

Post-Totalitarian Art: Eastern and Central Europe

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After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the nations of Eastern and Central Europe began to dispose of their long-ailing Communist governments.¹ Every facet of life was affected by the resulting sociopolitical changes. Along with the development toward democracy came another change, no less profound: the movement from state socialism to a consumer economy. This essay aims to sketch the effect of some of these changes on the gender-oriented art produced by women in post-Communist countries.

During the long era of the Cold War, the countries behind what was then called the Iron Curtain were subject to a Communist ideology that tightly controlled every aspect of life. In the arts, this meant that the modernism that had flourished in the region well into the 1940s was gradually suppressed, replaced by Socialist Realism—a highly idealized, propagandistic way of depicting the supposed successes of the Communist order. Any form of modernism became highly suspect. And because the state owned and controlled all economic opportunities, artists were forced to choose sides: if they wanted to exhibit and sell through the state-supervised art market, they had to join the official camp and follow its ideology and visual vocabulary.

The early stages of the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States and Western Europe were known at the time to only a handful of Eastern European artists, owing to a severely censored and delayed flow of information. There were exceptions, however, especially in countries with a less rigid Communist regime, such as Hungary, where the innovative feminist artist Orshi Drozdik began her concentrated investigation of gender identity in the 1970s,² and in what was then Yugoslavia, where Sanja Iveković (b. 1949), from Zagreb, exposed the power of the media to create gender-specific stereotypes and influence the formation of collective memory. Both artists consistently probe the gender issue in their extensive body of multimedia work.

In general, however, despite the revolutionary political events of 1968, little attention was paid to questions of gender. Partly, this reflected the totalitarian assertion that men and women had already achieved equality as a matter of official state policy.³ In reality, however, this meant that women often had to take on the most demanding jobs while at the same time tending to their families and catering to traditional male expectations of the dutiful wife and mother. The socialist welfare states, while indeed taking care of certain basic services, such as sponsoring day-care centers and establishing maternity leave, felt no obligation to assure equality of pay or to include women in decision-making.⁴

In light of the state's hypocrisy about women's issues—granting equality with one hand while taking it away with the other—it is not surprising that before 1989 many women artists steadfastly refused to consider themselves feminists. That would have been seen as supporting the state's ideology of only nominal "equality" and therefore an unacceptable gesture for those who opposed the government machinery as a whole.⁵ Moreover, since political art was the domain of the ruling class and had been fed to generations in the form of heavy-handed propaganda, any suggestion of political content within an artwork would have been seen as defection from the principles of pure art. Therefore the tenet that "the personal is political" was rejected by those who, nonetheless, unwittingly practiced within its very spirit. A case in point is Adriena Šimotová (Czech Republic, b. 1925), who for years translated her experience as a woman, wife, and mother into expressive work of great eloquence, yet who still maintains that there is no connection to feminism in her large body of work.⁶

The feminist developments of the 1970s greatly enriched artistic practice in Western Europe, the United States, and parts of Asia, but those ideas could not be properly tested in the countries separated from the rest of Europe until 1989. Let us look at the work of some of the artists who have been active in Eastern Europe since then.

Opposite:
Detail of Iskra Dimitrova, *ContACT*
Binary, 2000 (see fig. 15)



Figs. 1, 2 (above left and right)
Boryana Rossa (Bulgaria,
 b. 1972). *The Good, the Bad,
 and the Ugly* (*Dobrata, loszata i
 groznyi*), 2001, as seen in the
 exhibition *The Organization of
 Monsters and Villains*, Sofia,
 2002. Series of 5 digital color
 photographs on white opaque
 paper, edition of 5, 35 3/8 × 51 1/4"
 (90 × 130 cm). Courtesy of the
 artist. The first image shows the
 model for the series, Veronika
 Petrova, at the exhibition opening.

After the collapse of Communism, a society that for decades had been deprived of material goods, and where private property was severely restricted, came increasingly under the spell of consumerism. Although most women still needed to keep their demanding jobs, now they were also expected to conform to a new doctrine tirelessly promoted by the commercial media—to be fashionably slim, youthful, and expensively attired. For example, Boryana Rossa's *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (figs. 1, 2)⁷ shows a new kind of Eastern European woman: vain, marginally cynical, materialistic, interested solely in her own well being and success. Yet the images of that new woman are shown amid the dilapidated buildings associated with the decay of the old regime.

Not all of Rossa's work, however, is concerned with the ramifications of the new economic order. Performance is at the core of most of her pieces, documented in numerous videos. She explores extreme psychological and physical situations, as in *Celebrating the Next Twinkling* (page 239). Fear of the unexpected

is displayed in this video of the screaming faces of two young women. The sound component was added by scratching the image in a D.J. style, a modified soundtrack that slowly becomes independent of the image. As the artist says, "In this constant bouncing back and forth between the image and the sound, the feeling of real time is gradually lost and the next twinkling is celebrated as the true progress in time."⁸ *The Moon and the Sunshine* (fig. 3) is concerned with the endurance of pain. Here and in subsequent works the artist emphasizes the body itself. She subjects her own body to self-inflicted violence, exploring the ambiguous nature of human suffering. As she says, "Wounds and bruises are not always the result of violence; sometimes they are marks of love.... Pain (including the physical) is a part of human existence—it is part of the life of both men and women; it is part of the act of creation.... The difference is that some pains can be suffered only by women, others only by men. This is one of the reasons why I believe that the good things, too, about each of the sexes are diverse and that each has the privilege to be different."⁹ It is a

