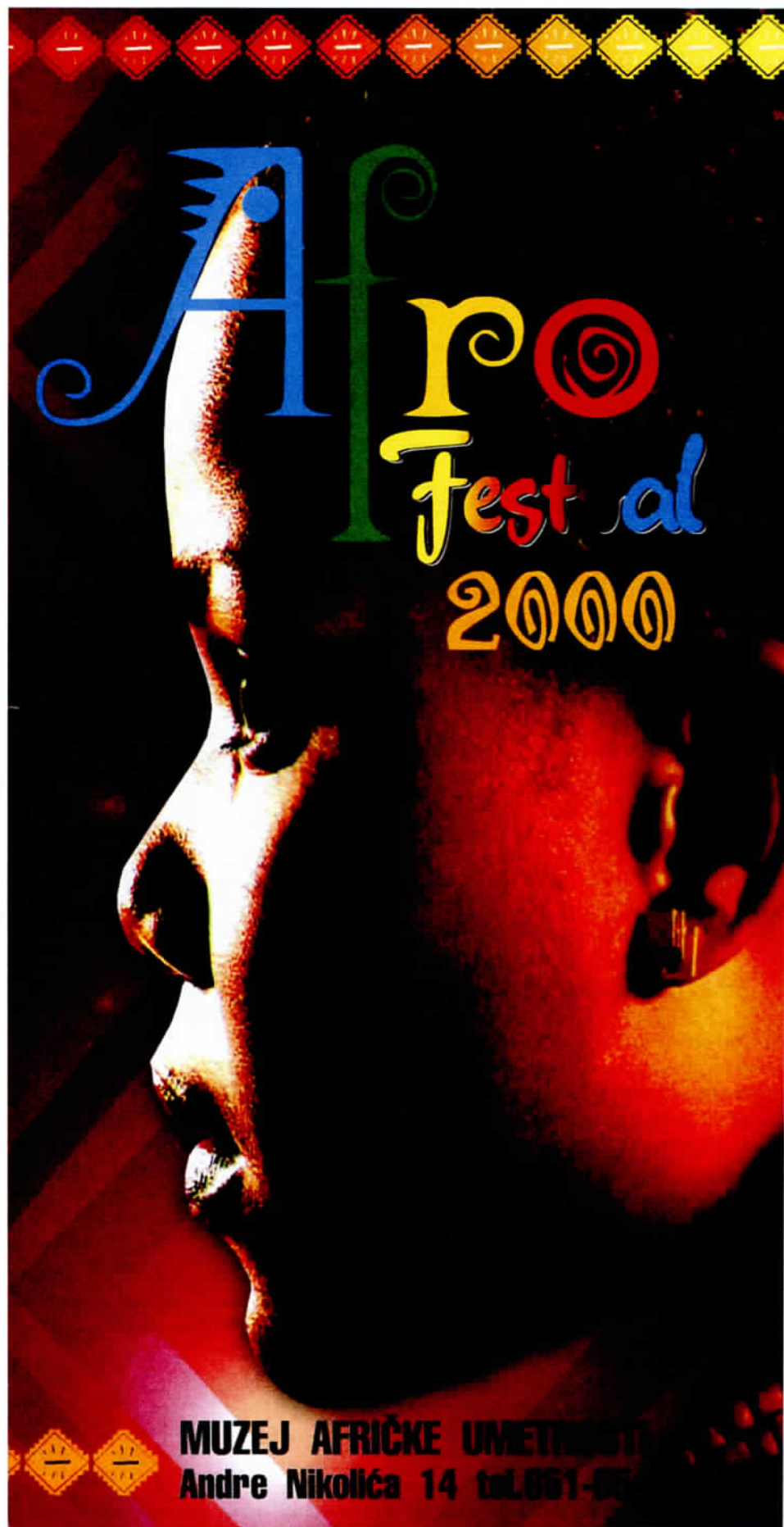


**Afterall**  
Autumn/Winter 2014  
**A Journal of Art,  
Context and Enquiry**

37

- 
- |    |   |   |
|----|---|---|
| 2  | <b>Foreword</b><br>– Melissa Gronlund   | Artists<br><i>Museum of American Art</i>  |
|    | Contexts  |   |
| 5  | <b>From Narcissism to the Dialogic:<br/>Identity in Art after the Internet</b><br>– Melissa Gronlund      | 75 <b>The Joy of Meta:<br/>On the <i>Museum of American Art</i></b><br>– Steven ten Thije   |
|    | Artists   | 85 <b>The Doorman</b><br>– Our Literal Speed  |
|    | Juan Downey   | Artists<br>Janice Kerbel  |
| 17 | <b>Beyond Technology:<br/>Juan Downey's Whole Earth</b><br>– Julieta González                             | 93 <b>Janice Kerbel:<br/>Diagramming Desire</b><br>– Anna Lovatt  |
| 29 | <b>Yanomami, Let's Talk</b><br>– Manuela Carneiro da Cunha<br>and Helena Vilalta                          | 103 <b>Janice Kerbel:<br/>Killing the Workers</b><br>– Tom McDonough  |
|    | Artists   | Contexts  |
|    | Otobong Nkanga  | 113 <b>The Way Ahead:<br/>The Association for the Advancement<br/>of Creative Musicians and Chicago's<br/>Black Arts Revolution</b><br>– Dieter Roelstraete |
| 41 | <b>Exchange and Some Change:<br/>The Imaginative Economies<br/>of Otobong Nkanga</b><br>– Monika Szewczyk | Artists<br>Boris Charmatz   |
| 53 | <b>Otobong Nkanga:<br/>Nothing Is Like It Seems,<br/>Everything Is Evidence</b><br>– Yvette Mutumba       | 123 <b>Boris Charmatz:<br/>An Architecture of Attention</b><br>– Catherine Wood   |
|    | Events, Works, Exhibitions  |   |
| 61 | <b>Five Images of an Image:<br/>The Museum of African Art<br/>in Belgrade</b><br>– Anders Kreuger         | 133 <b>Contributors</b>   |



