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The Austrian Cultural Forum New York and the Museum of Contemporary Art Belgrade present

SERBIA – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

SEP 23, 2010 – JAN 11, 2011

Artists: Biljana DJURDJEVIĆ, Uroš DJURIĆ, Vlatka HORVAT, Johanna KANDL, KUNSTHISTORISCHES MAUSOLEUM, Paul Albert LEITNER, Marko LULIĆ, Ahmet ÖĞÜT, Marko PELJHAN, Dan PERJOVSCHI, Darinka POP-MITIĆ, Anri SALA, Walter STEINACHER, Zoran TODOROVIĆ, Raša TODOSIJEVIĆ, Milica TOMIĆ, Stefanos TSIVOPOULOS, Katarina ZDJELAR.

The **Austrian Cultural Forum New York** and the **Museum of Contemporary Art Belgrade** are pleased to present an exhibition of works by 18 contemporary artists entitled **Serbia – Frequently Asked Questions**. The artists, many of whom are from Serbia, former Yugoslavia and Austria, reflect on two decades of drama in the Balkans with a special focus on Serbia. The exhibition will be on view from September 23rd to January 11th at the Austrian Cultural Forum in New York.

With the onset of war in former Yugoslavia, Serbia became perceived by some as a violent and xenophobic nation. International media coverage of the war helped establish stereotypes across the world and within Serbia that inaccurately categorized all Serbs as an intolerant and nationalistic people. As with every stereotype, this oversimplification served as an attempt to construct a difference: to distinguish an *other* from what we are, how we behave, and what we tend to think of ourselves.

Speaking out on traumatic events the artists in **Serbia – Frequently Asked Questions** share a critical stance toward processes of economic and political transition and refute preconceived notions about a decades-old conflict fueled by irreconcilable stereotypes on all sides. The exhibition reveals the culturalization of the Yugoslav conflict. Marked neither by sentimentalism nor cynicism, it presents the sensitivity of the individual artists - some of whom were directly involved but maintained a critical distance - as a powerful guide to a tumultuous and painful chapter in recent European history.

Serbia – Frequently Asked Questions will present a selection of works some of which are on loan from the collection of the **Museum of Contemporary Art Belgrade** as well as two new pieces especially commissioned for this exhibition.

Raša Todosijević, an influential artist active in the conceptual scene in 70s Belgrade, responds to the nationalist rhetoric in post-80s Serbian culture and politics in his mixed media series, *Gott liebt die Serben (God Loves the Serbs)*. Drawings by **Dan Perjovschi**, published in various daily papers, serve as specific political comments on the construction of stereotypes and paranoia in the Balkans and in Europe. The paradoxical issue of “national representation” is reflected in *Warmth* by **Zoran Todorović**. Commissioned for the Serbian pavilion at the 2009 Venice Biennial, the work consists of curious looking blankets with undetermined function made of three tons of human hair collected at hairdressers and military barracks where hair-cutting is a norm of discipline. **Stefanos Tsivopoulos**'s two-screen presentation uses one screen to show the original testimony of a Serbian soldier involved in atrocities of the Bosnian war while an actor repeats the story on the other. It is up to viewers to decide which character is real. **Milica Tomić**'s video follows the artist, carrying a Kalashnikov rifle in one hand and a plastic supermarket bag in the other, as she walks the streets of Belgrade paying homage to the principal locations of the armed rebellion against Nazi occupation in WWII. In his video *Naturalmystic*, **Anri Sala** documents a man from Belgrade who uses his vocal cords to flawlessly imitate the sound of a Tomahawk missile, a common background noise during the NATO bombing campaign over Serbia in 1999. This work focuses on a traumatic experience, presented in a way that is neither self-pitying nor self-negating.

Marko Peljhan was commissioned to present a compact version of his installation, *Territory*, which was presented in last year's Istanbul Biennial. The work is based on a long-term research project about technological and legal circumstances of the Srebrenica massacre. The exhibition also features an outstanding painting by **Biljana Djurdjević** that comments on the relationship of power and violence in the patriarchal social order as well as on adolescent sexuality and the confusion of growing up. Intrigued and fascinated by the emotional and cultural power that still remains from Tito's heritage in former Yugoslavia, Slovenia-based Austrian artist **Walter Steinacher**'s painting addresses the general process of selective, post-conflict remembrance. Conversely, a work on paper by **Johanna Kandl** examines the causes and consequences of capitalist transformation. Looking at layers of society that are left behind in the social race for progress, Kandl presents a very critical, almost photographic view of power relations hidden behind the banal everyday language of marketing and advertising.