Fig. 3
Boryana Rossa (Bulgaria,
 b. 1972). *The Moon and the
 Sunshine*, 2000. Single-channel
 video, color, sound, 7 min. 15 sec.
 Courtesy of the artist

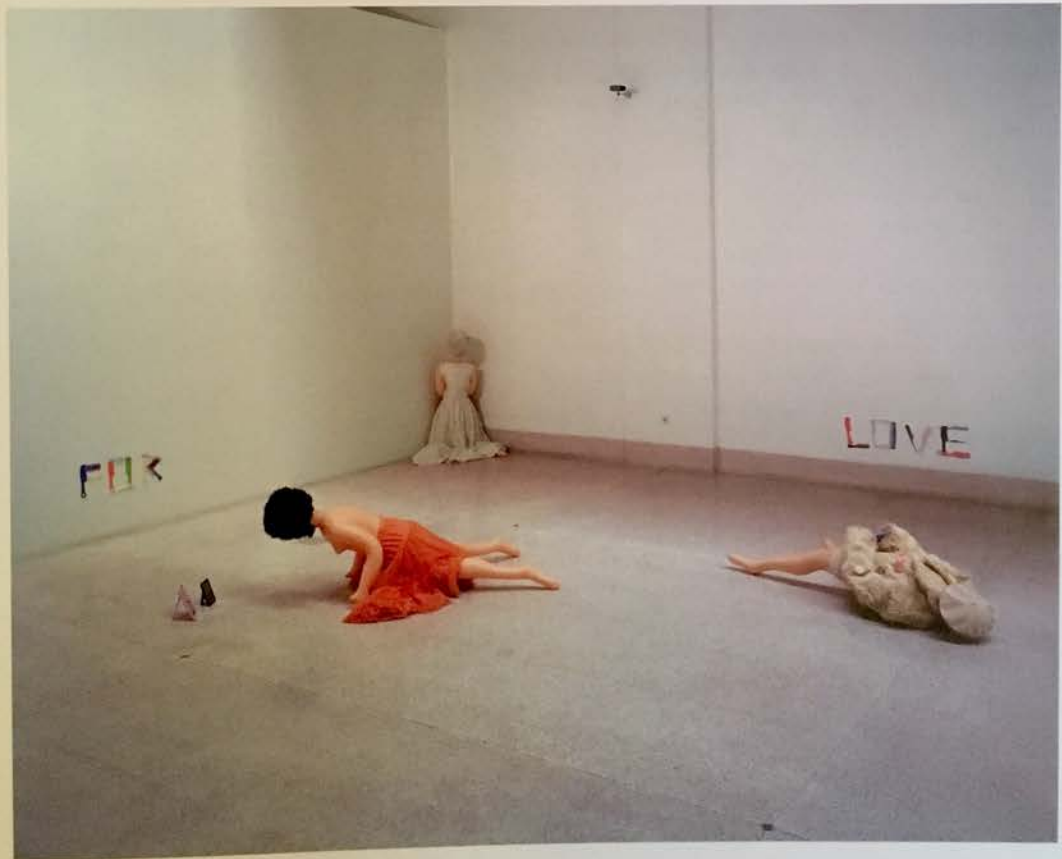
Fig. 4

Kateřina Vincourová (Czech Republic, b. 1968). *Love the Love Doll Jamie*, 2002. Inflatable sex dolls, clothing, combs, and mirrors, dimensions variable. Jiri Svestka Gallery, Prague. (Photo: Martin Polák, courtesy of Jiri Svestka Gallery, Prague)

compelling argument for respecting the complexities of gender difference.

The Communist states were known to take a rather prudish view of sex. The post-totalitarian reaction against that has been a deluge of sexually explicit merchandise, which started to pour into Central and Eastern Europe after the old regimes' demise. Artists were the first ones to evaluate this new phenomenon critically and to question its effect on society and on gender relationships.¹⁰

Kateřina Vincourová, who lives in Prague, has responded to the influx of sexual marketing. A few years ago, she was confronted by the opening of a sex boutique in her neighborhood. Its shop-window displays of large-scale sex dolls both repelled and fascinated her, and she began to contemplate a piece addressing this particular form of representation. For *Love the Love Doll Jamie* (fig. 4), Vincourová purchased several such dolls and presented them in a way that made them seem a little less like objects and a little more like human beings.





