

Iliina Koralova: Art Magazines from Eastern Europe
ART MAGAZINES FROM EASTERN EUROPE – STRATEGIES OF SURVIVAL
A REPORT

As a counteraction to long-lasting isolation, censorship and restricted access to information, the last decade of the 20th century was marked by a real mass-media boom in the countries of the former Eastern bloc. Newspapers, magazines, web sites, independent radio stations, private [and pirate] TV channels all attempted to satisfy the public's eagerness for information. Being informed became a synonym for being free.

During the socialist period art magazines served as propagators of state ideology and the aesthetic of socialist realism. Not many countries could boast the existence of an underground cultural scene including journals. In this sense, the full-access-to-all-information euphoria, which pervaded the whole spectrum of social activities, naturally also affected art and culture. Many periodicals that suddenly appeared on the market were trying to catch up after the years of strict censorship. The lack, after the Second World War, of artefacts in the modernist tradition [in some of the countries] had to be substituted by information and translated theoretical texts on the history and present-day situation in modern and contemporary arts from the countries of the so-called West. At the same time, these magazines became a forum for the new-born or reviving modern culture in the so-called East.

Together with freedom and democracy however, the countries in Eastern Europe had to face the laws of the market economy. Many journals, newspapers, or even glossy life-style magazines, disappeared shortly after their first issues were published. Deprived of state support, cultural life intensely suffers the disadvantages of a free economy. People working in this field have had to learn how to find alternative sources of financial support. And even now, more than ten years after the political changes, the question of the survival of the periodicals related to art and culture in most cases overrides that of their content, and affects their editorial policy. The idea of the project »Art Magazines from Eastern Europe – Strategies of Survival« was to introduce the public to the present situation in this field of cultural activities. It is clear that modern culture is very much dependent on the responses of art critics and journalists. At the same time, the production of art magazines is crucially connected to economic development. We therefore wanted to explore the different strategies these magazines employ in order to survive.

The first part of the project was an exhibition, which took place in the library of the GfZK, where a wide range of art magazines was presented. Part of the material was exhibited in showcases. The larger part, however, was available for the visitors to the library. The idea behind this decision was to facilitate access to these magazines, thus providing current information about different tendencies in contemporary art in the countries of Eastern Europe.

Two major facts came into light. During the research period it became clear that not all the countries have art periodicals, because of the lack of financial possibilities to support such journals. This 'fact was decisive to the development of the exhibition concept. The second problem was related to the transmission of information. Most of the art magazines are published only in the local language, thus limiting the possible number of readers. Since this problem has different aspects, and because of its varying reasons, it was considered one of the most important topics to be discussed during the symposium, which took place on the November 1st 2003 in the GfZK.

The participants were Heie Treier – editor-in-chief of »kunst.ee« [Tallinn], Vladimir Bulat and Iulian Robu – editor-in-chief and contributing editor respectively of »ART-hoc« [Chisinau], Viktor Misiano – editor-in-chief of »Moscow Art Magazine« [Moscow], Attila Tordai – editor-in-chief of »IDEA – arts + society« [Cluj] and Evgeny Umansky – editor-in-chief of »pH-magazine« [Kaliningrad], who presented their periodicals and talked about their professional experience.

One of the most important achievements of the symposium was to outline the future collaboration between the GfZK and the art magazines. In the book you are holding you can find a special section dedicated to the art periodicals. This section was created by the designers of each of the featured East European magazines, and is accompanied by a theoretical contribution by a local curator, critic or artist.