Not-quite/not-right

HISTORIES, BODIES AND CONCEPTS
IN CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY

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Essay by
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spot 2006

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HIŠA FOTOGRAFIJE
House of Photography
Maison de la photographie
2006

Let's begin with the title. It refers to a notion developed by the theoretician Homi Bhabha, who in the 1990s reflected on the relation between art, culture and politics, situating art and culture in a broader context. In order to better grasp this relation, showing the process of radicalization of art and culture, and especially of forms of visual representations contaminated by politics, Homi Bhabha used the notion of *not-quite/not-right*. This notion describes a productive discontinuity in artistic practices that prevents the totalizing strategies of identity politics, where art is seen as simply geographically localized or intimately psychologized.

The show brings to the surface of photography (dis)proportions and strategies that can be detected as structural interventions within contemporary photography, its history and the politics of representation. This exhibition's primary concern is to display a paradigm of photography understood in the process of its fabrication and artificiality, being based on carefully staged and (re)played performances and performative actions behind and in front of the camera. Pointing toward what Bruno Latour defined as "techniques-of-representation" within photography and its condition of possibility, this exhibition is not about "the optical space of visibility," but about the way "representation is (re)negotiated" within contemporary photography. In the age of technological and more precisely digitally produced images, the problematic status of the medium of photography can be precisely captured by insisting on a gap that exists between the concept of photography as presenting a true understanding of the world, and photography that accurately (de)constructs the rendering of things, bodies, spaces, and histories.

In this show, photography strongly accentuates the different performative politics (re)played in and for photography. The performativity in the photographs points directly to the process of construction. Secondly, it is possible to acknowledge the strong idea of conceptuality in the works, which questions the condition of photography, taking what seems to be the exterior of photography, what is waiting at its "door" (from politics to fashion, from democracy to intimacy), to its very interior.

The notion of conceptuality is also connected with the intervention of several discourses in photography, from theory and history to politics.

Tomaž Gregorič in his *Periphery 33* (billboard, 2002) renegotiates the possibility of transforming a photographic representation of an ordinary landscape, with grass and trees, (thus the title Periphery, perhaps) into a field of antagonistic forces. Gregorič's photograph displays an ordinary landscape marked (or even better, quilted) with the figures of two policemen appearing at, I should say, topographical points within the captured landscape. Contaminated with these one-dimensional, deeply ideologically signed figures, what seemed merely a peripheral landscape is turned upside-down. The calm peripheral plotline is "quilted" through these "anchoring figures" and changed into a disturbing signifying chain. Gregorič's photographic landscape is "de-naturalized" by the figures of the policemen. On the one hand, the policemen are located out-side the main narrative (they appear within the landscape so disturbingly fabricated); on the other hand, this out-side is obviously essential for the photographic landscape event in-side. With them as anamorphic stains, the photographic landscape is transformed into a "screen" that not only makes visible the fake "reality" of the landscape somewhere outside there, but displays it as being a pure effect of its performative (re)organization and mediation for the medium of photography.

Irwin's *NSK (State) Guard* photographs display "local," but real soldiers that guard the flag of the imaginary NSK [Neue Slowenische Kunst] State in Time. The NSK (State) Guard brings together two, so to speak, impossible levels of the functioning of every modern state: real soldier(s) from the respective national armies and artifact(s) that belong to the NSK State in Time: its flag and the Malevich cross imprinted on armbands. The projects were realized in Tirana in collaboration with the Albanian army in 1998, in Prague with the army of the Czech Republic in 2000, in Graz with the Austrian army in 2001, etc.

The NSK [Neue Slowenische Kunst] State in Time is a project begun in the 1990s by the Irwin group and other members of the NSK collective (Laibach, etc.) with the idea of a state that lives only in time, but which is made operational through real passports, real state insignias, and through embassies and consulates in private apartments and hotel rooms. The virtual NSK State employs construction, and instead of the outdated dichotomy between the public and the private, it ventures to create a possible global, although virtual, citizenship. There is something paradoxical about this virtual state model and its possible (kitschy, conceptual, and anti-modern) connections with art. Real Communism, Trans-national Capitalism, Bastard Malevich, Illegal Heartfield, Enthroned Magritte, and Naturalized Modernism – these are the elements used by the virtual NSK State in Time.

