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### **Art Practices and Strategies in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1999**

PhD project titled *Art Practices and Strategies in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1999* aims to give insight into contemporary art practices in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) in the period of time extending from the war in BiH and the siege of Sarajevo (1992–1995) to the post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina (1996–1999). This topic will be addressed by looking into two case studies: exhibition *Witnesses of Existence* (1992–1995) and the three Annual Exhibitions organised by the Soros Centre for Contemporary Art SCCA-Sarajevo: *Meeting Point* (1997), *Beyond the Mirror* (1998) and *Under Construction* (1999).

The main focus of this research, and a common thread in the selected examples within the two case studies, is a paradigm shift in the ways of deliberating on the role of art, as well as in the repositioning of its production. The research is interested in contemporary art practices and strategies in public space which directly assisted the process of democratizing art within a specific context. In doing so, they were primarily conditioned by the extreme circumstances caused by the war, rather than a chronological development of the cultural and art scene in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Thus, the research problem is addressed with the main assumption that the extreme situation of the Bosnian War resulted in a shift in contemporary art production and re/presentation towards the affirmation of socially engaged art practices and the politicization of art sphere. Accordingly, the research will look into the ways in which the selected projects and exhibitions, disregarding their individual formal and aesthetic qualities, contributed towards specific social processes, the production of public space, as well as the affirmation of social engagement in art.

The methodological framework of the project is based on archival material research, as well as on a historical-descriptive and comparative analysis of selected examples.

The research accordingly includes:

- An analysis of documentary material available in the archive and the newspaper library of the Art Gallery of BiH, the archive of the Obala Art Centre, the digital archive of SCCA-Sarajevo (scca.ba), as well as in artists' private archives,

- Interviews conducted with artists, art historians and workers in culture.

The framework for selection and the interpretation of the two case studies draws from a review of relevant literature, as well as of comparable examples in the international art context. The analysis is based on the work of several key theoreticians in the 20<sup>th</sup> century – Giorgio Agamben, Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin, Shoshana Felman and Aleida Asmman, among others – who engage with and critically approach the main problems of this dissertation: conflicts ending in war and collective traumas, testimony, social, political and cultural emancipation, as well as the potential of art to deal with those issues. The intention of the PhD project is to develop a method which draws from mutual interactions, intersections and dialogues between art, history and the critical theory.

The main goal of the research is to present, contextually and chronologically, the contemporary art practices which emerged during the '90s in the art scene of Bosnia and Herzegovina and which affected the democratization of the art field. In addition, it argues that the problem of the art field democratization through emerging 'new' art practices and strategies in public space should be understood primarily in relation to the shift of the art function in the 1990s, rather than the development of a cultural and art scene in BiH. To do so, the research will address the following main question:

- If and how are the contemporary art practices in BiH contextualised in relation to The New Art Practices in ex-Yugoslavia?
- If and how art in public space represented a crucial strategy of defending the public space during the war siege of Sarajevo?
- If and how art in public space represented a crucial strategy of reclaiming the public space, left demolished and devastated after the war?
- If the artefacts of art could be problematized as political and legal documents, as witnesses of a time?