

Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève

Walk through the show

Third Floor

Room 1: I do not wish to show anything new and original

Trbuljak's career experienced a watershed moment in 1971, when he was invited to stage an exhibition at the Zagreb Student Center and chose to present nothing but a poster bearing his portrait and the words "I do not wish to show anything new and original." His subsequent work has been defined by the unending conflict between his poetic, hermetic self and the art world as a whole. This inner conflict is often expressed with a degree of self-deprecation, as in the 1972 work *Referendum*, in which Goran Trbuljak invites passers-by to vote on whether they consider him to be an artist, or not. From the outset, his practice has been founded on an obsessive re-examination of the nature of art it-self or, more precisely, the implications of the decision to label oneself an 'artist'.

Room 2: Works, exhibitions, and interrogation of the name

Deriving from the notion that a work becomes a work of art only when it is incorporated in an art institution, Goran Trbuljak often emphasizes the idea that contemporary art institutions and their operations became more significant than the works shown within them. To express this view, Trbuljak makes the exhibition his medium, while the gallery itself becomes an integral part of his work. Thus he shows that to a large degree the wider resonance of an exhibition depends on the importance of the venue and its standing in the art world. Trbuljak's questioning of the art establishment has led to a series of works in which he investigates the importance of the artist's name.

Room 3: Anonymous street actions

A few years before Goran Trbuljak began to present his work under his actual name, he undertook a number of anonymous street actions in which he questioned the position of the artwork in relation to the art institution. The status of anonymity was part of his effort to examine his own position as a young, unknown artist. With their use of simple statements and questions, small interventions in public space, and audience participation, Trbuljak's early anonymous street actions in Zagreb can be regarded as experiments that directly address the relationship between the artist, the audience, the space, and the conditions in which an artwork is created and positioned.

Under the slogan 'An artist is anyone who is given the opportunity to be one', the first referendum at which ordinary citizens had to decide whether someone was an artist or not, was completed on 1.7.1972. The citizens had to declare whether Trbuljak was an artist or not. Since no one knew Trbuljak or his work at the time, the referendum showed that it is entirely irrelevant, insofar as the action itself is

concerned, whether or not the person who is being voted for or against engages in any kind of creative activity, or even if the person really exists. Out of 500 ballots that were given out, there were 259 positive votes and 204 negative.

Photographs in this room show the long corridors of the Châtelet subway station in Paris and their moving walkways. Goran Trbuljak attached small strips with the words "ARTIST" to the fixed partition and "TRBULJAK" to the moving handrails. The photographs document a number of trips on walkways at the very moment when one or both of the words happened to appear next to a person on the walkway.

Room 4: Exhibition at Galleria del Cavallino

In 1977 Trbuljak was given an opportunity for a solo exhibition at the Galleria del Cavallino in Venice, and he used it to conduct yet another investigative experiment of the relationship gallery-artist (and vice versa) within the international, in this case Italian, art system. The Galleria del Cavallino was a wellknown Venetian gallery that has during three decades presented the work of reputable names such as Balla, Arp, Klee, Mirò, Man Ray, Calder, Brauner, Morandi, Fontana, Munari, Capogrossi, Dubuffet, Mathieu, Poliskoff, Soto and Twombly, among others. Trbuljak introduced the fact that he has been offered a chance to show in such an important gallery into his project in the following manner: all artefacts at his exhibition were enlarged photographs of the catalogue front pages of the formerly mentioned notable artists' previous exhibitions at the Galleria del Cavallino, these are all reunited in this room for the first time since their original exhibition. For his invitation, Trbuljak changed the name of the gallery from Galleria del Cavallino to Galleria del Canaletto and his own catalogue was to consist solely of the history of this famous gallery, instead of presenting a biography of his little-known career. On the front page of the catalogue, the name of the artist (Goran Trbuljak) was published in smaller print than the name of the gallery (del Cavallino). All these actions led to the following conclusions: the institution of the gallery is not only an impartial display space, especially in the case of the work of someone of such modest international reputation as Trbuljak, but also, it is the key guarantor of promotion and status change for the exhibiting artist. Whether in the case of Trbuljak the exhibition at the Galleria del Cavallino really changed his position in the art system or remained just a footnote in his biography remains debatable, although the answer perhaps leans towards the latter.

Room 5: Louvre

In the famous Paris subway station Louvre, Goran Trbuljak used the illuminated sign as source of light for these photograms, by holding a sheet of photosensitive paper for a few seconds in front of each letter. Areas of the paper that have received no light appear white, and those exposed to the light, black. The six developed photograms reveal a negative image of the original word at a scale of 1:1.