In the NSK (State) Guard photographs there is a type of tableau vivant that captures real soldiers (wearing armbands bearing the Malevich cross) guarding the (imaginary) NSK flag. The NSK's flag consists of symbols from art history, notably the cross from Kasimir Malevich's paintings at its centre. The idea is to assemble everyday life and state policy with its phantasmic supplement, which is art. Or to juxtapose, face-to-face, contemporary art and its phantasmic supplement: the army!

In 2003, Irwin realized The NSK Guard Kyoto. "Salary-men" (a calque in Japanese for office workers) took the floor, replacing the real national army and guarding the NSK flag. Within Japanese society, salary-men were an "army" of workers of crucial importance for Japanese industrialization. That they are like an army is emphasized by their uniform style of rather sober suits and ties. Behind their uniform, they hide their role of maximizing the efficiency of the capitalist machine. Through their mode of dress and in the way they function, they are a normalized anomaly within the capitalist system in Japan.

The effect of such juxtapositions is the de-realization and the de-psychologization of the reality of the Institution of Contemporary Art. With such juxtapositions there is a diffracted picture of reality between art and army. Irwin does not ask us to merely choose between two or more options within a set of coordinates (art vs. army, etc.), but to change the set of coordinates itself. We have to deal here with the traumatic real, with the re-articulation and re-questioning of the position of the army in contemporary societies, and the art within the Art Institutions.

Jane Štravs' work is directed towards perceiving photography as a complex act of projections, voyeurism, and desire that mould the spectator's gaze. Once we become aware of this, we cannot but refuse the "innocent" belief that photography merely presents visual facts that are simply "out there" and which are now captured by the camera. Štravs' models often exclude their immediate environment, floating in a placeless place. This theme has a long history in his work. It is possible to connect this disappearance within photography – the almost perfect mimicry of bodies within the environment – with Maurice Blanchot's phrase "a right to disappear." For Blanchot, this presents the possibility of disappearing from the digitally and technologically produced and nurtured codes of the contemporary world. These codes impose precise spatial regulations and narrations aimed at surveillance and restriction. How can we subvert them?

In Štravs' work, there is a process of incarnation that is contrary to incorporation. Incarnation, according to Marie-José Mondzain, gives flesh and not the body.[1] If the image gives flesh, then it gives flesh to a certain absence. Incarnation is a process that gives an image to the non-figurable. To incarnate is to become an image of passion. To incorporate, to give a body, on the contrary, means to give substance to something or anything which may be used, consumed, manipulated. To incorporate means to cut the body into particles and consume it in order to become part of the body of the institution or of the State. Incarnation opposes the idolatry of cultural visibility that is at the base of institutional incorporation. With incarnation, the image has three different levels of meaning: visibility, invisibility and the gaze that puts them into relation. In Štravs' photographs we witness to a procedure of extraction rather than abstraction. The most pervasive effect of this extraction (via Alain Badiou) can be formulated as the extraction of the body from concrete spaces, of the gaze from bodies, and of the body from institutions.

Aleksandra Vajd & Hynek Alt *Empire On/Off* (archival inkjet print, 2005) re-photographs Andy Warhol's film *Empire* (1964), which comprises 485 minutes of film capturing a single view of the Empire State Building in New York, from early evening until nearly 3 a.m. the following day, in two stills ta-ken from a television screen. What really matters in the two photographs, with the titles *On* and *Off*, is the sign, familiar to television viewers, of the video pause method (that stops the playback of a video, while rendering only the current frame on screen).These two photographic stills show how electronic media capture experimental and neo-avant-garde films and make them "profane." This video pause sign is a mark of what happens to photography and analogue moving images when captured by digital technology. It reveals the perfect conceptual transformation of the medium of photography.

Vajd & Alt are not solely a collaborative artistic team within the medium of photography – they are also a real-life couple. In their series *ManWomanUnfinished* (2001 to 2006), they also posed in front of the camera. Vajd & Alt displayed their intimacy as a performative gesture that led to the estrangements of their bodies, transforming them into spectral "others." Aleksandra Vajd & Hynek Alt *No Audible* Dialogue (archival inkjet print, 2006) consists of two photographs, of two scenes with a narration that can

[1] I draw the concept of incarnation and its difference from incorporation from Marie-José Mondzain, *L'image peut-elle tuer?* (Paris: Bayard 2002).

