

**Slovenian  
Art and Culture Fights  
Against the  
Janshist Politics in 2020**



**Slovenska umjetnost  
i kulturna borba  
protiv janšističke politike  
2020. godine**

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#### SAŽETAK

Cilj članka je dokumentirati i kontekstualizirati slike prosvjeda koje su se pojavile u Sloveniji u prvoj polovici 2020. godine pomoću medijskih izvora, intervjuva i terenskog rada. U radu se razmatra kako je vlada koristila pandemiju bolesti COVID-19 i vlastitu poziciju moći kako bi pokušala promijeniti kanon slovenske kulture, povijesti i umjetnosti. Članak se fokusira na prosvjede i prosvjedne materijale umjetnika i drugih kreativaca koji su se pridružili prosvjednom pokretu i daje doprinos razumijevanju političkih i kulturnih procesa koji su se odvijali u Sloveniji u razdoblju između 2020. i 2021. godine.

Umjetnost, nekad „funkcija građanske svijesti o slobodi“, u vrijeme trećeg mandata Janeza Janše sve više gubi na snazi. Jačanje neoliberalizma i uništavanje socijalne države, financijska kriza koja je trajala od 2008. do barem prve polovice prošlog desetljeća te rastući populizam, u Sloveniji su stvorili plodno tlo za udruživanje neoliberalnih politika s rastućom plimom fašizma, što se osobito osjeća u ovom razdoblju Janšine vladavine. Prvi prosvjedi dogodili su se već tjedan dana prije izbora zbog odluke DeSUS-a (Demokratska stranka upokojencev Slovenije), NSi-a (Nova Slovenija) i SMC-a (Stranka modernega centra) da se pridruže Janšinoj vladi. Na ulicama se okupilo oko tisuću ljudi. Vlada je za ministra kulture imenovala Vaska Simonitija, umirovljenog profesora povijesti. U ožujku 2020., umjetnička scena još je gajila nade i pokušala pridobiti vladu da pomogne novozaposlenim kulturnim djelatnicima; no, paketi pomoći nisu bili namijenjeni kulturnoj proizvodnji.

→

#### ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to document and contextualize protest imagery, which appeared in Slovenia in the first half of 2020 through media sources, interviews, and field work. The paper examines how government used the pandemic and its power to try and change the canon of Slovene culture, history, and art. The article focuses on the protests and protest material by artists and other creatives, who joined in the protest movement. It is a contribution to the political and cultural understanding of the processes in Slovenia in 2020–2021. Art, once the “function of the bourgeois consciousness of freedom”, is increasingly losing out under Janez Janša’s third term in office.

#### KEYWORDS

protests, protest imagery, contemporary art, politics, cultural policy

# Petja Grafenauer





Fig.1 Irena Woelle, *Ustavimo virus sovraštva* [Let's Stop the Virus of Hate], protest with flag / protest sa zastavom, March 21, 2020 / 21. ožujka, 2020., Ljubljana. PHOTO / FOTO: Vuk Čosić. ↑

Ono što je Sloveniji dobila, osim nevolja u kulturi, bio je stalni dotok političkih skandala koji su prosvjednike tjerali na ulice. Mnogi umjetnici i kulturni djelatnici odlučili su se uključiti i iskoristiti svoje talente za *oslikovljenje* prosvjeda. Nekoliko aktivističkih pokreta u Ljubljani je formiralo *Narodnu protestnu skupštinu* koja se bavila raznim društvenim i političkim temama kao što su zaštita prirode, stanovanje, prekarni rad, kultura, antifašizam i mediji. Oni su predstavljali najugroženije sektore, one koji su bili pod najžešćim napadom—ne bolesti, već nove vlade i njezine politike. Na Protestnoj skupštini je odlučeno da će se ispred Ministarstva kulture organizirati tzv. *Akcija za kulturu*, koja će zahtijevati poduzimanje odgovarajućih mjera; u narednom razdoblju ih je uslijedilo još šest.

Djelatnici u umjetnosti i kulturi postali su tako jedni od najangažiranijih suradnika općih prosvjeda petkom. Vrlo su dobro razumjeli da ljudi vole kad ih se angažira, te su s lakoćom izrađivali plakate koje su prosvjednici mogli držati tijekom protesta ispred parlamenta i u drugim akcijama. Umjetnička i kulturna scena koriste slike drugačije nego politika; u tome im pomaže i poznavanje suvremenih teorija o slikovnom zaokretu te drugih koje propituju moć slike u suvremenom društvu, što pak potpuno nedostaje vladinim strukturama koje prosvjednike napadaju grubom policijskom silom i govorom mržnje kroz službene i neslužbene kanale. U nadmetanju za smisao između vladinih i prosvjednih slika, prosvjedna je strana bila kreativno mnogo jača—njihove slike su bile kreativno slobodnije, nevezane nekom pojedinačnom političkom ideologijom osim želje za pravednim, slobodnijim i otvorenijim društvom.

Iako situacija u kojoj se umjetnost i kultura u Sloveniji nalaze svakim danom postaje sve teža i tmurnija, iako se kultura u vladinim medijima predstavlja kao segment društva koji treba potisnuti i „reformirati” kako bi bolje odgovarao Janšinoj političkoj strategiji, na prosvjedima 2020. i 2021. vizualna umjetnost se etablirala kao nositelj istine i utoliko odnijela simboličku pobjedu. Unatoč nasilju koje provodi treća Janšina vlada, umjetnici su nepopustljivi u svojoj kritici društva te razotkrivaju sablažnjivu istinu koja se skriva iza očigledne moći. U ovom trenutku, umjetnost snažno manifestira svoju temeljno opozicijsku prirodu spram političke vlasti te predstavlja uzorni izraz društvene samokritike.