For one thing, she dressed them up in frilly garments, the choice of delicate fabrics creating a soft texture that mitigated the impression of synthetic plastic skin. Indeed, allowing the dolls to appear dressed at all endowed them with a touching degree of modesty, as if they were all too conscious of their vulnerability to our gaze. In addition, Vincurová posed the dolls so that we never see their faces directly, implying feelings of shame on their part and a wish to remain anonymous (though upon closer examination we can see a doll's face reflected in a small mirror, which may also catch our own image). Speaking of the dolls almost as if they were people, the artist says, "In the position of a voyeur we are also witnesses to the desire for change and for a return to respect, purity, and love."¹¹

Veronika Bromová belongs to the first generation of artists to use digital technology to augment their photographic work. The subject is predominantly the woman's body, frequently her own, tormented and deformed to address issues of sexual politics, exploitation, and recrimination. Bromová conceived the *Zemzoo* series (figs. 5, 6) while in New York in the International Studio and Curatorial Program in 1998; to escape the sweltering heat of the New York summer she visited the polar-bear habitat in the Central Park Zoo, and her empathy for the caged animal led to the project, which includes photographic work, video projection, and a kinetic sculpture of a polar bear. The work is aptly described by the art historian Karel Srp: "Both autonomously developing ideas—the polar bear and the female nude—attracted the artist independently of each other and were connected with her previous work which dealt with ... extreme body positions. Their simultaneous effect, enhanced by the shared space in which they were consequently installed, spoke of a dual solitude: the solitude of the woman both watching herself and throwing herself



Fig. 5

Veronika Bromová (Czech Republic, b. 1966). *Zemzoo*, 1998. Multimedia installation with kinetic object, 6 chromogenic prints with Perspex lamination, each 81 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 38 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (208 × 98 cm), and single-channel video projection of performance. Courtesy of the artist. (Photo: Martin Polák, courtesy of the artist and Lukas Feichtner Gallery, Vienna)

Fig. 6

Detail of **Veronika Bromová**, *Zemzoo*. (Photo: Martin Polák, courtesy of the artist and Lukas Feichtner Gallery, Vienna)

at the mercy of other people's vision, and the solitude of the animal wrenched from his natural habitat.... The white bear has become a symbol of the innocence and purity in the world, the joys of which cannot avoid traces of cruelty."¹²

It remains true that in post-Communist societies, women are still largely objectified, sexual innuendo continues to be a conversational norm, and sex trafficking flourishes to an unprecedented extent. The situation of women in Eastern Europe in some ways resembles nothing so much as the "postcolonial" condition seen in other parts of the world. New structures have to be established to free women from economic dependence, and there is a need for increased understanding of the commonalities as well as differences in the issues affecting women from various national, racial, and cultural communities.¹³ Indeed, new organizations have been created that focus on women's issues, and gender-studies centers have been established throughout the republics. Often in connection with the larger university systems, they address all aspects of women's life through publications and international symposia.¹⁴ Feminist discourse has increasingly made itself felt in art theory and practice.¹⁵

And there are successes to be noted. The exhibition *After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe* was held at the Moderna Museet, Stockholm, in the winter of 1999–2000, to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. One hundred and forty artists were included, and 40 percent of them were women—a high proportion by any standard—and the exhibition was organized by a well-known feminist curator, Bojana Pejić. Moreover, new varieties of feminism are being born in the region, creating works growing from the specific local situation and responding to local needs. The complexity of the development of feminist thinking has been assessed by Mare Tralla (Estonia, b. 1967) in her commentary on the Estonian artists who took part in the *Est.Fem* exhibition in 1995,¹⁶ an important event

in the formation of feminist consciousness in the Baltic republics.

Not only an influential writer, Tralla is also an artist who works in video, photography, and performance. It is illuminating to note that, while growing up in the Soviet era, she idolized heroic women—tractor drivers, construction workers, milkmaids—strong, muscular women who cherished being the heroines of socialist work and possessed the same physical powers as their male counterparts. Such images of robust women at work tell us something about the distinctive nature of a feminist agenda for Eastern Europe and how it differs from the West's. Though entrusted with the task of caring for family and children, in the Communist era women were not actually allowed to stay home with them past the time of a short maternity leave. Being a homemaker, rather than a laborer, was seen as parasitical and could lead to severe punishment. Thus, in Estonia the coming of "women's liberation" was in part actually about remaining at home with the children (contrary to what was seen in the West), and it was considered a victory when in 1988 women won the right to stay out of the workforce until a family's youngest child was three years old. For the women of Eastern Europe, being at home with their families was not only a practical goal but also a political statement—opposing the regimentation of women into the cadres of the Heroines of Socialist Labor.

Lenka Klodová was a driving force behind the establishment of the artists' collective called Mothers and Fathers in 2001. All of the artists in that group are from the generation born around 1970, and by 2001 nearly all of them had two or three children and were dealing with the pressures of family life amid the need to continue their art-making. They banded together to organize exhibitions and performances. They were inspired by the fundamental love between parents and children but also by the mundane household activities that they translated, in an almost Warholian manner, into



Fig. 7 (above)

Mothers and Fathers artist collective (Czech Republic, est. 2001). Installation views of the *Mothers and Fathers* exhibition at Gallery 1, Academy of Arts, Architecture, and Design, Prague, 2002. (Photos: courtesy of Lenka Klodová and Mothers and Fathers archive)



Fig. 8 (left)

Lenka Klodová (Czech Republic, b. 1969). *Winners*, 2005. Digitally altered photographs on self-adhesive material, 7' 10½" × 13' 3½" (2.4 × 4.05 m). Created for the Public Art Project organized by the Center for Contemporary Arts, Prague, spring–summer 2005. Sponsored by 3M, Czech Republic. (Photo: Martin Polák, courtesy of the artist)



Fig. 9 (above)

Elżbieta Jabłońska (Poland, b. 1970). *Supermother*, 2002, as seen at the Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, 2002. Performance and installation with mixed media and color photograph (fragment), original size 7' 3 1/4" x 13' 3" (2.23 x 4.04 m), at the Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, 2002. (Photo: Daniel Dabrowski, courtesy of the artist)