be described as alternation (on one photograph we see Vajd back/Alt face, on the other Vajd face/Alt back; while one is "here" due to its face, the other is "gone" and vice versa). This alteration also mimics that schizoid relation behind/in front of the camera begun with their *ManWomanUnfinished*, but with an important difference. In this work they inhabit only the photographic space. Instead of reflecting – it does not matter how well or tenderly – the intimacy of the symbolic reality between and surrounding them, Vajd & Alt multiply it into inflexible spaces of alterity. What are these spaces? Photographic archives constructed from hundreds of photographs. Ambivalent vis-à-vis the medium of photography, we see Vajd & Alt only on two photographs, each situated on a proper pile built from hundreds of other photographs we will never have a chance to go through and see, as they are as such presented only as re-photographed piles of photographs. Vajd & Alt's intimacy is therefore a remnant of the intimacy within the medium of photography; it is a memory of intimacy produced by the materiality of a photographic archive. As such, it is intimacy captured not "person to person," but as a commentary on the photographic condition of possibility in a time of its digitalization and globalization.[2]

Marina Gržinić

[2] In the end of this essay I would like to connect some of the works in the exhibition with those by the group *trie* from Slovenia; its members, the young, new generation of Slovenian artists – Metod Blejec, Staš Kleindienst and Sebastjan Leban – are with their art interventions on the structure of the 51st Venice Biennale, as a scene of a counter event, developing strategies similar to some of the works presented in the exhibition. The group *trie* shows with its interventions that although the Biennale is rooted in forms of aesthetics, we can understand its connection with power and empowered history of art only if we intervene from a socially and politically motivated »outside« into the very aesthetically fabricated »inside« of the Biennale. Cf. Marina Gržinić, »Trie: An Anti-Essentialist, Politically Driven Art Intervention,« in *Mixed Media – Venice Biennale*, *trie* group's catalogue, published in an edition of only 6 copies, Ljubljana 2006.

TOMAŽ GREGORIČ
Periphery 33
billboard, 236 x 332 cm
2002

IRWIN
In collaboration with Albanian Army
NSK Garda Tirana
National Gallery, 21. 12. 1998
archival inkjet print, 140 x 100 cm

IRWIN
In collaboration with Czech Army
NSK Garda Prague
MXM Gallery, 15. 9. 2000
archival inkjet print, 140 x 100 cm
Photo: Igor Andjelič

IRWIN
In collaboration with Croatian Army
NSK Garda Zagreb
Museum of Contemporary Art, 10. 12. 2000
archival inkjet print, 140 x 100 cm
Photo: Igor Andjelič

IRWIN
In collaboration with Austrian Army
NSK Garda Graz
Forum Stadtpark, 6. 10. 2001
archival inkjet print, 140 x 100 cm
Photo: Wolfgang Croce

IRWIN
In collaboration with Italian Army
NSK Garda Rome
Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art, 24. 04. 2001
archival inkjet print, 140 x 100 cm
Photo: Igor Andjelič

IRWIN
In collaboration with the Montenegrian Army
NSK Garda Cetinje
Cetinje Biennial, 22. 6. 2002
archival inkjet print, 140 x 100 cm

IRWIN
In collaboration with Kosovo Army
NSK Garda Prishtina
Exit, 8. 11. 2002
archival inkjet print, 140 x 100 cm
Photo: Igor Andjelič

IRWIN
In collaboration with Japanese Salary-Men
NSK Garda Kyoto
Kyoto Biennial, 4. 10. 2003
archival inkjet print, 140 x 100 cm

IRWIN
In collaboration with Kyrgyz Army
NSK Garda Bishkek
Kurama Art Gallery, 25. 4. 2004
archival inkjet print, 140 x 100 cm
Photo: Erkin Boljurov

NSK GARDA
TIRANA

IRWIN in collaboration with Albanian Army, Dec. 21, 1998

NSK GARDA
PRAGUE

IRWIN in collaboration with Czech Army, Sept. 15, 2000

NSK GARDA
ZAGREB

IRWIN in collaboration with Croatian Army, Dec. 10, 2000

N S K GARDA
GRAZ

IRWIN in collaboration with Austrian Army, Oct. 6, 2001

N S K GARDA ROME

IRWIN in collaboration with Italian Army, April 24, 2001

N S K GARDA
CETINJE

IRWIN in collaboration with Montenegrian Army, June 22, 2002

N S K GARDA
PRIŠTINA

IRWIN in collaboration with Kosovo Army, November 8, 2002

NSK GARDA
KYOTO

京都市　記念日

IRWIN in collaboration with Japanese Salary-Men, Oct. 4, 2003

NSK GARDA
BISHKEK

IRWIN in collaboration with Kyrgyz Army, April 25, 2004

Jane Štravs
Cattinara #1
archival inkjet print, 150 x 220 cm
2006

JANE ŠTRAVS
Cattinara #2
archival inkjet print, 150 x 220 cm
2006

Jane Štravs
Cattinara #4
archival inkjet print, 150 x 220 cm
2006

Aleksandra Vajd & Hynek Alt
Empire On/Off
archival inkjet print, dimensions variable
2005

