

THE UNCONVENTIONAL COLLECTOR IN AN AGE OF CHANGING PARADIGMS AND ART WORLDS

The exhibition of the gift collection of bibliophile editions by Zoran L. Božović (1949–2000) raises many questions. First and foremost, these might be questions directly related to the subject of the exhibition, such as the sociocultural significance of prints in late-socialist society and postmodern culture, the expressive possibilities of various techniques, or the relationship between the represented content and the technique by which that visual content was executed.

However, since these editions are the result of the closely intertwined, intrinsically unusual and unique activities of one man—both within the local art world and on a global scale—adequate answers to questions about the importance and meaning of these editions should be considered from a broader perspective. This includes examining these activities in the context in which they were realized, a context shaped by the disappearance of the Cold War world and the emergence of a new neoliberal world marked by post-Cold War geopolitical and cultural transitions and divisions.

Marina Martić wrote of Zoran L. Božović that in another environment, “he would be considered a highly successful entrepreneur in the field of art. In ours, he is just a man with an unusual hobby.”¹

An Unconventional Collector

The uniqueness of Zoran L. Božović’s presence in the art field stemmed from several factors, among which is the fact that, both then and now, the continuous practice of individual publishing activity has not been common in Serbian printmaking. Behind this endeavor stood someone who, by education and profession, came from the field of the technical sciences—someone who, over time, transitioned from being a conventional collector to an unconventional one, acquiring work

¹ M. Martić, Intervju sa Zoranom L. Božovićem, *Vreme*, April 1996.

by artists within the formats and conceptual frameworks he proposed. These works had previously only been presented to the public during exhibitions of the collection.

Božović was also someone who satisfied his curiosity about contemporary art and the mechanisms of various art worlds through conversations with the participants of those worlds, which he then published in professional art journals such as *Moment*, *New Moment*, and *Projekat*, as well as in books compiling those and other, previously unpublished, interviews.

Zoran L. Božović

After completing his undergraduate and postgraduate studies at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering at the University of Belgrade, Zoran L. Božović enrolled in doctoral studies and began his scientific and academic career at the Center for Multidisciplinary Studies (since 2007 known as the Institute for Multidisciplinary Research) at the University of Belgrade, in the field of biomedical engineering and informatics.

Socializing with artists of his generation toward the end of his undergraduate studies, on the one hand, strengthened and intensified his already existing interest in modern and contemporary art and its collection. On the other hand, this spontaneous and informal form of communication became the foundation and standard for all future collaborations and exchanges with artists—whose bibliophile editions, published interviews, and collections of works of art on cigarette boxes/packs served as material and aesthetic traces.

Božović's cultural needs soon evolved into cultural habits, which he developed and reshaped over time, in dialogue with artists, critics, gallerists, art historians, theorists, and collectors, as his taste and knowledge of art and the art world(s) transformed. As his network expanded, so too did the profile and format of his collecting activities.

His actions were not so much directed at critically questioning or transgressing the traditional roles within the art system, but rather pointed to the creative potential that exists between those

roles—through which it is possible to reorganize aspects of existing roles and to individualize new or alternative positions and practices.

It is a common understanding that the emergence and specific characteristics of a phenomenon are in a cause-and-effect relationship with its context. In this sense, scholarship often describes the collector as “the spider at the centre of the collecting web, the star-within-a-circle of individuality which interreacts with its surroundings.”² This environment is schematically simplified as a series of concentric circles, each representing a particular sphere—such as gender identity and family, relations with the market, spheres of work and leisure, social origin, and taste—any or all of which may substantially determine the scope, profile, and course of the collector’s activities.

Naturally, these elements, along with many others not encompassed by this division and specific to particular contexts, interact with one another in an infinite sequence of interrelated events.

The environment and context in which Zoran L. Božović began and developed his collecting and other activities in the field of art were shaped by a society that refused to take sides in the Cold War divisions, one firmly rooted in the singularity of the Yugoslav project, and at the same time—due to its ideological, political, and economic reasons—open to the world.

Božović’s interests were also generated and shaped by the dialectic between the ethics of efficiency and the ethics of self-realization. His engineering and scientific experience belonged to the sphere of rational knowledge—practical, profitable, and efficient—knowledge that, in the broadest sense, produces techniques for managing both machines and society.³

On the other hand, the emancipation of collecting as a form of escapism⁴ into an activity shaped

² Susan M. Pearce, *Collecting in Contemporary Practice* (London: SAGE Publications/Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1998), 20–21.

³ Gerson S. Sher, *Praxis: Marxist Criticism and Dissent in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 248–271.

⁴ About collecting as an escapist response to the moral, social, and economic uncertainties of the modern world or about escapism as one of the characteristics of collecting, see: Paul Martin, “‘I’ve got one just like that’: Collectors, Museums and Community,” *Museological Review* 1, 2, 1995, 77–86; Paul Martin, “Tomorrow’s History Today? Post-Modern Collecting,” *History Today*, February 1996, 5–8; Paul Martin, *Contemporary Popular Collecting in*

and directed by relationships and exchanges with a wide circle of individuals not only articulated hobby and amateurism as a unique position and potential profession and transformed the collector's passive role of observer or follower (or "entrepreneur in the field of art") into that of an active participant: in a broader sense, it also signified Božović's adoption of an alternative perspective on the social role and nature of knowledge. It marked his entry into the sphere of creation and distribution of cultural content, forms, and symbols.

