



МИЛАН КОЉОВИЋ И СТЕВАН КОЈИЋ – О УМЕТНОСТИ (И О БИЦИКЛУ)

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The exhibition Milan Konjovi , Stevan Koji : About art (and about the bicycle) is a relaxed attempt to comparatively overview two oeuvres that are poles apart in every respect. Milan Konjovi (1898-1993) is one of the most convincing protagonists of authentic pictoriality and he created and “kept” its core values during his seven decades long painting career, from mid twenties to the end of his creative and life's journey in 1993. The end of this last decade of the 20th century was the beginning of the creative adventure of Stevan Koji (1973), an artist who, driven by the impulses of reality, accepted the “screen paradigm” philosophy that marked the global “iconosphere” (M. Porempski), which we are destined to in this time at the start of the century.

The art of Konjovi stands at the beginning of the process of modernization of our painting. His cubist paintings and drawings from the early twenties of the 20th century, together with works of Dobrovi , Šumanovi , Radovi and Petrov, led to one of the most radical turns in understanding of the pictorial concept in Serbian art. Although they were protagonists of the end of the “epoch of empirical illusionism” (Proti), Serbian Cubists returned to scene painting as early as the same twenties. In the following decade and later Konjovi 's expressionist gesture flared and its eruptive power made his painting suggestive, authentic and “needed” in different periods of the development of art in our country.

A specific quality of the art of Milan Konjovi is constant dealing with so called “great themes” of painting (landscape, nude, portrait, still life). Yet, he is regarded as one of the most important landscape painters in our art. And all his landscapes were painted on the spot, in the outdoors. Konjovi did need this direct contact with nature. In the monograph catalogue of the Belgrade exhibition (1975) Dragoslav or evi gives a vivid description of Konjovi 's painting in the outdoors, noticing the ecstatic character of the artist's action.¹ In his famous study Lazar Trifunovi refers to “empathic relationship that develops at the moment of creation of a Konjovi 's painting out of doors: his feeling is conveyed to the painted shapes, meaning that in the process of transition of the actual object into the painting the projection of the painter's mental characteristics are manifested in the elements of the perceived”, and that by painting directly in the landscape, Konjovi “has the impression of touching the essence of nature, which enables him to experience the magic of birth of a painting”.² Therefore, starting from the motive and idea of the whole nature (landscape being its embodiment in the art of painting), refracting it through his own being, Konjovi reaches the individual nature of a painting.

Stevan Koji , one of the most fervent advocates of electronic art here, also deals with nature, very much so. Unlike Konjovi , who observed and experienced nature/landscape externally, Koji attempts to penetrate into its interior. This artist considers natural environment as a unique resource with great energy potentials. The artist verifies the impulses of nature, collects them, enters them into his computer and then establishes a digital system that will start a mechanical action of drawing. Photo synthesis, moisture of plants and other natural processes and phenomena – transformed into digitalized impulses - become the initiators of an electronic system which in the end results in mechanical drawing produced by this self-maintainable system. Today, in the time of highly developed computer technology, digital drawing is quite appropriate to the current moment.

The art of Stevan Koji , just like the art of Konjovi , corresponds with nature intensively. Needless to say, their relation towards the idea of nature is radically different in character: for Konjovi landscape is inspiration, and Koji sees it as a special resource which he “exploits” in the process of creating a work of art. Therefore, his installation, besides computerized bicycles and other electronic elements, is made from, soil, bonsai, flowers... It has turned out that Stevan Koji is most directly, in a scientifically decent way,

1. Dragoslav or evi , *Milan Konjovi by Himself*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade, 1975

2. Lazar Trifunovi , *Reality and Myth in the Painting of Milan Konjovi* , Milan Konjovi Gallery, Sombor, 1990

involved in the dialectical process, and his naturalist-computer installation, screen image or obtained pictogram drawing – assert the vitalist idea of nature as the supreme principle. Besides, due to his ability to make all these technical-digital processes discreet, to systematize, philosophize and aestheticize them, Koji conveys a unique, present-time and really personalized artistic message – highly effective in the current world and art.

