

With V. D. T.'s Machine of Nature (Antimuseum)

It seems that initially, Vladimir Dodig Trokut's different practice and his adherence to the forms of *otherness* of artistic behaviour and procedures was accepted, recorded and commented on in exhibition catalogues in a timely manner.¹ However, his uncompromising position and subversion of common social conventions, habits, and value concepts – especially artistic ones – and manners of “strange” or “uncomfortable” artistic research led him towards a permanent margin. *Collecting* and *transformation*, as the main – but by no means the only! – modes of Trokut's artistic reaction, have resulted in numerous artefacts, still causing suspicion and essential confusion of institutional and other frameworks dealing with the protection of cultural heritage, its preservation and presentation. The work of Vladimir Dodig Trokut is inseparable from his project of the Antimuseum, a collection of objects of different cultural value and culturological semantic stratification. The artistic and intellectual platform on which Trokut built his own work – but also advocated *trickery* and *deceit* as a prolific artistic tool – is on a trajectory of extremely experimental artistic positions initiated by radical actions of Marcel Duchamp and Dadaist provocations. Still, it seems that his true cornerstones are actually Surrealism and its artistic and literary derivatives, then the experimental efforts of John Cage and the Black Mountain College progressive art school, and especially the polyvalent personality of Joseph Beuys. In the early 1970s, Trokut participated in the act of artistic exchange with Beuys, who gave him a cane. Unquestionably important, then, were Dimitrije Bašičević - Mangelos, Radoslav Putar, Darko Schneider and several others. They were as much Trokut's reference points, his spiritual interlocutors, as were the contexts of ethnography and folklore, especially the phenomena usually described using adjectives like “supernatural” or “paranormal”. For example, in his conversations, Trokut pointed out spiritistic-magical traces on objects from the Dalmatian hinterland that narrate the experience of the shamanistic practice, but he also mentioned “supernatural” and occult occurrences preserved in oral traditional culture. He also emphasized the characteristics of people from his native Imotski region, which is distinguished by unusual lucidity and the proverbial cunning and craftiness.

Either way, the best qualification of Trokut's distinctive personality and indivisibility of man and his artistic act, on the discursive line of “artistic nomadism” and the undisguised ambition of various twentieth century avant-gardes to completely equate life and art, actually becomes a shortened biographical record of Željko Ivanjek written in a publication accompanying the more comprehensive Trokut exhibition *Circulus vitiosus - Perpetuum mobile* in 2013:

He spent decades seeking a roof above his head for the pieces of art that he found and for himself because the roof of the sky and its meaning were more important to him.²

¹ See for example: *Nova umjetnička praksa, 1966 – 1978* (ed. Marijan Susovski), Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, 1978 or *Inovacije u hrvatskoj umjetnosti sedamdesetih godina* (ed. Marijan Susovski), Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, 1982.

² *Joseph Beuys, John Cage, Vladimir Dodig Trokut* (text: Darko Schneider, biographical text: Željko Ivanjek), Anti Museum, Croatia – Museum of Obsessions, Zagreb, 2013. The exhibition *Circulus vitiosus - Perpetuum*

The artistic legacy of Vladimir Dodig Trokut can be viewed in the context of the anthropological turn in the domain of the conceptual artistic practice from the late 1960s and through the 1970s, which continued even later. As noted, its fulness was achieved precisely by the concept and reality of V. D. T.'s Antimuseum. The uniqueness of the appearance of this *set of objects* was institutionally recognized as early as 1981 – although it began its work much earlier – by a decision of the Regional Institute for the Protection of Monuments of Culture in Zagreb on 14 July of the same year. It is important to draw attention here to this deliberate approach to institutional protection as a pretext for finding a space to display the collection and its further expansion, although the idea of the Antimuseum was conceived as diametrically opposite to elite museum practices and recognition. Trokut's challenges to institutional parameters, as such, and simultaneous distancing from them and their rigid restraints, are utterly intriguing! An updated decision on the protection of the collection was adopted in 2002, i.e. the final document in 2014, by which the collection is entered in the *Register of Cultural Goods of the Republic of Croatia – List of Preventively Protected Goods*. The latter document, signed by Silvije Novak and dated on 6 March 2014, emphasizes the cultural-historical importance and contours – of the obviously not as yet fully catalogued, deposited in different locations and irresistibly fluid – collection:

(...)

The collection of the “ANTI-MUSEUM” is the result of an extremely rare and interesting collecting activity of Vladimir Dodig Trokut, that created a set of objects that testify to the history and culture of everyday life. Also, the collection contains objects of conceptual art and special units with ethnographic, technical and prehistoric materials. From the museological, artistic and cultural standpoint, Dodig's valuable idea and concept of the so-called Antimuseum was supported by numerous professional institutions and respected individuals, and the importance of the objects and collections was recognized by the professional and cultural public.

(...)