Collecting as a Cultural and Behavioral Phenomenon

Collecting is a cultural and behavioral phenomenon⁵ based on the possession, classification, and display of objects through which taste, knowledge, and prestige are represented.⁶ The pleasure of collecting lies in the pleasure of difference—difference that arises from classification according to the perceived distinctions between objects within a single collection or between different types of collected objects,⁷ but also the difference through which one's own uniqueness is established in relation to another individual or a nation.

Anthropological, sociological, and philosophical answers to the question of why collecting arises and is nurtured in Western cultures—as well as those within the frameworks of cultural studies and cultural analysis—begin by examining the dynamics of the subject–object relationship, marked by individualization and domination. Many of these interpretations view the collecting impulse from the perspective of consumerism critique or psychoanalytic theory.⁸

Britain: The Socio-Cultural Context of the Construction of Identity at the End of the Second Millennium AD (dissertation, 1997) quoted in: Pearce, *Collecting in Contemporary Practice*, 15–16.

⁵ John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, "Introduction," in *Cultures of Collecting* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 4.

⁶ Jean Baudrillard, "The System of Collecting," in *Cultures of Collecting*, eds. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 15; Susan Pearce, *Museums, Objects, and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Books, 2017), 36–67; 89–117.

⁷ Naomi Schor, "Collecting Paris," in *Cultures of Collecting*, eds. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 257–258.

⁸ Baudrillard, "The System of Collecting," 7–24; Susan Stewart, "Objects of Desire," in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan Pearce (London: Routledge, 1994), 204–223; James Clifford, "Collecting Ourselves," in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan Pearce (London: Routledge, 1994), 258–268; Schor, "Collecting

Museum studies or museology, on the other hand, draws a distinction between private and institutional collections (i.e., between individuals and their collecting activities as a form of leisure or personal passion, and curators as professionals). It points out that private collectors are motivated by a number of factors: leisure time, aesthetic preferences, sensual pleasures, fantasy, competition, risk, the desire to place objects in new contexts, a sense of belonging, prestige, cultural and social/class superiority, the ambition to achieve perfection,⁹ and even “the sense that from now on he can live out his life uninterruptedly and in a cyclical mode, and thereby symbolically transcend the realities of an existence before whose irreversibility and contingency he remains powerless.”¹⁰

Private collecting is certainly a form of productive leisure and is mostly described in literature as a hobby—a specialized quest pursued by an individual outside of their professional sphere, one that with time and persistence becomes increasingly absorbing and rewarding.¹¹ However, if the activity of collecting transforms into an occupation marked by serious, dedicated engagement, a more systematic approach, and organizational effort, and if it begins to contribute to the individual and/or the community, to the common good, and becomes part of functionally interdependent relationships with professionals and the public, then it ceases to be merely a hobby. In other words, it becomes an amateur pursuit through which the collector self-actualizes, achieves, expresses, enriches, regenerates, or fundamentally changes themselves—refining his or her self-conception and beginning to adopt the standards or methods set and followed by relevant professional fields. This, symbolically, brings them closer to institutionalization and professionalization—moving them away from the margins of leisure and free time, within which

Paris,” 252–274; Brenda Danet and Tamar Katriel, “No Two Alike: Play and Aesthetics in Collecting,” *Play & Culture* 2 (1989): 221.

⁹ Mieke Bal, “Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting,” in *Cultures of Collecting*, eds. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 103. Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study*, 36–67.

¹⁰ Baudrillard, “The System of Collecting,” 17.

¹¹ Robert A. Stebbins, “‘Amateur’ and ‘Hobbyist’ as Concepts for the Study of Leisure Problems,” *Social Problems*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (April 1980): 416.

the individual is free to develop as an idiosyncratic and unpredictable actor.¹²

Amateur Practice and Collecting as a Form of Engagement

Amateur practice, in itself, allows for a partial or temporary escape from everyday life.¹³ A collector's specific relationship to the objects they collect—grounded in the belief that these objects are exceptional due to a particular trait or combination of traits, as well as the tendency to invest “in objects all that one finds impossible to invest in human relationships”¹⁴—shapes and defines what can be called collection escapism.

However, the inherent potential of objects to always be connected to human-initiated and realized projects, and the fact that, regardless of how much they reference one another, objects always “admit within their orbit the external dimension of social and human intercourse,”¹⁵ opens the door to a different kind of collecting. This alternative form is based on initiative, unpretentious formats (like “book size”¹⁶ or “the most banal object, such as a cigarette box”¹⁷), and on techniques or disciplines (like drawing and printmaking), as well as technical knowledge, reproduction, and exchange.

In other words, collecting as a hermetic practice of acquisition and ownership was, in Božović's case, transformed into a dynamic field of encounters, initiatives, processes, and narratives. The bibliophile portfolios eventually became occasions for meetings and conversations that were later formalized as interviews—just as, in the beginning, they were essential to the development of the collection of artwork on cigarette packs, a collection that, through expansion and

¹² Stebbins, “‘Amateur’ and ‘Hobbyist’ as Concepts for the Study of Leisure Problems,” 414–415. Stephen F. Knott, *Amateur Craft, History and Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 45–87.