Aleksandra Vajd & Hynek Alt
My Left Hand
archival inkjet print, dimensions variable
2006

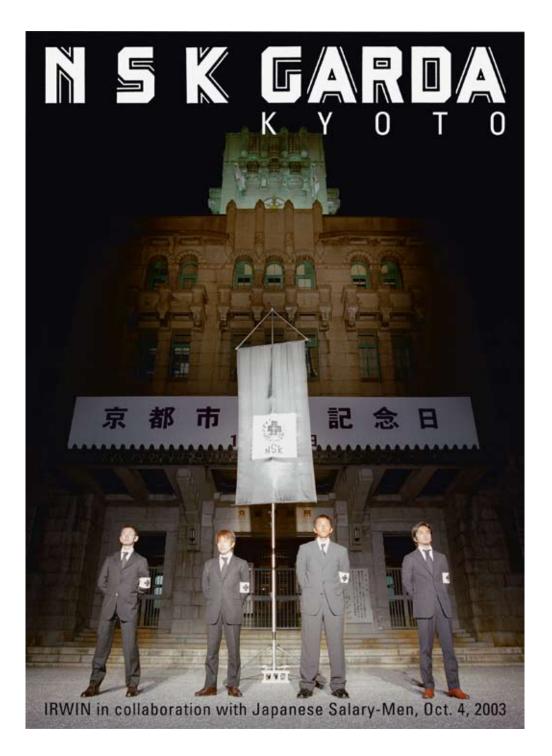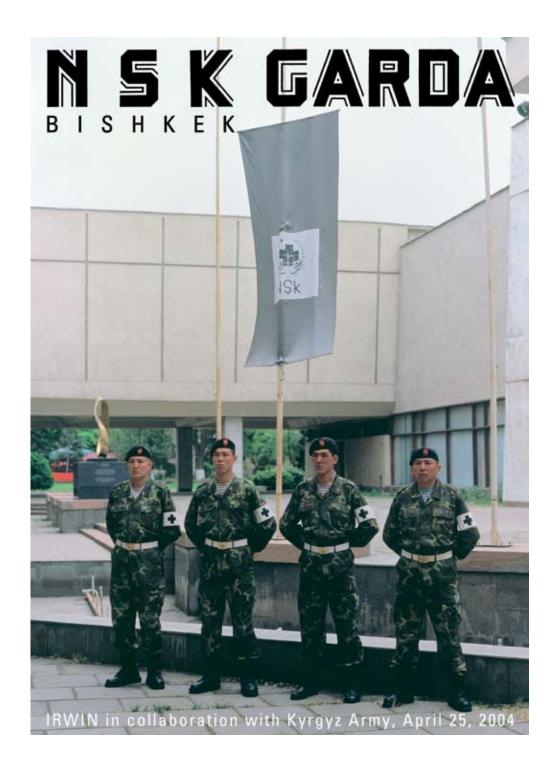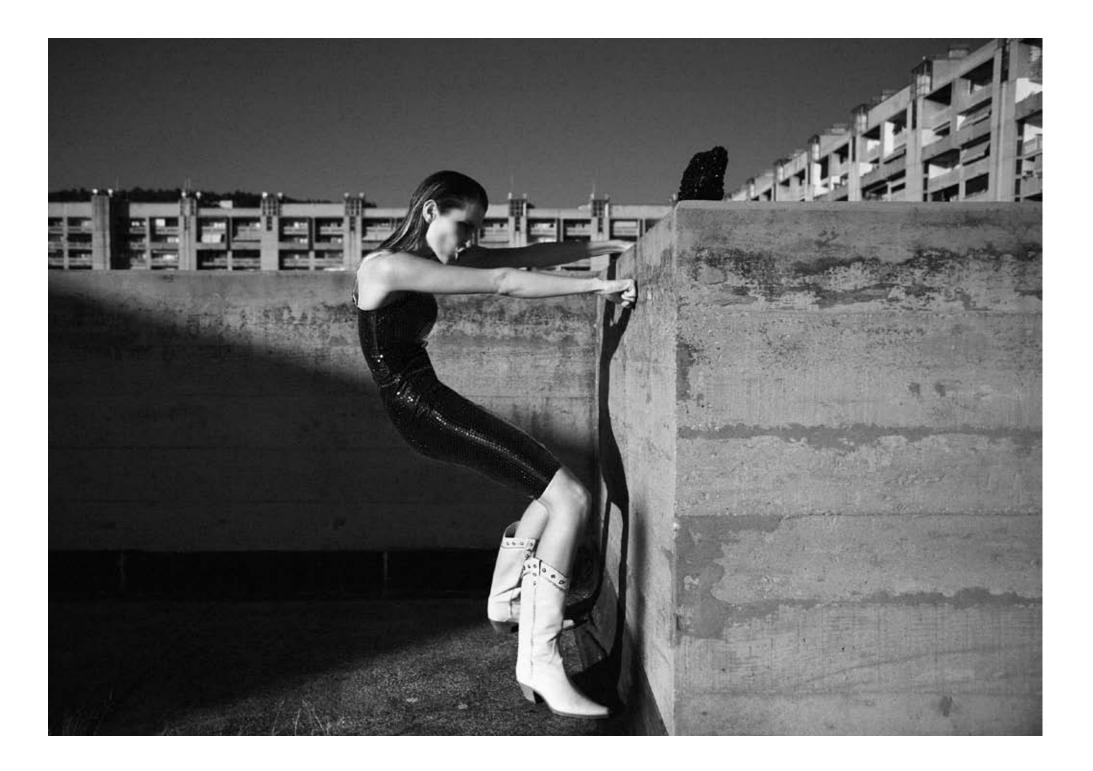Aleksandra Vajd & Hynek Alt
No Audible Dialogue
archival inkjet print, dimensions variable
2006