#### KLJUČNE RIJEČI

prosvjedi, slike prosvjeda, suvremena umjetnost, politika, kulturna politika

## WHY ART MATTERS ?



Fig. 14 Ištvan Išt Huzjan, *Antifašistična umetnost* [Antifascist Art], sticker / naljepnica, June 9, 2020 / 9. lipnja 2020.

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Contemporary art is one of the most aimless, yet important human activities, all the while representing a negation of the existing order.<sup>1</sup> It is a sad state of affairs when this approach to analysing art actually distances us from the works of art themselves; however, it is nevertheless necessary, being a means of expressing the power of art and the artistic, cultural, and generally social discontent arising between 2020 and 2021 in Slovenia. During this period, art, more so than ever before since 1991 and Slovenian independence, has become a point of contention in the drab, COVID-19-infected everyday life of contemporary society, especially for the powers-that-be. It incites the ire of the regime and its “new normal”, which only exposes the latter’s falsehoods.

Art, once the “function of the bourgeois consciousness of freedom”, is increasingly losing out under Janez Janša’s third term in office. All the while, it is worth remembering that even before the totalitarianism of 2020, in the midst of the liberalism and neoliberalism of the times, “absolute freedom in art was only freedom in the sphere of the individual, as such coming into conflict with the permanent state of non-freedom as a whole”.<sup>2</sup> Even Adorno states that art is at its most vulnerable when it is not dangerous.<sup>3</sup>

The contemporary artist (also) embodies “the social forces of production without necessarily being bound by the censorship dictated by the relations of production, which he continually criticizes”.<sup>4</sup> More than anything else, the art of the new age is defined through the conflict with the relations of production: “Nowhere does the historical essence of art express itself in such an emphatic way as with the qualitative unstoppable of that art”.<sup>5</sup> It only ever has meaning when it is granted autonomy, autonomy that was radically snatched away in Slovenia starting in 2020.

“Art, which is at its core always oppositional, if indeed it is to be called art, criticizes any society [...] and only artwork that radiates the social ways of knowing can have a true ‘raison d’être.’”<sup>6</sup> »Art is therefore a paradigm of the self-criticism of social consciousness.”<sup>7</sup> Art becomes social through its position in society, through eternal opposition, criticizing society through its very existence and ‘uselessness,’<sup>8</sup> a favourite accusation of puritans of all ideological stripes—from the religious to the fascist.

“Real art, one that implies knowing that requires an overly sensitive awareness of outside aesthetic assumptions, of the whole historical situation of the time”<sup>9</sup> therefore clings to life due to its own social power of rebellion and thus gives society not only communication, but more importantly negation, using the power of “internal aesthetic development to socially reproduce societal evolution, but never supporting it.” Its social function is necessarily linked to its critical power of knowing, i.e., to the category of truth “that is expressed differently in art than in science, meaning it cannot be judged through the same prism, as it employs a different logos to that

1  
Grlić, *Izazov negativnog*, 93.

2  
*Ibid*, 146.

3  
Adorno, *Estetička teorija*, 70.

4  
Grlić, *Izazov negativnog*, 98.

5  
*Ibid*, 95.

6  
Adorno, *Estetička teorija*, 143–146.

7  
*Ibid*, 162.

8  
*Ibid*, 140.

9  
*Ibid*, 99.

of discursive logic.”<sup>10</sup> “He opposes totality by showing that this totality is not identical to itself, the one which overlaps with its own notions.”<sup>11</sup> The social spirit of power therefore “guesses deep down that its stable dominion is not the dominion of the spirit at all, finding the sole remaining reason for its existence in the physical violence at its disposal. It must not tell its secret, as that could threaten it with ruin.”<sup>12</sup>

ART POLITICS  
IN SLOVENIA IN THE  
NEW MILLENIUM

The freedom of a country can be measured by the degree of political non-interference afforded to art. It seems that from 1991 onwards, that degree in Slovenia was quite high; content-wise, politics more or less stayed away from art. It can even be said it was quite indifferent to it. This is apparent when one considers that legislation relating to culture has not been changed since 2002. The Ministry of Culture was likewise never at the centre of political wrangling, besieged by new visions, policies, or guidelines. While we did adopt National Programmes for Culture,<sup>13</sup> the state offered culture the freedom to create and some (minor) support for live culture, which nevertheless enabled it to successfully gain a foothold in the contemporary international art world. The decisions made by the governments of Janez Janša have slowly but surely been eroding this in recent years.

Starting in the 1990s and especially in the new millennium, the creative industries rhetoric in Slovenia started assessing the value of culture, and even art, based on measurable economic effects.<sup>14</sup> Visual art has likewise become part of the cultural industry which creates cultural goods and sells them to consumers. Both groups outside and inside the government sector did not achieve any significant systemic changes, especially the kind that would go beyond the purview of the Ministry of Culture. The Ministry of Culture had unsuccessfully tried for many years to reach an agreement with the Ministry of Finance on any sort of incentive to help broaden the art market—for example, tax credits for buyers that would spur more art purchases and the “percent for art” scheme, where a percentage of each public investment would go toward art (while the law passed in 2017, it is not being implemented).

As not one of the post-independence governments have updated the country’s cultural policy, we can assume none of these governments particularly cared for culture and art. It either did not perceive or did not want to perceive the need to update the legislation in force. It was therefore left to the Ministry of Culture to offer any sort of government incentive, with no help from the other ministries (for finance, the economy, education, welfare, etc.), preparing tenders and calls for co-financing cultural programmes and projects.

