

The adventure of emotions

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In Buenos Aires in 1962, the artist Alberto Greco, contributing to the subversive strategies of his generation that strived to annihilate the art object as a symbol of conformism and alienation of institutional and commercial culture, started his outstanding cycle of performances announced by the manifesto *Vivo Dito* (live finger, a/n), that encoded the elements of living reality as works of art. Moving a-squat around chosen individuals, he chalked out circles thus marking totality of their subjectivity as the unrepeatably, living art work. Simultaneously, Greco determined artist as key protagonist in processing the reality into cultural system and defined art practice as social activism and public space as its domain. At the same time, on the other end of the world, in Skopje, city that a year later would be destroyed by the cataclysmic earthquake, little girl Breda Beban watched couples in love as they kissed by the river Vardar. The couples, imbued by the shared feelings and unaware of their setting, in her mental eye were separated from reality by a crystal sphere which, propelled by (the) emotions, slowly ascended taking them into the skies.

As in a plot of some novel of Latin American magical realism, forty years later our protagonists met in the same space. Sitting on one of many terraces of Buenos Aires, Breda was recounting her childhood vision and somebody present recalled Greco's legendary *Arte Vivo*. The vision has found its form and the concept retrieved its vision.

Greco's basically ontological discourse, inspired by the intellectual rebellion of his time and by then integrated into cultural inheritance, met multidisciplinary discourse of a contemporary artist, procedures of appropriation and re-enactment fuelled by powerful narration with elements of globalisation and gender poetics. Breda assumed Greco's gesture. The photos show her with her hair gathered in a tight bun as she squats in the right corner of the frame, staring into the camera. Clad in uniform-like clothes, with her eyes shielded by dark glasses, in one hand she holds the title card that defines the title of the work and the names of its protagonists while, by the other hand, she chalks a circle. Within the circle, standing above her, couples kiss in Trieste, Tbilisi, Buenos Aires, London, Athens... everywhere. Figure is the same; identities vanish first in love that merges two into one, then in the universal gesture of kiss that overcomes all geopolitical, ideological, economical, conventional and, for that matter, all imaginable opposing systems. With this apotheosis of love back into the realm of socially engaged art, Breda Beban covered yet another part of her mission to bring emotions and passion, themes that the public understands and loves intuitively, into the domain of referential art thus creating another one of always necessary links that connect general public to the elitism of art and neo-avantgarde heritage. Her oeuvre consistently focused on the narratives of individuals caught in socio-political dramas of their surroundings that are completely out of their influence or control.

These little human stories, on which in fact the fate of humankind is based upon, climax in the intimate figure of a kiss which, as merging of two separated souls into one, create the completeness craved for by all mankind from the beginning of time as the pivotal human dimension of our existence.

Culture wise, the implications are numerous: from philosophical, as in Plato's Symposium, to those strictly artistic in masterpieces of modernism as in works by Rodin, Munch, Brancusi, Picasso, Warhol and others. Obviously, the realisation of civilisation of democracy and liberal sexuality highlighted the intimacy of kiss as a theme of mainstream art, but it is not accidental that it was Vivo Dito of a female artist to point at the universal and quintessentially emancipating nature of its public display. In fact, the female artists were the ones who, thanks to their gender standpoint, drew attention to the mechanisms of sexual repression that glimpse through the iconography of love and factual shifting of sexual themes into the domain of pornography. Although there is something classical in the composition that in Breda's figures of kisses develops from tongues and heads positions suggesting a spiral movement that will eventually propel the lovers in the sky, not unlike the baroque representations of ascension, the kiss in her Arte Vivo assumes the form of political viewpoint and not only about the social reality at that, but about the universal order as well.

Alberto Greco committed suicide in Barcelona in 1965, considering it his ultimate art work, as he stated in his farewell note. The artist who never ceased to annihilate the art object thus promoting identification of life with art, by annihilating the artist and elevating him to myth introduced death into the equation.

Breda Beban died in London in 2012, fighting to the bitter end for the intensity of life that she was promoting by her art. The fate coupled these two activists in the great narration about meaning and role of art that marked the culture of the 20th century. Their voices added passion to this central theme that could be generated only from the so called 'cultural margins' they themselves stemmed from and without which the 'centre', as Croatian art historian Želimir Košćević once said, wouldn't be anything else but a 'black hole'.