Hynek Alt

1976 born in Kutna Hora, Czech Republic
Lives and works in Berlin and Prague.

Education
2006   MFA Degree at the State University of New York
2004-06   Fulbright Scholarship at State University of New York
2001   MA Degree in Photography at the FAMU,
        Dept. of Still Photography, Prague
2000   Guest student at Middlesex University,
        Fine Art Campus, London
1998   BA Degree in Photography at the FAMU,
        Dept. of Still Photography, Prague

Selected Solo Exhibitions
2006   Exposed Appearance, CEC ArtsLink, New York City
2006   The Documentation Project, At 932 2nd Avenue,
        New York City
2005   Exposed (together with Aleksandra Vajd),
        Vitrinka P. A. S., Prague
2005   You Look Like I Look (together with Aleksandra Vajd),
        Czech Center, New York,
2002   Pulse, Month of Photography, Bratislava
2001   Edge, Photogallery, Liberec, Czech Republic
1999   Unclear Connections, Papyrus Gallery, Nymburk,
        Czech Republic
1999   Blue, Velryba Gallery, Prague

Selected Group Exhibitions
2006   Check-In-Europe, Reflecting Identities in Contemporary
        Art, European Patent Office, Munich, Germany
2006   MFA Thesis Show, Samuel Dorsky Museum of Arts,
        New York
2006   I Image, Galeria Nowa Przestrzen,
        Lodz Photographic Festival, Poland
2006   1:1 The Interpersonal in the Contemporary Art,
        Gallery PM, HDLU, Zagreb
2006   I Image, Central European House of Photography,
        Bratislava
2005   EuroPART, Aktuelle Kunst aus Europa, Billboard Project,
        Austria
2005   Frame005 Award, Brno, Czech Republic
2005   Intercity: Berlin – Praha, Manes Gallery, Prague
2005   2LIVE, Gallery of Fine Arts Koroška, Slovenj Gradec,
        Slovenia
2005   Czech Photography of the 20th Century,
        Municipal Library, Prague, Czech Republic
2005   I Image, Galeria Dorothya, Budapest

Tomaž Gregorič

1969 born in Ljubljana
1993 graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana
(graphic design department)

Lives and works as freelance photographer in Ljubljana.

