

Július Koller
„Univerzálné Futurologické Operácie“
curated by Roman Ondák
19. July – 21. September 2003

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Július Koller "found a new understanding of the social space of the city formulated in the approaches of the international avant-gardes critical of modernism, picking up from Dada and Duchamps, in Nouveau Realisme and Fluxus, in the 'psychogeographical' explorations of the Situationist International. This was a theme, from which it was possible to imagine a different position. Counter to the cynical technoid fantasies of omnipotence of the socialist state apparatus and its designers, or the gestalt-therapeutical ambitions of the fashionable modernists, the direct experience of the reality of the art work was to be returned to the individual. Starting from this idea, Koller has consistently developed his position up to the present day, and an oeuvre that in its stringency, obsession and peculiarity could well be called one of the most erratic and consistent of European contemporary art. It is perhaps most comparable with the universe of a Marcel Broothaers." (Georg Schöllhammer)

Július Koller, born 1939 in Piestany (formerly Czechoslovakia), was significantly influenced by Dadaism as a student. When people started talking about the Happening in Slovakia (the first theoretical texts were published in 1966), Július Koller presented his radical stance with regard to this contemporary, artistic development and communicated it with his work sent out as postcards labeled "Anti-happening". With the term "Anti-happening", which represents a typical manifestation of Július Koller's "subjective system of objectivity", he attributed a special significance to activism as a radical concept of distancing. In this way, he rejected any "stage-direction of artistic actions", calling for "an inconspicuous arrangement of oneself and one's surroundings" and the necessity of an "uninterrupted intellectual reflection on cultural situations". He communicated this appeal with text messages, with various actions, "Anti-pictures" and "Anti-happenings".

In 1970 in conjunction with his U.F.O. Manifesto (Universal-Cultural Futurological Operations), Július Koller emphasized his interest in the self-initiative of the subject that is to shape future-oriented cultural situations. In the same year, Július Koller began to realize this approach in his action of an ongoing self-transformation into an "U.F.O.-naut". This constantly transforming figure, which has manifested itself and been photographically documented once each year since 1970, carries out various "operations", which have different names but always include the abbreviation U.F.O. in the title. The photographic documentations of the "U.F.O.-nauts" show the artist in an annually modified form, a constantly changing character as a manifestation of personal life circumstances and as a commentary on the cultural and socio-political situation of each year. Over the course of years, Július Koller has thus transformed himself into a figure-sign, which connects with situations and configurations of everyday life through minimal actions and gestures, communicating ironically encoded messages in the abbreviation U.F.O. Every "operation" that Július Koller has subsequently carried out himself creates a "cultural situation" of this kind, which is oriented to "actively changing reality".

Sport as a parallel and simultaneously real world became another playing field for Július Koller as the possibility of a "radical transformation of the idea of the work away from the object towards the trace of an action or an instruction for action" (G. Schöllhammer). In preparation for his solo exhibition in May 2003, Július Koller therefore delimited the exhibition space of the Kölnischer Kunstverein with white chalk markings, like those familiar from tennis courts and soccer fields. This action refers to a work from 1970, in which Július Koller set up a playing grounds ready to be used, open spaces for a communicative encounter. "The sports fields actually symbolize my attempt to prepare a terrain, similar to the way the new season is prepared each spring in tennis by removing the old ground cover and carrying out repairs. In the same way, I have prepared the surface for playing or for the arrival or the anticipation of something that could come from the cosmos. (...) It is basically a matter of individualizing the striving for understanding ... Until 1968 we still had this idea that this understanding - or 'democratic socialism', as we called it then - could work better than it had done so far." (Július Koller)

In all of Július Koller's works, the gesture of universal appropriation seems to conjoin with the gesture of skepticism. Again and again, the question mark appears as an ambiguous symbol of questioning, doubting and uncertainty, but also of communication. Whether as "U.F.O.-naut" or in an action with children, with which Koller depicted the question mark, but also in other variations and in other places, it seems as though the question mark communicates with the open situation of an extraterrestrial being ("U.F.O.-naut") with our present reality and its uncertain future.

The exhibition at the Kölnischer Kunstverein is the first comprehensive solo exhibition of Július Koller internationally. It is curated by the young artist Roman Ondák, who will be represented at the Kölnischer Kunstverein with a solo exhibition of his own in 2004.

Július Koller's work has most recently been shown at the 50th Biennale in Venice (Utopia Station) and the group exhibition "Ausgeträumt ..." at the Secession, Vienna, 2001.

Catalogue

A catalogue is published on the exhibition (270 pages) by Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, with essays by Georg Schöllhammer, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Roman Ondák and Vít Havránek in German, English and Slovakian.

Press discussion

Friday, 18 July 2003, 11:00 a.m.

Lecture

Lecture by Georg Schöllhammer followed by exhibition discussions with Július Koller and Roman Ondák on 16 September 2003, 7:00 p.m.

Opening hours

Tuesday - Sunday, 1:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Films

Films in the cinema at the "Brücke", 7:00 p.m.

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