

Exception – The case of the exhibition of Young Kosovo Artists in Serbia

Jelena Vesić, Dušan Grlja, Vladimir Jerić Vlidi

This section deals with ‘the case’ of the exhibition *Exception – Contemporary art scene of Prishtina* and its violent (non)opening in Belgrade, happened during February of 2008. This event, overshadowed by the massive political turmoil before and after the local political leadership of Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia around the same time, in the circles of what could be described as ‘critical art and activist scene’ of Belgrade gained somewhat mythical connotations. The aim of the following three texts is to examine the conditions and constellations which were contributing to the emergence of such an event, to try to understand what it was exactly about, and to analyze its consequences. It is our opinion that [this video clip](#), viewed quarter of the million of times right after it was posted, tells a lot about the condition of contemporary societies in the region known as former Yugoslavia (you can find it re-posted [here](#), with somewhat apologetic description of the author translated in English – click on ‘more info’ to read it). The scarce conversation is in Serbian, but we do believe that the pictures are sufficient enough to portray the social tensions and desperate position of the ‘small individual’ caught in the unsolvable puzzle of ‘the society in transition’ and the vicissitudes of ‘politics of identity’ as the tool to ‘normalize’ what is perceived as the ‘periphery’ of today’s global capitalism.

Below you can find a chronology of the events surrounding the exhibition, and some links we managed to gather where some additional information could be found, together with discussions and reactions following ‘the case of *Exception*’.

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- [“Politics of Display and Troubles with National Representation in contemporary Art”](#)
by Jelena Vesić
- [“Four Acts and a Pair of Socks”](#)
by Vladimir Jerić Vlidi
- [“The Exception and State of Exception”](#)
by Dušan Grlja

Chronology of Events by Marko Miletić

January the 22nd 2008

The opening of the exhibition *Exception: The Contemporary Art Scene of Prishtina* in the Museum of Contemporary Art of Vojvodina, Novi Sad, organized by NGOs *Kontekst* from Belgrade and *Napon* from Novi Sad.

January the 25th 2008

The municipal committees of the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) and the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) as well as the Association of Evicted and Displaced Serbs from Kosovo demand the official Municipal authorities to close down the exhibition or they will do it themselves, as it was stated by them in the media. On the same day Dren Maliqi's artwork *Face to Face* becomes the object of various media manipulations.

February the 3rd 2008

The second round of presidential elections was held. Boris Tadić, the candidate of Democratic Party (DS), was elected.

February the 6th 2008

The exhibition *Exception* was moved to the *Kontekst* gallery in Belgrade. The call for gathering of all patriots in order to stop the opening of this exhibition was published at the web-site of the extreme right *Patriotic Movement Honor [Otečestveni pokret Obraz]* and in various daily newspapers.

February the 7th 2008

3 pm: The police notifies the organizers that several extremist groups announced that they will come and stop the opening of the exhibition.

6 pm: A couple of dozens of policemen in civilian clothes is in the gallery and in surrounding streets.

6.15 pm: Police cordons were set up in the surrounding streets preventing the extremists to approach and enter the gallery.

6.40 pm: Unidentified person succeeds to enter the gallery and tear down a part of Dren Maliqi's artwork depicting Adem Jashari. His accomplice finished the deed by destroying it completely.

6.50 pm: The organizers decide to proceed with the opening, leaving the dismembered artwork as a part of the exhibition.

7.05 pm: The introductory speeches have begun. After few sentences by the curators, one of the present "patriots", a painter and a member of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, wielding a stone in his hand, interrupts the speech insulting the organizers. Couple more people joins in, among which a woman who brought her two kids to spit on the "terrorist Shiptar art".

7.15 pm: The organizers demand police's action to enable the opening to be continued. Police officer in charge responded that they cannot deprive people of their freedom of speech.

7.20 pm: The police order the organizers to stop the opening, since they cannot guarantee the security of the event any more.

Afterward until 11 pm: The organizers and a part of the attendants, inspired by this incident gathered at the Center for Cultural decontamination and decide to publicly fight for the (re)opening of exhibition by forming a group *Workers in Culture [RUK]*.

February the 8th 2008

6 pm: The glass door of the *Kontekst* gallery was smashed, as well as the gallery sign.

The police advised the organizers, because of security reasons, to remove the artworks from the gallery during the night.

