

## ***Shifters : Signaling in Latin America and Eastern Europe***

**Curator : Florencia Chernajovsky**

**from 31 January to 21 March, 2015**

*"Duchamp had said that the artist of the future will be the person who points his finger at something and says this is art, and that will be art."*

Dennis Hopper

The exhibition *Shifters* brings together proposals seeking to re-orientate the perception of reality vis-à-vis a few simple gestures: designate, demarcate, delineate. Imagining unconventional ways of making use of ordinary cultural artifacts, the artists gathered here tend towards strategies of appropriation and the consistent 're-employment' of objects, thus rendering them new meaning. They exercise what Michel de Certeau calls the practice of the *gap* or a "shift".

Consisting of works relatively unknown to the international scene, this exhibition highlights the work of artists operating at the margins of the art market, with particular attention to the peripheral scenes of Latin America and Eastern Europe during the 60s and 70s. Throughout the course of the exhibition, the images reveal strong and concurrent affinities by artists towards basic gestures and small actions. The aesthetic proximity, both political and poetic, of these practices doesn't cease to amaze given their polar opposite geographies and lack of communication at the time of their making. Despite having been connected by contexts of dictatorship and/or political censorship, these pioneering figures have long lived in a sense of isolation, broken by a few brief interchanges within Mail art. The actions documented here also reveal an ensemble of maneuvers that question the institutional circuit of the exhibition and the circulation of works of art. Instead of extracting the object from its social framework as Duchamp did with his *readymades*, these artists deploy themselves in the city and choose public space as a medium of their work. Thus, their aim is to draw the viewer's attention to a situation or an ordinary object. By moving out of the museum and the gallery and into the street, their actions explore alternative circuits that are a challenge to the established order. A form of cultural resistance thus emerges, tracing the lines of a new space of invention and emancipation inside of everyday life.

Surpassing the Duchampian "indexical" quality of the manufactured object transferred to the neutral space of the "white cube", these artistic gestures are inscribed in an urban context in constant flux, whereas the signaled body is set in movement literally if not conceptually. These actions, often fleeting and subtle, question the notion of authorship and art at large; they orientate yet also fracture and disturb our gaze, typically attuned to the everyday. This exhibition articulates the traces left from those simple and ephemeral interventions in a non-chronological manner.

The exhibition opens with a film by Juan Downey titled *Shifters* where the artist conducts a census of indexing systems (1) in Western cultural history. Following, ensues a series of emblematic and gestural actions by Luis Camnitzer, Edgardo Antonio Vigo and Tomislav Gotovac, which

consists of pointing a finger to objects. In the tradition of living sculptures by Piero Manzoni, Alberto Greco desperately attempts to point out (and thus point to) all that is offered to him : cars, animals, passersby... His *vivo-dito* (living finger) goes on to seize a whole village in Spain in 1963 and finds a strong echo two years later in the *Happsoc* actions carried out by Stano Filko and Alex Mlynárčik in Bratislava. Questioning the role of the artist in urban space is furthered with the signs bearing the word "artist" that Goran Trbuljak glued along the corridors of a subway station in 1973. Július Koller, on the other hand, modestly registers, *umenie* (meaning "art" in Slovak) on the edge of stairs.

The exhibition also highlights certain actions that sample or tease out the real. Many accounts by Edgardo Antonio Vigo are documented here, followed by a few actions proposed by Hélio Oiticica. His *bolide-lata* (1966), kerosene canisters usually used in Brazil to signal roadwork, announces further diversions of urban traffic. In 1968, Vigo made his first signaling action in convening a group of people to contemplate a traffic light as an aesthetic object. The panels and other road signs are in this respect a relevant and recurrent motif of re-appropriation by artists as can be seen in the work by Ewa Partum (*Legality of Space*, 1971) and a few years later in an action by Fedor Vučemilović in Zagreb where he works to disrupt road markings. Multiple uses of the line, drawn with a pencil or a piece of string or tape, are the subjects of the works by Jirí Kovanda, Edward Krasiński, Mladen Stilinović and Horacio Zabala, amongst others. The terms "dessiner" and "désigner" (in French) stem from the same root *designo*, and can therefore acquire the usual sense of reporting a part of the world, real or imagined, while viewing it aesthetically.

Drawing a line or walking in one direction can become, by extension, the movement of the index finger of the artist who points to something. In 1970, Vigo invited the public to take a virtual walk through a public square by drawing a circle around him. His accomplice, Carlos Ginzburg, signaled an entire city by walking during artistic meetings held in Pamplona in 1972. Like Ginzburg, who wore a "sandwich board man" sign on his neck, Paulo Bruscky wandered through Recife in 1978, questioning the meaning and value of art. The exhibition *Shifters* spills out into the street with the intervention by Eduardo Costa and Roberto Jacoby, who reactivate their *Señal de obra* made in Argentina in 1966. By indexing certain urban elements with the colour green, they offer visitors the possibility to extend the experience of the exhibition outside of the gallery with what they refer to as a "discontinuous visual journey."

**Artists :** Paulo Bruscky, Luis Camnitzer, Eduardo Costa & Roberto Jacoby, Antonio Dias, Juan Downey, Stano Filko, Carlos Ginzburg, Tomislav Gotovac, Alberto Greco, Željko Jerman, Július Koller, Jirí Kovanda, Edward Krasiński, Gastão de Magalhães, Hélio Oiticica, Ewa Partum, Mladen Stilinović, Goran Trbuljak, Edgardo Antonio Vigo, Fedor Vučemilović and Horacio Zabala.

(1) In his famous treatise *Anthropogénie*, the Belgian philosopher Henri Van Lier postulated that the index is "those actions by which the standing body... has developed an ability to point out targets, marking beginnings and endings, tracing directions." He wrote that the index finger (*zeige-finger* in German) meaning "tracing finger", is first the organ of insistent indexing. Van Lier further speaks about "walking as a way of indicating walking" capable of "pointing to targets, tracing directions and movement."