Fig. 10 (above right)

Elżbieta Jabłońska (Poland, b. 1970). *Eat Your Heart Out*, 2001. Documentation of performance at Inner Spaces Gallery, Poznań. Courtesy of the artist

art objects. At the exhibition *Mothers and Fathers* at the Academy of Arts, Architecture, and Design in Prague in 2002 (fig. 7), they shrink-wrapped sets of dirty dishes, which one could purchase in order to experience the pleasures of washing up after a family meal. One could also purchase a sleeping bag equipped with the portrait of a "wife" or a "husband," to substitute for the real one in case of need, or buy a cast of a "father" that could fit neatly under an automobile, simulating one of men's favored pastimes—fixing the family car. Herself a mother of three young children, Klodová continues to celebrate parenthood in her work.

Klodová's most recent project, *Winners* (fig. 8), was installed in a prominent thoroughfare on the banks of the Vltava (Moldau) River. Created as part of the series of public art initiatives administered by the Center for Contemporary Art in Prague, it aroused controversy because of its subject and its placement. The images were inserted into niches in the retaining wall that had been constructed long ago to support a monument to Joseph Stalin, erected only two years after the dictator's death, and torn down shortly afterward; the artist could hardly have chosen a location more burdened by history.¹⁷ The former monument to Stalin displayed a procession of heroes, personifications of the socialist work ethic, looming large over the Vltava. Klodová replaced these mythic figures with very different kinds of heroes:

photographs of famous sportswomen, their images digitally altered to make each of them appear pregnant. These pictures present the pregnant athletes at their "moments of victory, after breaking a record," as the artist says; they were intended as "an allegory, an effort to show the similarity between motherhood and a supreme performance."¹⁸

Similar ideas permeate the work of Elżbieta Jabłońska, who bases her art on the exploration of the mundane rituals of everyday life, such as the preparation of family meals (page 208). As Sebastian Cichocki has written of her work: "What is important to a supermother? Cooking is important. Wonderful things happen in the kitchen: peeling vegetables, counting calories, boiling rice and pasta, cracking nuts, portioning herbs, smelling, slurping (how many different terms has Jabłońska been able to find for the very action of absorbing food?), and pilfering for something delicious around the pots and pans. Motherhood is important. With all the mess, lack of sleep, and the stupidest of questions (How old is the youngest artist? Who rules the cosmos? Why is the color black sad?) Jabłońska once recapped her art in one sentence: 'If you have a family, one with a mom, a dad, and a child, you'll know what it's about.'"¹⁹ She often explores the nurturing experiences of motherhood and plays with the myth of the heroic Polish mother: brave, protective, and supportive, all at once. For the

Supermother series (fig. 9), Jabłoriska created color photographs of herself, dressed in different superhero costumes, with her son Antek. She set these into an installation in the Zacheta Gallery, one of the premier venues for contemporary art in Warsaw. In this series, Jabłoriska and Antek appear to be sitting physically in the gallery, in front of a diorama-like photograph of their living room. In fact, however, their image is a life-size photograph set into a tableau. The characters Jabłoriska assumes are iconic images of popular culture—but her poses point to the religious imagery of the Madonna and Child, highly resonant in devoutly Catholic Poland. Popular culture meets high art, profane meets sacred, which leads the viewer to acknowledge the multiple roles women have had to play. On the one hand, women must be modern and adventurous; on the other, they are expected to uphold traditional domestic ways. This latter aspect of women's activity is also featured in numerous performances in which Jabłoriska prepares and serves vast amounts of food, such as *Eat Your Heart Out* (fig. 10).

Issues of statehood, in a post-Communist Europe, and their effect on personal identity are frequently explored in the work of artists from the Balkans. Tanja Ostojic began the project *Looking for a Husband with an E.U. Passport* in 2000 (page 231)³⁰ as a direct comment on the situation of women in this transitional period. Ostojic is an interdisciplinary performance artist who presently works in various European countries. She points to the inequities involved in the policies adopted by the European Union toward nonmembers. Born in Belgrade, capital of the former Yugoslavia, she witnessed the breakup of that country and the tragic consequences for the region during the rule of the notorious Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević.³¹ *Looking for a Husband with an E.U. Passport* reflects on the difficult situation of Serbian citizens, who must obtain visas, sometimes in dubious ways, to enter the wealthy European Union member countries.

In the summer of 2000, Ostojic wanted to travel to Austria to take part in an artists' gathering and workshop, but her application for a visa was denied. She turned the refusal into the creative impetus for a performance. With the help of Austrian friends, she illegally crossed the border and documented her actions. Drawing on this experience and those of countless other applicants denied free passage, she developed a complex piece that involved posting her advertisement on the Web, gathering responses, and answering some of them. It also led to her marriage to the German media artist Klemens Golf and ultimately to her residency in Germany, a member of the E.U.