¹³ Knott, *Amateur Craft, History and Theory*, xviii.

¹⁴ Baudrillard, “The System of Collecting,” 11.

¹⁵ Baudrillard, “The System of Collecting,” 22.

¹⁶ Zoran L. Božović, pref. cat. *Poklon zbirka bibliofilskih izdanja Zorana L. Božovića* (Belgrade: Narodni muzej, 1995), 5.

¹⁷ Zoran L. Božović, pref. cat. *Povratak minijaturi* (Beograd: Grafički kolektiv, 1985), 2; Zoran L. Božović, pref. cat. *Povratak minijaturi II* (Belgrade: Grafički kolektiv, 1995), 2.

exhibitions, ultimately became an institution in its own right and an intriguing invitation for artists to participate and be represented through their work.

Thus, within the framework of postmodern encouragement of various forms of non-disciplinarity (interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinary, transdisciplinarity, and postdisciplinarity), this “unusual hobby” became a noteworthy and respectable set of activities—both locally and globally. This is evidenced not only by the responses found in the interview books, but also by the preserved correspondence with international artists and the range of activities through which a unique position was constructed—one that fundamentally questioned the rigid distinctions between amateur informality and professional work.¹⁸

Bibliophile Editions

The publishing of graphic portfolios that would come to form Zoran L. Božović’s gift collection began with his acquaintance with the poet Marija Čudina. Her poem “Bestiarium” from 1981, addressed to Vladimir (Veličković), shares with Veličković’s painting a questioning of the anthropocentrism that posits the subject of humanism as a universal abstraction, challenging it with the animal Other. This prompted Božović to conceptualize his first portfolio, which would include five facsimiles of the poem’s manuscript¹⁹ and five prints based on Veličković’s original sketches and paintings, featuring his recognizable motifs. This portfolio, however, would not be printed until 1987, following the publication of two earlier portfolios with prints by Nedeljko

¹⁸ For a more detailed examination of the nature of the relationship between amateurs and the public and professionals, as well as indications of how and when amateurs serve the public as if they were professionals, see: Robert A. Stebbins, *Amateurs, Professionals, and Serious Leisure* (Montreal & Kingston, London, Buffalo: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992), 22–23; 26–33; 38–55.

¹⁹ It is interesting that the poem, printed in a folder, partially differs from the one whose parts were published a year later, in 1988, in the journal *Mogućnosti*, in the selection from Marija Čudina’s poetic oeuvre, as well as in the Serbo-Croatian version that accompanied the translation of the poem into Dutch, published in 1987 in the Dutch literary journal *De Tweede Ronde*, which raises the question of the existence of multiple versions and their chronology. Additionally, in *Mogućnosti*, the first section of the “Bestiarium” was published as an introductory section followed by parts from another cycle of Marija Čudina’s “Poetics of the Bestiarium,” which the poem “Bestiarium” preceded. See: “Uit: Bestiarium Marija Čudina” (Vertaling Spomenka Novaković en Lela Zečević), *De Tweede Ronde* (1987): 143–146; Marija Čudina, “Poetika o Bestiariumu,” *Mogućnosti*, 5-6 (svibanj-lipanj 1988): 393–394.

Gvozdenović (in 1982—Božović's first published edition—and again in 1984), one with a print by Ivan Tabaković, and two portfolios by Mića Popović: *Ljudi* (1985), accompanied by an essay from art historian and National Museum curator Vanja Kraut, and *Meksiko* (1986), which featured a text written in essay form by teatrologist, playwright and theatre director Jovan Ćirilov.

During this period, from 1982 to 1986, Božović attended Professor Rodoljub Boško Karanović's printmaking class at the Faculty of Fine Arts twice a week during the academic year. With the professor's approval and generosity, Božović came to familiarize himself with various printing techniques and procedures, and the expressive possibilities each offered. His goal was, as he emphasized, not to express himself, but rather to ensure that the artists who accepted the invitation and provided the matrices for the graphics, "find a technique that would best suit them to express themselves, while being limited or hindered in the creative process as little as possible."²⁰

In other words, the prints were executed in a range of printmaking techniques—often within the same portfolio, where each print was produced using a different technological method—so as to suit the individual "handwriting," concepts, and other specific features that distinguish each artist's work and practice.

Božović typically hired professional printmakers to produce the editions (including Boško Karanović, Dragan Coha, Branimir Karanović, and Zoran Todorović—who printed his own matrices for Portfolio 17). However, on several occasions, Božović himself took on the task of printing the editions, specifically for Portfolios 14 and 15.

Between 1982 and 2000, Božović published twenty-five portfolios and four book-format editions (two of which were also published in English). Two of the portfolios remained unfinished. His initial idea was to merge image and text and to find a format that would encompass the qualities of both media—a portfolio belonging to the field of printmaking with discreet dimensions that could be "kept in a library and perused whenever desired." In doing so, he brought together two

²⁰ Zoran L. Božović, pref. cat. *Poklon zbirka bibliofilskih izdanja Zorana L. Božovića*, 5.

systems of presentation: the visual and the verbal. Božović pursued this concept through various iterations, gradually expanding his collection over time.

