



Aanant & Zoo

VLADO MARTEK

Zureden ohne Unruhe

25 January — 01 March 2014

Opening Reception Fr 24 Jan 2014, 7 — 9pm

—

For the last 40 years, visual artist and poet Vlado Martek has played an instrumental part in shaping the contemporary literature and art scenes of both the former Yugoslavia and present-day Croatia. Some of his most notable (and notorious) contributions to this canon can be found in his experimental performances of the late 70s and early 80s. It is with great pleasure that Aanant & Zoo launch their 2014 exhibition program with a solo exhibition dedicated to a selection of Martek's performances from this significant period in his career.

Zureden ohne Unruhe showcases several print series that were utilised for some of the artist's most important performances. In these performances, these prints functioned as pamphlets and were often distributed to the public in Zagreb and Paris. These performances – or 'poetic agitations' as Martek calls them – demonstrate some of his most successful attempts at fusing art and poetry into the singular moment, and would also form the basis for his post-Surrealist literary movement 'Pre-poetry'.

The poetic agitations exhibited in *Zureden ohne Unruhe* are unique for two reasons. Firstly, and most obviously, for the palpable energy contained within these prints which mirrors the power of the artist's intention within the performative moment. Martek's agitations were immediate, raw and courageous. The messages of his print poems were unapologetically literal in order to be understood by the widest demographic of the population. The distribution of these prints was an intervention into public space that carried significant risk to the artist under the oppressive rule of Tito in the late 70s. However, these prints were not merely anti-government propaganda – they urged the recipient to read the poems of Mayakovski, of Malevich. They directly urged artists to take up arms against the state.

They were proof that Martek's resistance could not be attached to the modus of traditional leftist political resistance, nor to the abstract and self-referential tropes of academic deconstruction. His poetic agitations ensured art and literature remained an unavoidable reality within the daily civilian life and struggle of this time. Martek developed this approach through his involvement in the 'Gang of Six' artist group (with Mladen and Sven Stilinović, Fedor Vučemić, Boris Demurand, Željko Jerman). This group of poets and artists took spirit from the Croatian Spring of the early 70s to make serious ideological interventions into public space that would challenge Yugoslavia's political and cultural hierarchies without being encumbered by the tropes of either.

Zureden ohne Unruhe exhibits works which were also of substantial significance for Martek's individual development as an artist. The prints and documentary footage on display mark some of his first attempts at harnessing performance art as a vessel for the dissemination of his poetry practice. This hybridization of disciplines would become a permanent characteristic of his practice, and establish him as one of the forerunners in post-Surrealism. Stylistically, these works were executed through an anti-aesthetic method that would become his signature. This approach was simultaneously informed by and set against the art historical institution Martek was so well read in. His hybrid objects and poetic agitations challenged the 'universal' transcendence of Late Modernist works which were being produced in cities from the artistic 'centre' (i.e. the USA/central Europe) at this time. It was contributions like Martek's poetic agitations which would sow the seeds for the decentralization of artistic origin and medium from the centers to the former peripheries.