Cover of the leaflet  
'Afro Festival 2000',  
organised by the  
Museum of African  
Art, Belgrade,  
17–22 October 2000.  
Courtesy the Museum  
of African Art

## Five Images of an Image: The Museum of African Art in Belgrade

– Anders Kreuger

### One: The Image-Object-Body

*If pure recollection is already spirit, and if pure perception is still in some sense matter, we ought to be able, by placing ourselves at their meeting place, to throw some light on the reciprocal action of spirit and matter. 'Pure', that is to say, instantaneous perception is, in fact, only an ideal, an extreme. Every perception fills a certain depth of duration, prolongs the past into the present, and thereby partakes of memory. So that if we take perception, in its concrete form, as a synthesis of pure memory and pure perception, that is to say, of mind and matter, we compress within its narrowest limits the problem of the union of soul and body.*  
– Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*<sup>1</sup>

This understanding of perception as something always alloyed with memory, laid out by Bergson in *Matter and Memory*, rests on a cunning refusal to specify the differences between image, object and body in common-sense terms: 'I call *matter* the aggregate of images, and *perception of matter* these same images referred to the eventual action of one particular image, my body.'<sup>2</sup>

The body and the brain are, for Bergson, nothing more and nothing less than images among other images. And since the part cannot possibly create or contain the whole – a trick possible only in language – the world cannot possibly exist only inside the brain. Nor, indeed, can memory-images be 'stored' there, because if perception-images are 'in some sense matter', then memory-images are 'already spirit': the past is preserved in the past *in general* (a Bergsonian statement that sounds simpler than it is) and we will look in vain for traces of it in the tissues of our body.

Yet Bergson's intention was precisely to create a philosophy compatible with common sense, which tells us that the outside world doesn't cease to exist when we no longer perceive it and that it probably also existed before us. In order to do so he must insist on some counter-intuitive interpretations of the world and of consciousness. He must ask us to interpret phenomena commonly considered to be objects (or bodies) as images, and to refrain from trying to determine whether these phenomena exist inside us or outside of us, 'since interiority and exteriority are only relations between images'.<sup>3</sup>

This fluid approach to the image as a category of thought is probably conditioned by Bergson's highly visual use of language. He is the master of finding surprisingly simple

verbal illustrations for complicated thoughts with minimum loss of precision, as, for example, when he asks us to visualise the present moment as a constantly moving mirror that refracts the stream of time into two jets: one bending off towards the unknowable future, the other towards the

---

**Anders Kreuger pays a new visit to a museum that he remembered as an image of a non-colonial collection of African Art – and of the time when it was created.**

past in general.<sup>4</sup> And although it would be difficult to write about art and its epiphenomena without deciding, in each concrete case, whether to call something an image, an object or a body, it would be almost impossible to do so if some universal definition of the image were

1 Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (1896, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer), New York: Zone Books, 1988, p.244.

2 *Ibid.*, p.22.

3 *Ibid.*, p.25.

4 See H. Bergson, 'Memory of the Present and False Recognition', in *Mind-Energy* (1908, trans. H. Wildon Carr), New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920, pp.165–67.

imposed on us. To call something an image in the deliberately open-ended Bergsonian sense is to use a mirroring device; it allows us to inject reflection and self-reflection into a description, a story or an argument.

With this in mind, I shall take the liberty of treating the moderately exotic Museum of African Art in Belgrade as an image rather than as a museum. More to the point, I shall claim that it was created to be an image of itself as a museum (incorporating the mirror-effect from the very beginning) rather than an organism (object and body in one) entrusted with the task of working with, for and through images. It may be objected that any phenomenon existing for more than 35 years without significant changes to its original appearance becomes an image of itself, but I shall try to explain why I believe this museum was, in real terms, pre-programmed to illustrate Bergson's use of the image: to unite the material and the spiritual. In this case that means reconciling the various benefits to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia of its friendly relations to decolonised Africa with the desire to interpret these relations in non-cynical terms, as solidarity and friendship.

At the heart of this operation there was and is, I believe, a sincere — if somewhat impersonal, politicised — understanding of such noble words. Otherwise, why would so many people, of different generations and under different political regimes, have displayed so much effort to keep this museum open?