Historically, the emergence of artistic prints, portfolios/albums, and printed books in Western European culture and civilization occurred nearly simultaneously, in the second half of the 15th century and at the turn of the 16th century. In 1455, Johannes Gutenberg printed the first Bible using metal type. Around the same time, after gaining experience in Italy, Albrecht Dürer became his own draftsman, woodcutter, and publisher, producing prints and something like illustrated books—albums—which he signed with his monogram. Dürer transformed the rough and unsophisticated form of earlier woodcuts into a refined balance of black and white lines and surfaces, in accordance with Renaissance ideals of art as a liberal form.

The histories of (illustrated) bibliophile editions and of print portfolios largely followed parallel trajectories, rarely intersecting. This was the case despite both traditions emphasizing the uniqueness of editions—expressed in limited print runs (although the former also includes handwritten and ornamented books, both pre- and post-Gutenberg)—and their visual-aesthetic distinctiveness.

Ambroise Vollard's publishing, printmaking, and bibliophilic activities at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century played a significant role in promoting the prints of contemporary artists who were not printmakers through a commercial representation of prints that took into account both the artists' interests and their availability to a wider circle of collectors. Of particular importance was Vollard's challenging approach to the conservative conceptualization of the bibliophilic illustrated book.²¹ With his *livres d'artiste* project (1900–1939), in which he boldly combined the traditional print portfolio with the luxurious illustrated book—each of the twenty-two editions printed in limited runs, on fine paper, and featuring original prints—he redefined the bibliophile edition in line with the aesthetic regime of modern culture. In doing so, he merged the suggestiveness of the written word with the transformative power of the image.

²¹ Una E. Johnson, *Ambroise Vollard, Éditeur, Prints, Books, Bronzes* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977), 17–40; Rebecca A. Rabinow, Douglas W. Druick, and Maryline Assante di Panzillo, *Cézanne to Picasso: Ambroise Vollard, Patron of the Avant-Garde* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art / New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 189–212.

The print and bibliophilic production within the Yugoslav artistic space, shaped by dynamic connections with the European artistic and cultural sphere, was as different from the European as the ways and rhythms of becoming modern in these spaces were different. Yugoslav printmaking mirrored changes in painting, and, particularly within the avant-garde, absorbed the techniques of press printing and mass media distribution, challenging the exclusivity of limited editions and conventional collecting. Print portfolios, bibliophile editions, individual prints, and drawings were especially prominent in interwar social and partisan art due to their practical and symbolic roles. Printmaking was seen as an ideal medium for political engagement: the immediacy and unpretentiousness of the printed sheet, its technological connection to printing (a cornerstone of the labor movement), and the portfolio's capacity for sustained visual narrative all contributed to its political potency. Words could clarify and amplify the message of an image, or vice versa. After World War II, portfolios and prints translated the monumental themes of revolution and reconstruction into the visual language of everyday life, mediating and fostering the production of the socialist subject.

The founding of the Grafički kolektiv in Belgrade (1949) and the launch of the Ljubljana International Biennial of Graphic Arts (1955) marked the institutional expansion and popularization of printmaking in socialist Yugoslavia. By the 1950s, three general approaches to printmaking emerged, all of which considered portfolios and bibliophile editions important practices. The first one was an interpretative approach, focused on adapting individual painterly or sculptural poetics into the printed form, often positioning printmaking as secondary, aimed at democratizing an elite art. The second was a research-driven approach oriented to the exploration of the meaning and scope of replication and serial production in the context of new technologies and socialist consumerist values. Finally, the third was a technical-expressive approach that graphic artists embraced in order to challenge the expressive possibilities of existing print techniques, which by the 1980s expanded into more daring and transgressive practices by emerging artists.²²

²² Ješa Denegri, Ljiljana Slijepčević, Miloš Arsić, et al, *Jugoslovenska grafika 1950–1980* (Beograd, Muzej savremene umetnosti, 1985); Jasna Tijardović Popović, ed., *Jedan vek grafike, Dela iz grafičke zbirke Muzeja savremene umetnosti u Beogradu* (Beograd: Muzej savremene umetnosti, 2003).

However, throughout this entire period, it was mostly the artists themselves who took the initiative to publish portfolios and bibliophile editions—occasionally also printmaking centers, or galleries and their curators—typically prompted by a specific occasion and usually on a one-time basis. The continuous and systematic publishing of portfolios in two “bibliophile” formats (with only one exception, Portfolio 8 from 1987, titled *Vuk* [Karadžić]), along with the selection that brought together artists of various generations, poetics, and artistic disciplines—and which, in addition to Serbian and Yugoslav artists, also included European, American, and Latin American contemporary painters representing such diverse tendencies as narrative figuration, new realism, Fluxus, minimal, and conceptual art—set Božović’s publishing activities apart as unique within the local cultural landscape.

