Press release

**NSK from *Kapital* to Capital**

**Neue Slowenische Kunst – an Event of the Final Decade of Yugoslavia**

11 May – 16 August 2015

Curator: Zdenka Badovinac

**Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, Cankarjeva 15**

Press conference: Monday, 11 May, 11 a.m., Moderna galerija’s auditorium

You are kindly invited to the opening ceremony of the retrospective exhibition *NSK from* Kapital *to Capital. Neue Slowenische Kunst – an Event of the Final Decade of Yugoslavia* on **Monday, 11 May 2015 at 8 p.m**. at the Moderna galerija, Cankarjeva 15. The inaugural speech will be given by the Minister of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia, Julijana Bizjak Mlakar, MA.

In 1984, three groups – the multimedia group Laibach (established 1980), the visual arts group IRWIN (1983), and the theatre group Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre (SNST) (1983–1987) – founded the Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) art collective. That same day, the three groups founded a fourth group, the design department New Collectivism. Later NSK established other subdivisions: the Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy, Retrovision, Film, and Builders.

The exhibition *NSK from* Kapital *to Capital* covers a period that marked the final decade of Yugoslavia, highlighting the fact that NSK was no less a critic of the coming global capitalism than of the failing outgoing socialism. In the latter respect it differed both notably and fundamentally from the liberal critique of socialism. Rather than employing the standard forms of artistic critique or irony, NSK based its approach on subversive affirmation and over-identification, articulating, among other things, the kind of society the groups envisioned after the collapse of socialism. Founding the NSK State in Time in

1992, they opted for a global community based not on territorial or economic principles but on aesthetics and thought.

In 1990, the Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung (the successor of the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre and Cosmokinetic Theatre Rdeči pilot) staged a production entitled *Kapital*; in 1991, IRWIN published a book and staged an exhibition entitled *Kapital*; and in1992, Laibach released an album entitled *Kapital.* With these projects the three core NSK groups marked the end of ideology and the beginning of total capitalism, which many continue to see as a social system without an alternative. Not so NSK: it has already established itself as an alternative institution and an alternative state, in both the concrete

and abstract senses of the word.

In the 1980s, NSK built its subjectivity through the deconstruction of various traumatic absences in Yugoslavia: the absence of the emancipatory potential of struggle for liberation, the absence of workers’ rights, the absence of an original national culture,and the absence of a developed art system and a strong state. In order to find a substitute for this considerable body of absences it devised, within the framework

of its aesthetic concept, a unique principle of construction that is at the same time a principle of deconstruction. NSK generally needs to be understood in terms of its complexity and ambivalence; no NSK work is merely an artefact, a painting, a theatre production, a concert, a publicity action, a provocation – as often as not it is all of these and more all at once. The various media and approaches employed combine to form a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a total work of art that transcends the boundaries of the usual understanding of art.

The exhibiting of NSK from *Kapital* to Capital is designed to trace both the many separate events that developed and the duration of the various concepts at work. Much like the 1980s marked a pivotal decade in politics, with a string of related events leading up to the bloodshed of the war in Yugoslavia in the 1990s, each NSK concert, exhibition, theatre performance or other public appearance triggered processes that have not yet run their course to this day. Employing the philosophical language of Alain Badiou, we could say that the NSK *Gesamtkunstwerk* was an event that ruptured with the established order of things. Every NSK event was a monolith with multiple meanings, new projects, and references stemming out of it.

The art of NSK could be compared to such international trends as appropriation art, institutional critique, and relational art, though these descriptions fail to encompass a crucial difference, one that NSK safeguarded by coining its own terms for what it did. NSK countered the postmodern art of the 1980s with its retro method, laying bare the ideological manipulation with images: Laibach with the retro-avant-garde, the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre with the retrogarde, and IRWIN with the retro principle. NSK differed from Western appropriation art in that it appropriated, with its events, the state itself and state institutions; it differed from the familiar paradigms of institutional critique in that it arrived at the conclusion that there was actually nothing to criticize, since both the state and the institutions first needed to be constructed; and it differed from usual relational art in that the NSK events of the early 1990s already involved the participation of others who wanted to see radical changes in the art system and who shared the same

sense and set of urgencies regarding the Eastern European cultural space in the new circumstances.

What can we take away, what lesson might be gleaned from NSK that could be of use to us today? At first glance, the NSK fusion of mutually exclusive symbols appears to have become an essential part of contemporary imagery. On the one hand, we are witnesses to a process of complete symbolic depletion, and on the other, to the reactivation of symbols. Today, this game of symbols is becoming uncomfortably similar to that of the dubious 1980s, making the NSK tradition more topical than ever.

The exhibition, which will be on view at the Moderna galerija until 16 August, will be accompanied by a **public program** including panel discussions, talks, projections, guided tours and workshops. From 19 June until 20 June an **international conference** will be held in the auditorium of the Moderna galerija, where the distinguished speakers will try to shed light on the legacy and present-day significance of the NSK art collective, the key lecture will be given by **Boris Groys**. On Saturday, 20 June, on the Summer Museum's Night at 10 p.m., a sound performance by Laibach live will take place infront of the museum.

A hardcover **book** will be published to accompany the exhibition, edited by **Zdenka Badovinac, Eda Čufer** and **Anthony Gardner** and co-published and distributed by MIT Press.

In 2016 the exhibition will travel to Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven (NL) and to the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow (RUS).

More about the exhibition on [www.mg-lj.si](http://www.mg-lj.si) and nsk.mg-lj.si.

The exhibition is part of the five-year programme The Uses of Art – the Legacy of 1848 and 1989, organised by L’Internationale. It is supported by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia, the European Union Culture Programme and the Foundation for Arts Initiatives. The publication is co-published and distributed by MIT Press and supported by Kontakt, the Art Collection of Erste Group and ERSTE Foundation.

