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***Umjetnik radi: Stilinović, Šutej, and Trbuljak on Art, Work, and Life***

In a socialist state, a theoretical worker's paradise, what kind of worker is an artist? What can a model of the artist as a worker offer to the history of art? These questions are at the center of my dissertation, an exploration of the political, emotional, and creative dimensions of living and working in the art world of socialist Yugoslavia. My title, *Umjetnik radi*, which translates from Croatian to English as "the artist is working" comes from an eponymous series of photographs by the artist Mladen Stilinović, who was born in Belgrade and based for most of his career in Zagreb. In the images, Stilinović presents himself at work as despondent and drowsy, lying atop floral sheets and a thin mattress. Work, Stilinović suggests, is something artists do in their inactive time. As a native of Yugoslavia, a country that constitutionally defined its citizenry as a society of workers and producers, Stilinović provocatively portrayed himself as decidedly non-productive. Despite the inflammatory potential of his project, Stilinović was not a dissident, or even unofficial, artist. Yugoslav socialism, while it did not always provide suitable working conditions, nevertheless invited such self-consciousness, and even critique, of the conditions of work.

In my project, I engage artistic critiques of work, such as Stilinović's, alongside the particularities of how art and work were defined in the Yugoslav state. A new image of the socialist art world emerges through my project: one that illustrates the complexities of co-existence rather than the artificial clarity of conflict and opposition that have been endemic to studies of twentieth-century socialism until recently. With this image of co-existence and complexity, my project aspires further to inform contemporary conceptions of life under socialism, life in twentieth-century Eastern Europe, and the ways artists and artworks reflect and respond to their historical and political conditions.

Taking the lifespan of socialist Yugoslavia (1945-1992) as a chronological frame, my study focuses, in particular, on Zagreb, Croatia, Yugoslavia's second city, and three artists active there beginning in the 1960s and 1970s: Mladen Stilinović, Miroslav Šutej, and Goran Trbuljak. Stilinović, known for ironically subversive images and texts like *Umjetnik radi*; Šutej, an abstract printmaker known for works that played with optical illusion and vibration; and Trbuljak, a photographer, cinematographer, and creator of anonymous street

interventions, each found success in Zagreb, exhibiting frequently, and receiving prizes and social benefits. These three artists illustrate the range of positions that young, experimental artists could occupy in Yugoslavia: Šutej being the most closely aligned with and favored by the state of the three, Stilinović the most critical and unaligned, and Trbuljak somewhere in between.

Employing archival documents from museums, galleries, art academies, and professional organizations, contemporaneous art criticism, personal interviews with artists and curators, and close readings of artworks and art events, I narrate an account of what it meant and how it felt to be alive in the particular time and place of socialist Zagreb through a focus on the figure of the artist and three particular artists whose careers gesture compellingly at these questions. At the heart of my project is a desire to reorient how art historians think about criticality. The impact of critique was inhibited in Yugoslavia, precisely because it was allowed and encouraged “at work,” and this makes the country a rich context in which to examine the crucial matter of how art can treat political circumstances.