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In a comparative review of creative procedures and results of two artists, the bicycle appears as a bizarre coincidental and anecdotal detail that makes a connection between the works of Konjovi and Koji – although located at diametrically opposed historical, artistic and conceptual positions – possible and interesting.

Milan Konjovi used to go in search of motifs to paint on his bicycle. In the notes by Irma Lang, long-time director of the Milan Konjovi Gallery in Sombor, there is a record of a recollection of the artist: “I used to take my bicycle, ride 15 km to Monoštor, do a painting, have a swim in the Danube, return home, have lunch and then I would go to the canal by bike...”³ Hence, his bicycle riding most often personified the connection of Konjovi with the landscape, a confirmation of the artist’s belonging to the whole of nature. But the most direct function of Milan Konjovi’s cycling tours was to select the scenes which would initiate his action of painting. Lazar Trifunovi wrote, “...he has to look for micro locations, some stubble fields, or unusual angles and views, special positions that create visual dynamics appropriate to his artistic sensibility”,⁴ and in this way, he points to a vital moment in the work process of a landscapist that is usually left out in observing, understanding and analyzing of landscape paintings, and not only those done by Konjovi.⁵

The bicycle of Stevan Koji is – computerized. Koji equipped the handlebars of his bike with a laptop with numerous external sensors attached. The artist does not ride to the outdoors on that bicycle in order to discover characteristic landscape motifs, like Konjovi, but uses it as kind of a scientific all-terrain vehicle fitted to detect in-situ the existence of electronic waste (techno-objects) and living organisms (bio-objects) at a selected “location”. Therefore, the location (natural or urban) at which Koji moves on his bike is actually an area full of usable resources which the artist classifies as “subjects of techno-biological structures”. Later, he requalifies them – using digital procedures and processes – into separate contextual, plastic and visual, metaphoric, philosophical and poetic notes. Stevan Koji is, in fact, a socially engaged artist who directs his activity towards science and art alike – in order to come to subjectivistic and personalized conclusions. That is why this “self-maintainable system” of his is absurd – because it transforms visualized screen and mechanical drawing images into art because, by precise speculative procedures, a suggestive and totally current aesthetic and poetic note is created.

Therefore, bicycle “rides” of Milan Konjovi and Stevan Koji are different in character. The ways they were used by the two artists reveal a lot about the character of their artistic attitudes and their art, and also about the spirit of the times these two artists belong to. Stevan Koji’s installation with bicycle, viewed from the position of time in which this exhibition is realized, can even be understood as unique and entirely discreet homage to Konjovi, to his creative energy and a different understanding of art, picture and its meaning. And such respect can be observed only in the art that bases its effective innovativeness on respecting of fundamental demiurgic and dialectical principles, just as it is the case with artistic expression of Stevan Koji.

3. Irma Lang, *Konjovi at Close Range*, Milan Konjovi Gallery, Sombor, 2010

4. Lazar Trifunovi, *Ibid.*

5. In the thirties Konjovi used to go to the landscape by hackney-carriage (just like Sava Šumanovi), in the fifties and sixties by bicycle, and when well along in years he was in search for a landscape, a driver would take him in a Citroen car.



The Lost Treasure of Savamala, 2013, , ()



