situations in Ukraine.

Bio

Arban Mehmeti is a PhD candidate at Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany. As a Social Scientist, his primary research interests encompass Conflict and Peace Studies, Cultural Studies, and Disinformation in the Western Balkans. His current research focuses on the „Cultural peacebuilding pro-

cess between Kosovo and Serbia.“ Additionally, he has extensive experience working with think tanks on various topics related to the Western Balkans within his areas of expertise.

Hella Wiedmer-Newman, eikones – Center for the Theory and History of the Image, Basel

Abstract

Research into post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) with a focus on art as a tool of reconciliation and transitional justice or the like is itself subject to critique, for its instrumentalization of contemporary art and its narrative of wholesale Bosnian victimization. This presentation re-inscribes the “protectorate” into the “post-conflict.” A system of international administration, the UN-protectorate is both covert and ever-present in everyday Bosnian life, with important variations depending on whether one lives in the Bosnian Federation or the Serb Republic. Especially in the past five years, I argue, in the face of acute military aggression in Ukraine and Gaza, as well as a shifting NATO situation, geopolitics has entered the memorial and political discourse in BiH in explicit ways and is manifest in ideological art and culture projects. Focusing on Bojan Stojčić's 2023 video work *Hope Hotel Phantom*, I will suggest how artists are both starting to memorialize and thereby create the beginning of the Dayton era and, at the same time, critique the operations of the Bosnian UN-protectorate.

Bio

Hella Wiedmer-Newman is a PhD candidate at the eikones Center of the University of Basel, where her dissertation investigates the visual memory politics emerging within the post-conflict protectorate of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Her chapter, “Unsettled: Narrative Strategies in Exhibitions about the ‘Global Refugee Crisis’,” appeared in the 2024 Palgrave edited volume *Beyond Regime and Refuge: Contemporary Representations of Forced Migration in Europe*. And she published an article on Selma Selman's activist art practice in *ArtMargins* in 2022. She also writes art and exhibition criticism for various outlets, engaging with contemporary issues in the art world and their socio-political implications.

Abstract

Taking into account that the narrative of the People's Liberation Struggle was the pillar on which the identity of socialist Yugoslavia rested, it becomes clear that the disintegration of the common state brought with it the demand for a revision of the relationship of Post-Yugoslav societies towards this part of their past. However, even three decades after the breakup of Yugoslavia, in most of the memorial WWII museums the permanent exhibitions conceptualized during Yugoslavia have been retained without any changes or with only minor additions. It turns out that the politics of ethno-nationalism, as an imperative imposed on the institutions of collective memory, cannot be consistently applied in the revaluation of museums created on the completely opposite principles of the "politics of inclusion."

This paper discusses how the post-Yugoslav transition has opened up the possibility of viewing the memorial WWII museums as historical artifacts by focusing on the Memorial Centre Lipa Remembers (re-opened in 2015). This is the only museum in ex-Yugoslav region that based the new concept of its permanent display on the auto-reflexive method, according to which it allows visitors to discover the way in which this institution was built and how heritage was cultivated and communicated in Yugoslavia.

Bio

Nataša Jagdhuhn is a museum and cultural theorist. Her research is located at the intersection of (art)history, critical heritage, museum and memory studies. Jagdhuhn completed her doctorate at FSU Jena in 2020; in 2022, her dissertation was published under the title "Post-Yugoslav Metamuseums" (Palgrave Macmillan, series "Studies in Cultural Heritage and Conflict"). Currently, she works as research associate at the Chair of History of Science at the HU of Berlin where she investigates the historico-political grounding of the decolonial turn in museum theory and practice, particularly the Non-Aligned Movement's pivotal role in this process during the global Cold War.

Abstract

In the wake of Skopje's devastating earthquake in 1963, an initiative spearheaded by the United Nations prompted artists from around the world to respond with valuable contributions of artwork donations. This generous gesture led to the creation of a unique collection at the Museum of Contemporary Art - Skopje.

The collection spans diverse geographical regions from all over the world. Its establishment was not only a humanitarian response but also a significant cultural and political gesture. It served as a diplomatic tool to enhance political alliances, foster international unity and address the needs of a devastated city. The relevant questions arise: How does a humanitarian initiative become a powerful political statement? In what ways does „The Skopje Solidarity Collection“ reflect global political dynamics? What role did the international initiative of solidarity play in shaping geopolitical relations during the Cold War? How can we speak of solidarity in an increasingly globalized yet divided world? Can we understand and apply the concept of solidarity today? How do the principles demonstrated by the Museum of Contemporary Art - Skopje inform current practices of cultural and social engagement? By revisiting the museum's historical roots and envisioning its future, and through drawing parallels between solidarity in the past and our present, the presentation will also focus on the ongoing relevance of collective action in addressing current and future crises.