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February the 11th 2008

3 pm: The students of the University of Belgrade organize a protest entitled *Europe has No Alternative*. They demand the resignation of Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica if the government does not ratify the agreement with the EU.

February the 13th 2008

12 am: The press conference of RUK was held in the Belgrade's Media Center about the violent incidents that prevented the opening of the *Exception* exhibition.

February the 17th 2008

12 am: The Declaration of Independence was declared at special session of the Parliament of Kosovo.

7 pm: Hooligan groups made havoc in Belgrade, demolishing the embassies of the US, Slovenia, and the offices of the Liberal-Democratic Party (LDP), as well as the *McDonalds* restaurants. The press correspondents were attacked and several of them beaten up. Over 30 people were injured. The police reacted belatedly.

February the 20th 2008

The panel entitled *Europe has No Alternative* was held at the Media Center in Belgrade. The proponents of clero-fascist organizations verbally assaulted the speakers which were mostly the professors of the Belgrade University.

February the 21st 2008

The demonstrations entitled *Kosovo is Serbia* were held in Belgrade. During the course and after the demonstrations extreme right and hooligan groups set the US embassy and one of the *McDonalds* restaurants on fire, demolished Croatian, Turkish and German embassies, as well as some of the offices of foreign banks. Several news reporters were beaten up and some shops were looted. Over 200 people were injured. One casualty confirmed. The police reacted belatedly.

February the 28th 2008

Police bans the meeting entitled *A Window to Europe* of the student's movement *Europe has No Alternative*. After this ban, some members of this movement together with the Slovenian ambassador, replaced together the smashed window on the embassy of Slovenia.

March the 7th 2008

Police bans the action *In Search of Prime Minister* organized by the student's movement *Europe has No Alternative*.

March the 8th 2008

Police bans the public celebration of the International Women's Day in the organization of the *Women in Black* NGO.

4 pm: Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica on a government press conference announces that there is no more agreement within the coalition in power on the question of Kosovo and European integrations, and that the premature elections for the government will be held on May the 5th 2008.

Translated from the 7th of February newspaper, p 9,
(http://radniciukulturi.net/files/7februar_Glasilo%20Radnika%20u%20kulturi.pdf)

Links:

1. The catalogue of the exhibition "Exception - Contemporary art scene of Prishtina":
http://www.kontekstgalerija.org/pdf_08/odstupanje.pdf
2. RUK! statement:
<http://radniciukulturi.net/ruk>
3. RUK! newspaper:
http://radniciukulturi.net/files/7februar_Glasilo%20Radnika%20u%20kulturi.pdf
4. Reactions to the closing of the exhibition in *Reartikulacija* journal:
http://www.reartikulacija.org/RE3/ENG/stateofexception3_ENG_excep.html
5. *Rekapitulacija*
<http://www.msuv.org/publications/rekapitulacija2008/rekapitulacija2008.pdf>
6. Kontekst arhiva 06/07/08
http://www.kontekstgalerija.org/pdf_08/KontekstArhiva.pdf
7. The interruption of the exhibition 'Exception: Contemporary Art Scene of Prishtina' – Two eyewitnesses' account – blog post by Jelena and Vlidi.
<http://www.labforculture.org/en/members/jelena-vesic/blog/the-interruption-of-the-exhibition-%27exception-contemporary-art-scene-from-prishtina%27-two-eyewitness-account-part-i>
8. The discussion in the Alkatraz Gallery:
http://www.kudmreza.org/alkatraz/arhiv/razstave/2008_04a_eng_kontekst.html
9. "Force of trauma," a text by Sezgin Boynik
<http://victims.labforculture.org/site/texts/force-of-trauma>
10. About the 12 meters tall image of Adem Jashari in Prishtina:
<http://www.bookcase.com/~claudia/mt/archives/000812.html>

Reviews:

1. <http://www.cunerview.net/index.php/Artists-Reviews/Belgrade-Exhibition-EXCEPTION-forced-to-close-before-opening.html>
2. http://www.newkosovareport.com/index2.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=518&pop=1&page=75&Itemid=39
3. <http://www.reuters.com/article/entertainmentNews/idUSL0716728920080207>
4. <http://www.osservatoriobalciani.org/article/articleview/9779/1/407>
5. <http://www.ecopolis.org/statement-of-support-for-artists-of-the-exhibition-exception-contemporary-art-scene-from-prishtina/>
6. <http://www.juliagorin.com/wordpress/?m=200902>