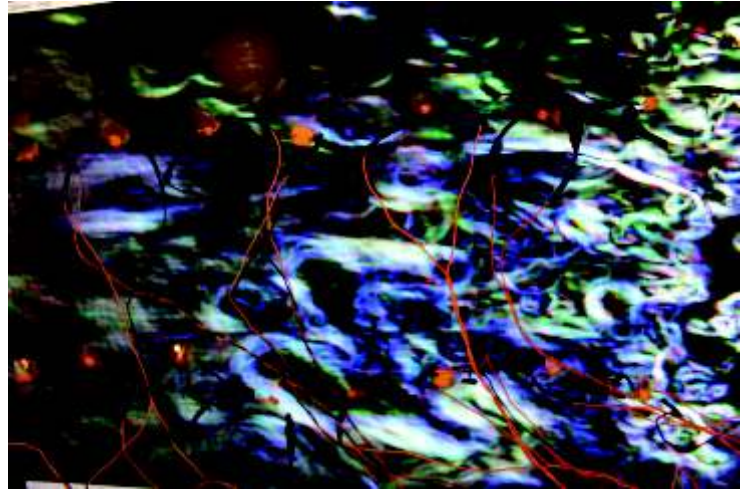
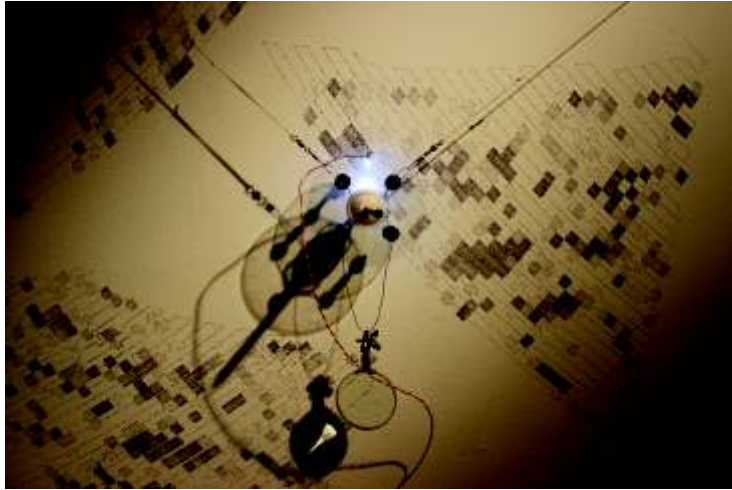
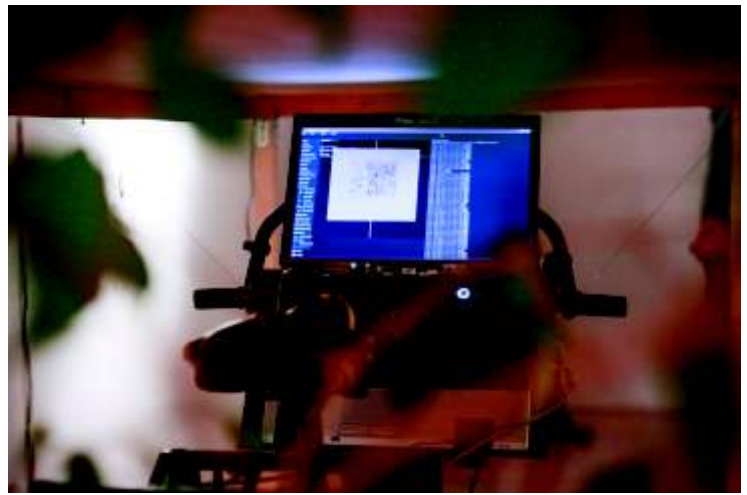
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The Lost Treasure of Savamala, 2013,

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-, 1958, , 50x65 , : 58. (), .1485



The Lost Treasure of Savamala, 2013,

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Exhibition authored by Sava Stepanov "Milan Konjovi , Stevan Koji , About art (and about the bicycle)" premiered at The Art Gallery of the Cultural Centre of Belgrade within the cycle Critics have chosen which has been, since 2001, presenting exhibitions of winners of "Lazar Trifunovi " Award for fine arts criticism. Sava Stepanov is the winner of this prestigious award for the year 2011. Exhibition in Zrenjanin has been slightly modified so that in addition to the installation by Stevan Koji , Milan Konjovi 's paintings will be exhibited as well in the Contemporary Gallery which are kept in the collection of the Art Colony E ka, while Konjovi 's paintings that were presented in Belgrade were taken from Milan Konjovi Gallery in Sombor. This was the reason to write something, for this occasion of exhibition in Zrenjanin, about the work of these two artists in the Art Colony E ka who stayed there with a period of exactly half a century between.