Milica Tomic was born in Belgrade in 1960. The name Milica, taken from a medieval Serbian queen,³² was seen as an odd choice at a time when Yugoslavia was trying to modernize, but it was still acceptable since it was a family name. During the 1980s, however, growing nationalist feelings brought sudden importance to her name, with its connection to the most illustrious period in Serbian history. The implications of Milica's name, once only part of her intimate private identity, but later part of a national collective identity, have led her to confront the tragedy of still-reverberating Balkan ethnic conflicts. In a single-channel video by Tomic called *I Am Milica Tomic* (page 256), her identity as an individual is tied to the artificially constructed identity of a nation. In the video loop, Tomic repeats her name in different languages and takes on the corresponding nationality: "Ich bin Milica Tomic / Ich bin Deutsch; I am Milica Tomic / I am English," and so on. With each phrase, bloody wounds appear on the artist's body; ultimately, however, it is unexpectedly transformed back into the pristine image of a beautiful young woman. The way that violence sometimes accompanies identity politics could hardly be more overtly stated.

National identity, regional history, pop culture, and gender issues are intertwined in Tomic's two-channel video projection installation *Alone* (fig. 11). One part

Fig. 11

Milica Tomic (Serbia, b. 1960). *Alone*, 2001. Two-channel video projection and installation, color, 20 min. Charim Galerie, Vienna



Fig. 12

Milena Dopitová (Czech Republic, b. 1963). *A Dance?*, 2001. Single-channel video, loop, color, silent, 6 min. Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York. (Photo: courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York, and Jiri Svestka Gallery, Prague)

shows three men playing the card game known as "preference"; this typical entertainment for male groups in the region is felt to embody such traits as fast thinking and decisiveness. Many important business and political decisions are reached while the game is being played in the secluded safety of the back rooms of cafés, social clubs, and restaurants. The other screen shows the popular singer Dragana Mirković performing the song "Alone." Through her highly expressive rendition and the emotional content of the song, she draws the viewer's attention away from her male counterparts on the other screen, who gaze out, as men so often do, from a position of privileged invisibility.

Mirković's performance also takes part in the region's newfound marketing of cultural identity: the "turbo-folk" style she is famous for is seen in Serbia and Montenegro as an important, even unique, contribution to global pop culture and as a way to enter the international music business. Extremely popular in Southeastern Europe, turbo-folk is actually a rich hybrid drawing on Serbian and Roma brass band music, Middle Eastern rhythms, North African Rai music, Turkish and Greek pop, Western rock and roll, and contemporary Western European electronic dance music.²³



Milena Dopitová's *Dance* (page 195) is from a series of large-scale color photographs, accompanied by two videos, called *Sixtysomething*. One video shows a still-youthful forty-year-old artist and her twin sister being transformed, through elaborate make-up, into gray-haired matrons. In the photographs, they engage in various quiet activities, often wearing unflattering outfits that betray the economically disadvantaged socialist past. Nevertheless, there is a great deal of tenderness between the sisters as

together they cross the threshold to the later stages of life. The images suggest loneliness and melancholy, evoked here by the colorless surroundings of a deserted city park on a rainy day. A silent video projection titled *A Dance?* (fig. 12) shows older couples dancing outdoors, enjoying what time is left for little pleasures. The brevity of life is further suggested by a group of colorful, dramatically lit butterflies installed throughout the gallery. Dopitová's work deals with gender identity amid the physical and economic consequences of aging. It shows a brighter side in a recent video of middle-aged professional dancers, gracefully rehearsing in a studio. The video *I Know That You Cannot Hear This Song* (2005) is an affirmation of positive moments in aging and the serenity that grows with experience of life. The artist reminds us that aging does not need to be seen only as a continuous process of physical deterioration or as an exclusion from the beloved professions; even for dancers and those in competitive sports, for whom lessened physical ability might be most distressing, age is also a guiding spirit for attaining deeper wisdom, spiritual beauty, and dignity.²⁴

Katarzyna Kozyra is one of the most celebrated feminist artists from post-Communist Europe. She achieved notoriety with her piece *The Pyramid of Animals* (fig. 13), done as her diploma work at the Fine Art Academy in Warsaw in 1993. Loosely based on the Brothers Grimm fairytale "The Bremen Town Musicians," this work consists of a stuffed rooster, cat, dog, and horse placed one on top of the other, with video documentation and written commentary. The outcry that greeted this piece grew mainly from the video and written documentation of the death, flaying, and stuffing of the horse the artist selected for the piece.²⁵ The directness of the video—and Kozyra's matter-of-fact report of her finding of mass "graves" of animal corpses while she looked for another component for her sculpture among the hundreds of animals euthanized every day—offended the feelings of many about the ethical treatment of



Fig. 13
Katarzyna Kozyra (Poland, b. 1963). *The Pyramid of Animals*, 1993. Video installation, 47 min., with four stuffed animals and written commentary by the artist, 7' 2 3/4" x 6' 2 3/4" x 3' 11 1/4" (2.2 x 1.9 x 1.2 m). Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

