

Irwin

STATE IN TIME

The Aarhus Art Building

February 2 – April 6, 2008



The Slovenian art group Irwin consists of the five artists Dušan Mandič, Miran Mohar, Andrej Savski, Roman Uranjek and Borut Vogeljik. The group was founded in 1983, the year before the artists founded the multimedia avant-garde commune Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK).

With their controversial works, happenings, interventions in politics and use of classic avant-garde methods such as manifests, montage and public provocations, Irwin and NSK have played an important artistic and political role in the post socialist countries as well as in western art circles both before and after the collapse of the Berlin Wall and after the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991.

The Slovenian artists continued the avant-gardist intentions in an Eastern European context and showed at the same time that it's legitimate to think and create politically engaged contemporary art with a critical and barrier-breaking potential. This despite the fact that the German literary critic, Peter Bürger, in his influential 1974 essay 'Theorie der Avantgarde', did away with any chance of real, ongoing avant-garde art after the final collapse of the historic avant-garde in the years between the wars.

In 1992 the artist commune NSK transformed itself from an organisation to a state in time (NSK-State in Time) that since has grown to include several thousand citizens. In the virtual, utopian state the members of Irwin played and play the role of protagonists as well as chronologists by analysing and continuing the processes that began in Europe after the fall of Socialism.

In 1996 Irwin launched the procedural Retroavantgarde that – in the shape of an artistic statement and a constructed framework – mirrors the lack of a stable historical narration of modern and contemporary art in Slovenia, in the Balkans and the Eastern European countries in general. In a very concrete way Irwin has subsequently taken the initiative to found several important and contemporary art collections in the Balkans, for instance Ars Asevi and 2000+Arteast Collection.

Today Irwin is more active than ever and interacts on the global art scene with its highly current, interactive and constantly changing project East Art Map. The project is a thorough mapping of works by Eastern and Central European avant-garde artists from 1945 to the present day with the aim of lifting artists out of their national frameworks and having them written into a Western art historical context.

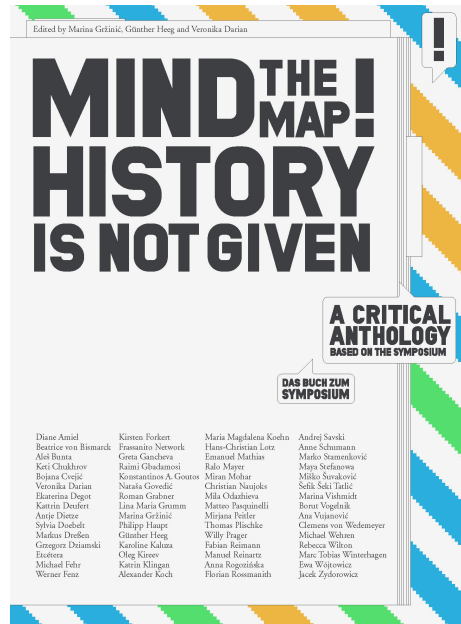
Thus one of the most significant and influential art groups from Eastern and Central Europe is now presented for the first time in Denmark and for the first time at a solo exhibition in Scandinavia. Seen together the presentation of Irwin/NSK in Denmark should not only be seen as a purely artistic matter but also as a part of a highly necessary democratic dialogue between East and West in a globalized but not yet fully developed united Europe.

NSK-State in Time is a utopian state without a concrete territory, but with several thousands of citizens plus formal national symbols such as a flag, stamps, emblems and a passport that everyone is free to obtain for 30 €. The NSK-state now counts more than 3,000 citizens and is an artistic embodiment of utopian theories about how only a real state with its abstract power structures can dissolve national ideologies, ethnic attachments and 'Blut und Boden' affiliations – national and ethnic affiliations that once again became a part of the European reality in the 1990s.

Recently the NSK-state has received more than 1,000 applications for NSK-passports and citizenships from Africa – mainly from Ibadan in Nigeria. Since it was doubtful whether the interest from the African applicants was related to art, there was a risk of an NSK-passport being transformed from artefacts to useful documents in the third world. Irwin wanted to make sure that the NSK-passports didn't fall into the wrong hands and were used to exploit people in need and under pressure. Therefore the artists collaborated with the Aarhus-based anthropologist Esben Hansen and the curator of the exhibition, Henrik Broch-Lips, in a research project with the aim of shedding light upon the background for the passport's possible change from artistic objects to functional documents in the third world.

The exhibition presents the results of this research plus a large number of documents in the shape of video interviews, photographs, articles, artefacts and other kinds of visual material from the nearly 15 years of existence for this state. Moreover a passport office will be opened where at selected times during the exhibition period it will be possible to become a citizen of the NSK-State. Irwin has earlier set up embassies in Moscow, Sarajevo, Gent and Beijing, a consulate in Umaq, and opened post offices in Skopje and Dublin. For the present exhibition a number of posters have been printed showing the statistics for the state's development as to number of citizens and their age, sex and profession.

East Art Map is an interactive installation and a comprehensive mapping of Eastern European art. The project was initiated in 2002, but is still undergoing a rapid development. Irwin has set the utopian goal of reconstructing and registering the history of the forgotten Eastern European avant-garde art from 1945 to the present day. This takes place by means of a presentation of the projects of 250 artists – all estimated to be of major importance by 24 invited art critics, curators and artists from the ex-socialistic Central, Eastern and Southern European countries. In other words East Art Map shows what for decades was hidden from the Western European eye. In order to symbolize the mapping of the excluded artists Irwin has copied a map of Europe on which has been placed a black crackled square. This is a subtle reference to the general notion of Eastern Europe as an artistically dark area, but it's also a reference to the leading avant-garde artist and theoretician Malevich, since X-ray examinations have revealed that the first black square from 1914-15 crackled ten years later because the Russian avant-garde artist had painted it on top of another motif, a painting with a large number of colours and supremacist shapes. Irwin relentlessly reveals that the instituted, imaginary notion of Europe likewise covers other pictures, motifs and stories that only come into the light when the surface crackles. The interactive installation consists of a number of large video screens that light up and in a beautiful way lead the onlooker into the world of Eastern European avant-garde art since 1945.



Corpse of Art is a reconstruction of the artist Kasimir Malevich exhibited in his coffin at the Artists' Union in Leningrad in 1935. In this context the inheritance from Malevich can be read as a failed Utopia whose vision was appropriated by the Communist regime on its way to power. The work, which also includes Malevich's painting of a black square and a vase with white lilies, calls to mind the symbols of the totalitarian regimes while at the same time it also acts as a re-enactment of a pre-existing work of art that was exhibited in Leningrad in 1937.



Irwin/NSK info center

In the café there's an information table containing the most important Irwin/NSK books and catalogues. On video screens a selection of films and videos from the various NSK groups will be shown.

The exhibition is the result of a collaboration between curator Henrik Broch-Lips and Director Thorsten Sadowsky, The Aarhus Art Building. In the spring of 2008 the German Kehrer Verlag will publish a 160-page

catalogue in English about Irwin/NSK with contributions by Irwin, Henrik Broch-Lips, Esben Hansen and Thorsten Sadowsky.