Thus, another link between these two, at first glance unlinkable artists, apart from commitment and amazement with nature, is that they both participated in the Art Colony E ka, Milan Konjovi for the first time in 1956, the year it was founded, and then two years later in 1958, and Stevan Koji in 2006 when the Art Colony E ka celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. Participation in the Art Colony E ka enabled these two artists to stay and work in the nature in which both found inspiration for their works. Since its foundation, colonies have generally been, besides the quest for freedom of creative work, advocating the return of artist to the nature, and as such were in the fifties often dedicated to the landscape as a theme ideal for a variety of artistic researches, and which at the same time went beyond the constraints of social-realist dogmatism. Fifty years later, in the 2000s, landscape returns into focus of the organizers of the Art Colony E ka who provide artists with the ability to deal with it to the full in the modern context.

During the 1950s, Milan Konjovi enjoyed staying in colonies and was one of its founders and ideators (Senta 1952, Ba ka Topola 1953, Be ej 1954, E ka 1956). According to Sava Stepanov, colonies were, in their heroic age during the fifties surely "the most convincing manifestation of the definitive victory of a living being of art over ideology of socialist realism in Vojvodina"¹. Together with Jožef A and others like-minded, respecting the collectivist spirit of the colony Milan Konjovi "tried to find ways to freedom of creative work, and to modernist expression. 'Gradually, the mission of the colony is formed before me. It is here the new painting should start from'"². Milan Konjovi was an artist who was highly respected and who had great influence on colleagues from Vojvodina – with his experience both in life and art, he was their role model, and with his authority influenced the development and formulation of the structure of sojourn and work of artists in colonies participating in the work of their advisory and exhibition committees. Artists and experts from Serbia and the former Yugoslavia used to say in the most positive sense that Vojvodina was Konjovi 's land area. Even Konjovi himself said: "I influenced, in our Vojvodinian painting, other artists. It is only natural that they succumbed to my way of work... That was in colonies"³. Contemporary Gallery does not have, except for some newspaper articles and scarce information in different scientific literature, sufficient documented information on the sojourn of this great artist in E ka, but according to the catalogue in the monograph on Milan Konjovi by Irma Lang, in 1956 and 1958 this artist painted nineteen paintings in E ka, four of which remained the possession of Contemporary Gallery Zrenjanin ("Haystacks at the end of the village" 1956, "Wheat" 1956, "E ka castle" 1958, "Sun over Banat" 1958) while others are mostly either private property or property of museums in Vojvodina. Even from the very names of these paintings we can see to what extent Konjovi was fascinated with the landscape in E ka and how important work in nature was for him as an artist. In newspaper articles from 1956 we can read that Konjovi shared his studio with A and that he found very enjoyable both the environment the colony is in and the good organization of sojourn and work in the colony as he and A , in the opinion of fellow artists, were the most hardworking in the colony, i.e. they painted most, hence the author of the text further concludes "I am looking through the paintings, and I think that this surrounding is most suitable for the two, particularly for Konjovi . Field, that is his most common theme and that is what he really feels to be his environment"⁴. At the first exhibition of art colony, Konjovi presented, as stated in the catalogue, five paintings ("Maize", "Wheat Field", "Haystacks at the end of the village", "Fyke net on the Begej",

1. Sava Stepanov, Milan Konjovi on the crossroads of Serbian art, Center for Visual Culture Golden Eye, Bel Art Gallery, Novi Sad, 2009, p. 12