The Collection is divided into two large units. The historical part of the collection contains about 15,000 objects grouped in the following collections: ethnographic collection (mostly traditionally processed wood – 997 exhibits, then 145 pcs of ceramics, and about 350 pcs of textile); prehistoric collection (ritual figurines, ritual jugs – Vinča, sites in Dalmatia – 24 pcs); documents (charters, codes, manuscripts, etc. – about 400 units); collection of paintings “New Art Practice” (from 1950 to present day, about 700 works); collection of watches (arts and crafts, 18th c. – 1910) – 15 pcs; various household objects (arts and crafts, candlesticks, chalices, silver material), technical collection (telephones, typewriters, radios, cameras, collection of dentistry, medical aids, slide projectors, collection of navigation devices) – about 130 objects.

The second, much larger unit is the “ANTI-MUSEUM” departments with about 80,000 objects: new religious art, kitchen utensils, packaging collection, esoteric

mobile was held in the Extended Media (PM) Gallery of the Croatian Association of Artists in Zagreb, in January 2013.

collection, industrial archaeology, new folklore, photographs with photo installations and the complete equipment of two photo laboratories of family photos, tiles, messages, inscriptions, 1960s and 70s clothes, children's toys, inventories of craftsmen and their workshops.

(...)

In the international context, Harald Szeemann also paid tribute to the Antimuseum in a fax message on behalf of his famous agency *Agentur für Geistige Gastarbeit* and the museum *Museum der Obsessionen*, which he initiated and set up as working and intellectual platforms, i.e. the foundations of a rich archive and library that he had collected during his life on his estate in the Swiss town of Tegna. Certainly, it is possible to recognize a certain kinship between Szeemann's concepts and Trokut's project, especially in the extremely open ways of collecting and sorting the material and the secondary activity in art and culture. The draft for V. D. T.'s Antimuseum, titled **ANTIMUSEUM AND HOW TO ACQUIRE IT** provides the following descriptions of the concept, mode of operation and approach that affirm the vitality of objects as manmade and describes a kind of DNA of Trokut's collecting experience and vocation:

Museums exist around the world, let us create an **ANTIMUSEUM!** V. D. T.'s collecting practice combines a variety of materials, artistically, culturally and historically very valuable objects of time and documents of life. Sequences and units form the holdings of this **ANTIMUSEUM**. Indeed, the collected and sorted material was realized on the basis of the **IDEA** of the eternal human and natural **PRODUCTION OF OBJECTS** and their **DESTRUCTION**. Previous practice has set the institution of the Museum against destruction. Museum or rubbish heap! **ANTIMUSEUM** or **LIFE!**

V. D. T. has always considered the idea of the **MUSEUM – MACHINE OF NATURE** to be his pronounced way of life and the principle of gaining experience. And not only of collecting the works, ultimately under the name of the **ANTIMUSEUM**. A tin cookie box or a dollhouse are equally valuable and talk about the world and its inhabitants, period and time, at least as much as the paintings of Uzelac or Gecan, at least as much as a Picasso. The value of the underlying idea of collecting and sorting should not be confused with the possible and rare artistic experience or the possible market value of the object as such. The rarities of the collection, of course, could also satisfy that criterion. The idea of a dead Museum as an exhibition space versus the idea of a living **ANTIMUSEUM**. Life or death!

V. D. T.'s collection consists of diverse **UNITS**, totally closed and theoretically completely differently treated or interpreted. Only their perceptible whole or the **CHAIN OF CIRCLES** and **LINKS** makes the **CONCEPT OF THE ANTIMUSEUM** apparent. Because the idea is not to mount, say a Picasso portrait opposite an African mask, a ceramic vase next to an associated female nude painted in oil on canvas. The imaginary museum of associations is dead!

(...)

By collecting objects and their treatment and transformation, by processing them thoroughly and indexing them by similarity, by relativizing and completely annulling priorities of status or quality of material execution, the boundary between the ephemeral everyday object and an artistically exceptional exhibit is erased and they enter the domain of wider anthropological discourse as equally important. Although it only appears to come close to the models of conventional museum work, the procedure should in this case be viewed and understood in the context of Vladimir Dodig Trokut's basically anarchic attitude, which produces peculiar results of his collecting code. There is a constant semantic mobility in Trokut's community of objects, a denial of incompatibility, a call for rebellion, and endless intellectual drifting. Old semantic transfers and new meanings are in a constant game of permutations. Every possible anomaly opens a crack of new meanings.

This exhibition in Split presents Vladimir Dodig Trokut's (*Trokut*, eng. triangle) individual works and *artistic spells* selected by Dubravka Rakoci, which return the artist to the urban quadrat of Diocletian's Palace, in an atmosphere of the anniversary of his relinquishing the earthly dimension. At the same time, it is possible to understand them as an inkling of the presence of a distinctive personality, indisputably important for our understanding of the artistic climate in Split from the late 1960s onwards. The symbolism of lost freedom becomes the breeding ground of free thought.

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