

The Croatian presentation at the 54th Biennale di Venezia

One Needs to Live Self-Confidently... Watching
Antonio G. Lauer a.k.a. Tomislav Gotovac and BADco.

curated by What, How and for Whom/WHW

Preview Days: June 1–3, 2011

Intermittent choreographic interventions during the preview days

Public Dates: June 4–November 27, 2011

venue: Arsenale

www.croatiavenice2011.whw.hr

The exhibition, *One Needs to Live Self-Confidently... Watching*, presents Antonio G. Lauer a.k.a. Tomislav Gotovac and theatre collective BADco. from Zagreb. The art of Tomislav Gotovac is based on the idea of 'global directing', not only as applied to film directing, but also as it extends into everyday life. BADco.'s artistic practice, operating at the intersection of theatre, performance and dance, engages with a redefinition of the performative act, and of the established relations between the audience, performers and performance.

The title of the exhibition, a quote taken from Tomislav Gotovac, in many ways summarises Gotovac's artistic credo, but it is ubiquitous enough to include a demand to take responsibility for things seen. *Responsibility for Things Seen: Tales in Negative Space*, the site-specific installation by BADco, sets the spatial parameters of the exhibition, conceptualising the absence of performers, and the complex field of friction between a stage and exhibition space, while taking into account the selection and conditions of Gotovac's presentation. On the other hand, Gotovac's works cannot escape the conditions and procedures set by BADco's installation, whose main interest lies in an examination of the 'much maligned capacity of images to capture our imagination'. BADco.'s *Responsibility for Things Seen* is not a reaction or intervention into Gotovac's work, but takes 'Gotovac' as a problem around which it evolves, which is more than just an element of its 'site-specificity'.

Tomislav Gotovac's presentation includes his key structural and experimental films, and a series of photographs from the early 1960s through to the end of the 1970s. It downplays the recuperation of his opus within the narrative of Croatian national art history and the usual clichés of the underrepresented dissident who fought for the freedom of artistic expression in the dark times of communist repression, as the story goes in the standard readings of the 'body in socialism'. The selection of his works attempts to accentuate specific procedures whose strict discipline and analytical possessiveness often trespassed into excess and transgression, to reinforce once again the systemic organising principle that underlies them, maintaining their autonomy as the ultimate responsibility to the self-devised and perfected system whose iron logic governed Gotovac's life and art.

Family Film I (1971) and ***Family Film II*** (1973) include explicit scenes of the artist making love with his female partner, but it would be wrong to understand this in the lineage of a post-'68 understanding of sex as liberation, the embodiment of the principle of self-creativity and individual engagement, emancipatory, a de-alienating weapon. One should see those images as part of the artist's obsession with repetition and systemic developments, what he called the 'iron net', a biopolitical regime that regulates diverse bodies and horizons of enjoyment.

Characteristic structural elements are discernible in two other experimental films shown in the exhibition. *S* (1966) shows a male hand leafing through a Swedish erotic magazine, with city roofs in the background and a captivating jazz soundtrack, while the early structuralist film *The Forenoon of a Faun* (1963) juxtaposes ambivalent shots of human interaction with an almost abstract detail of a wall and cityscape. The accumulation of images, registering without intervention, reduction and repetitiveness, 'cataloguing' the fragments of reality and finding systems in unexpected, unforeseen circumstances, a personal standpoint that resists narration, also characterises the photographic series *Metal Covers of the City of Belgrade* (1977), as well as *Cara Dušana 11* (1977), the latter a group of works that documents Gotovac's place of living in Belgrade from 1971 to 1977. Incidentally, this is also the location of the second Family Film. There are other slippery clues and unreliable threads, for example, motifs of hands, prominent in the movie *S* and repeated in the early photo series *Hands* (1964), in which the artist deals with the issues of montage and directing, and puts his body in a public space, or the motif of a (foreign) magazine from the same film, repeated in *Showing the Elle Magazine* (1962), a work of multifaceted conceptual anticipation, pointing to Gotovac's long standing method of 'making films with other means'. Although oppositions and contradictions are not resolved in these often misleading signs, they are helpful in navigating his works against linear and definitive readings.