2. Ibid, p.13

3. Ibid

4. D. uk, "Two hours in the Art Colony E ka", newspaper Zrenjanin, 28/07/1956, p.5

"Earthing up vegetables"), whereas the catalogue contains a reproduction of his work "Cornfield near E ka"⁵. For the local newspaper Zrenjanin, Živojin Turinski, at that time a student who enthusiastically followed what was happening in E ka, and later on one of the representatives of art informel which shook the 1960s Belgrade as well as the entire former Yugoslavia and the renowned professor at Belgrade Academy, born in Zrenjanin and a frequent participant in the Art Colony E ka, for the occasion of this first exhibition of the colony, wrote about the exhibited works, "In the first place it is certainly Konjovi – a powerful, eloquent, using explosive colours within the old, expressionist approach to the motif"⁶. On the third exhibition of the Art Colony E ka in 1958, Milan Konjovi exhibited three paintings: "Sun over Banat", "Castle" and "Cross-like stacked wheat sheaves"⁷. In one letter, Konjovi gave a hint about changes in his painting that had begun with Senta⁸, hence we may conclude that the work in colonies, socialising and mutual influences, as well as contact with young artists and the new spirit of the time influenced Konjovi to engage in experiments with abstraction, primarily in still life (Nature morte 53 I, 1953), and then he applied in art colonies his new artistic experience to the landscape as well: "using synthesis and geometric transposition, visual symbols are formed from elements of reality on the two-dimensional surface of a painting, tightly composed, and by adding cast to the colour the full tactile value of the material is achieved".⁹ At that time (1952/3) Konjovi abandoned painting on canvas, paper and cardboard, and worked almost exclusively on hardboard. All this also fully applies to paintings created in the Art Colony E ka.

Working in nature and with nature is also essential for the artistic opus of Stevan Koji. Starting his artistic life at a time when the life of Konjovi practically came to an end and forming himself as an artist in the completely altered socio-political and artistic context, Koji approached and observed nature in a different way. New technologies unthinkable at the time of Milan Konjovi, completely changed the viewpoint. Although Konjovi would go to the countryside in order to paint directly in nature, he remained separated from it by the two-dimensional object – canvas or hardboard, whereas with the help of new technologies, Koji penetrates into the nature, on the virtual or real level, nature is an integral part of his art, i.e. it becomes a work of art by itself – plants, land, processes in nature, nature itself. In E ka in 2006 Koji presented a video installation "Land – Sky", which remained in the collection of the Contemporary Gallery Zrenjanin. This installation is perhaps one of the first Koji's works of art in which nature is explicitly the center of his art. Here the artist was only at the beginning of his relationship with nature, it still was not the part of a work of art as it was in his subsequent installations (starting from 2010) rather, as with Konjovi who is separated from the nature by hardboard, brush and paints, Koji is separated by some other, more modern technical medium – a camera and a video camera. The video installation consists of three parts: photographs of grass (land), photographs of the sky, and in the middle in the black rectangle a short video is displayed in loop which, like wildlife documentaries, shows plants, insects crawling in the grass, land, sky, nature sounds, sunset, night, twinkling in the dark – the nature itself. In his later works, Koji "connects" nature with the new technologies and on the principles of ecotechnology conceptually bases his artistic experiments that are consistent with the trends of contemporary art in redefining and unsustainability of traditional division of phenomena into natural and cultural ones.

On account of well-laid foundations it is founded on, forming a collection, institutionalizing and establishing the gallery, the Art Colony E ka continues to actively participate in the artistic life in our region. Inviting and preserving in its collection, the works of such artists as Milan Konjovi and Stevan Koji, the Art Colony E ka confirms itself as being life-giving, which is reflected in its responsibility towards the preservation of cultural heritage, as well as in researches and recognising new trends in contemporary art.