## Two: Museum Recycle Bin

ANGELA: *My ideal would be to paint a picture of a picture.*

*I am so upset that I never perfected what I invented in painting. Or at least I've never heard of this way of painting: it consists of taking a wooden canvas — Scotch pine is best — and paying attention to its veins. Suddenly, then a wave of creativity comes out of the subconscious and you go along with the veins following them a bit — but maintaining your liberty.*

— Clarice Lispector, *Um Sopro de Vida (A Breath of Life)*<sup>5</sup>

I had been to Belgrade only once, thirteen years ago, invited by the then new leadership of the Museum of Contemporary Art, whose stylish but decaying building may now finally be renovated before its fiftieth anniversary in 2015. My task was to meet their staff and talk to them about my experience of 'implementing change in an institutional environment' and other skills to do with 'transition' that I had learned by working for an inter-governmental organisation (the Nordic Council of Ministers) throughout the 1990s. I don't remember being very attentively listened to, but then again, as soon as you pronounce the words 'change' or 'renewal' any employee of any organisation in any country will stop listening to what you actually say and start wondering, 'When are they going to fire me?'

What I do remember from Belgrade are fragments of visual reality, or rather, of that reality as an uncomfortably outdated image of itself. The shop interiors and pedestrian streets would have been state-of-the-art in the early 1980s. The angrily upturned hairstyles sported by female passers-by seemed to accentuate their frustration at the way things had been going for the last ten or twelve years, as if the air-bombed headquarters of the Yugoslav National Army were not an obvious enough reminder of their country's fall from grace. The people of Belgrade had learned that change and renewal are not always for the better.

Another memory from the autumn of 2001 is 'MSU Recycle Bin', the first exhibition organised at Muzej savremene umetnosti (the museum's Serbo-Croat name) under the director Branislava Andelković. Dejan Sretenović, the chief curator, had conducted a critical but joyful survey of *everything* that the incoming team found in the building when they took over after a previous leadership loyal to Slobodan Milošević's regime: from exhibition posters (Yves Klein in 1971, Robert Smithson in 1980) and other archival delights immortalising the museum's golden first fifteen years to ill-designed flyers from the dark 1990s (in Serbia this decade can hardly be referred to otherwise) to past-its-prime computer hardware encased in dirty beige plastic.

<sup>5</sup> Clarice Lispector, *A Breath of Life* (1978, trans. Johnny Lorenz), New York: New Directions, 2012, p.43.



Archival photograph of the entrance to the Museum of African Art, Belgrade, featuring a Ghanaian fishing boat given as a gift to Dr Zdravko Pečar in 1975 by the leader of Mankoadze, the village where it was constructed and used. Courtesy the Museum of African Art

I was impressed by how the exhibition recycled recent art history and brought it back to life without showing almost any 'real' works of art. Sretenović advised me to also visit Muzej afričke umetnosti, the Museum of African Art, which he described as something of an artwork in its own right, perhaps even more artful than the objects of which it is composed.

So I went to find the museum in Senjak, a leafy area of Belgrade with many ambassadorial residencies. The image that stayed with me was an array of dark wooden masks and other sculpted artefacts in a vaguely garage-like space, mounted on triangular plinths painted matte green and blue. I also recall large black-and-white photographic prints, somewhat frayed at the edges, and dark wooden panelling that may not have been quite as precious as it was made to look.

This was an unusually well-preserved example of a modular, immersive style of display — at the same time elegant and economical, informational and emotive, naïve and manipulative — that could still be encountered in the late 1970s. Used, by then mostly in socialist countries, for prestigious temporary exhibitions such as world's fair pavilions, its main characteristic was to turn objects into images, and vice versa, and to treat 'surface' and 'content' as conveniently equivalent components in a 'universal language' of visual presentation.

At Belgrade's Museum of African Art the differences between the various peoples of Mali are both underlined and smoothed over, because the Chi Wara masks of the Bamana

and the photographs of masked Dogons dancing are so obviously meant to 'tell the same story'. The visual logic of old Ashanti gold weights, often translating themselves into miniature copies of various everyday objects (where the European mind would have expected a predictable and unadorned shape to signify the universality of the measuring unit), finds new resonance in the 'political' printed fabrics of West Africa of the 1960s. These incorporated images of state leaders into their designs, insisting that images of the new leaders should be seen everywhere (and be worn as part of outfits for special occasions). The first image-object that visitors to the museum encounter, already at the entrance, is a hardwood sculpture of the map of Africa. Its angular representations of decolonised state borders reoccur on the otherwise stylishly under-designed black-and-white labels that accompany the exhibits.

I can, in all honesty, no longer know how detailed my impressions of this first visit were, but the image of the museum imprinted itself on me with enough force to inspire a second visit this summer. I wanted to check if I had misunderstood its aesthetics and the political motivations behind it. I wanted to see if the museum was still there as a perception-image of itself, or if I had taken too much creative liberty with my memory-image of it.