Most of the bibliophile editions were “monographic,” including the two aforementioned portfolios by Nedeljko Gvozdenović, two with prints by Mića Popović, the portfolio with prints by Ivan Tabaković, and *Bestiarium* with prints by Vladimir Veličković, as well as individual portfolios with works by Radovan Kragulj (1985/87), Dušan Otašević’s *Processed Products* (1989), Božidar Damjanovski (1990), Svetozar Samurović’s *Daycare* (1993), Talent Kuda (1995), Vojo Stanić (1995), Zoran Todović (1995), Erró’s *Interrupted Narration* (1997), three portfolios with prints by Cuca Sokić (1989, 1992, 2000), and artist books such as *Projects* by Mrđan Bajić (1990), *The Annunciation of Morning* by Dragan Mojović (1990), *Impressions* by Vladan Radovanović (1993), and *At Leisure* by Vojo Stanić (1995).

Portfolios containing prints by various authors were either thematic (such as the aforementioned *Vuk* portfolio, as well as portfolios 20 and 24: *Four Unwritten Stories* [1995] and *Self-Portraits* [1999]), or collections assembled by the collector-publisher at a given moment into individual, non-thematic units (portfolios numbered 9, 10, 14, 17, 18, as well as two unfinished). The entire collection of this gift edition is distinctive in that it fully represents the development of the publisher’s interests, taste, and knowledge, and his enjoyment of the process (“I publish because I like it”²³), mapping Božović’s movement through various worlds of art, his communication and relationships—some generational, others intergenerational, and still others shaped by mutual

²³ Zoran L. Božović, pref. cat. *Poklon zbirka bibliofilskih izdanja Zorana L. Božovića*, 6.

understanding or negotiation of cultural and ideological similarities and differences.

Conversations on Art, Photo Portraits, Interview Books

To better understand the selection of prints found in the portfolios, it is necessary to take into account Božović's other activities in the field of cultural production: interviews, photographs with portraits of artists, and a collection of artwork made on cigarette packs. Across nine books published between 1989 and 2001, around ninety conversations were compiled, each accompanied by portraits of the interviewees taken by Božović himself.²⁴ These photo portraits, as documents of encounters and conversations, became not only a supplement to what was said but also a projection of what could have been said—yet, for various reasons, remained implied between the lines.

As products of a gaze into the “aura” of the artist, the portraits—mostly situational, taken in

²⁴ Four books contain conversations with mostly Belgrade artists, art historians, art critics, curators, and theorists: Aleksandar Cvetković, Božidar Damjanovski, Ante Marinović, Milan Miletić, Dragomir Mileusnić, Dragan Mojović, Dušan Otašević, Kemal Ramujkić, and Milun Vidić (Zoran L. Božović, Vesna L. Čolić, *Razgovori o umetnosti* [Belgrade: Grafički atelje Dereta, 1989]); Dejan Anđelković, Mrđan Bajić, Mirjana Đorđević, Uroš Đurić, Zdravko Joksimović, Darija Kačić, Lidija Merenik, Nikola Pilipovićem, Mileta Prodanovićem, Dejan Sretenovićem, Miško Šuvaković, and Talent and Zoran Todović (Zoran L. Božović, *Likovna umetnost osamdesetih i devedesetih u Beogradu - razgovori* [Belgrade: Cicero, 1995]); Daniel Glid, the Škart Collective, Branko Pavić, Milica Tomić, Zoran Todorović, Zoran Naskovski, Darka Radosavljević, Vera Stevanović, Dragoslav Krnaiski, Jovan Čekić, Bata Krgović, Ivan Ilić, Nina Kocić, Jelica Radovanović, Marija Vauda, and Saša Marković-Mikrob (Zoran L. Božović, *Likovna umetnost 80-ih i 90-ih u Beogradu: razgovori* [Belgrade: Remont, Beopolis, 2001]); Ljubica Cuca Sokić, Bojan Bem, Voja Stanić and Ješa Denegri (Zoran L. Božović, *Razgovori o umetnosti* [Belgrade: Remont, Beopolis, 2001]). Five books collected conversations conducted by Božović with international artists, gallery owners, curators, and critics such as: Valerio Adami, Ben Vautier, Jean Charles Blais, Rafael Canogar, César, Corneille, Erró, Gilbert & George, and Peter Klasen (Zoran L. Božović, Vesna L. Čolić, *Umetnici o umetnosti* [Belgrade, 1988]); Fernando Botero, Achille Bonito Oliva, Leo Castelli, Christo, Jan Dibbets, Keith Haring, Joseph Kosuth, Yvon Lambert, Sol LeWitt, Claes Oldenburg, James Rosenquist, and Frank Stella (Zoran L. Božović, *Razgovori o likovnoj umetnosti* [Beograd: Cicero, 1991]); Sandro Chia, Robert Combas, Leonardo Cremonini, Rudi Fuchs, Jeff Koons, Larry Rivers, Robert Ryman, Richard Serra, and Keith Sonnier (Zoran L. Božović, *Razgovori o likovnoj umetnosti II* [Beograd: Cicero, 1994]); Arman, Richard Artschwager, Riva Castleman, Daniel Lelong, Richard Oldenburg, Dennis Oppenheim, Jean-Louis Prat, Jesus Rafael Soto, Lawrence Weiner, Tom Wesselmann (Zoran L. Božović, *Razgovori o likovnoj umetnosti III* [Belgrade: Cicero, 1998]); Jean Jacques Lebel, Nicholas Bourriaud, Pat Andrea, Antonio Segui, Erik Bulatov, Orlan, Edward Lucie Smith (Zoran L. Božović, *Razgovori o likovnoj umetnosti 4* [Belgrade: Remont, Beopolis, 2001]).