Bio

Jovanka Popova (1980, Skopje) is a curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art - Skopje and Press to Exit Project Space. She was curator of the North Macedonian Pavilion at 58 Venice Biennale, and curator and coordinator for 14 Manifesta Biennale Prishtina Parallel Program in MoCA Skopje. She served as a board member at MoCA - Skopje. She was the executive director of the "Jadro" Association of the Independent Cultural Scene, North Macedonia. She was president of the Macedonian Section of the International Association of Art Critics. She is also a board member of AAC (Austrian Association of Curators). Currently, she is a visiting lecturer at Die Angewandte University of Applied Arts - Vienna.

Abstract

In the context of post-Yugoslav countries, visual memory projects often deal with contested histories, national identity, and political ideologies, shaping how societies remember and interpret past events. The first decade after the war, Kosovo was mainly focused on Public Memorials and Monuments, like statues, memorials of fallen soldiers etc. The last decade the approach has changed to more abstract way of visual memory projects such as exhibitions and installations. I will be focused on this study on the last decade by delving into some different approaches of artists in the afterwar challenges and the link to the past. They are hosted and funded by different institutions and also have different approaches, with what I want to give a broader overview of the political context in neoliberal Kosovo and the contemporary artists who are still connected to the past of Yugoslavia, most of whom were children during the war. I will use historical and political context linking it with the visual and theoretical materials of the visual memory projects. Through discourse and visual analysis of three projects that I will investigate deal with different topics that are still a big pain in Kosovo's society: 'I think for you' (2015), 'Living with the memories of the missing' (2019), and 'when the sun goes away we paint the sky' (2022).

Bio

Qëndresa Ajeti is a Ph.D. candidate at the Technical University of Munich at the Chair for the History of Architecture and Curatorial Practice. In her thesis, she analyzes the role of the Kosovo School of Architecture within the architectural culture of Socialist Yugoslavia (1978-1999). During the winter semester 23/24 she taught the seminar „Heritage to be rediscovered - Socialist Architecture of Former Yugoslavia“ at the Department of Architecture at TUM. She has actively participated in numerous international conferences, including recent presentations at EAHN24 and Mantovarchitettura. She is a recipient of the doctoral scholarship from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) from October 2022.

Abstract

Nemanja Cvijanović's *Monument to Red Rijeka – The Self-defensive Monument*, composed of 2,800 glass shards symbolising the Partisans who died liberating Rijeka after fascist Italy's 1943 capitulation, reconstructs a communist-era red star. Unveiled during Rijeka's tenure as European Capital of Culture in 2020, the monument provoked protests from Croatian nationalists. While ostensibly commemorating anti-fascist resistance, it selectively memorialises local Yugoslav communist history, omitting the regime's persecution of Italians, including executions and forced displacements. This selective amnesia reflects broader patterns of historical curation that privilege certain narratives while marginalising others. The unveiling followed a season of exhibition controversies—a problematic 2019 centenary exhibition in neighbouring Trieste, *Disobbedisco*, framed a post-World War One occupation of Fiume (now Rijeka) in apologetic terms, disregarding the city's multiethnic identity, while a local exhibition, *D'Annunzio's Martyr*, sought to critically address the occupation through feminist frameworks, only to be followed by neo-fascist demonstrations.

Adopting an interdisciplinary approach informed by memory studies, this paper examines Cvijanović's work within Croatia's cultural landscape and Rijeka/Fiume's contested heritage. By romanticising the Partisan legacy while eliding its repressive dimensions, *Monument to Red Rijeka* exemplifies Yugonostalgic aestheticisation, demonstrating how public monuments promote confrontational visual politics and impede a comprehensive reckoning with the city's complex multicultural past.

Bio

Ana-Maria Milčić holds an MA in art history from the University of Rijeka and a PhD from the Courtauld Institute of Art, where she focused on avant-garde art and the 1919 Italian occupation of Fiume (now Rijeka, Croatia). She currently teaches art history modules remotely at the Fine Art department of Northwestern Polytechnic in Canada and holds the position of Senior Research Officer at the Ben Uri Gallery and Museum in London. Her interests include art and dictatorial regimes, particularly Italian Futurism in Fiume, European Jewish avant-garde art, female exile artists in the UK, and the relationship between art and trauma.

Abstract

This paper examines the role of feminist artistic interventions in shaping public memory and space in post-Yugoslav contexts, focusing on the works of Maja Bajević (1967, Sarajevo) and Hristina Ivanoska (1974, Skopje). While their practices emerge from distinct socio-political landscapes, both artists critically engage with spatial politics, gendered invisibility, and the erasure of historical narratives through participatory and public art. This presentation examines how both artists use their practices to contest dominant memorial frames in Sarajevo and Skopje, revealing how gender, urban space, and public memory are negotiated in these two cities – which are often overshadowed by larger cultural and political centers within art historical narratives of late Yugoslavia.