FROM A SOCIAL  
TO A TOTALITARIAN  
STATE

The increasing spread of neoliberalism and the destruction of the welfare state, the financial crisis, which lasted from 2008 to at least the first half of the past decade, and growing populism (an example of this is President Borut Pahor’s Instagram profile, *borutpahor*) have all proved fertile ground for neoliberalism (and liberalism) in Slovenia to join forces with the rising tide of fascism during Janša’s third term in office (2020–).<sup>15</sup>

Though it may seem like it, the transition period has not yet ended. In the words of Franček Drenovec (2013): “Even when they talk about economic growth, what they are really talking about are foreign investments. What a sorry end to Slovenia’s transition story! The complete downfall of the elite, a complete descent into misery!” The only way for them to remain the local elite is to completely reduce and trivialize the space afforded to the local elite in society.” His words proved to be prophetic in the years that followed. The fall of Janša’s second government did not improve matters. Inexperienced governments followed one after the other, none of them with any real political or economic foundations; political thought all but disappeared. This happened because “neoliberalism and neoliberal hegemony produce specific structural and cultural circumstances that change the way capitalist countries operate, which in turn serves to concentrate capital in central capitalist states; this brings about the transformation and the ensuing crisis of liberal democracy.”<sup>16</sup> Instead of holding early elections after then PM Marjan Šarec stepped down, Janez Janša managed to form a coalition government on 25 February 2021, which included SDS, NSi, SMC, and—up to the beginning of 2021, Desus. “When the National Assembly discussed the new prime minister on 3 March, candidate Janša pronounced around 5700 words in his introductory remarks. He managed to spare a paltry 19 words for the epidemic,”<sup>17</sup> even though medical professionals were already starting to sound the alarm bells because of the lack of preparation that was going into dealing with the coming virus. The first protest happened a week before the vote because of the decision made by Desus and SMC to join Janša’s government. Around 1000 people gathered in the streets. Janša immediately introduced a military approach to tackling the epidemic by establishing a crisis centre. He also started replacing staff, expanding the media space to ensure favourable coverage, and violating legal and constitutional rights. We soon started learning about affairs related to procuring personal protective equipment, accompanied by the repression of civil society and consequently culture.<sup>18</sup>

In 2020, Janša’s government did at first provide sufficient help due to the epidemic, which put a halt to cultural life. However, its further actions in 2020 and 2021 extrinsically and intrinsically cut into art—by withdrawing funding,

preventing work, replacing internationally-acclaimed directors of public institutions with individuals with doubtful professional credentials, changing the membership structure of committees by appointing political loyalists, depriving non-governmental organisations of work space, allowing the minister to capriciously take away artist statuses from people, withdrawing support for important projects, perpetrating media attacks on art historians, professors, artists, curators, and by committing a host of other egregious actions. Under Janša's government, art and culture in Slovenia have lost all semblance of freedom; the government supports projects that encourage populism, nationalism, and neoliberalism. In art as well, what we are seeing is the "neoliberal guarantee of freedoms for (international) capital and the further commodification and commercialization of welfare state services."<sup>19</sup> But that is not all it is—it is a takeover symbolic capital through political interference in creative freedom or its dissolution through iniquitous procedures, all with the aim of creating a new kind of culture and art in Slovenia and redefining values through art and culture to create a janšist<sup>20</sup> neoliberal autocracy.

ARRIVES  
THE  
MASTER

When Janez Janša's third government appointed Vasko Simoniti, a retired history professor, as the culture minister at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, no one dared think that the coalition would also regularly infringe on laws and the Constitution as they relate to culture, trying to change fundamental societal values, history, the ability to access information, school curricula, culture and art... No one thought it would try to subvert democratic values and turn the country into an authoritarian state where the politically and financially strong dominate the rest of the population, especially the most vulnerable segments of society, which includes self-employed cultural workers, especially those who were already in a precarious position. Employees who dissent from the government's political orthodoxy have also been publicly chastised for daring to express their opinion.

The people in the art world foresaw significant problems caused by the lockdown caused by the pandemics, namely the lack of work for artists and other cultural workers in the Slovene art world already in March 2020. For that reason, a closed Facebook group *Pomoč samozaposlenim v kulturi v času Covid-19*<sup>21</sup> (Help to Freelance Cultural Workers During Covid-19) was formed, gaining more than 2200 members. Its aim was to try and bring together self-employed and other cultural workers and help in two ways: through policy and charity. The group wrote petitions, appeals, requests, and letters to the Ministry of Culture asking for help. Some of its members, with the help of other people, established the *Solidarni s kulturo* (In Solidarity with Culture) charity fund. It is open to public donations ([solidarniskulturo.org](http://solidarniskulturo.org)) and helps cultural workers cover the cost of basic necessities, without plunging them into a quagmire of bureaucracy.

10

Grlič, *Izazov negativnog*, 140–141.

11

*Ibid*, 233.

12

*Ibid*, 239.

13

According to the definition of the Ministry of Culture, the National Programme for Culture is the central Slovenian cultural policy document. However, it is a political document, an idealised description on paper, showing the significant divergence between theory and practice when it comes to these sorts of programmes, which have not been adopted by the government for a number of years now.

14

Zorko, *Nove oblike sodelovanja med kulturo in gospodarstvom*, 28.

15

For the relationship between liberalism and neoliberalism, see Mastnak, *Liberalizem, fašizem, neoliberalizem*, 2015.

16

Hočevar, *Kapitalistična država in kriza liberalne demokracije*, 5.

17

Žerdin, MMXX, 37.

18

*Ibid*, 43.

19

Podvršič, Veselinović, "SDS v primerjalni enačbi razrednih strategij skrajno desnih strank na evropski industrializirani periferiji in njen regresivni rezultat", s.p.

20

Janšism is a political orientation as developed and represented by Slovenian politician Janez Janša. For further explanation of the term see for instance Močnik, "Kaj je janšizem?".

21

The core of the group consisted of public relations expert Urška Comino, art historian Petja Grafenauer, art historian Urša Jurman, music curator Miha Zadnikar, art historian Beti Žerovc and several others who prefer to remain unknown.