studios, exhibition spaces, or the homes of the photographed—reveal the intertwining of the professional and the private, the public persona and vulnerable existence. They portray desire, ambition, and the motivation that desire generates. Ultimately, they are also documents of self-performance: of being an observer, a conversational partner, a co-participant, and a witness to the performative drama—the drama of becoming an institution as an artist/critic/curator/gallery owner, or the drama of being a central figure in the art world. Amidst the difficult circumstances of maintaining ties and communication with the international art community during the 1990s, Božović’s exhibition of artist portraits, presented in early 1996 at the Gallery of the Belgrade Youth Center, offered Belgrade’s artistic and cultural audience a personal glimpse into both the local and (Western) international art scenes. At the same time, it mapped the trauma of rupture and strengthened the beginnings of renewed connections and the process of re-networking.²⁵

Return to Miniature / *Du bon usage de l’emballage*

A number of the artists portrayed in Božović’s photos provided the matrices for a print or entire portfolio, and most of them were among the three hundred artists from various centers of the former Yugoslavia and different parts of the world who accepted the “challenge” of creating works on cigarette packs. A gift from Marija Čudina, consisting of two drawings by Leonid Šejka on cigarette boxes, prompted Božović to reflect on two things: the possibilities of the small format, and the recycling/transformation of used packaging into a base for a drawing, painting, collage, or material for an object/sculpture/assemblage/(mini)installation. This led him to conceive a collection which, despite initial skepticism, mistrust, or misunderstanding of the idea by some artists, came to life.

To date, the collection has been exhibited five times: three times in Belgrade at the Graphic

²⁵ See: Zoran L. Božović, *Fotografija*, exhibition catalogue (Belgrade: Dom omladine, 1996); Jasmina Čubrilo, “Program Galerije DOB-a i prelomi devedesetih,” in *60 godina Doma omladine Beograda (1964-2024)*, ed. Sergej Beuk (Belgrade: Dom omladine Beograda, 2024), 45–47.

Collective Gallery in 1985, 1995, and 2001 under the title *Return to Miniature I, II, and III*²⁶; in 1997 at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Verviers under the title *Du bon usage de l'emballage*; and in 2000 at the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Visuels de La Cambre in Brussels under the title *Retour de la miniature*.²⁷ The exhibitions in Belgrade followed the growth of the collection, each presenting works added up to that point (the first in 1985), or created between two time periods (the second showing works from 1985–1995, and the third from 1995–2001), while the exhibitions in Verviers and Brussels showcased a representative selection ranging from the earliest works to those added just before the exhibitions.

The exhibition titles themselves map out three main issues of the collection. The first and second relate to dimension and format: “miniature.” Historically, miniature art evolved from book illustration, through emancipation from text and ornamental frames, to individual small-format works kept in albums or portrait medallions created for private use within families, and further transformed throughout the centuries, shaped by various influences and phases. The essential characteristic of the miniature is that it does not depict a detail of a larger image but presents a compact composition within a small format.

Božović revitalized this format marginalized in 20th-century art even before the launch of the International Biennial of Miniature Art in Gornji Milanovac in 1989 (he participated in the first four with his photographs). He did so in part to question the role of the art market as an integral part of the art system, equally important to both artists and collectors, and to examine the valuation and commodification of artwork within the hybrid model of a socialist planned economy and the limited functioning of market economy laws. In that system, the art market was perceived as disorganized, lacking systemic solutions, and more monopolistic than structured with clear mechanisms of supply and demand.

Božović’s concept offered an alternative collecting model, based on the exchange of goods and

²⁶ *Povratak minijaturi I*, exhibition catalogue (Belgrade: Galerija Grafički kolektiv, 1985); *Povratak minijaturi II*, exhibition catalogue (Belgrade: Galerija Grafički kolektiv, 1995); *Povratak minijaturi III*, exhibition catalogue (Belgrade: Galerija Grafički kolektiv, 2001)

²⁷ *Du bon usage de l'emballage, Deux Cents Miniatures Contemporaines*, catalogue (Verviers: Musée des Beaux-Arts, 1997); *Retour de la miniature*, catalogue (Brussels: École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Visuels de La Cambre, 2000).

ideas—both material and nonmaterial—transcending the logic of the traditional art market. He articulated it as an open structure, a process of horizontally forming a diverse and heterogeneous community, without selection criteria (except for format and material) and without formal propositions. At the same time, the concept of the miniature reflected postmodern skepticism and critique, embodying a reflection on the postmodern “dismantling of the Big”²⁸: “big” or grand narratives/metanarratives, (universal) Truths, Knowledge, Ideologies, etc.²⁹

The proportion of the small format to the number of works in the collection represents the ratio of the singular to the multitude. The collection itself—alongside the collection of bibliophile editions, interviews, and portraits—produces a new multitude of expressions, positions, formal and informal relations, and professional and personal connections, interwoven with the symptoms of both late-modernist and postmodernist international and local art systems.