Some of the works deal with more general and universal processes, causing or paralleling violent conflict. **Ahmet Ögüt** looks at paranoid, instrumental, and randomly indifferent aspects of surveillance in the context of power struggles. As a foreign artist based in the Netherlands, **Katarina Zdjelar** situates her own experience of dislocation by investigating systems of communication and learning rather than focusing on the loss perpetuated by this distance. Her video work explores the paradoxes, promises, and failures of cultural translation. Like Zdjelar, **Vlatka Horvat** also deals with the aspects of dislocation. In her video *This Here and That There*,

the reorganization of the chairs in a shallow pond is a sad and poetic metaphor for grappling with the loss of geographic roots and social communities. In another commissioned piece, photographer **Paul Albert Leitner** takes the perspective of a travelling journeyman and reveals the hardship and dignity of normal street life in the peripheries beyond metropolitan centers. Not indicating where each photo was shot, he unveils a series of observations recorded in Serbia, Austria, and the USA. A panoptical but “low-fi” commissioned montage of snapshots by **Uroš Djurić** is a condensed overview of the artist’s social links within and beyond the art world, concentrating on informal situations that artists create or within which they find themselves.

Serbia – Frequently Asked Questions presents two further newly commissioned works: a film by **Marko Lulić** and a mural by **Darinka Pop-Mitić**. Lulić’s performative work pays homage to Bogdan Bogdanović, a leading anti-Milošević intellectual who shaped the tradition of modernist memorials erected in times of socialist Yugoslavia. Pop-Mitić’s wall drawing, inspired by the legendary American cartoonist George Herriman and his character Krazy Kat, offers a new and tragicomic perspective on the complex history of Austro-Serbian relations in the 20th century since the 1914 assassination of Prince Ferdinand in Sarajevo.

Also on view will be a special section dedicated to a selection of artifacts from the collection of **Kunsthistorisches Mausoleum** from Belgrade, a peculiar “commemorative institution dedicated to preserving memories of art history.” Art history is generally defined as the study of objects of art in their historical development, using the context and narratives found in art of the past. In the case of the Mausoleum, the narrative comes first, and artifacts were produced later based on the narrative. If history is the way we have chosen to remember the past, then this Mausoleum is a place where we can remember remembrance itself.

The **opening reception** will take place on **Wednesday, September 22**, from 6 to 8pm, at the ACFNY, 11 East 52nd Street, New York, NY 10022. **Admission is free.**

Curators Branislav Dimitrijević & Andreas Stadler
Exhibition Coordination Natascha Boojar & Vesna Milić (MOCA Belgrade)

With generous support from the **Fund for an Open Society–Serbia; Open Society Institute; General Consulate of Serbia; Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations; Czech Center New York; Harriman Institute at Columbia University; Romanian Cultural Institute; New York Public Library for the Performing Arts and WaxFactory.**

An official **EUNIC project** (European Union National Institutes for Culture).

Supporting Institutions of the Austrian Cultural Forum New York: **Austrian Airlines, Botstiber Foundation, RZB Finance, The Austrian Wines**

Schedule of Serbia – Frequently Asked Questions satellite events

WEDNESDAY, SEP 22, 5PM

Artist Talk with Biljana Djurdjević, Uroš Djurić, Johanna Kandl, Marko Lulić, Marko Peljhan, Darinka Pop-Mitić and the curators Branislav Dimitrijević & Andreas Stadler

For further information and rsvp go to www.acfny.org

WEDNESDAY, SEP 22, 6 PM – 8 PM

OPENING RECEPTION

7 PM: **Official opening speech** by Michael Spindelegger, Austrian Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs

For further information and rsvp go to www.acfny.org

TUESDAY, OCT 12, 6:30 PM

STAGED READING presented by the Romanian Cultural Institute

The Locusts, by Serbian writer Biljana Srbljanovic

The reading will be followed by a conversation with the author.

Venue: Martin E. Segal Theatre Center, CUNY

For further information and rsvp go to www.icrny.org

WEDNESDAY, OCT 13 - 17

Film series

Venue: Czech Center

For program and rsvp go to www.czechcenter.com

MONDAY, OCT 18, 6:30 PM

READING presented by WaxFactory

4boys.org by Simona Semenic

Venue: ACFNY

FRIDAY, OCT 22, 8 PM

CONCERT

Bassiona Amorosa and Jasna Popovic

Venue: Carnegie Hall, Stern Auditorium/Perelman Stage

For further information and tickets go to www.carnegiehall.com

FRIDAY, NOV 5

ACADEMIC CONFERENCE

“Constructing the Balkans, De-Constructing Ourselves”

Venue: Harriman Institute of Columbia University

For schedule and rsvp go to www.harrimaninstitute.org

MONDAY, JAN 10, 2011, 5:30 PM

Roundtable discussion

Serbia@Europe

Venue: Open Society Institute

For further information and rsvp go to www.soros.org

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