5. The first exhibition of art colony Zrenjanin, 1956

6. Ž. Turinski, Exhibition of art colony, newspaper Zrenjanin, 06/10/1956, p. 5

7. The third exhibition of art colony Zrenjanin, 1958

8. I. Lang, "Milan Konjovi (1898-1993)", Gallery "Milan Konjovi", Sombor, 2010, p.101

9. Ibid, p.100



, 1958, , 37x72 , : 58. ()
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(, 1898–1993)	
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Milan Konjovi (Sombor, 1898-1993) started his painting activity very early. His first official teacher was István Réti, a famous Hungarian painter and Konjovi attended his School of Free Drawing in Subotica. After the First World War, in which he was an active participant, Konjovi studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague under Professor Vlaho Bukovac. After two years he left the Academy and studied painting with Jan Zrzavý, a leading Czech painter of the time. In 1924 Milan Konjovi left for Paris and enrolled at the Chaumière Academy and after that, for a short period, attended André Lhote's Art School. Konjovi lived in Paris until 1932 and enjoyed a notable reputation there, and then returned to Sombor, where he lived till his death. In the Second World War Konjovi was a prisoner of the concentration camp in Osnabrück for some time. He had over 300 one-man exhibitions and participated in some 700 group exhibition in the country and abroad. In 1966 the Milan Konjovi Gallery was founded of the gifts he gave his hometown; more than a thousand paintings, drawings, watercolours, graphic artworks and tapestries are kept there. He was elected a full member of the Vojvodina Academy of Sciences and Arts in Novi Sad in 1979, a corresponding member of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb in 1986, and a full member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Belgrade in 1992. He received numerous awards.

Stevan Koji (1973, Kikinda) graduated with MA from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade, Sculpture Department. He is a part-time Professor at the New Media Department of the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad. He exhibited and participated in symposiums and workshops in: Austria, France, Croatia, Japan, South Korea, Canada, Hungary, Germany, Romania, USA, Slovenia and Serbia. He received several awards: 39th Novi Sad Salon Grand Prix, Novi Sad (2010), 21st Salon Grand Prix, Pan-evo (2003); 5th International Biennial of Young Artists Codes of Time, Centre for Contemporary Arts, Konkordija, Vršac (2002); Award for large format nude, Ilija Kolarevic Fund, Faculty of Fine Arts, Belgrade (2000). He is primarily interested in exploring relations among art, society, science and technology through the relationships: analogue/digital, biology/technology, ecology/economy, low-tech/hi-tech, open/closed systems, time/space, virtual/real, etc.



The Lost Treasure of Savamala, 2013, , ()



1. , 1956, , 45x80 , : 56. (),
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1. , 1956, , 45x80 ,
: `56. (),
- , . 1385
2. , 1956, , 45x80 , . : 56. (),
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3. - , 1958, , 50x65 ,
: 58. (),
- , . 1485
4. , 1958, , 37x72 ,
: `58. (),
- , . 1386

1. The Lost Treasure of Savamala, 2013, ,
2. , 2014, , 1`55`



List of exhibited works:

Milan Konjovi

1. Haystacks at the end of the Village, 1956, oil on hardboard, 45x80cm, sign. down right: `56. Konjovi (cir), Contemporary Gallery Art Colony E ka, Inv. No. 1385
2. Wheat, 1956, oil on hardboard, 45x80cm, sign. down left: 56. Konjovi (cir), Contemporary Gallery Art Colony E ka, Inv. No. 1387
3. Castle- E ka, 1958, oil on hardboard, 50x65cm, sign. down right: Konjovi 58. (cir) Contemporary Gallery Art Colony E ka, Inv. No. 1485
4. Sun over Banat, 1958, oil on hardboard, 37x72cm, sign. down left: `58. Konjovi (cir), Contemporary Gallery Art Colony E ka, Inv. No. 1386

Stevan Koji

1. The Lost Treasure of Savamala, 2013, installation, changeable dimensions
2. Homage to Milan Konjovi , 2014, video, 1`55`



МИЛАН КОЊОВИЋ И СТЕВАН КОЈИЋ – О УМЕТНОСТИ (И О БИЦИКЛУ)
10 – 28. ФЕБРУАР 2014, САВРЕМЕНА ГАЛЕРИЈА ЗРЕЊАНИН