ARTISTS AND CULTURAL  
WORKERS TRY  
TO FORM A DIALOGUE



Fig. 2 Vuk Čosič, Irena Woelle, *Odzvonilo vam je sovraštva* [It Tolls for Thee], sticker on forehead of Ivan Gale / naljepnica na čelu Ivana Galea, 6. lipnja, 2020., Ljubljana. PHOTO / FOTO: Željko Stevanič.

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Fig. 3 Ištvan Išt Huzjan, *Simbol vstaje* [Symbol of Uprising], logo / logotip, May 15, 2020. / 15. svibnja 2020.

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Fig. 4 Jaša Jenull, *Rekreacija v času Janše in Koronavirusa* [Recreation in the Time of Janša and the Corona Virus], video still / video still, March 20, 2020 / 20. ožujka 2020., Ljubljana.

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A few other groups and individuals were also active online during the lockdown, trying to get the government to help the newly unemployed cultural workers. *Asociacija*, a society of non-governmental organisations and self-employed cultural workers, established well before the crisis—the fine art and culture sector in Slovenia has been plagued by a number of problems even before the pandemic—was likewise attempting to reach out to the Ministry of Culture. *Skupina za pomoč prekariatu* (Group for Helping the Precariat), founded by Alenka Sottler, Dejan Koban, Arjan Pregl, Boris A. Novak, Jure Novak, Svetlana Slapšak, and Svetlana Makarovič, among others, was also highly active.

The group *Pomoč samozaposlenim v kulturi v času Covid-19* redoubled its efforts when it became apparent the Slovenian government intended to provide aid in several tranches, ignoring the plight of the cultural and creative industries (the only source of financial aid were the funds allotted to employed and self-employed individuals in general). The government announced a financial assistance package for sole traders amounting to EUR 350 for March and EUR 700 for April and May respectively—provided they are able to show a loss of 10% compared to 2019 and agree to publicly exposing their name. No other Covid-19 financial relief was offered to artists and cultural workers, bucking trends in most of the EU Member States.<sup>22</sup> The video footage published on the Ministry of Culture's website, as well as certain tweets by new government-appointed employees, also made it patently clear that the master—the Ministry of Culture—has no desire to form a dialogue with the cultural and creative industries, relying instead on their own plans. The Group consequently realised that it had reached the limit of what a policy approach could achieve.

The overall climate was not only disastrous for art and culture—and sole traders and the precariat in general—but for the Slovenian population. During its first couple of months in power, the new right-wing government became enmeshed in several scandals, not least one involving irregularities in purchasing medical equipment used in fighting against Covid-19. The corruption scandal was exposed by Ivan Gale, a public servant working at the Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Commodity Reserves, who quickly became a “folk hero”, spawning a Facebook support group called *Skupina podpore Ivanu Galetu* (Group in Support of Ivan Gale), which was later joined by *Piščalka* (The Whistle). At the time of writing, the first group has 78,000 members.

Covid-19 and the *jansist* government used up most of the oxygen on the political scene. What emerged was a kind of “new normal”, a dialectic between the Prime Minister Janez Janša, Culture Minister, Vasko Simoniti, and several other government officials—and the serfs—everyone willing



Fig. 5 Jaša Jenull, *Dovoljena rekreacija...* [Permitted Recreation], video still / video still, April 18, 2020 / 18. travnja 2020., Ljubljana.

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Fig. 6 Arjan Pregl, "Magritte", banner / transparent, June 19, 2020 / 19. lipnja 2020. PHOTO / FOTO: Arjan Pregl.

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22  
EUNIC Global 2020, »How is the European cultural sector responding to the current corona crisis?«.

23  
Kar se je zgodilo, je bila konstitucija vstajniške javnosti kot ob protestih proti 2. Janševi vladi 2012-2013, za kar glej Ribač, *Vzrok javnosti v času množičnih protestov v Sloveniji leta 2012 in 2013*.

to stand up to the increasingly emboldened Janša government. From March 2020, this 'new normal' became punctuated by a steady-stream of political scandals, which ultimately drove protesters into the streets again. In the midst of the lockdown, on 3, 10, and 17 April, Ljubljana experienced what were dubbed *Balcony Protests* [Fig. 1]. On 24 April, public discontent took on an entirely different and continuous form when thousands of people gathered on bicycles to protest the government. As of this writing, there have been more than 40 of such protest gatherings demanding the resignation of the government (the largest on 28. 5. 2021 with 40.000 people attending), organised not only in Ljubljana, but also in Maribor, Brežice, Nova Gorica, Krško, Novo Mesto, Anžovo, Ptuj, and elsewhere.<sup>23</sup>

Some artists decided to get involved by volunteering their talent and creating protest imagery. Independently created and very original visual material soon began emerging, for example Irena Woelle and Vuk Ćosić's bicycle sticker (protesters rode on bicycles to get around the strict Covid-19 measures prohibiting gatherings) with the statement: *Odzvonilo vam je* (The Bell Tolls for Thee, a reference to the bicycle bells rung by protesters) [Fig. 2]. On June 12, the movement launched the *S pedal na stopala* campaign (*From Pedals to Feet*), prompting large crowds to start protesting on foot; however, bicycles continued to play a role in the protests.

When word of the antigovernmental protests reached visual artist Ištvan Išt Huzjan [Fig. 3] abroad, he produced a series of images, offering them to the people via social media, to the *Mladina* magazine (which did not respond), and to the left-wing political party *Levica*. The latter made them available to download from its website. As time passed, the movement adopted the spoke bicycle tire symbol, emblazoned in front of Mt. Triglav, the pre-eminent emblem of the Slovenian nation, as its official symbol. Street theatre director and Ljubljana native Jaša Jenull was also unsatisfied with the government's course of action, which is why he started making humorous viral videos lampooning the government's decisions. On March 20, in response to the government's campaign aimed at promoting solo forms of exercise, he recorded himself doing a solo jog through the city, stopping and protesting in front of the main government buildings [Fig. 4]. When golf made it onto the list of approved sports, Jenull used it as the theme of his next video on 18 April [Fig. 5]. Nor was he alone, as other artists, for instance Arjan Pregl, were also busy creating independent protests art.

