

Galería Elba Benítez



Katalin Ladik. O-PUS

June – July 2019

After having presented the groundbreaking oeuvre of the female pioneers of the Central-Eastern European Conceptual Art Dóra Maurer and Ewa Partum in the exhibition *The Sky Is Blue in Some Other Way* (2014), the Galería Elba Benítez is proud to present the exhibition *Katalin Ladik. O-PUS*, introducing the work of Serbian/Hungarian poet, actress and performer Katalin Ladik (born 1942, Novi Sad, Serbia; lives and works in Budapest, Hungary) whose radical, gender-bending, often participatory performances and actions, conceived in former Yugoslavia and socialist Hungary, earned her the status of a pop cultural icon and were associated with the experimental, neo-avant-garde achievements of John Cage's intellectual circles and Fluxus practices. Often referred to as the "Yoko Ono of the Balkans", Ladik has been a forerunner of intermedia art and performance, involving her body as well as sound and visual experiments, and introducing proto-feminist discourse in the politically and socially oppressive context of Eastern Europe.

Katalin Ladik. O-PUS concentrates on Ladik's visual poetry and performance as a live act, photographic documentation and an experimental film and video. The exploration of a vocal expression (voice as instrument, a vehicle of corporal transformation and a component of shamanistic identity) are focused on in this show. The exhibition's title *O-PUS* appropriates the title of one of Ladik's early iconic works - the performance-cum-film *O-PUS* (1972), conceived with Attila Csernik (on view in the exhibition and accompanied by a score). *O-PUS* transposes the achievements of visual poetry into the world of sounds, a process typical of many works by Katalin Ladik in which she sings, whispers and shouts, exploring the relationship between visual effects and their reflection in sound.

The exhibition traces the development of Ladik's radical approach from the end of the 1960s until today, including the live performance at the exhibition opening and a poster version of Ladik's score for the participatory action *Change Art*, performed in Belgrade in 1975, which can be perceived as the artist's credo. *Katalin Ladik. O-PUS* begins with the artist's debut, an anthology of poetry entitled *Ballada az ezüstbicikliről* (Ballad of the Silver Bicycle), published in 1969 in Novi Sad, where Ladik was associated with a progressive Hungarian magazine called *Új Szimpozium* (New Symposium) and later collaborated with the artist and theorist Bálint Szombathy and the Conceptualist collective Bosch+Bosch (1973-1976). The exhibition unfolds with the presentation of the major performances and actions of the 1970s and 1980s that mark the artist's incessant search for rituals and archetypes. Ladik appropriated Balkan folk music and Hungarian folklore in her transgressive, vocal extravaganzas and phonic interpretations of visual poetry, challenging the audience with the unprecedented representation of female body and the usage of voice that was considered "a social weapon, a tool of critique and emancipation". Explaining Ladik's transition to what might be called supraethnicity, Emese Kürti (the author of *Screaming Hole. Poetry, Sound and Action As Intermedia Practice in the Work of Katalin Ladik* (2017), emphasizes Ladik's role as the sole Hungarian-speaking poet-performer in contemporary Yugoslavia who could go beyond the given cultural-ethnic limits and who could express herself in the Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian cultural spaces in a supralinguistic way. *Poemasks* (1982), also on view in the exhibition, are Ladik's living sculptures that exemplify the metamorphosis which is inherent in the artist's creative process, a fluid shift, in Ladik's own words, "from woman to man, or from artist to artwork, and then destroy the artwork". According to Kürti, Ladik's entire oeuvre "is about the impossibility of reconstructing the platonic harmony between the sexes, the fragmentary character of intellectual-sensuous relations between man and women, and the dynamic crisis of the female subject, which is condensed into diverse forms: now a scream, now an autobiographical novel".

The exhibition *Katalin Ladik. O-PUS* has been conceived as an homage to French poet and actor Antonin Artaud (1896-1948), recognized as one of the major figures of twentieth-century theatre and the European *avant-garde*. Artaud has remained an important theoretical reference point for Ladik to this day. Her performance *L'agneau de Dieu et le double* (Marseille, 1996) had been conceived to celebrate the centenary of Artaud's birth. Ladik's earlier performance *Seraphin Tanz* (Dance of the Seraphim) (1990) can be traced back to this same origin. Both performances (as video and photographic documentation) are included in the exhibition. Ladik's fascination with Artaud's work is serious and profound; the artist approaches Artaud's thought and work, and especially the metaphysics of the theatre of cruelty and its concentration on a prelinguistic state, within a post-Cagean context as a symbiosis of sonic and interdisciplinary performativity with a strong focus on corporeality. Gabriella Bartuc, a critic reviewing Ladik's work in Vojvodina as well as an eyewitness, referred to Ladik as "Artaud's daughter". Artaud is represented in the exhibition by two drawings - his early self-portrait from 1920 and one of his last drawings, dated 1948, where the artist portrays himself as his alter ego *Le Môme*. Additionally on view is Artaud's final work - a legendary and scandalous radio play, *To Have Done With the Judgement of God* (1947/48), "a heretic's scatological tirade at the extreme of the linguistic lunatic fringe", a true incarnation of Artaud's theatre of cruelty.

