

MIODRAG MIŠA NEDELJKOVIĆ (1927–2004)

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Abstract: *The periodization of fine and applied art after the industrial revolution and the response of alienated artists to industrial kitsch testifies to the utility and purpose of art—the artistic and social avant-gardes and the crown of all their endeavors in the heroic period. From art and craft pastiche, to utopian efforts to reform society through design, a rich linear syntagm was structured that intrigued and burdened the creatives from this region, who sought to introduce the land of peasants and barbarogens into the currents of industrial and social progress, culture and art. One of those individuals, in whom Morris and Marinetti, Van Doesburg and Itten, Gropius and Meyer, Vassarelli and Dibiffe... Müller-Brockman and Rand conflicted, tirelessly pursued the affirmation and institutionalization of applied art and design through pedagogical, editorial, theoretical and research work, as well as visual and graphic practice. Miodrag Miša Nedeljković was a modernist with a small 'm'¹, artist and designer, theoretician and practitioner, who nomadically moved through the currents of modern and postmodern fine and applied art and design with renaissance curiosity, driven by intrigue and logic, was primarily concerned with the emergence and establishment of circumstances, and environmental issues.*

Key words: fine art, applied art, graphic design, design theory

1. INTRODUCTION

“My view of the global ‘visual art empire’ was congruent with my attitude towards reality expressed as ‘harmony of the universe’. I have of course considered the universe preeminently as the incredible flexibility of communication between the world of ideas and the world of things. The focus of this adventure were the relationships within it and their contradictory ability to break the initial model, free creativity and breed meta truth. Thus, the exploration of the primary was transferred from the visual universe to harmony in general. The primary secondary circle closed and the harmony of art endorsed the harmony of the sign in general, and therefore also the sign of meaning in general, the sign of function and information, thus harmony encoded all our systems of thought and meaning.” (Nedeljković, 1990).

2. EARLY LIFE

Miša Nedeljković was born in Niš in 1927. His mother, impoverished after the death of his father, couldn't raise three children, so he and his sister were sent to the Queen Mary's Orphanage in Negotin, where they were educated until 1944. During his ten-year stay in the orphanage, Miša grew up in exceptional discipline and dedication to work. At the age of 17, in 1944, he joined the 10th Partisan Strike Brigade of the 22nd Strike Division of the National Liberation War. He was severely wounded in combat on Kopaonik, fighting against the ballistas and the German Prince Eugene Division. However, he returned to the battlefield after treatment and wasn't demobilized until December 1945. After the war, he completed the Commercial Technicians High School in Zrenjanin, and worked briefly as a field operative in municipalities of Stara Pazova, Subotica, and Novi Sad.

Disillusioned by his work, he decided to develop his drawing skills. His first job as a draftsman was at The Agency for Economic, Cultural and Political Propaganda Jugoreklam in Novi Sad, where his talent was recognised and he was employed after completing his internship in 1952. Before long he became the

¹ Keedy (1998) indicates the existence of modernists, that is, modernism with a capital 'M', and modern designers with a small 'm'. The main difference is that with a capital 'M' it stands for style and ideology without limitation to historical moment and geographical location. Therefore, being a modern designer with a small 'm' simply means being committed to work in a way that is contemporary and innovative, regardless of the designer's stylistic or ideological bias.

Head of the Applied Graphics and Painting Department. As he advanced in the graphic profession Nedeljković felt drawn towards the institutionalization of applied art. When the Association of Applied Arts Artists and Designers of Serbia (serb. ULUPUS) was founded in 1953, he became a member, together with 16 fellow artists and designers from Vojvodina. Four years later, initiated from Belgrade, the branch of ULUPUS for Vojvodina was established.

In 1957, Miša Nedeljković enrolled at the Academy of Applied Arts – Department of Applied Graphics in Belgrade. At the admission exam, he ranked first with the commendation of *cum laude*. Due to his experience and refined skills the Academy transferred Nedeljković from third to fifth year of studies. He graduated in 1961, in the class of Professor Mihailo S. Petrov, with an average grade of 9.78. The same year, he was employed at the School of Applied Arts in Novi Sad, where he had worked for 11 years as a professor of the subject group related to applied graphics.