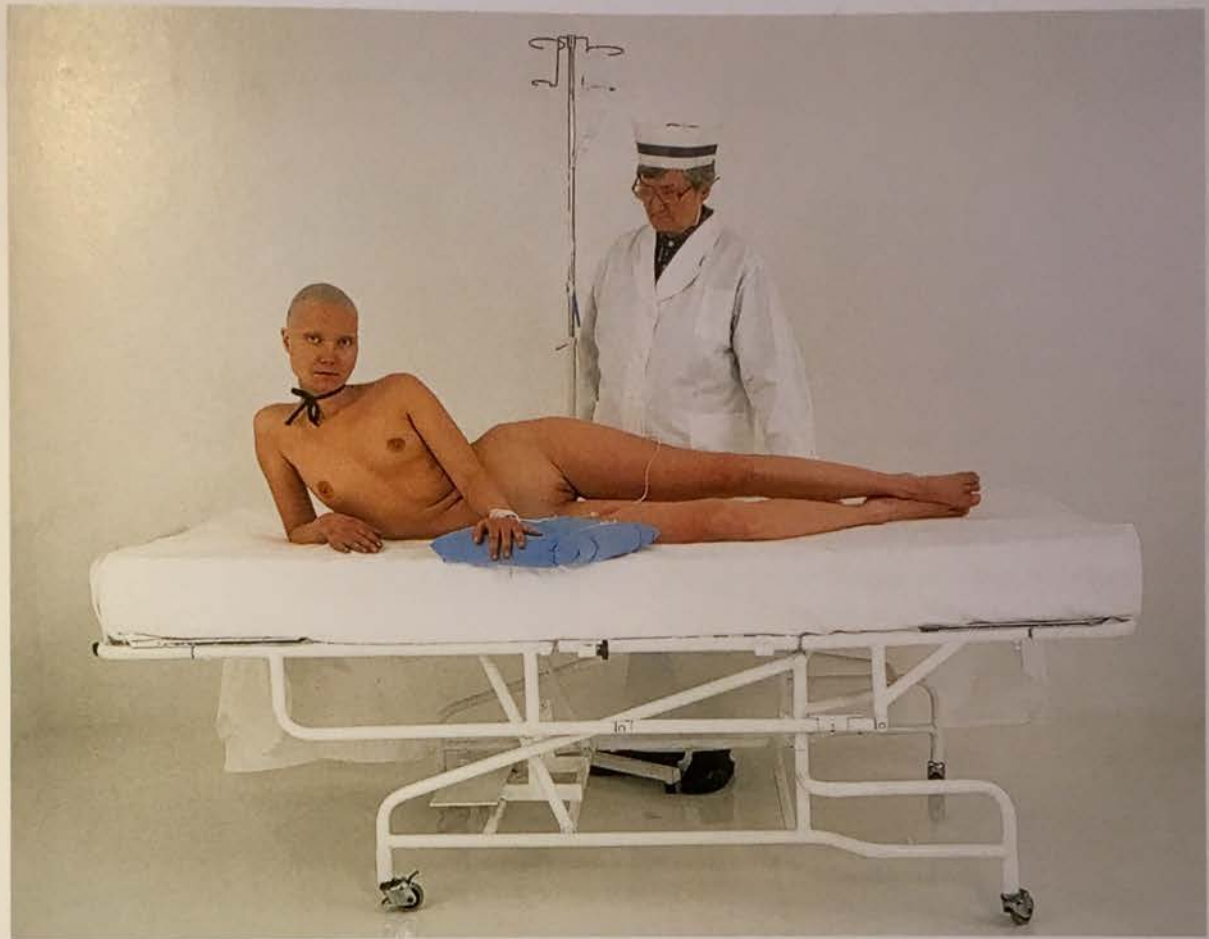


Fig. 14
Katarzyna Kozyra (Poland, b. 1963). *Olympia* (detail), 1996. Installation with three color photographs; single-channel video on separate monitor, color, sound, 12 min. 70 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 90 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (180 x 230 cm). Private collection. (Photo: courtesy of the artist, Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, and National Museum, Krakow)

animals. From then on, Kozyra's work was seen as controversial, and her presentations have generated heated discussion.

This was true of Kozyra's piece *Olympia* (fig. 14), in which she posed in a series of photographs taken while she was being treated for cancer. The work consists of three large-scale images and a video. The artist's face bespeaks the anguish of a life-threatening illness, the hairless body the effects of chemotherapy. In devising her pose, Kozyra looks back to art history, casting herself in the role of a Parisian courtesan, the model for the famous painting *Olympia* (1863) by Édouard Manet. But in this instance, the attendant figure is not the beautiful young black woman that Manet painted who presents a lounging Olympia with a bouquet of flowers from an admirer; instead, it is a mature nurse administering a life-sustaining intravenous drip in a barren hospital room.

Kozyra overcame her illness and went on to create the celebrated video installation *Women's Bathhouse* (1997),

which depicts womankind in the raw as the artist filmed clandestinely inside that Budapest women's facility; and *Men's Bathhouse* (1999), also secretly filmed, this time while Kozyra disguised herself as a man and entered hidden male territory. While gender issues occupied the artist's attention for a good part of her earlier career, Kozyra has recently turned to various aspects of performance and theater production in an extensive piece called *In Art Dreams Come True* (2005–6).²⁶

Themes of mortality can be found not only in Kozyra's self-portrait *Olympia* but also in the Macedonian artist Iskra Dimitrova's self-portrait *Thanatometamorphosis* (page 194). A life-size cast of her body floats tenuously, half-submerged in a pool of dense black liquid that seems about to consume it completely. The change from life to death is effectively conveyed. Though the perishability of one's own body is something difficult to imagine, here the inevitability of a final transformation is clearly visualized for the viewer's, and the artist's, contemplation.