The photograph on the left is the result of an overprint of four successive shots of the sun. By turning the camera a quarter of a turn each time, the artist constraints himself to place each time the sun at the center of the image. Without any reference point, the attempt "failed", revealing four staggered suns.*Second Floor*

This floor presents a series of works beginning in 1981, the year in which Trbuljak identified the period from 1970 to 1980 (presented on the third floor) as a time of crisis, criticized his earlier works and questioned what he might achieve as an artist in the future. Far from abandoning art altogether, this 'artist in crisis' makes the idea of his 'personal failure' the incentive and creative springboard for his future work.

From his first beginnings in the late 1960s, Goran Trbuljak created works in a variety of media. His conceptual practice questions the physicality of the object as a vehicle of meaning; at the same time, his humorous, self-ironic approach breaks with the established paradigms of conceptual art itself. Trbuljak is never interested in the annihilation of the object, but rather in the concept of the object-as-vehicle, always consciously anchored in a carefully selected range of media, from photography and film to print, painting, and sculpture. Such flexibility highlights Trbuljak's perpetual challenge to the concept of the medium, its properties and potential. On the one hand, this implies a robust autonomy, resistant to the demands of the art establishment; on the other, it avoids any specific medium becoming recognized as the artist's primary 'language' and defining characteristic.

Rethinking Painting

As early as the late 1960s, Goran Trbuljak stated that he had no relationship to painting as a medium of expression; he believed that painting had lost its potential and critical edge as an art form the moment it became a social commodity. This attitude led to the creation of a body of work that extends over a period of forty years and examines conventional assumptions about painting, its tools, and materials. Apart from the material and symbolic aspects of the medium, Trbuljak is also interested in what he considers as the impermanent nature of painting – the notion that a painting is not a fixed or finished work at the moment one views it, but that it can be changed and developed further. As he suggests, a painting should not be an aesthetically unique object, but rather a space in which the artist examines the characteristic features and relevant categories of the medium.

Works on paper (vitrines)

Trbuljak's works on paper share a common idea: "An artist does an exercise as he waits for the time when he will be ready for the work he will make in future." There are two kinds of artist's exercise in Trbuljak's opus, which he was carried out over forty years. The idea behind the first kind is that the artist merely repeats the cover of a notebook. The second kind of exercise – shown on the notebooks in the display cases – was executed by hand, with a pen or a pencil: the artist drew merely dots or vertical and horizontal lines, in simple notebooks with preprinted lines or grids, in the hope that one day this method would lead to a "masterpiece".

There is an obvious distinction between Goran Trbuljak's "official" activity as a conceptual artist who questions the role of art and the artist, and a more intimate practice, carried out in his home and which is not intended to be shown. He fills here a "space of creation" with a quasi-mechanical activity, which allows him to preserve the manual practice that he refuses himself as a conceptual artist. However, these two activities, conceptual and mechanical, meet in his will to

never achieve anything new and original.

Tambourine (columns and pilars)

In Trbuljak's examination of the medium of painting, the surface of the canvas is considered from various perspectives. Here the visual characteristics of the work are complemented with a musical dimension. Before a painter begins a new painting, they normally tap on the stretched canvas to check its tautness and quality.

In this series, Trbuljak made use of this painters' ritual and amplified it by mounting bells onto the frame of the empty canvas to transform it into a tambourine. In some cases, he then applied paint to the canvas with a jazz brush. These gestures, can be seen as an n-th effort of Trbuljak to distance himself from painting and its tradition.

Sunday Painting (wall on the right)

Seeing an easel set up in the window display of an artist supply store, Trbuljak, like a true "Sunday painter", would come by on Sunday, when the shop was closed, and paint directly onto the window, so that the paint would appear to be part of the canvas. Every Monday, the shop owner would clean the paint off; Trbuljak would photograph this, and consider it part of the artwork.

During the 1970s, in a fully conceptual period, Trbuljak questioned through humour the impossibility of painting, by bringing the Sunday painter and the anonymous conceptual artist together. Trbuljak explored the possibilities of art despite being aware of its inherent contradictions, his work can be regarded as a life-long dialectic between the passionate advocacy of art and its rigorous critique.

Fourth Floor & Cinema Dynamo

Cut, 1974

The video captures the instant before the destruction of the film tape. As the film tape rotates on the recorder the artist's hand holding scissors can be seen slowly approaching the tape. The "cut" is obvious when the concrete image disappears and all we are left with is the fuzzy screen.

No title (Razors), 1976

L'air du large, 1995

Every Day by Itself, Never Together, 2002