Figure 1: "Dawns Bathed in Tears" Suzana Bralo, Museum of the Socialist Revolution of Vojvodina, Novi Sad, 1985. p. 9

3. AFFIRMATION AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF APPLIED ART AND DESIGN

Miša Nedeljković was the third and last president of the ULUPUS branch for Vojvodina (1962–64). In 1962, the Vojvodina branch hosted for the first time the Plenum of the Association of Visual Artists of Applied Arts of Yugoslavia. The Plenum commenced the consideration of establishing a separate, equal association for Vojvodina. Already at the next Plenum of the Association, held in Sloven Gradec in 1963, on the initiative of the Management Board of the ULUPUS Branch for Vojvodina², a decision was made to recommend to the next Annual Election Assembly and Congress of the Association of Fine Artists of Applied Arts of Yugoslavia, the establishment of the seventh Association, for the territory of Vojvodina. Over 90 percent of the delegates voted for this recommendation, after which the recommendation was submitted and adopted at the next 6th Assembly and 3rd Congress of the Association in Ljubljana, in 1964. The Association of Fine Artists of Applied Arts of Vojvodina was founded on November 8, 1964, at the Founding Assembly in Novi Sad. The duty of President of the Association was first entrusted to Miodrag Miša Nedeljković.

In 1970, the Association of Vojvodina (serb. UPIDIV) was entrusted to prepare and organize the 9th Assembly and 5th Congress of the Association of Fine Artists of Applied Arts and Designers of Yugoslavia (serb. SPID-JU). The Association has accomplished this task with outstanding results by widely engaging all of its resources. As a result, the Association of Vojvodina was given mandate of the headquarters of the Association for the period of 1970-1973. Miša Nedeljković was elected president of the Presidency of the Federal Association of Yugoslavia, and Mirko Stojnić was elected secretary. After this term, Nedeljković was re-elected as president of the UPIDIV Management Board for the period of 1973–75.

² Miodrag Nedeljković, president. Mirko Stojnić, vice-president

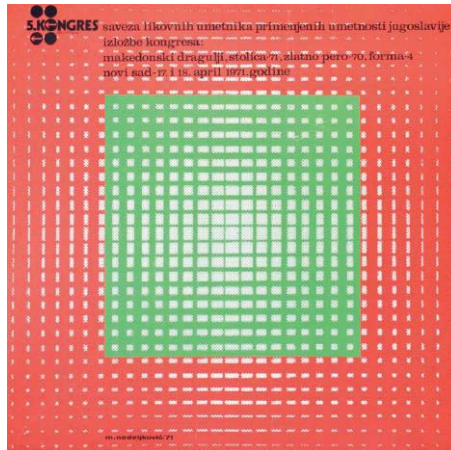


Figure 2: 5th SPID-YU Congress (silkscreen print), 70x70 cm, Novi Sad, 1971.

At the beginning of the eighth decade, the Association finally adopted a long-term program of development orientation towards design disciplines, followed by numerous discussions, lectures, articles and studies from that period, focused on the issues of defining the subject and concept of design, its importance and role, development and origin in accordance with the climax of the general project of modernity and environmental issues. From 1971 to 1977, Nedeljković was Head of the Design and Propaganda sector in Agroindustrija and Pobeda factories and planning officer for small urbanism in Urbis in Novi Sad. At the same time in UPIDIV, in line with the long-term development program of Vojvodina, the personnel development program was analyzed and objective social conditions of a wider scale were increasingly sought for the professional engagement of the membership (Nedeljković, 1985). In accordance with that policy, Nedeljković creates a Design Development Sector in Pobeda and co-opt several members of the Association into this Sector.

Nedeljković managed the Cultural Centre of the Workers' University from 1977 to 1983. One of the most significant projects realized by Nedeljković in that period was the organization and design of a large-scale art exhibition Days of Vojvodina Culture in Vienna, in the spring of 1981. For this exhibition Nedeljković realized one of his most effective posters in fruitful cooperation with photographer Silvester More and designer Robert Žemberi in the manner of international style (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Culture of Vojvodina (silkscreen print), 84x59 cm, Vienna, 1981.

