

MICHAL KERN

SPACE OF THOUGHT

Curated by Daniela Čarná

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SODA gallery Bratislava

Photo: Adam Šakový, Courtesy of SODA gallery

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GALLERY OF CONTEMPORARY ART

A specific variant of art in nature is a valuable and perhaps underestimated contribution of Michal Kern (1938 - 1994) to the story of Slovak conceptual art. His work combines two poles of relationship to the country. The first is aimed at a silent meditative penetration of it, in the second it becomes an environment for interpreting ideas, with a frequent ecological and ethical message. Kern's approach to nature is both anthropocentric in both cases. He approached her from the position of a humble man, observer or pilgrim, restoring lost contact with her so that nature would accept his intervention. At Michal Kern, the relationship to the environment is rooted in the life story and he has been in dialogue with nature throughout the whole work. Before discovering it as an inexhaustible source of creation, he needed to step aside to see what constituted the mundane and therefore overlooked reality for him. Kern's relationship to nature had a gradation. After abandoning traditional painting and coping with the legacy of his father, the painter Petr Július Kern, the period of concretism (1967-72) followed, until he again anchored in the natural environment of his native Liptov and the nearby Low and High Tatras. Here he discovered his "studio in nature" in the form of minimalist interventions and touches recorded by the medium of photography. However, he created the space of thought everywhere, in nature and in the studio: in a hiding place of meditations, built from the stems of gigantic burdocks, on a snowy shield with traces documenting the route, reflecting the tree crowns on a square mirror (referring to Malevich), where he went for conversations with God and himself, and on the surface of an empty paper he entered with an archetypal gesture of drawing or perforation.

Among the first interventions in nature is the cycle *Against Violence* (1976-78), preceded by the first action *Dice Game* (1975). Kern responded to the violence with a gesture of personal engagement. He resisted him as a living target, with a white peace flag and a text message. Every man is my brother. He then placed a photograph of a defenseless child - his son, a country with a smoky Liptovský Mikuláš in the center of the target, and finally the globe itself: he concluded with snow, a symbol of cleansing and possible conflict resolution, in which he wrote the word Love, Love, Liebe: "Every year the first snow comes, the last snow melts every year. I have buried a human-like target and I wish winter to last long. He perceived them from the immediate surroundings during the construction of the dam Liptovská Mara, building the highway behind his house, but also from the global environmental challenges and conclusions of the so-called. Roman club. These were discussed by artists at housing meetings of the unofficial scene in Bratislava, even more or less urgently because the communist regime did not allow their solution: "I have lived here for 40 years and I see Liptov changing. It shows the destruction of nature all over the world. "Michal Kern pointed to events in nature and in society with a sensitive appeal and message of its origin, but also today. It invites us to stop, to realize our "here and now" and to take personal responsibility for the environment we co-create. It offers a possible guide and it is up to us how we decide: "Write a project for a million people to touch the dew and live in harmony with nature. ... I see what others have no time for. I'm telling you about the way I feel things. "

Daniela Čarná