### Three: Two Weeks in May

*The Museum of African Art is not just a collection of primitive art objects by unknown peoples of the Black Continent, worthy of interest only because of their 'animalism', as it is often stated in European textbooks. Our museum offers art of great value, created by African peoples who for centuries have been oppressed and constrained in their economic, cultural and political development. The inauguration of this museum in the city of Belgrade is in a way symbolic, because our country has also been subjected to plunder throughout its history. The choice of Belgrade is in a way symbolic, because it is the city that welcomed the leaders of the non-aligned countries at the time of their first conference, which marked a turn in the history of relations between the colonial countries in particular and the whole world in general.*

— Živorad Kovačević, President of the Belgrade City Council, in the museum's first catalogue, 1977<sup>6</sup>

So I called the museum, after consulting its recently overhauled website,<sup>7</sup> and chanced upon the very helpful curator and public relations officer Emilia Epštajn. She kindly agreed to help me around and give me access to the museum's archive during a few days in the beginning of July this year. She also put me in touch with Ana Sladojević, a former colleague of hers who recently defended a doctoral dissertation about the museum, and more specifically about the anti-colonial discourse that was spun around it from the very beginning.<sup>8</sup>

This, in fact, was the second thing I remembered about the museum, after its frozen-in-time display: that it presents itself as the only museum of African art in Europe not based on colonial practices of collecting but, on the contrary, made possible by Yugoslavia's friendship with decolonised African countries, which in turn was facilitated by its active role in the Non-Aligned Movement.

Sladojević also points out that the institution's official name is, still today, 'Museum of African Art, Collection of Veda and Dr Zdravko Pečar'.<sup>9</sup> This couple were an active presence not just in setting up and running the museum, but also in Yugoslav journalism and politics, and especially in the formation of their country's attitudes and policies towards Africa.

6 Živorad Kovačević, 'Ouverture du Musée d'Art Africain — événement culturel et politique', in *Musée d'Art Africain, Collection Veda et Dr Zdravko Pečar*, Belgrade: Beograd-Publik, 1977, p.4. Translation the author's.

7 See the museum's website: [www.museumofafricanart.org](http://www.museumofafricanart.org) (last accessed on 4 August 2014).

8 See Ana Sladojević, 'Museum as the Image of the World: The Space of Representations of Identity and Ideology', unpublished doctoral thesis, Belgrade: University of Arts in Belgrade, Interdisciplinary Studies, Group for Theory of Art and Media, 2008—12.

9 A. Sladojević, 'The Museum of African Art in Belgrade and Its Anti-Colonial Discourse', unpublished and undated research paper, Belgrade: University of Arts in Belgrade, p.5.



Archival photograph of the permanent display of the Museum of African Art, Belgrade. Courtesy the Museum of African Art

Veda Zagorac (1914–89) was a close associate of Josip Broz, who, under his *nom de guerre* Tito, led the communist partisan movement that fought the German invaders in Yugoslavia during World War II. In the early post-War period, while Yugoslavia was still in the Soviet Bloc, Zagorac held senior governmental posts and directed a big publishing house (a politically important job in any socialist country). During the colonial war in Algeria in the late 1950s she was cultural counsellor in the Yugoslav embassy in neighbouring Tunisia, shortly after it gained independence in 1956.

Her husband Zdravko Pečar (1922–93) was a journalist who covered events in the Middle East and Africa for Yugoslav outlets such as the news agency Tanjug (which was closely related to the intelligence community). He reported from the war of liberation in Algeria, travelled widely in West Africa during the years of decolonisation around 1960 and published books about this experience that were widely read not only in Yugoslavia but also in other non-aligned countries, notably in francophone Africa. Later he was Yugoslav ambassador to Mali, the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Liberia, Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso), Togo and Dahomey (now Benin), before moving back to Belgrade in the mid-1970s to become director of Radio Yugoslavia.<sup>10</sup>

Zagorac and Pečar were thus influential figures in the so-called Second Yugoslavia, the Socialist Federal Republic that replaced the pre-War kingdom. Like Tito, they were Croats, and like him they (at least Pečar) appreciated the good life. We should therefore not be too surprised that, during their long stays in the newly liberated continent, they amassed a collection of some 1,500 African artefacts, including many aesthetically and historically valuable pieces: masks, wooden, bronze and ivory sculptures, ceramics, musical instruments, textiles, jewellery.

Sladojević's research is predicated on the observation that the idea of building a collection of African *objets d'art* is somewhat contradictory to the anti-colonial ethos articulated by the political establishment in Yugoslavia in the 1970s.<sup>11</sup> Collecting, classifying, cataloguing and then displaying one's spoils in public — regardless of the specific circumstances in

10 Biographical data adapted from *Muzej afričke umetnosti: Zbirka Vede i Dr Zdravka Pečara/Musée d'Art Africain: Collection Veda et Dr Zdravko Pečar/Museum of African Art: The Veda and Dr Zdravko Pečar Collection*, Belgrade and Gornji Milanovac: Museum of African Art/Dečje novine, 1989, p.569.

11 A. Sladojević, 'The Museum of African Art in Belgrade and Its Anti-Colonial Discourse', *op. cit.*, p.1.

which these acts are performed — reflects an ambition to assert control and superiority through knowledge, which is an important operational principle behind colonialism.