## PROTESTS

On May 21 [Fig. 6], several activist movements formed a Protest Assembly in Ljubljana to address various social and political themes, such as nature, housing, precarity, culture, antifascism, and the media. At the same time in these also represented the most vulnerable sectors, the ones most under attack, not by the disease, but rather the new government and its policies. Among the many interested parties were also the members of the *Pomoč samozaposlenim v kulturi v času Covid-19 group*. In cooperation with other cultural workers, they formed the Council



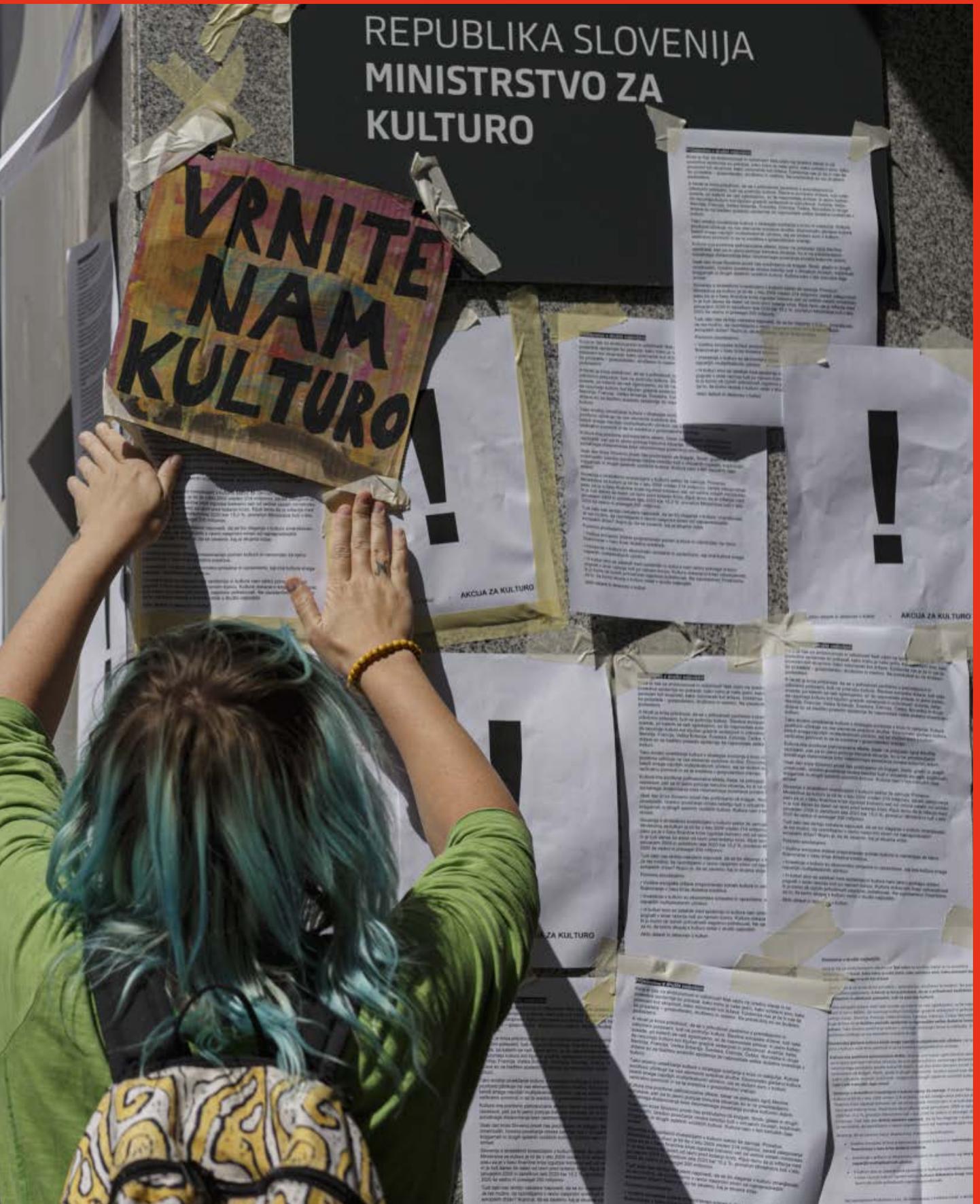


Fig. 7 ADDK, 1. akcija za kulturo [First Culture Action], protest gathering / protestno okupljanje, May 26, 2020 / 26. svibnja 2020., Ljubljana. PHOTO / FOTO: Željko Stevanic. ↑



Fig. 8 ADDK, *Poslednja akcija za kulturo* [The last Action for Culture], protest gathering / protestno okupljanje, June 9, 2020 / 9. lipnja 2020., Ljubljana. PHOTO / FOTO: Željko Stevanić.

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Fig. 9 ADDK, *5. akcija za kulturo: Utrjevanje snovi* [Action for Culture 5: Repetition of Learned Matter], protest gathering / protestno okupljanje, June 30, 2020 / 30. lipnja 2020., Ljubljana. PHOTO / FOTO: anon.

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Fig. 10 ADDK, Untitled, flag / zastava, July 3, 2020 / 3. srpnja 2020., Ljubljana. PHOTO / FOTO: anon.