Selected Solo Exhibitions
2003   Periphery, Nova ljubljanska banka, Ljubljana
2000   Photographs 1995 –2000,
        Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana
2000   Still lives, Gallery Ars, Ljubljana
1997   London 1995 – 1996, Gallery Fokus, Ljubljana
1994   Photographs 1994 – 1995, Škuc Gallery,
        Ljubljana
1993   About objects, IDCO, Ljubljana

Selected Group Exhibitions
2005   To live, Gallery of Fine Arts Koroška, Slovenj
        Gradec
2005   Slovene art 1995 – 2005, Museum of Modern
        Art, Ljubljana
2004   Welcome, Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London
2003   European photography projects, Art space,
        Vienna
2003   U3, 4th Triennial of contemporary Slovene art,
        Museum of Modern Art,   Ljubljana
2003   Take care, A+A Gallery, Venice
2003   Blind spot, Billboard Project Lower Austria,
        Vienna
2000   Slovene photography –Tendencies 1990-1999,
        Galerija sodobne umetnosti, Celje, Slovenia
2000   Slovene photography – Tendencies 1990-1999,
        Razstavni salon Rotovž, Maribor, Slovenia
2000   Slovene photography –Tendencies 1990-1999,
        Mestna galerija, Nova Gorica, Slovenia
1999   Slovene photography –Tendencies 1990-1999,
        Mala galerija, Cankarjev dom, Ljubljana
1999   Eye and its Truth, Museum of Modern Art,
        Ljubljana

Irwin

founded in 1983. Irwin is also the cofounder of NSK in 1984.

Dušan Mandič (Ljubljana 1954)
Miran Mohar   (Novo Mesto 1958)
Andrej Savski (Ljubljana 1961)
Roman Uranjek (Trbovlje 1961)
Borut Vogelnik (Kranj 1959)

Selected Solo Exhibitions
2006   Like to Like, Art Center Lazareti, Dubrovnik, Croatia
2005   Like to Like, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne
2004   Hysteria and its Two Retro Friends, Gallery Škuc,
        Ljubljana
2004   Like to Like, Cornerhouse, Manchester
2003   Retroprincip, Kunstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin
2002   Rekapitulacija, Museum Ostdeutsche Galerie,
        Regensburg
2001   New Works, Galerie Grita Insam, Vienna
2001   Retroavantgarde, Galeria Bonomo, Bari,
2000   Irwin Live, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana
2000   Retroavantgarde, Interiors of the Planit,
        Galerie Rabouan Moussion, Paris
2000   Privatization of Time, Museum of Contemporary Art,
        Zagreb

Selected Group Exhibitions
2006   Erste Bank Collection Museum Moderner Kunst
        Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna
2006   Eye on Europe: Prints, Books & Multiples, 1960 to Now,
        Musem of Modern Art, New York
2005   Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul
2005   Collective Creativity, Fridericianum, Kassel
2004   The Post-Communist Condition, Kunst-Werke, Berlin
2004   The Beauty of Failure / The Failure of Beauty,
        Joan Miró Foundation, Barcelona
2003   Personal Systems, Venice Biennial, Venice
2003   Berlin-Moscow/Moscow-Berlin, Gropius Bau,
2002   (Un)Painted, Essel Museum, Vienna
2002   In Search of Balkania, Neue Galerie Graz
2002   Vulgata, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana
2000   Das Fünfte Element/Geld oder Kunst,
        Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf

Jane Štravs

1965 born in Ljubljana
In 2002 a monograph about his work was published in English; the
essays were written by Marina Gržinić and W.J.T.Mitchell; publisher
ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana

Lives and works as freelance photographer in Ljubljana.

Selected Solo Exhibitions
2006   Public Image, Polo Natatorio Comunale
        "Bruno Bianchi", Trieste
2006   Fuel, Slowenisches Wissenschaftsinstitut, Vienna
2005   Road Movie, Gallery Fotografija, Ljubljana
2003   Photographic Incarnations, Mermaid Gallery,
        Dublin /Bray, Ireland
2003   Oscar Wilde House, Dublin
2003   Galerie Westlicht, Vienna
2003   Slowenisches Wissenschaftsinstitut, Vienna
2002   Photography 8202, Mala galerija,
        Cankarjev dom, Ljubljana
1998   Gallery Equrna, Ljubljana
1996   Gallery Krka, Novo mesto, Slovenia
1993   Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana
1990   Likovni salon, Celje, Slovenia