We should also not be surprised at all that the City of Belgrade gladly accepted Zagorac and Pečar's donation of their collection in 1974. The architect Slobodan Ilić, at the time best known for his work in Lebanon, was commissioned to design a one-storey structure to house it, with exposed concrete walls and other references to the 'organic' and 'vernacular' brand of international Modernism that Le Corbusier had popularised with Chandigarh, his new capital for the Indian state of Punjab planned in the 1950s. The museum building embodies the internationalist orientation of the Yugoslav construction industry, which was awarded many lucrative contracts in non-aligned countries across Africa and the Middle East. It also partly incorporates what used to be the studio of the painter and prominent communist politician Moša Pijade. This part of the city had been popular with the ruling elite ever since its gardens and orchards were laid out in the early nineteenth century, when Serbia was still an Ottoman dominion.

25 May 1977 was Tito's 85th birthday.<sup>12</sup> It was to be an important celebration, one of the last of its kind while the leader was still alive. (Tito's official birthday was celebrated every year throughout the 1980s, although he died in 1980.) Two days before, on 23 May, the Museum of African Art was inaugurated. The interior designers, Saveta and Slobodan Mašić, managed to get everything done in just a couple of weeks: the panelling, the plinths and glass cases, the photographic enlargements, the labelling, the lighting, the paint work. Since then only very minor changes have been made to the main collection display, although already at its opening the first director of the museum pointed out that 'the number of objects surpassed our desires'.<sup>13</sup>

Yugoslavia had organised the first conference of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961 and it hosted the conference a second time in 1989 with a session held at the Museum

of African Art. Dr Pečar, still very much a presence at the museum, wanted an additional floor built to accommodate this. In connection with the construction work, most of the original top-lights in the exhibition hall were closed and replaced with neon fixtures, but the new roomy attic (of a bulging design with New Age overtones) was never finished. Just a couple of years later, Yugoslavia's membership in the Non-Aligned Movement — which

***It is tempting to regard the ethos of non-alignment as an antidote to today's conformist globalism, but how accurate and productive is it to idolise and retroactively empower the leaders of 53 years ago?***

it helped create, and which, in turn, contributed to the construction of an internationalist identity for the country of many nations — was suspended as the country itself was falling apart.

#### Four: Non-Committed Monuments

*There still prevails, as in the past, the practice that only the biggest, the most advanced and militarily the most powerful countries attempt to make decisions involving the fate of the world, while a large number of small- and medium-sized countries, which are not developed for well-known reasons but constitute the majority of mankind, have been unable, until recently, to participate as equal partners in taking decisions on questions of general interest. These countries were looked upon, and are even today considered, as a kind of reserve and voting machine in international forums such as the United Nations and others. This gathering of the highest representatives of non-aligned countries illustrates, however, that such outdated practices must be discarded, that non-aligned countries can no longer reconcile themselves with the status of observers and voters and that,*

12 No one appears to have known Tito's exact birthdate. It was officially celebrated as if he had been born on 25 May 1892, although 7 May has been proposed as the 'more authentic' birthday.

13 Jelena Arandelović-Lazić, 'Le Musée d'Art Africain à Belgrade', in *Musée d'Art Africain, Collection Veda et Dr Zdravko Pečar*, Belgrade: Beograd-Publik, 1977, p.52. Translation the author's. In the 1989 catalogue, published on the occasion of the second Belgrade conference of the Non-Aligned Movement, more than 1,200 objects are listed and illustrated.





Official photograph of the high-level delegates to the First Conference of Non-Aligned Nations at the Palace of the Federation of the Republics of Yugoslavia (now Palace of Serbia) in Belgrade, 5 September 1961. Courtesy the Museum of Yugoslav History, Belgrade

*in their opinion, they have the right to participate in solving problems, particularly those which endanger the peace and the fate of the world at the present moment.*

— Josip Broz Tito, inaugural address to the First Conference of Non-Aligned Nations in Belgrade, 1 September 1961<sup>14</sup>

Self-reflective approaches to exhibition-making have become fashionable. Curators dedicate whole biennials to probing various modes of display, inside and outside of the museum. It may, for instance, be argued that an overly introspective and ‘art-specific’ interpretation of self-reflexivity limited the relevance of this year’s Berlin Biennale, too concerned with modes of display in its selection of works and venues while not sensitive enough to the longer-term societal implications of its tactics. Art historians produce books, even entire series of books, around notions such as ‘radical museology’ or ‘exhibition histories’, and there are many versions of what the right path for such research should be, methodologically and in terms of its overall ambition or just the tone it uses to attract attention to itself.

Another noticeable trend in the art world, especially in the academic or semi-academic parts of it directly touched by the ‘educational turn’ that probably peaked some seven or eight years ago, is the research project that rediscovers and repackages the cultural politics of the not-too-distant past. Suddenly events such as the Persepolis Festival of Arts in Iran (1967–78), the World Festivals of Black Arts (in Dakar in 1966, in Lagos in 1977) or the travelling exhibition ‘Art for Palestine’ (initiated in Lebanon in 1978) no longer seem like yesterday’s news.<sup>15</sup> Could it be that the present moment needs to cross-check its own globalism against the internationalism of 35 or 45 years ago?

14 English transcript of the speech made available through the John F. Kennedy Memorial Library, Washington DC, on <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKPOF-104-004.aspx> (last accessed on 16 July 2014).