Dimitrova is also interested in establishing a dialogue between her work and the audience through technology. In her interactive video installation *ContACT Binary* (fig. 15), the viewer's physical contact with the piece is essential. In the center of a darkened room a silicone membrane is placed between two sheets of glass hung from the ceiling. Visitors are asked actually to touch the piece; their physical contact activates the video and audio components of the installation. Each visitor's touch is slightly different in pressure and duration, prompting a different response from the projection and audio program. The constantly shifting nature of the piece acts out the unique identity of each individual's contact with it. The title *ContACT Binary* is borrowed from astronomy, referring to a binary star system, in which two stars, bound together by the force of gravity, orbit one another so closely that energy and particles of matter pass between them. Astrophysics thus provides a metaphor for the kind of dynamic discourse that Dimitrova establishes with her audience.

Similarly, we might also think of feminism in general as a kind of artistic "universe" in which many individual feminisms orbit one another independently, sharing and dispersing energy, re-contextualizing concepts and forging them anew. For the artists surveyed here, clearly there is no single "brand" of feminism in post-Communist Europe. Instead, the political and cultural history of each country shapes the character of local feminist projects, giving rise to a plethora of diverse voices within the multi-layered framework of global feminisms.

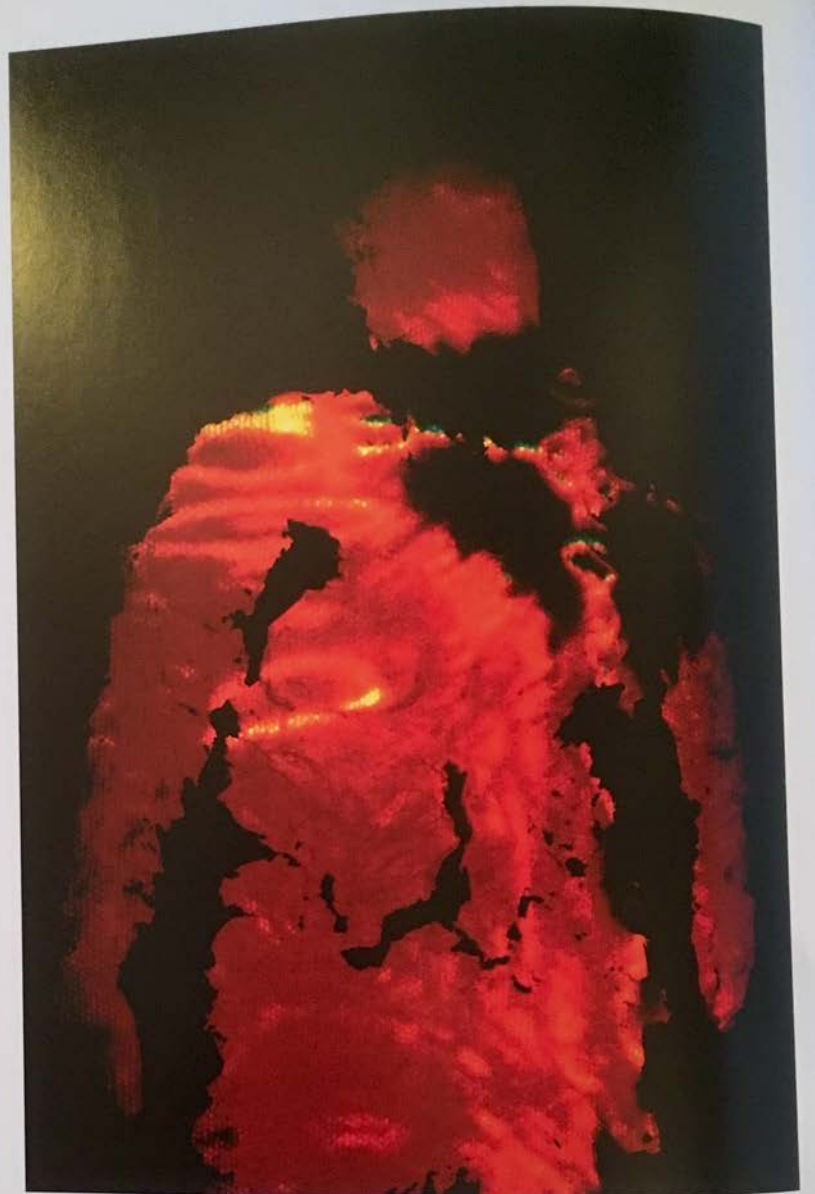


Fig. 15

Iskra Dimitrova (Macedonia, b. 1965). *ContACT Binary* (detail), 2000. Interactive video installation; video projections on silicone set between 2 touch-sensitive glass plates. Courtesy of the artist. (Photo: Elizabeta Avramovska)