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of Cultural Workers (*Aktiv kulturnih delavk in delavcev*) or ADDK for short.<sup>24</sup>

At the *Protest Assembly*, it was decided that the ADDK would take to the streets and organise an *Action for Culture* in front of the Ministry of Culture, demanding it take appropriate action. The ADDK, following its members' example, also decided to take part in the Friday protests. Art and culture played an important role within the protest movement, not only through the ADDK, but also several other non-member entities (from at least March until the time of writing). These stakeholders were not only fighting the good fight for its own sector and industries, but also in solidarity with those concerned about the environment, housing for the young, care and support for the elderly, the fight against fascism, violence against women, and other social problems that are the hallmark of the so called new reality.

The ADDK organized 6 protests for culture in front of the Ministry of Culture. The first one took place on 26 May under the banner *Akcija za kulturo: kulture ne damo* (Action for Culture: We Are Not Giving Up On Culture) [Fig. 7] and the others followed on 2, 9, 16 and 30 June, respectively. The second *Action for Culture* did not organise under a specific banner, but the third one was called *Poslednja akcija za kulturo* (The Last Action for Culture), responding to the Ministry's claim that culture and art are in safe hands.

Following the Ministry's assertion that it did not want to do anything, not even open a dialogue with its sector, it became obvious that the decision to allow the destruction of living culture was not an economic, but a political one. The steps taken by the Ministry, the government and its media, especially Novaz4TV, further pointed in that direction.<sup>25</sup> Some of the ADDK members jumped over a fence erected on Republic Square to prevent the Friday protests and were met with violence by the police, following ordered issued by the Minister of Internal Affairs.<sup>26</sup> In response, the cultural workers prepared a protest campaign they called *Nasilje. Ministrstvo za kulturo. Odgovor.* (Violence. Ministry of culture. Answer.), which also took place in front of the Ministry of Culture on Tuesday 16 June at 3 pm (N.Š. 2020).

The fence on Republic Square was removed later, but not before another early Friday pre-protest intervention took place. It involved several very well-known personalities from the artistic world and further afield jumping the fence and reading the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia out loud on the empty square. They were removed by the police and fined.

*Action for Culture* number 5 was called *Utrjevanje snovi* (Rote Learning) and the last one, organised on 28 July, was called *Korektura* (Correction).

All six of the *Actions for Culture* were performative visual messages intended for the Ministry of Culture, the public, the state and the media. For months, cultural workers wrote



Fig. 11 ADDK, 5. akcija za kulturo: Utrjevanje snovi [Action for Culture 5: Repetition of the Learned Matter], Facebook invite / Facebook-pozivnica, June 30, 2020. / 30. lipnja 2020.

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ADDK's core members are actor Primož Bežjak, net artist Vuk Čosić, art historian Petja Grafenauer, visual artist Meta Grgurevič, artist Ištvan Išt Huzjan, theatre director Jaša Jenull, who became a face of the whole citizens protest movement, visual artist JAŠA, art activist Tjaša Pureber, puppeteers Brane Solce and Sanja Fidler, a economist that does not want to be named, actor Katarina Stegnar, student Nejc Trampuž, designer Irena Woelle, musical curator Miha Zadnikar and many others.

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See for instance Friedl Jarc, „Odziv državne sekretarke na torkov protest Aktiva delavk in delavcev v kulturi“; s.a., „Tema dneva: Gosta Vasko Samoniti [sic!] in Branko Meh.“; P.G., „Krizni ukrepi so pri kulturi 'pomoč kulturi', pri drugih panogah pa 'ohranjanje delovnih mest.'“; s.a., „Ministrstvo po akciji kulturnikov: Zanikamo, da kulturna panoga po pandemiji ne bo preživela“; Čobec, „Zakaj se ministrstvo ne pogovarja s protestniki?“; Orel, „To financiramo: Kustosinja Moderne galerije Martina Vovk v stilu Mussolinijevih fašistov poziva na puč!“; etc.

26

Square of the republic is a place in the capital city of Slovenia, where most of the protests since and also for the institution of Slovenia as a state happened. s.a., „Ministrstvo po akciji kulturnikov“; Rus, „Policija jih je popisala zaradi bodočega kaznivega dejanja—udeležbe na protest.“

27

Perš, „Ko se slačijo prvorazredni! 44 milijonov davkoplačevalskega denarja za SMG!“.

pleas and sent unanswered documents asking the Ministry for help. Their first action was therefore to tape over the façade of the Ministry with those documents. The second action saw the protestors form a row in front of the Ministry entrance, leaving their working props there. Two actors, Katarina Stegnar and Primož Bežjak took their clothes off, claiming they were costumes. They were molested by the police and fined by the Health Inspectorate. The pro-government and right-wing Nova24TV channel also exploited the images to further belittle culture and art.<sup>27</sup>

The following week—the *Actions for Culture* were always held on Tuesdays at 3 pm just as the white-collar workers were leaving the ministry—the protestors laid down in the street in front of the Ministry to protest the Master who controls their labour conditions. [Fig. 8, 9]. For the fourth *Action for Culture*, they came with chairs and stared at the glass façade of the Ministry in silence as a kind of biopolitical theatre. The ‘play’ was interrupted by a passer-by who stopped and screamed at about 400 of the gathered protestors to “go and do some real work instead of protesting and creating.” This is indicative of the negative climate the state has managed to create in the last decade in relation to the arts and culture.

The fifth action, *Rote Learning* [Fig. 11], called out the Ministry's silence on the art and culture sector during the pandemic. Protestors walked in a line, like prisoners when let out to the prison courtyard, each reading a book they brought with them out loud. As part of the sixth and last action, they once again plastered papers with exclamation marks and signs demanding the minister's resignation onto the building. Alongside *Actions for Culture*, they remained a staunch partner in the antigovernmental Friday protests and were the ones that kept them going as of this writing, there have been a total of 23 *Friday protest*.