15 ‘Unedited History: Iran 1960–2014’, co-curated by Odile Burluraux, Catherine David, Morad Montazami, Narmine Sadeg and Vali Mahlouji, at the Musée d’Art moderne de la Ville de Paris (16 May–24 August 2014) includes a rather comprehensive section on the Persepolis Festival and MACBA in Barcelona is planning a project about the ‘Art for Palestine’ exhibition, while Chimurenga presented their research on FESTAC77, held in Lagos, at the San Francisco Public Library from 24 May until 29 June 2014.

The Non-Aligned Movement is also being revisited and reinvented. During my recent visit to Belgrade I saw 'Travelling Communiqué' (2014), an exhibition dedicated to archival research on and artistic reinterpretation of the first conference of the Non-Aligned Movement in Belgrade in September 1961. This project, which now also involves students at the Dutch Art Institute in Arnhem, was developed as a collective work by the artists-researchers Armin Linke, Doreen Mende and Milica Tomić, 'in collaboration with a team of curators from the Museum of Yugoslav History (Radovan Cukić, Ivan Manojlović, Mirjana Slavković) and through discussions with a large number of international authors.'<sup>16</sup>

'Travelling Communiqué' is built around an official group photograph of the highest-level delegates to the 1961 conference and a letter to US President John F. Kennedy that they all signed. The exhibition featured well-known names such as Kader Attia and the Otolith Group along with internationally less exposed artists, for instance those behind the Netsa Art Village in Addis Ababa (Helen Zeru Araya, Tamrat Gezahegn, Mulugeta Kassa, Mihret Kebede and Tesfahun Kibru). It took place in the Museum of Yugoslav History in Belgrade, which itself is illustrative of the history it interprets for today's audiences. The present organisational setup of the museum — one of Belgrade's main tourist attractions — dates from 1996, when the holdings of the Josip Broz Tito Memorial Centre and the Museum of the Revolution of the Peoples and Nationalities of Yugoslavia were fused, but the building in which the exhibition took place was inaugurated in 1962, when Tito officially turned seventy, as the Museum of 25 May. Its elegant international Modernism, both hardened and softened by the ceremonial requirements of state socialism, contrasts with the petit-bourgeois sentimentality of the countless gifts received by Tito from the Yugoslav population and visiting foreign dignitaries or during his frequent trips abroad.

This is not the occasion to profile the Museum of Yugoslav History or to provide a detailed review of the contemporary-art-as-research (and research-as-contemporary-art) exhibition that I have already drastically summarised. I mention them because they enable me to make two points, based on speculative observation, which may cast some light on the question I am trying to ask. Why has the Museum of African Art been preserved as an image of how it looked in May 1977? And why was it created as an image of what a Museum of African Art in Belgrade might look like?

It seems pertinent to compare the two museums. The various components of what is now the Museum of Yugoslav History formed an immediate (i.e. unmediated and perhaps not very self-reflexive) self-image of political power, casting a direct light on its own intentions and vanities. This complex of buildings and gardens was not primarily an image of what a commemorative museum might be; rather, it was meant to become an instant monument to the supreme benevolence that created it. The task was to efficiently conjure up that emotion — love — for which all those pavilions filled with gifts were always only a substitute or, at best, an empty sign. Therefore this museum had to be changed as soon as possible after the political and emotional reality around it changed. It now comprises considerably fewer buildings than it did in the 1980s, and attempts (not always well-advised) have been made to tweak the selection of objects on display and add contextualising comments to them.

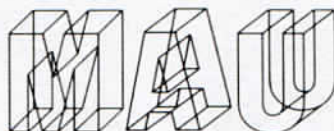
The Museum of African Art, by contrast, was never intended as a direct illustration of political power. Instead it spoke obliquely, not just through images but through the images of others, about the capacity of its host country to inspire less absolute but more durable emotional responses: respect, sympathy, friendship. Or at least that was the message pitched to the Yugoslav public. The museum became an image of a 'best possible scenario' for Yugoslavia, as well as a suitable backdrop for photographing the African leaders who visited its capital. And therefore, while this political self-image was crumbling around the museum, no one wished to tamper with its last remaining manifestation.

And then my second point. As we see in the group photograph, Tito tries to strike a confident note in his address to the illustrious delegates at his carefully stagecrafted conference, where all the front figures of the Non-Aligned Movement showed up:

