

Stano Filko

From Earth to Pluto

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SODA gallery

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Curated by Nina Vrbanová

In Stano Filko's (1937–2015) spectrum, the colour blue represents the cosmological region, or space. It is also the space between heaven and earth, between the earthly life (physic, biologia) and pure transparent spirituality (metaphysic, the spiritual). The author describes a relatively broad scale of visual works from this area as the 4th dimension. Indeed, it dominates his early production from the period of the second half of the 60s. The initially robust mirrored environments from the end of this decade are replaced by smaller visual forms of concepts and prints, while the conceptual continuity remains. "In the second half of this decade he produced several ambitious environments on the theme of the cosmos and universe, which from the conceptual perspective are later proven to have been decisive. The ideal of a total fusion of life and art as one of the central premises of conceptual art will also be, for Filko, both the source as well as the goal of art, not only on the level of themes or ideas, but simultaneously as their visual creation in time."

Amongst the first works which contain the theme of the cosmos, and which more or less settles as a particular segment of Filko's practice, is the now well-known setting *Universal Environment* (1966–67). As the artist describes in his first samizdat catalogue of 1971: "A tri-chandelier (white, red and blue) revolves in the centre of the environment, giving the entire space a moving and colourful, cosmic ray-light." While in this work Filko fitted the cosmos into a broader iconographic structure in an effort to produce an environment as a consequential-universal whole in existence, in *Cosmos* (1968) he becomes far more straightforward and thematically precise. In 1969, "Filko exhibited at the VI Biennale in Paris with *Cosmos*: with an inflatable sphere-shaped tent, whose internal walls displayed, with the help of projected documents, the main stages of the cosmic adventure."

The early period of the artist's work also includes a concept sketch of the installation *Space of Rocket X* (1967), which is made up of a variable series of hanging outline objects in the shape of rockets, disks and half-disks. Levitating in space, they again produce a certain type of environment alluding to the possible journeys of man into space. They are kinds of paths of interconnection, meeting and discovery of these spaces. Again Filko innovates in this case, and varies the visual and material end-concept. We know, for instance, of a silver version of this installation from his solo exhibition at Tranzit in Bratislava (2005). The artist's erstwhile preferred forms in installation usually directly integrated the visitor through mirrored floors, which symbolically coded the earthly with the cosmic, the individual with the objective and so on. The visitors' illusory reflection, as an

ephemeral part of the work, carried the notion of existence as the liminal space between the real, earthly, temporally known cosmic, and at the same time the ephemeral—"here-being." The blue cosmic sphere in Filko's work, then, in essence always reflected more the movement and relations between the earthbound and the cosmic, than any exactly defined characteristic of either.

The end of the 60s saw Filko's work focus on the ambitious print cycle of *Associations* (1968–70). Once again blue in colour, the offset prints were composed of mostly found contemporary photographs that depicted the cosmic adventure. The cycle also includes text art as well as a purely conceptual mapping of the individual stages of (proto)exploration of the cosmos in human history, and the associated hopes, models and new discoveries. Indeed, the title of the graphic cycle itself is suggestive of what kind of knowledge the artist is after. And so we do not find exact or even scientific artistic aims in these works, but rather a visual accumulation of temporal and thematic facts on an associative basis, which facilitates the conceptual linking of the human and the extra-terrestrial worlds. Several experts now agree that the cycle originally contained as many as 39 different prints. Together with their original cover, they were probably prepared by Filko for his seminal presentation at the Osaka Expo in 1970.

In the subsequent two decades the cosmological theme and cycle of blue works do not vanish from Filko's practice, but it does retreat into the background. They become part of the artist's wider system—the colour spectrum. At its peak phase this spectrum is expanded to 12 colours—chakras, while the colour blue is numbered 5. Only the return from emigration brings, in a certain sense, the deeper revisiting of the cosmological theme. Filko thematically models several solo shows in this way during the 90s. In his studio he dedicates a particular, highest placed room to the cosmic sphere. He varies and innovates concepts of the environment which reach back to the 60s period. Later he makes new series of tin rockets, which he seemingly liberates from the earth's surface by an expressively painted blue spiral, flowing centrifugally upwards—into the cosmos.

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