#### ART DECIDES TO BECOME POLITICAL

The ADDK became one of the most engaged Friday protest collaborators [Fig. 10]. As already mentioned, the police erected a fence every Friday at Republic Square. This at first represented a barricade between the state and the people [Fig. 16]. The artists were the ones to cross it symbolically for the first time [Fig. 12, 13], but the next time, they jumped over it with some other protestors [Fig. 14].

The artists and cultural workers understood very well that crowds like to be engaged, much like when visiting a gallery, a museum or the theatre, and not just stand and protest in silence. The next Friday, it was only natural to make posters that protestors could hold facing the parliament. Because of their content, some people were again fined by the police. It was only recently that the courts ruled that the “Death to Janshism” cry does not constitute a death threat directed towards Janez Janša himself [Fig. 15].



Fig.12 Vuk Ćosić and Irena Woelle, *Papirnata letala* [Paper Planes], protest gathering / protestno okupljanje, June 6, 2020 / 6. lipnja 2020., Ljubljana. PHOTO / FOTO: Željko Stevanić.

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Fig.13 Vuk Ćosić, Irena Woelle, *Papirnata letala* [Paper Planes], June 6, 2020 / 6. lipnja 2020. PHOTO / FOTO: Željko Stevanić.

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Fig.14 ADDK, Smrt jansizmu, svoboda vsem! [Death to Janshism, Freedom to All!], protest gathering / protestno okupljanje, June 12, 2020 / 12. lipnja 2020., Ljubljana. PHOTO / FOTO: Željko Stevanić.  
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Fig.15 Joško Suhadolnik, Untitled (artist Jaša Mrevlje Pollak being held down by the police because he jumped over a fence erected on Republic Square by the government to stop the protests / umjetnik Jaša Mrevlje Pollak oboren od policije zbog preskakanja ograde na Trgu Republike), June 12, 2020 / 20. lipnja 2020., Ljubljana.  
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Fig. 16 *Protest na biciklih* [Protest on Bicycles], May 22, 2020 / 22. svibnja 2020., Ljubljana.  
PHOTO / FOTO: Miro Majcen.  
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Fig. 17 : Ištvan Išt Huzjan, *Untitled / Bez naslova*, July 17, 2020 / 17. srpnja 2020.

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Fig. 18 : Ištvan Išt Huzjan et al., *Untitled (PLS flag / zastava PLS-a)*, September 4, 2020 / 4. rujna 2020., Ljubljana. PHOTO / FOTO: Željko Stevančić.

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Fig. 19 Vuk Čosić, Jaša Jenull, Miha Zadnikar, *Kje si Miško [Where Are You, Miško]*, poster / poster, June 24, 2020. / 24. lipnja 2020.

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The ADDK also contributed to the *Third Protest Assembly or Protestna ljudska skupščina* (Protest People's Assembly —PLS) at Argentina Park in Ljubljana, where several thousand people gathered and were split into interest groups (Workers and Social Rights, Cultural Politics, Alternative Politics, Media Politics, Environment, Growth and Sustainable Development, Health Policy and Protest Organization). They discussed the needs and solutions to the problems facing Slovenian society under the Janez Janša government [Fig. 17, 18].

The protest on 14 August saw people making fake protest currency in the amount the government was planning to spend on purchasing weapons and armaments. Undeterred by the downpour, the protestors set out to symbolically divide the money amongst other sectors, such as Housing, Social Rights, the Environment, Culture, Education, etc.

Working on the protests almost daily for months, the ADDK was overwhelmed. Additionally, the regular attendance and participation at Friday's protests also meant neglecting cultural issues. In the beginning of September, they split into two interconnected groups: the PLS group, charged with dealing with the protests, and the ADDK group, which once again focused on issues dealing with art and culture.

The protest movement, which by that time had lasted for months, spawned several artistically exquisite protest images and slogans, created not only by some of the finest Slovenian artists, but also by anonymous contributors, often using the technique of shaming<sup>28</sup> [Fig. 19, 20] or even perverting the Master-Servant discourse. The representation of the Master, as he would like to be portrayed, incorporates an ideology that defies the reality of his actions. We are not only dealing with a battle between civil society and the government, but also with a battle for the ownership of the Master's image and its content. Here, at least, the protesters are two steps ahead of the government.

The art and culture scene, which is currently one of the main driving forces behind the protest movement, uses imagery that includes theoretical knowledge of the pictorial turn, something governmental structures totally lack, attacking the protestors with brute police force and hate speech presented through official channels (parliament, videos and other announcements by governmental structures and through their own Nova24TV broadcaster) and even unofficial ones (Tweeter). The protestors use their knowledge to shame and belittle the Master and the jansh-ist ideology the government represents. As pacifists, they have no desire to cross the boundary leading to violent protests. The image the Master wants to present himself with is revealed to be devoid of meaning, lacking truth (acting in the realm of post-truth) and by all credible cultural standards low, as best seen on the new leading SDS party television channel, Nova24TV.



Fig. 20 Vuk Ćosić, Jaša Jenull, Miha Zadnikar, *Kje si Miško* [Where Are You, Miško], protest gathering on Statehood Day / protestno okupljanje na Dan državnosti, June 24, 2020 / 24. lipnja 2020., Ljubljana.

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Fig. 21 Statue by the Slovene sculptor Zdenko Kalin (symbol of National Radio and Television with a Hungarian flag), intervention / Skulptura Zdenka Kalina (alegorija nacionalnog radija i televizije), intervencija. July 15, 2020 / 15. srpnja 2020., Ljubljana. PHOTO / FOTO: anon.

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28

Online shaming is a form of public shaming in which targets are publicly humiliated on the internet, via social media platforms or other media.

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Janša, s.t. (Kultura smrti, ne pa umetnost. Zavržno. #sramota).