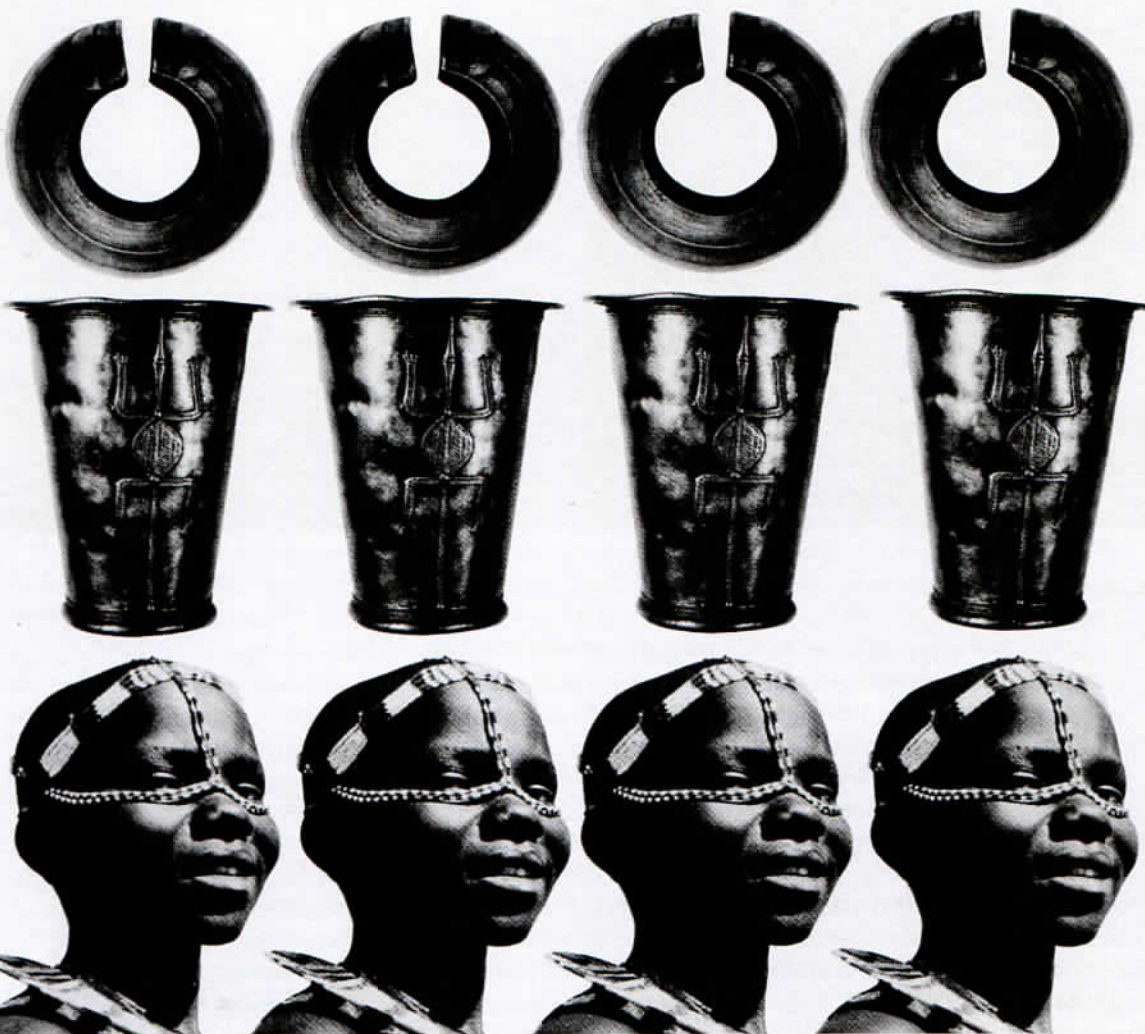
16 See <http://www.mij.rs/en/exhibitions/197/travelling-communication.html> (last accessed on 4 August 2014). 'Travelling Communiqué', Museum of Yugoslav History, Belgrade, 10 June—14 August 2014.

# Nakit

AFRIČKI NAKIT  
AFRICAN JEWELLERY  
Jelena Arandelović-Lazić



MUZEJ AFRIČKE UMETNOSTI  
MUSEUM OF AFRICAN ARTS  
Zbirka Veda i dr Zdravka Pečara  
Collection of Veda and Dr Zdravko Pečar



Design: Slobodan i Sarenka Malic  
Studio: Structure, Beograd  
Photo: Branislav Nikolic

Photo: Sajra Studio, Nairobi

Cover of the exhibition catalogue *African Jewellery* (Belgrade: Museum of African Art, 1984).  
Courtesy the Museum of African Art

Jawaharlal Nehru of India was there, and Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, as well as the Ghanaian leader Kwame Nkrumah, Indonesia's president Sukarno and Haile Selassie, the Emperor of Ethiopia. The US dismissed these countries as non-committed rather than non-aligned, when it wasn't suspecting them of toeing the Soviet line on defining topics such as nuclear confrontation or the status of Berlin and Germany. In the end, what does the letter to Kennedy, phrased in Nehru's Edwardian English, communicate other than precisely the lack of power and agency that Tito denounces? And what do the faces and attitudes of the 26 dignitaries in the group photograph convey other than the varying degrees of narcissistic disorder that the too-powerful tend to radiate? It is tempting to regard the ethos of non-alignment as an antidote to today's conformist globalism, but how accurate and productive is it to idolise and retroactively empower these leaders of 53 years ago?