In *Dressed Up* (1999), Bajević printed a map of Yugoslavia onto fabric, before cutting, sewing, and wearing it to embody the disintegration of her homeland, while constructing a new sense of self. This act of reappropriation interrogates the ways individuals re-anchor themselves in a history and spaces from which they have been dispossessed. Similarly, *Women at Work* (1999-2001), performed with displaced Bosnian women, transforms transient public spaces into sites of intimate mourning. By positioning domestic labor in the public sphere, Bajević challenges the – spatial and memorial – invisibility of refugee women's histories.

Hristina Ivanoska's ongoing project *Naming the Bridge: Rosa Plaveva and Nakie Bajram* (2004-) examines onomastics and historical dismissal in Skopje, a city often marginalized within post-Yugoslav discourse. While Sarajevo, marked by the war, has been central to regional memory politics in the past years, Skopje's memorial and spatial erasure stems from political neglect and nationalist reconfigurations. By advocating for a newly constructed bridge to honor two women—one Macedonian, one Turkish – who fought for literacy and women's rights, Ivanoska challenges nationalist and patriarchal urban narratives while interrogating the symbolic and material structures that shape urban spaces.

By juxtaposing Bajević's and Ivanoska's practices, this paper explores how

feminist artistic interventions can challenge hegemonic memory cultures, while proposing new models of public engagement. Situating their work within debates on spatial politics, gendered nationalism, and participatory art in post-Yugoslav cities, I argue that, through distinct approaches, both artists use counter-mapping strategies to reveal suppressed histories and challenge the inscription of national and gendered narratives in urban space.

Bio

Melody Robine is a PhD candidate at Sorbonne Université and Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS, Paris) under the direction of Alessandro Gallicchio and Nathalie Clayer, with the title "Reclaiming the city. Contemporary art and urban spaces in (ex-)Yugoslavia after 1980 : the cases of Sarajevo and Skopje". She received a Master's degree in Political Science from Sciences Po (Paris, France) and a Master's degree in contemporary Art History from Sorbonne Université. She worked in several French cultural institutions (Ministry of Culture, Villa Medici in Rome) and art galleries (Galerie Templon). Melody frequently curates exhibitions (French Institute in Sarajevo, French Institute in Skopje) and has presented her research in several conferences (Theocharakis foundation in Athens, Wien Universität, National Academy of Sciences of Tirana).

Hana Ćurak, Universität Zürich

Abstract

Diasporic former Yugoslavia is often framed through crisis narratives—war, economic collapse, and displacement—casting movement and its effects as an exception rather than an ongoing historical process. This talk challenges such framings by asking: What shifts when migration is seen not as rupture but as an ordinary, structuring force of daily life?

Grounded in understanding archival and visual practices and examples from different spatiotemporal points, the talk examines how post-Yugoslav diasporic experiences connect to displacement, belonging, and memory. On the one hand, it explores how dominant narratives disrupt national canon formation, situating post-Yugoslav diasporic condition within broader global histories of empire, neo-imperialism and renewed global rise of

fascism. On the other, drawing on autotheory and queer diasporic critique, it interrogates how everyday accounts of the diasporic condition complicate binary narratives—how lived experiences serve as archival interventions, contesting official historiographies and illuminating the intergenerational realities of the diasporic condition.

By moving beyond crisis discourse and exceptionalism, this talk positions post-Yugoslav diasporic condition as a key site for rethinking community, history, and political belonging—outside the confines of nationalism and dominant cultural narratives.

Bio

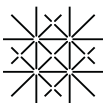
Hana Ćurak works as a research associate at the Humboldt University of Berlin, Institute for European Ethnology. Her research interests broadly emerge from the intersections of memory studies and cultural anthropology, focusing on contemporary art and curatorial practices.

In her PhD project (University of Zürich, Department of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies, from Spring 2024), titled „Collectiveness and Radical Futures: Shared Curatorship as Intervention“, Hana ethnographically explores whether collective curatorial practices are able to intervene across different temporalities and social and political contexts.

In Berlin, Hana is currently associated with the Collaborative Research Center „Intervening Arts“, where her research focuses on intervening collective curatorial practices in the context of (post)Yugoslavia.

She is the founder of the multimedia platform „Sve su to vještice (It's all Witches), a collective dedicated to building of a counter-archive of Yugoslav feminist history, with the aim of radical intervention into possible feminist futures.

University of Basel
eikones Forum
Rheinsprung 11
4051 Basel
eikones.philhist.unibas.ch



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