This intention to evade definitive and directive readings comes to the fore in BADco.'s installation *Responsibility for Things Seen: Tales in Negative Space*. In a simple spatial gesture of wall replication, and the utilisation of a storage space behind the existing exhibition wall, the functions of spaces shift, and hierarchies between space and non-space, stage and backstage are blurred. In this spatial disposition five continuously active displays are installed, three of which are visible only through cutouts in the wall, while the other two are set on its replica, the salient and mighty presence of the wall. The films displayed use and combine material referring to the construction and displacement of the exhibition space, recordings of choreography performed in the previously empty exhibition and of the movements of visitors in real time, as well as digitally manipulated and temporally dislocated recordings of viewers in the exhibition, software-operated real-time-edited images from live feed from five cameras installed in the exhibition space, with prerecorded images of performers during the exhibition set-up. In every moment what is offered to the viewer is a construction that remembers, notes and anticipates, while the very act of seeing becomes a subject, an obsession, a game, a problem, the same one that Gotovac attempted to solve by his 'non-stop image' principle, and systemic subjection of reality to the principles of film. BADco.'s installation incites performative events in an enclosed, seemingly protected (surveyed) and yet fragile space, showing no traces of the assumption that community is established through gestures that abolish the dividing line between spectators and actors, staging instead the absence, making sense of activities already at work in the spectator. Badco.'s temporal gesture of manipulating absence as presence, of both performers and spectators, and our sense of time and ability to experience the present as opening to the future, demands nothing, steers nobody, yet makes clear that there is no such thing as neutral viewing

The exhibition is accompanied by a publication, with essays by Bojana Cvejić, Florian Malzacher, Renata Salecl and Georg Schöllhammer, which is available for free download: <http://croatiavenice2011.whw.hr/croatiavenice2011.pdf>

Antonio G. Lauer a.k.a Tomislav Gotovac (1937-2010) was an avant-garde film director and performer. He graduated in film directing from the Academy of Theatre, Film, Radio and Television in Belgrade. Gotovac made his first performances, films, collages and series of photographs in the early 1960s. His artistic activities combined visual art, the avant-garde, experimental, documentary and feature films, performance,

body art and conceptual art. In addition to various individual and group exhibitions, performances and experimental film practices, Gotovac showed his films at local and international film festivals. In 2005, he changed his name to Antonio Lauer. The Croatian Film Clubs' Association and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb published a monograph on his work in 2003.

BADco. is a Zagreb-based theatre collective. The collective, a confluence of interests in choreography, dramaturgy and philosophy, is nowadays made up of Pravdan Devlahović, Ivana Ivković, Ana Kreitmeyer, Tomislav Medak, Goran Sergej Pristaš, Nikolina Pristaš, Lovro Rumiha and Zrinka Užbinec. Since it was founded in 2000, it has systematically focused on theatrical and dance performance as a problem-generating rather than problem-solving activity - questioning the established ways of performing, representing and spectating. BADco. approaches the theatrical act as an unstable communicational exchange, a complex imaginary, challenging the spectator to look beyond the homogenising media reality and reclaim her or his freedom of spectating. As part of their work BADco. is publishing a book with contributions by Petar Milat, Guiliana Bruno, Peter Szendy and Stephen Zepke.

What, How and for Whom/WHW

What, How & for Whom/WHW is a curatorial collective founded in 1999 and based in Zagreb, Croatia. WHW has been involved in a wide range of production, exhibition and publishing projects. Since 2003, WHW has been curating the programme of Gallery Nova in Zagreb. In 2009, WHW curated the 11th Istanbul Biennial entitled What Keeps Mankind Alive?.

Ana Martina Bakić is the exhibition's architect, and publication and visual materials are designed by a member of the WHW collective, Dejan Kršić.

The exhibition is realised in collaboration with the Croatian Film Clubs' Association and Zagreb Youth Theatre. It is funded by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia, with additional support from the City Office for Culture, Education and Sports, City of Zagreb.