#### Five: Around the Anchor

*This anchor, of the 'admiral' type, belonged to the ship Negriera, which sunk in the Bay of Guinea 150-200 years ago. While fishing, the Spanish captain Jesus Armandi, from Accra, recovered the anchor near Porto Novo and donated it to the Pečar collection in 1975. During three centuries 20 million blacks were brought to America and 200 million perished through violence or during the transport. The peoples of Yugoslavia never took part in this trade in human beings.*

— Plaque in the garden of the Museum of African Art<sup>17</sup>

UNESCO Director-General Amadou Mahtar M'Bow on an official visit to the Museum of African Art in Belgrade, September 1980. Courtesy the Museum of African Art

It is not as if the museum has done nothing to adapt to the changing reality around it. In addition to the all but untouched basic display of the collection, there has always been a small room for temporary exhibitions, organised around themes inspired by the objects bequeathed by Zagorac and Pečar or in collaboration with other museums or collections. Especially in the museum's first decade of activities, these exhibitions would be investigative and broadly thematic, incorporating contemporary reality in Africa (for example 'African Jewellery', 1984, or 'Symbols on West African Textiles', 1986). Also in recent years there have been exhibitions about quite diverse topics, such as Saharan rock paintings or West African barbershop signs, although a persistent problem is the lack of funds for sending the museum's curators on 'field trips' to the continent they spend their whole professional life studying. When I visited I saw an exhibition of horsemen amulets from the Kotoko people around Lake Chad, chosen from an Italian private collection ('Kotoko Equestrians, Guardians of the Soul: From the Pierluigi Peroni Collection', curated by Marija Ličina).

It is also not as if the museum has never explored the opportunities for critical thinking that its own institutional history offers. This, in fact, began in 2004 with the exhibition 'Black Body, White Masks', Dejan Sretenović's erudite settling of accounts with what we

<sup>17</sup> Translated from the Serbo-Croat by Ana Sladojević.

<sup>18</sup> See Dejan Sretenović, *Crno telo, bele maske* (exh. cat.), Belgrade: Museum of African Art, Collection of Veda and Dr Zdravko Pečar, 2004.

might call Yugoslavia's anti-colonial semi-unconscious.<sup>18</sup> The continued existence of the Museum of African Art in its almost unadulterated original form might be regarded as a symptom of something unresolved, and he used some of the same strategies that made 'MSU Recycle Bin' such a thought-provoking exhibition – not least inserting a generous selection of textual and visual documents, together with some original artworks and period objects, into the museum's usual display.

In doing this Sretenović surreptitiously juxtaposed the live image of the museum itself in the present (which in Bergsonian terms means both perception-image and memory-image, indiscernible as parts of real-life vision but at the same time distinct from each other) with images (in the more technical sense of visual documents) resurrected from archives chronicling more than a century of contact between Serbia/Yugoslavia and Africa. The exhibition suggested that the Museum of African Art could be seen as a beacon of museological stability in a dangerously unpredictable surrounding reality, but also that professed internationalist conviction had often, in both Yugoslavia and Serbia, co-existed with an uncritical self-image – and with unarticulated racial prejudice. From the writings of Dr Kosta Dinić, the Serbian physician who served Leopold II in the Congo Free State in the 1890s, through Josephine Baker's four visits to Belgrade (in 1929, 1958, 1968 and 1971) or the locally produced film *Tarcan*, released in 1940, to the reception given to African asylum-seekers in 2014, the public's attitudes towards 'people of colour' have not always matched the solidarity with the 'dark continent' that was declared a cornerstone of Yugoslav foreign policy already in the 1950s.

This exhibition, with its title alluding to Frantz Fanon, was an enticingly wide-ranging critical visualisation of the surprisingly (to an outsider like myself) intimate relationship between Yugoslavia and Africa throughout the twentieth century. It also attempted to bring the audience up to date with postcolonial thought and terminology and to analyse Yugoslav culture through the prism of 'primitive art' and its impact on international Modernism. Sretenović's approach may have been a bit approximate, and his enthusiastic and tongue-in-cheek embrace of 'visual research' may not have aged so well after a decade of various attempts at refining this curatorial method (from the 'Migration of Form' to the 'Brain' in two successive editions of Documenta, to give only the most obvious examples). Yet 'Black Body, White Masks' deserves to be remembered for its intelligent approach to making sense of the facts on the ground.

This exhibition at the Museum of African Art was followed by others, notably a mini-series of sorts rather disingenuously titled 'Coloured World' (2007) by its curator Mihael Milunović, which included an installation by the Paris-based Cameroonian artist Barthélémy Toguo on the museum's unfinished upper floor, usually inaccessible to visitors, and an exhibition by Dominican-born artist Jno-Baptiste Lennon. Serbian artist Zoran Naskovski has also intervened in the museum's collections at several occasions, from 2006 until 2013. And throughout 2014 the museum has put renewed effort into embedding its traditional activities (which include a festival of African culture with open-air concerts, dance performances and food stands) by asking Ana Sladojević to organise 'Contexts and Representations', a series of conversations or 'open research hours' to which she invites various people to discuss their interest in the museum and its history. The first of these events was dedicated to Sretenović's exhibition, almost exactly ten years after it took place.

I was invited to talk about my interest in this museum's particular mode of display and to air my hypothesis that it is a complex image of a museum, and of its own past, rather than a museum *tout court*. So on the warm evening of 2 July 2014 a small but attentive group gathered, on US Army collapsible chairs from the American School next door, around the anchor permanently stranded in front of the museum's entrance to try and formulate why the museum has been allowed to continue its largely imaginary life – as an image among other images, much like Bergson's only seemingly dismissive description of the human brain. The perhaps most convincing version was offered by one of its curators, the anthropologist Aleksandra Prodanović-Bojović: 'Because for us it stands for something positive that we don't want to completely lose touch with.'