Selected Group Exhibitions
2006   Portreti Trenda, Razstavni salon Rotovž,
        Maribor, Slovenia
2005   Euro Press Photo Awards, Lisbon, Portugal
2005   Trend 2001-2005, Muzej novejše zgodovine, Ljubljana
2004   Razširjeni prostori umetnosti, Slovenska umetnost
        1985-95, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana
2004   Laibach Fokus, Gallery Photon, Ljubljana
2003   Do roba in naprej, Slovenska umetnost 1975-1985,
        Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana
2003   In Passing – structures of perception and moving,
        Pavel House, Bad Radkersburg, Austria
2001   Oko in njegova resnica, Spektakel in resničnost v
        slovenski umetnosti 1984-2001,
        Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana
2001   Zero –Absolute –The Real; International Exhibition of
        Photography, Performance, Internet Works and
        Installations, Gallery Marino Cettina, Umag, Croatia
2000   Slovene photography –Tendencies 1990-1999,
        Galerija sodobne umetnosti, Celje, Slovenia
2000   Slovene photography – Tendencies 1990-1999,
        Razstavni salon Rotovž, Maribor, Slovenia
1999   Slovene photography –Tendencies 1990-1999,
        Mala galerija, Cankarjev dom, Ljubljana

ALEKSANDRA VAJD

1971 born in Maribor, Slovenia
Lives and works in Berlin and Ljubljana.

Education
2004-06   Fulbright Scholarship at State University of New York
2003   Starting the PhD. studies in Theory of Photography at
           the FAMU, Prague
2001   MA degree in Photography at the FAMU,
           Dept. of Still Photography, Prague
1999   BA degree in Photography at the FAMU,
           Dept. of Still Photography, Prague
1997   MA degree at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in
           Ljubljana

Selected Solo Exhibitions
2006   Exposed Appearance, CEC ArtsLink, New York City
2006   The Documentation Project, At 932 2nd Avenue,
           New York City
2005   Exposed (together with Hynek Alt), Vitrinka P. A. S.,
           Prague
2005   You Look Like I Look (together with Hynek Alt),
           Czech Center, New York
2004   Untitled 2003, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana
2004   Various pictures, Gallery Loža, Koper, Slovenia
2001   Crumbs upon the Sheet, Second Kiss,
           Umetnostna galerija Maribor, Razstavni salon Rotovž,
           Maribor, Slovenia
2001   Second Kiss, Photo gallery, Sarajevo
2001   ZONA, Month of Photography, Bratislava
2000   Second Kiss, Minus seven and minus three and a half,
           SloFine Arts, Manifesta 3, Museum of Modern Art,
           Ljubljana
2000   Family Album, Obala Art Centar, Sarajevo

Selected Group Exhibitions
2006   Finalists of the OHO Group Award,
           Gallery and Center P74, Ljubljana
2006   Check-In-Europe, Reflecting Identities in
           Contemporary Art, European Patent Office, Munich
2006   MFA Thesis Show, Samuel Dorsky Museum of Arts,
           New York
2006   I Image, Galeria Nowa Przestrzen,
           Lodz Photographic Festival, Poland
2006   Intimacy, City Gallery Piran, Slovenia
2006   1:1 The Interpersonal in the Contemporary Art,
           Gallery PM, HDLU, Zagreb
2006   I Image, Central European House of Photography,
           Bratislava
2005   Prizor-Privlacnost-Prag, Gallery Kresija, Ljubljana
2005   EuroPART, Aktuelle Kunst aus Europa, Billboard Project,
           Austria
2005   Intercity: Berlin - Praha, Manes Gallery, Prague
2005   2LIVE, Gallery of Fine Arts Koroska, Slovenj Gradec,
           Slovenia

MARINA GRŽINIĆ

is philosopher and researcher at the Institute of Philosophy at the
ZRC SAZU (Scientific and Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy
of Science and Art) in Ljubljana. She is Professor at the Academy of
Fine Arts in Vienna. She also works as a freelance media theorist,
art critic and curator. Gržinić has published hundreds of articles and
edited 13 books.

BOJAN RADOVIČ

is photographer and curator. He works as free-lance photographer.
His work has been presented in numerous exhibitions in Slovenia
and abroad. Currently he is director of Hiša fotografije / House of
Photography, Slovenia, an independent, non-profit institution devoted
to creative photography.