The title of the exhibition in Verviers, *Du bon usage de l’emballage* (On the Proper Use of Packaging), problematizes the disposable and ephemeral material from which the works were created. In light of discussions that began in the 1980s—when the collection itself began to develop—and from the perspective of postmodern reevaluations of modern art history, particularly through the dynamics and dialogue between aspects of “high and low,” i.e. the popular and the everyday on the one hand, and the sophisticated and elite on the other,³⁰ the works—and thereby the main “theme” of the collection, or the collection as a whole—take on new meaning.

The use of cigarette packaging ranges from the recycling of cardboard as a standard surface for two-dimensional representations, to the box as an atypical material for sculpture or mini-installation, which can oscillate between being treated as raw material, a readymade, or an *unreadymade*,³¹ depending on how we understand who is responsible for the selection of this mass-produced object—the collector or the artist. Furthermore, it depends on whether it is the

²⁸ Arundhati Roy, *The Cost of Living* (New York: Modern Library, 1999), 12.

²⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

³⁰ Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, *High & Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art: Abrams, 1990); Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, *Modern Art and Popular Culture: Readings in High and Low* (New York: Abrams in association with the Museum of Modern Art, 1991).

³¹ Joshua Simon, *Neo-materialism* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 39–60.

artist who transforms an everyday item into a work of art, or whether it is the framework of the collection and its exhibition context that allows us to recognize the everyday object within the work.

This “readymade” issue, highlighted in the title of the exhibition, reexamined both the citationality of the art of the 1980s and modernism’s concept of authorship and the strong subject. Theoretically it raised a number of questions, primarily related to overcoming the concept of the autonomy of art through an avant-garde “aesthetics” of the everyday, context, the artist’s work and signature, and various aspects of life. It thereby makes the collection of works on cigarette packs unique in comparison with other collections comprising examples of different artistic expressions, poetics, and concepts from the last four decades of the 20th century—collections in which both modernism and postmodernism, “artistic Authority” and “artistic Anarchy”³² are simultaneously represented.

Conceived as an open platform for any artistic “commentary” on the proposed format, the collection—due to its cooperative relationship with artists, the author’s framing of conceptual parameters (small format, high & low, (un)readymade), and the promotion of the idea and realized works through exhibitions—functions more as a curatorial project that evolves and expands its “master plan”³³ than as a conventional art collection. This conclusion is further supported by the fact that the project’s encouragement of the creation of artwork on or from cigarette packs was developed during a period in which, under the influence of new public health policies, environmental awareness, and the emerging wellness industry—all in response to the harmful effects of tobacco consumption—the previous affirmative approach to consumption as a signifier of modernity, individualism, emancipation, freedom, critical thinking, or hedonism was being reexamined. Smoking increasingly became a signifier of personal and collective responsibility, subject to strict regulation, prohibition, and penalties.

³² Ihab Hassan, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 59, quoted in Hans Bertens, “The Postmodern Weltanschauung and its Relation to Modernism: An Introductory Survey,” in *A Postmodern Reader*, eds. Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 45.

³³ Paul O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 87–130.

...and Other Activities

Other activities include Božović's work in photography, developed from childhood and youth under the auspices and influence of Yugoslav amateur photography. He also participated in the International Biennial of Miniature Art in Gornji Milanovac (his photograph *The Wall* won an award at the Second Biennial in 1992), the International Salon of Art Photography in 1997 (when he received first prize) and 1998, as well as the International Photographic Meeting in Thessaloniki in 1997.

He mediated and organized the first exhibitions of Erró, the Icelandic artist and representative of narrative figuration, in Belgrade. The first two were exhibitions of Erró's serigraphs, in 1992 at the Graphic Collective and in 1995 at the Zlatno oko (Golden Eye) Gallery in Novi Sad, while the third was a large exhibition of paintings, prints, and collages at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade in the fall and winter of 1997. The latter was also one of the first major international exhibitions after the signing of the Dayton Agreement and the suspension of sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1995. A year before Erró's exhibition, in 1996, Božović facilitated the installation and presentation of *Ihr Fahrplan*, a project by American conceptual artist Lawrence Weiner, at the Graphic Collective Gallery.

He was a member of the Board and Council of the Fourth and Fifth Belgrade Biennial of Graphics (international exhibitions) in 1996 and 1998. Erró's exhibition in 1997 at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade, as well as *Du bon usage de l'emballage* in Verviers that same year, were just some of the outcomes of this engagement. Additionally, the enthusiasm and interest of the owner of the Cicero printing house in collecting artwork provided an opportunity for Božović to initiate and become the editor of a series of monographic editions on individual artistic oeuvres.³⁴ This model of collaboration—where the collector finances the publication of a monograph on artists whose work they own—became common after 2000 (such as the

³⁴ The following monographs were published: Đorđe Kadijević, *Vera Božičković-Popović* (Belgrade: Cicero, 1994); Irina Subotić, *Umetnost Ljubice Cuce Sokić* (Belgrade: SANU, Cicero, 1995); Irina Subotić, *Vojislav Vojo Stanić: biti dosledan sebi* (Belgrade: Cicero, 1998); Mrđan Bajić: *Backup* (Belgrade: Cicero, 2006).

publishing initiatives of the Vujičić Collection Foundation and the Trajković Collection).

