

## Soros realism

This controversial term refers to a phenomenon in art of the post-socialist Eastern Europe in the 1990s. The term was initially conceived by Miško Šuvaković, art theorist from Belgrade, and defined it his essay 'The Ideology of Exhibition: on the ideologies of Manifesta' in 2002.

Soros realism does not imply the revival of the painterly realism of a paranoid nationalist type, evolved in most of the post-socialist societies in the 1980s and 1990s, nor is a crude variant of the socialist realism which established the artistic canons in the East in the 1930s, 40s, 50s and 60s. To the contrary, it implies smooth and subtle uniforming and setting the norms of the postmodern pluralism and multiculturalism as criteria of enlightened political liberalism expected in European societies at the turn of the century. The specific benefit from such approach is the shift from "restricted" (indeed elite) emancipation brought about by high and alternative art, to general social emancipation within the given local culture. For instance, post-structuralist theory and liberal values with "academic" or "museal" properties (and, certainly, a "minority intellectual" discourse), now "by means of" art become the discourse, taste and value of the "normal" culture embraced by the freshly emerging middle-intellectual level of the bourgeoisie and its public opinion (doxa). The specific disadvantage of such approach to art is imposition of "average transparency", conceiving artistic and aesthetic aims as effects determined by culture. In other words, art of the young, marginal and those in transition acquires its "own" mobility ghetto with granted possibilities of survival and realization.<sup>1</sup>

1// Miško Šuvaković, "Ideologija izložbe: o ideologijama Manifeste" in Platforma SCCA #3, SCCA-Ljubljana, Ljubljana: 2002, <http://www.ljudmila.org/scca/platforma3/suvakovic.htm>



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soros realism TABAK 1/b

The term Soros realism is controversial for the following reason: in fact, it refers to socially and politically engaged art, conceived throughout former Yugoslavia in the time of its dissolution in the 1990s. It affirmed positive values of the democratically ordered societies, like emancipation, multiculturalism, human rights and freedoms. In this way, it severely criticized the dominant ideology in the local context, namely: the rapid rise of nationalism as a reaction to the demise of the socialist-communist order and the value system it represented. According to its political-aesthetical premises, art termed as Soros-realist may be perceived as opposite to the nationalist art, and that encouraged by the state apparatuses in the communist and socialist times.

On the other hand, all those artworks and actions were supported by the Soros Foundation through its centres for contemporary art, whose purpose was to support cultural-artistic projects which contributed to fashioning of a social ambience befitting a democratically ordered capitalist society. Soros centres provided an infrastructure for professionalization of the emerging artistic scene, through production and education of the artists and cultural workers. This education was different from that obtained in state academic institutions. But, in order to see their works produced and realized, the artists had to comply with the newly established ideological macro-framework.

Such art supported by organizations from the West, in a way approached "state art" of the communist and socialist times, but also the state art produced with a view to propagating nationalist ideas, although Soros realism (in terms of ideology it stood for) featured as its total antipode.

The political engagement was different, but the logic of the 'commissions' was the same.