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P.G., *Ibid.*

The government is taking significant steps to change laws and destroy public media, the way Hungary did. This issue is not just important for safeguarding media freedom and quality. The media is also governed by the Ministry of Culture. Some of the protests included this issue as well, using imagery to connect it with Hungary, a country that has become all too relevant for Slovenia since SDS came to power, because of the similar ideology of their government [Fig. 21]. On 31 August, Slovenia even organized the *Bled Strategic Forum*, a meeting bringing together Hungary and other countries with democratic deficits and a low level of respect for the rule of law. This meeting, which took place in Bled, was also marked by protests [Fig. 22, 23].

The war for meaning between governmental and protest imagery presents itself as creatively and substantively much stronger on the protestor's side, as it is created in freedom, unbound by ideology, except the desire for a righteous, freer, and more open society. In these cases, we can see that artists are not constrained by an imperative to produce either autonomous or engaged art, one person can do both, if he or she so chooses and the context demands it. The people engaged in the protest movement include some of the most prominent visual and theatre artists in Slovenia. The pandemic and the actions taken by the government pushed them to react as a political being and contribute with what they do best—make imagery. Art undoubtedly changes formally, as it becomes political and aimed at a wider audience. But Slovenia's 2020 protests were also educational, as people who otherwise never visit galleries or museums were presented with an abundance of quality artistic imagery. Although artist-made protest imagery can be formally different from their usual expression and is knowingly adapted to life on the street, it can and does still preserve the poetics or another signature expression of an artist in question. The protest imagery does not function as corporate design—of course it can fake it for its purposes—, it is street art with the knowledge and experience of at least 120 years of history of art functioning outside the gallery or a museum. An artist is schooled to use imagery and can easily and creatively convert the Master into a laughingstock or even a Servant and therefore change roles in the world, where the media image is really important and the artist as the actual servant of the regime has no other power than his expression.

As the government seems to understand that they cannot beat artists at their own game, they have ideologically decided to kill the field. On Twitter, Prime Minister Janez Janša, the very person against whom the protests are directed, talked about Slovenian art and culture as the “culture of death.”<sup>29</sup> Later, the culture minister, the retired right-wing historian Vasko Simoniti, said the following about the 2422 self-employed cultural workers in Slovenia who get their social contributions paid by the state: “A large number of these people, with their social rights and requirements, fall under the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.”<sup>30</sup> [Fig. 24] The Ministry of Culture is under the complete control of the ruling party—SDS—who is a hard master in a state that is currently crossing a number of ethical and often even legal boundaries. The Master is actually using the Corona crisis



Fig. 22 Irena Woelle, *Antifa blejska kremšnita* [Antifa Bled Cream Cake], action / akcija, August 31, 2020 / 31. kolovoza 2020., Bled. PHOTO / FOTO: Irena Woelle.

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Fig. 23 Brane Solce et al, *Untitled (Balaton)*, protest gathering / protestno okupljanja, August 31, 2020 / 31. Kolovoza 2020., Bled. PHOTO / FOTO: Borut Krajnc.

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Fig. 24 Brane Solce, *Janez Janša*, protest gathering / protestno okupljanje, July 10, 2020 / 10. srpnja 2020., Ljubljana.  
PHOTO / FOTO: Borut Krajnc.

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to intentionally destroy the lively art scene in Slovenia, as it opposes the Master's government. Art and culture, additionally, are just one of its victims, which also include social and labour rights, care for the environment, antifascism, housing for the young, care for the retired and several other sectors badly afflicted not just by the pandemic, but mostly by the ruling right-wing populist masters.

#### WHAT NEXT ?

While the situation in which art and culture find themselves grows bleaker with each passing day, culture in turn being presented as a segment of society that needs to be suppressed and "reformed" to better suit Janša's aesthetic (this also includes all spheres of civil society), it is hard to offer any definite conclusion. If we go back to Adorno and Grlič, we see that with every protest, the ruling class is further exposed through visual art, which is why it is increasingly resorting to violence. On 28 May, the very day I am finishing writing this paper, an All-Slovenian People's Uprising is being organised at 6 pm. It will also be attended by trade unions and other segments of civil society. The Government is already issuing stark warnings.

Regardless of the circumstances we find ourselves in here in Slovenia, visual art has already won and been established as a vehicle for truth. It remains independent in its quest to serve the people; it is no longer aimless, but rather taking on the form of *artivism*.<sup>31</sup> Art is in the service of freedom, even though its critical components are being suppressed by the Government at every turn through violence and by issuing fines—to the extent that the individual's sphere of freedom has almost wholly disappeared. But art is still considered dangerous by the powers-that-be, as can be seen from their reactions to it. It is right to be afraid. Let us once again repeat Grlič's assertion that today, it is the artist that embodies the social power of production. Despite the violence perpetrated by Janša's third government, artists are unrelenting in their criticism of society, displaying the unuttered truth behind apparent power. At this moment, art continues to maintain its core oppositional nature and remains a paradigm of the self-criticism of social consciousness.<sup>32</sup> We can therefore see *artivism* as true art, which is made both by artists at the Venice Biennale and self-taught artists. The visual elements from the Slovenian protests have likewise undoubtedly become part of the art world, even from a theoretical standpoint, the kind used by institutional art theory.<sup>33</sup> The bicycle, the symbol of the 2020–2021 protests, has been included in the *Bigger than Me: Heroic Voices from Ex-Yugoslavia* exhibition (MAXXI, Rome, 5 May – 12 September 2021), thus becoming not only a piece of *artivism*, but also a part of the contemporary international art world.<sup>34</sup>

31  
Milohnič, „Artivizem“, 3–14.

32  
Adorno, *Estetička teorija*, 162.

33  
Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*; Dicikie, *Art and the Aesthetic*.

34  
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