In addition to interviews, Božović was also invited and encouraged by artists such as Mića Popović, Ljubica Cuca Sokić, Erró, and Dragan Coha to write exhibition catalogue forewords. In these texts, he spoke with the voice of an enlightened amateur and friend, offering a different approach and way of thinking about the artists' work. While it's not unusual for a collector or publisher of print portfolios to appear as the author of a catalogue essay or art critique, what may be uncommon is when that text becomes an integral part of the collector's or publisher's own artistic project—one that critically reflects on aspects of the scene in which the collector or publisher participates.

In 1997, Božović organized an exhibition titled *Oil on Canvas* at the Gallery of the Student Cultural Center, where he exhibited five of his own monochromatic paintings, all of the same dimensions. Each was "painted" using a different type of oil, as indicated by the titles of the works: *Used Oil INA SAE 20/40*, *Two Walnut Oils*, *Pumpkin Seed Oil*, *Sunflower Oil*, and *Jecoris Oleum*. The accompanying preface was a compilation of quotations, mostly taken from contemporary theoretical literature, and in that form, it imitated Benjamin's ideal model of text and his greatest ambition as a writer, which is a manuscript written entirely from quotes.³⁵

Božović's entire project had a performative character, rooted in the debates and his own experience of navigating parallel spheres: on the one hand, the local collecting circles and art market actors, primarily focused on the "established values" of early 20th-century art, 1960s abstraction, New Objectivism and figuration of the 1960s and 70s, and the so-called Paris School; and on the other, the emerging "alternative" art scene shaped by post-avant-garde and postmodern tendencies—artists and practices that were largely excluded from or uninteresting to the local art market at the time, but were beginning to draw attention from private galleries and collectors, such as Slobodan Rašić Raša, curator at Gallery Lada, Gallery Zvono, and collector Radomir Dražović.

These two worlds existed in complete separation, with little to no contact: the first was

³⁵ Hannah Arendt, "Introduction, Walter Benjamin: 1892–1940," in *Illuminations*, Walter Benjamin (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 39, 47.

preoccupied with original artwork created using classical techniques and “pure” media (painting and sculpture), where artistic value was often equated with market value; the second was immersed in theoretical turbulence, grappling with questions of autonomy and heteronomy, and reflecting on the implications of postmodern critique and parody of modernism, as well as critical engagement with institutional policies of the global (or globalized) art world.

Conceptually, Božović’s project *Oil on Canvas* draws on post-avant-garde and postmodern strategies. The tautological format of both the exhibition title and the titles of the paintings ironically references the formalism and high modernist ideal of autonomy and literalism, particularly as developed in American art criticism by figures like Clement Greenberg. The project does not so much question the notion of representation as it does the relationship between a group of images and their accompanying paratext. Meanwhile, the foreword—constructed entirely from quotations, including Božović’s signature beneath it—ironically invokes postmodern strategies of parody and irony aimed at the doxas of modernism. According to the classification of the use of irony in art, and painting in particular, of the 20th century, Božović’s irony in *Oil on Canvas* is one that develops as a strategy from conceptual art. It focuses not only on the relationships within the image, group of images, and their context, but also on verbalized records in the paintings, titles, and the extensive legend that is an integral part of the work, or an interpretation. It also applies to the way ideas circulate and are realized, appropriated or rejected, changed, twisted.³⁶

In the pre-Internet era, when catalogues, journals, and analogue media were the main channels of information exchange, Zoran L. Božović—thanks in part to his university career and the academic conferences and international research projects in which he participated—traveled extensively. During those travels, he consistently devoted time to his “second profession”: activities that, due to these travels, often went far beyond the boundaries of casual amateur interest.

³⁶ See: Monique Yaari, “Ironies of Modern/Postmodern Art: Duchamp, Magritte, Adami,” in *The Turn of the Century/Le tournant du siècle: Modernism and Modernity in Literature and the Arts/Le modernisme et la modernité dans la littérature et les arts* 3, eds. Christian Berg, Frank Durieux, and Geert Lernout (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter 1995), 543.

By establishing both formal and, more often, informal channels of communication, seamlessly weaving together different art worlds, from major cultural centers to those in the margins, at a time when, influenced by post-1989 geopolitical and economic changes, these worlds began to undergo transition and reshape into a globalized art world where different hierarchies began to apply, Božović laid the foundation for all his activities: the publishing of print portfolios, the creation of a unique collection of works on cigarette packs, and the publication of books of conversations. Through these efforts, he transcended and reevaluated the position of a collector, transforming it into a highly unusual and authentic one, becoming a flexible agent of artistic production and dissemination, a figure of action: participant, producer when necessary, interlocutor, artist, and, for many whom he met along the way, a timelessly cherished and steadfast friend.