

Westfälischer Kunstverein

Rothenburg 30,
48143 Münster
westfaelischer-
kunstverein.de

Opening times:
Tue-Sun 11am - 7pm

Admission: 4 €,
Concessions 2 €,
for multiple visits
Free admission for
members

The Black Wave
New Yugoslav Cinema 1963-72
22 February - 22 March 2020

In collaboration with Filmclub Münster

As a result of Josip Broz Tito's split from Josef Stalin and the Soviet Union in 1948, Yugoslavian culture underwent a radical transformation: the rigid demands and prescribed aesthetics of Socialist Realism were challenged by a young, often subversive avant-garde. Nowhere was this more evident than in the remarkable films of the so-called "Black Wave" movement of the sixties and seventies. As a hinge linking the West and the Eastern bloc, Yugoslavia had to walk a tightrope that not only challenged it in how it positioned itself politically and ideologically, but also with regard to the guiding principles of its cultural production. It is precisely this balancing act between the rejection, on the one hand, of the archetypal hero of Socialist Realism, who gives way to the cynical anti-hero in the "Black Wave" movement, and the most conspicuous US cultural export of the late 1960s, the sexual revolution on the other, that makes these films a unique testimony to their era.

Never resolutely anti-communist, many of the films radiate an impressive sense of vibrancy and energy, which is both directed against a system that undermines individuality and posits a longing for the kind of revolution that might have been. It's hardly surprising then that many films of the "Black Wave" movement were banned in Yugoslavia for many years and some of the directors even had to leave the country. As a result, many of the Black Wave films contain a kind of an oppositional anti-optimism toward state-invoked notions of progress, coupled with an unmasking of patriotism and socialist mythologizing. The social problems of the time are often the starting point for Želimir Žilnik's and Dušan Makavejev's films. Their respective formal languages range thus from the documentary via non-linear narration deploying ambiguities and surrealist motifs, all the way to sarcastic irony bordering on the cynical.

SHORTS

The three short films by Želimir Žilnik (#01) are documentaries about people on the fringes of society, specifically the homeless and children living on the street in Yugoslavia, but also *Gastarbeiter* or guest workers in Germany. It is significant that Žilnik himself makes an appearance as an opposite number, letting these individuals have their say in a concrete address.

For the short *Black Film* (1971), Žilnik invited a group of (officially non-existent) homeless people from the streets of Novi Sad into his (and his somewhat surprised wife's) two-room apartment to give them somewhere to stay

for a few nights. Žilnik conducts short interviews in the street with passersby, but also with police officers, in order to find a permanent solution for the homeless.

The documentary *Little Pioneers* (1972) takes issue with Yugoslavia's official claim to care for all its citizens - especially children, all of whom who are considered to be "good little pioneers". However, in Žilnik's take on reality, the situation for many children, especially Roma children, is altogether different.

After problems with censorship in Yugoslavia, Žilnik spent the mid-1970s in West Germany, where he made seven documentary films and a feature film as an independent producer. These films were among the first to deal with the situation of *Gastarbeiter* in Germany and are still shown today at retrospectives and symposia. *Inventory, Metzstr. 11* (1975) from this series is featured here. In the film, all the residents of the house introduce themselves in their respective mother tongues in the stairwell - stating their names, their desires and their hopes.

The Slovenian director Karpo Godina (b. 1943) was Želimir Žilnik's cameraman on *Early Works* (Golden Bear, Berlinale 1969). After he was banned from directing in 1972, he made his feature film debut in 1980 with *The Raft of Medusa* (Splav Meduze).

The exhibition will screen three of his award-winning short films (#02) honoured at international film festivals (including Oberhausen, Zagreb and Belgrade) for their radical, critical approach, all three quickly falling prey to the censor back in Yugoslavia. Godina experimented with the static camera in an attempt to create a distance to the filmed events, but also to make a strain of subversive irony palpable.

Devoid of spoken words and with only music to accompany it, *The Gratinated Brains of Pupiliija Ferkeverk* (Gratinirani mozak Pupilije Ferkeverk) (1970) uses one camera setting to present members of the avant-garde artists' group, Pupiliija Ferkeverk, sometimes scantily, sometimes less scantily-clad, more or less idly standing or swaying in the water against a backdrop of changing weather. In Godina's own words, the film was banned "because it charts the decline in moral values and culminates in the slogan 'Take LSD'". According to Godina, the text modules inserted into the film logged "important stations in life", such as "death, love, dictatorship and, at the end, dropping LSD".

The *Litany of Happy People* (1971) is an ironic commentary on the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic groups in the autonomous province of Vojvodina, which experienced an eventful history in the political development of Yugoslavia and, later, Serbia. Religious leaders of different ethnic groups explain the specific characteristics of "their people" and thereby expose this identity as a construct. The film was banned because it was deemed to be "cast doubt upon the scope for a multi-national Yugoslavia".

Curiously enough, *About the Art of Love or a Film with 14441 Frames* (1972) was commissioned by the Yugoslavian military, which placed almost unlimited resources in the form of 20,000 troops, 60 tanks and 20 aeroplanes at Godina's disposal. But apart from the soldiers, none of this military hardware appears in the film - instead, we see droves of yearning young women. Godina sums up the message of his film as follows: "Make love not war" and states that the army "literally hacked the film to pieces with an axe, but [I] was able to rescue a copy".

Five more short films (from the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen film archive) by four different directors will be shown at a third viewing station (#03). Vlatko Gilić (b. 1935) from Montenegro is among them; he received an award for his life's work in 1996 and is represented here with the impressive documentaries *One Day More* (Dan više) and *Judas* (Juda). Both films stand out on account of their archaic, surrealistic imagery - a throng of people of all ages in a communal mud bath or an inhospitable stone desert riddled with snakes. Gilić abruptly ended his career in 1980 due to official disapproval on the part of the communist authorities and has since refused to give interviews about his films.

Aleksandar Marks' *Ecce Homo* and Dragutin Vunak's *Cow on the Border* (Krava na granici) are both animations, the latter following a cow that inadvertently strays across the state border while chewing its cud. As a result, the cow inevitably sets a train of events in motion, activating a whole defence apparatus, and almost triggers a war before ultimately being repatriated.

Vefik Hadžismajlović is a filmmaker from Sarajevo; he observes his protagonists at eye level, an approach redolent of a fundamental, marked solidarity and empathy. In *At the Dinner* (Na objedu), he depicts the milieu of the rural population without sentimentalising it, depicting the relationships of the people to their relatives who have left home to join the communities of *Gastarbeiter* elsewhere (mostly West Germany).

FEATURE FILMS

In a separate room (#04), four different feature films by Dušan Makavejev, Želimir Žilnik and Živojin Pavlović will be shown in weekly rotation, at 1 pm and 5 pm. The ticket is valid for the duration of the whole exhibition and thus allows multiple visits to see all films.

Talk by Želimir Žilnik (in English)

Tuesday, 3 March at 6pm

The exhibition is a joint project developed in conjunction with Filmclub Münster. The Westfälischer Kunstverein is supported by the Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe and the City of Münster.

