



Aanant & Zoo

VLADO MARTEK

THE POWER OF SUPPORT / DIE KRAFT DES UNTERGRUNDS

April 27 – June 16, 2012

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Aanant & Zoo is honoured to present the first solo exhibition of croatian artist Vlado Martek (*1951) in Germany.

Martek, who in the early 1970s studied philosophy and literature in Zagreb, began his artistic career as a poet. Soon he found himself disenchanted with writing as a method of expression. Between 1975 and 1978, Martek presented his poems and other writings to the public on the street as a member of political art collective *Group of Six Artists* (with Boris Demur, Željko Jerman, Mladen Stilinović, Sven Stilinović, Fedor Vučemilović) while living under the restrictions of the oppressive Tito-government. Meanwhile, as a self proclaimed *Nomad of Art*, Martek began shifting his artistic praxis from poetry to other means of expression: Martek has worked as a librarian since 1979.

The base or *Untergrund** of Marteks artistic praxis consists of writing, poetry and language. Since the 1970s Martek has used the different mediums of sketch, collage, happening and books to negate and deconstruct the traditional forms of speech and thus finally returning it to its essence and finding new and different manners of dealing with language. Martek is not a quiet observer. In his works he reacts analytical, critical, ironic and humorous on social structures and constructs, as is evident in the here displayed manifesto *Snaga podloge*.

Martek, who calls himself a *Pre-Poet*, reduces poetry to its essential elements. Following the notion that a poem is made not written, Martek breaks the poem down to its sheer material components of paper, pencil and the occasional word. The artist sees the alphabet, the foundation of language and thus also of (classical) poetry, as the symbolic source of all knowledge. Between the first and the last letter “*everything that could be said*” takes place. The work “*Stift und Alphabet*” (2002) unites the essential elements of speech. The piece of paper changes from foundation to realm of action. Everything that could be said and done is possible with pencil, paper and the letters of the alphabet.

Martek started self-publishing his books in 1982. These so-called *samizdats*, named after the russian practice of illegally publishing and distributing books during Soviet times, often contained no more than a short ironic analytical statement concerning current political events. The artist started a semiotic guerilla war by appropriating and de-contextualising and thus changing the meaning of

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slogans and symbols. Hereby not only attacking the powers that be but also the viewer. He demands of the viewer to question everyday ideological structures and to renounce authorities. Many works exude an everyday aesthetic through the use of everyday materials.

Often present in Marteks work is paper he found, which shows its age through its used look. Pencil, marker, watercolour and stencils are also recurring materials in his work. The formal aspects of the work reject a mythological perception thus re-directing the viewer to the materiality of the words and materials used.

With “The Power of Support / Die Kraft des Untergrunds” Aanant & Zoo shows a range of exemplary works in which paper, mirror and glass come together to show the materiality of Marteks poetry in the form of collage, drawing and writing.

The croatian concept of *podloga*, meaning basis or support is meaningful for Martek in multiple ways: The *podloga*, functioning as place of existence, is being written and drawn upon. Either tracks are left on it or it itself becomes the content as exemplified by the work “Was, wie und für wen” (2000) where Martek literally turns the relation between paper and text on its head by covering the writing with a blank piece of paper. The mirror, when used as *podloga* serves an extra purpose by returning the gaze of the viewer. The artist manipulates the nature of his material. For example when glass, paper, mirror and a blank surface reveal a “Sonett” (1978/2009) while conserving the poems its inherent rhythm and sound despite the material change.

* The German expression Untergrund refers to both the space underneath the ground as well as a material surface.

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