Notes

1. The Berlin Wall fell in November 1989. The same month saw the beginning of the so-called Velvet Revolution, which ended the Communist regime in what was then Czechoslovakia. Germany was reunited in October 1990.
2. For more on Drozdik, see the catalogue of her retrospective exhibition at the Ludwig Museum, Budapest, December 2001–March 2002; Orshi Drozdik, Eva Körner, Katalin Néray, Andrea Tarcalzy, and John C. Weichman, *Orshi Drozdik: Adventure and Appropriation, 1975–2001* (Budapest: Ludwig Museum Budapest, Museum of Contemporary Art, 2002).
3. It was during the struggle against the oppression of Czarist Russia that many women became active revolutionaries, and their contributions were recognized by awarding women equal rights in the newly formed Soviet Union.
4. See Edit Andráš, "Gender Minefield: The Heritage of the Past," a paper given at the opening symposium of the exhibition *After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, October 16, 1999–January 16, 2000. Published in issue 11 (October 1999) of the international feminist art journal *n.paradoxa*, the paper is available online at <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/n.paradoxa/andras.htm>. Edit Andráš is an eminent feminist scholar living in New York and Budapest.
5. See also Marianne Marchand and Anne Sisson Runyan, Introduction to *Gender and Global Restructuring: Sightings, Sites and Resistances* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 15.
6. Unpublished conversation of the artist with Martina Pachmanová, dean of the Academy of Applied Art, Architecture, and Design, Prague, and preeminent force in women's studies in the Czech Republic and the region. Pachmanová organized the exhibition *The Muzzle (Náhubek)* at the J. Fragner Gallery, Prague, in 1994. See also Zora Rusinová, "The Totalitarian Period and Latent Feminism," *praesens*, no. 4 (2003), pp. 5–12.
7. Taking into account the gender specificity of the original Bulgarian, *Dobrata, loszata i groznyiata*, the title could be more literally translated as *The Good (Woman), the Bad (Woman) and the Ugly (Man)*.
8. Text from a portfolio supplied by the artist.
9. *Ibid.* Interested in the possibilities offered to artists by new digital technologies, Rossa presently studies at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in upstate New York.
10. Lenka Klodová has addressed issues of pornography head-on by creating erotic materials directed toward female audiences. Her probing into issues of pornography ultimately resulted in complex postgraduate work at the Academy of Applied Art, Architecture, and Design in Prague. She submitted her doctoral study, "Relationships Between Men and Women and the Imagery of Space and Action" (unpublished), to the school in 2005. The project concerned visual paraphernalia as well as research into the effects on gender relationships.
11. Conversation with the artist, January 2006.
12. Karel Šrp, *Zemzoo: Veronika Bromová* (Prague: AHA Publishing, 1999), pp. 5–6. Published on the occasion of Bromová's exhibition at the 1999 Venice Biennale.
13. In addressing women's issues in Central and especially Southeastern Europe, attention must be given to questions of Roma women. More broadly, see Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, N.C., and London: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 222–72, especially p. 242.
14. The Open Society Institute, in the Soros foundations network, has established an important Women's Program that deals with many political and economic issues in the post-Communist world. Departments of gender studies have been created at the Central European University in Budapest and in the Faculty of Humanities at the Charles University in Prague, and the field of gender studies has become part of the curriculums at Warsaw, Lodz, and Krakow universities. Independent organizations have been founded in the former Yugoslav Republic, including the Union of Women's Organizations of the Republic of Macedonia and the Women's Studies Center in Belgrade.
15. Important feminist papers were presented at the A.I.C.A. symposium in Bratislava, 2003; at the symposium held on the occasion of Orshi Drozdik's retrospective at the Ludwig Museum, Budapest, in 2002; and at the Conference of Czech and Slovak Feminist Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Charles University, Prague, in 2005. See also the coverage in journals such as *Focus*, *ArtMargins*, *praesens*, and *n.paradoxa*.
16. *Est.Fern*, the first feminist show in Estonia, opened in August 1995 in Tallinn, in several galleries through the city. It was curated by Eha Komissarov and Reet Varblane.
17. Stalin died in March 1953; the monument was unveiled on May 1, 1955, but was torn down shortly after the exposure of Stalin's despotism by Nikita Khrushchev at the meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1956. The sculptor, Otakar Švec, committed suicide.
18. Conversation with the artist, November 2005.
19. Sebastian Cichocki, "Three Heroes in the Kitchen, Antek Excluded: On the Art of Elżbieta Jabłońska," in *Elżbieta Jabłońska: Supermatka* (Białystok: Galeria Arsenal, 2003), p. 19.
20. This piece, a work in progress, includes such diverse components as an interactive Web project, performances, and photographic documentation. The artist intends to publish a book that will document the piece's development.
21. Slobodan Milošević (1941–2006) rose to power through the Yugoslav Communist Party machine. He emerged as a leading force in Serbian politics in 1987 largely by exploiting the nationalistic tendencies that later led to the massacres in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Kosovo during the early 1990s. Brought before the World Court in The Hague in 2001 on charges of genocide and war crimes, he died there in March 2006.
22. Milica Eugenia, a queen of Serbia, was the wife of King Lazar, who died at the Battle of Kosovo in June 1389. As guardian of her son Stefan Lazarević, she prevented further destruction of Serbia by agreeing to an Ottoman vassalage, herself entering a convent in 1390.
23. Rambo Amadeus is a pseudonym of Antonije Pušić (b. 1963), the popular Serbian-Montenegrin rock singer and songwriter from the former Yugoslavia who coined the term for this eclectic musical style.
24. For more on Milena Dopitová, see Martina Pachmanová, "Sixty-Something: Dancing with a Twin," *praesens*, no. 4 (2003), pp. 19–26. See also Marek Pokorný, *Milena Dopitová: Sixtysomething* (Prague: Jiri Svestka Gallery, 2003).
25. For more about the controversy, see Hanna Wróblewska, "Katarzyna Kozyra: In Art Dreams Come True," *Flash Art* 39 (January–February 2006), pp. 62–66.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 66.