Adam Budak

Katalin Ladik was born in 1942 in Novi Sad, Yugoslavia. She has lived and worked alternately in Novi Sad, Serbia, Budapest, Hungary and Hvar Island, Croatia.

She is a poet, artist, performance artist and actress. Her career in sound poetry and action art unfolded in parallel with her literary activity; her artistic pursuits involve the genres of audio play, experimental music, experimental theatre, visual poetry and mail art. In 1973, she joined the Bosch+Bosch group, of which she was an influential member.

Her literary career began in 1962 with the avant-garde Symposion circle in Vojvodina, comprising the future founders of the journal *Új Symposion*. Her first volume was published in 1969 under the title *Ballad of the Silver Bike*, with a gramophone record supplement that featured recordings of her interpreting her poems. Her poetry merges mythology, folklore symbolism and folk poetry with modern lifestyle, technology and eroticism (*The Small, Red Bulldozers Have Taken Off*, 1971; *Tales of the Seven-Headed Sewing Machine*, 1978; *Icarus on the Subway*, 1981; *The Promiscuous Broom*, 1984; *Exile*, 1988; *Engagement*, 1994). Her compositional technique and tone are closely related to Surrealism.

In addition to written poetry, her activity in the field of sound poetry is internationally acclaimed. Her record *Phonopoetica* was published in 1976 in Belgrade, featuring vocal interpretations of visual poems by experimental poets including Gábor Tóth, Bálint Szombathy and herself. Ladik's records reveal her singular vocal skills: her scale ranges from overtones to bass. Electro-acoustic effects are secondary to her music, as she works with the perspectives of the human voice, which includes screaming, growling, chirping, intonation and extremely hushed whisper.

As a singer she has collaborated with a number of outstanding representatives of experimental music, such as Ernő Király of Novi Sad, composer of folkloristic music, or the ACEZANTEZ band (Dubravko Detoni, Milko Kelemen) of Zagreb, internationally acclaimed in the field of electroacoustic avant-garde, as well as Dušan Radić of Belgrade and Boris Kovač of Novi Sad.

The majority of her performances are in between performance art and theatre. She presents her sound poetry accompanied by body art actions, vocal and gesticular improvisation. She leaves considerable room for chance, new ideas, and she builds on audience involvement; the evocation of rituals and collective myths has an emphasized role in some of her performances. Since 1968, she has had solo performances and ones involving the Bosch+Bosch group or various members of the former *avant-garde* scene, in Zagreb, Belgrade, Balatonboglár, Amsterdam, Paris and New York.

She has been represented at a number of solo and group exhibitions all over the world with her visual poetry, collages and mail art. In 2010 she had a retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Vojvodina in Serbia. Her works can be found in the collections of The Museum of Modern Art (New York), the Ludwig Museum (Budapest), the Sammlung Verbund (Vienna), the Museum of Contemporary Art (Belgrade) and the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona.

Adam Budak has been since 2014 Chief Curator of the National Gallery Prague where he continues as Curator at Large. Previously he served as a curator for contemporary art at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (Washington D.C.) and at the Kunsthaus Graz (Universalmuseum Joanneum Austria). Budak curated numerous exhibitions, including Manifesta 7 (2008), La Biennale di Venezia (Polish Pavilion of the Architecture Biennale, 2004 and Estonian Pavilion at Art Biennale, 2013), two editions of Prague Biennale (2003, 2005), two editions of the Biennale Gherdëina (Ortisei, 2018) and the Trienala Ladina (San Martino In Badia, 2010). He contributed to a large number of publications and edited two volumes of *What is Architecture?* In 2014 he curated the exhibition *The Sky Is Blue In Some Other Way* at Galeria Elba Benitez (with the participation of, amongst others, Dóra Maurer, Ewa Partum, Mangelos and Eva Kot'átková).

In collaboration with the gallery acb

acb

Katalin Ladik: *Poemask 11/4*, 1982. Credits: Ana Lazukic