4. DESIGN, APPLIED AND FINE ARTS

Along with Arsovski and Stojnić, Nedeljković was among the first Yugoslav graphic artists who adopted and implemented the Swiss style of visual totality as an international universal visual language (Figure 4, 2 and 3) *Sterijino pozorje* and *FORMA* 1). Art historian Miloš Arsić, describes the manifestations of the international style in Miša Nedeljković's posters as manifestations of utility constants in which "the graphic-visual system of signs dominates, sometimes combined with the verism of the photo template... [Nedeljković] mainly opts for a structural analysis of some of the primary artistic elements, primarily the system of lines, points and surfaces, i.e. for contrast, rhythm and proportions. The geometrical organization of space prevails with an emphasized architectural stability, which is enriched by expertly guided organic cooperation of letters used in the sense of 'pure graphics', the rationalism of straight lines with a distinct optical structure, the extreme moderation of accents of colour and the visual effectiveness of the 'raster'" (Arsić, 1985).



Figure 4: *The First International Triennial of Theater Scenography and Costume – Sterijino pozorje* (silkscreen print), 100x70 cm, 1966.

On his political and cultural posters, Miša Nedeljković does not determine the visual register of the message with visual abstract graphics. With means of expression of such a specific illustration, the interpretant metonymically or metaphorically becomes a signifier through an index in an image or raster, point, line, direction or radiation, and thus connotes collective, society, individual, inclusion, progress, networking, amplification and similar (Figure 2).

For more than five decades, Nedeljković has been actively engaged in graphic design, primarily book design, shaping visual identities and means of external and direct propaganda. For his professional accomplishments, Nedeljković received a total of 41 Awards, and for achievements in affirmation and improvement of the profession, he was granted 36 Recognitions and Certificates of Appreciation. In the first years of his professional development, Nedeljković was most prominent in book design, which is confirmed by numerous awards³. Nedeljković approaches each work, publication or periodical aligning with the style or principles he transposes from au courant forms or texts from his own artistic oeuvre. However, the visual rhetoric and poetics applied to book design is in accordance with the theme insofar as it is clearly a more artistic and poetic approach to literary works (Figure 5), compared to publications of technical communication and direct means of propaganda, where it is consistent with the principles of visual universal totality (Figure 6).

³ Between 1961–71. Nedeljković has been awarded ten times for book design, and received eight awards from the Association of Publishers of Yugoslavia at the International Book Fair in Belgrade.



Figure 5: Book design for Forum, Novi Sad; Nolit, Belgrade; Belgrade Graphic Institute, Belgrade and others.



Figure 6: Book design – Miloš Arsić, Miodrag Miša Nedeljković: Design, Applied and Fine Arts (1955–1985), UPIDIV, Novi Sad, 1985. The ceramic panel "Alone" (cover image), from 1968, for which Nedeljković was awarded the gold medal of the Association of Independent Artists of Milan at the 26th International Exhibition of Ceramics in Faenza, is an idiosyncratic expression of Nedeljković; it is a reflection of the developed graphic visual language in majolica.



Figure 7: The ceramic panel "Family", from 1968, is another artistic gesture by Nedeljković in the same technique, in which he relies on the decorative style of moderate modernism or return to order, a stylization generated by concentric circles in a radially directed composition.

Miloš Arsić (1985), documents his approach to theoretical issues of applied arts and design through two primary views. The first, in which Nedeljković directly addresses the issues of solving specific tasks, that is, how to form effective utilitarian themes and forms⁴; and second, which underlines a unique commitment to the affirmation of applied art and design, aspects of organizational, pedagogical and theoretical research⁵.

To whom, what, how, why, how much, is the title of Nedeljković's manual, published independently in 1974, in which the author defines an educational framework for studying the phenomenon of graphic communication, which integrates the principles of marketing and communication into a modern approach. Design as communication, according to the model of Shannon and Weaver, is the starting point for Nedeljković insofar as it can be complementary with the framework of structural semiotic analysis, which means that long before Baldwin and Roberts (2006), Nedeljković synthesized two different approaches to studying and understanding issues of visual communication through the educational framework. Striving for an exact and rational system, both in design and in theory, Nedeljković relies on the structuralist semiotic postulates of Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco, and the visual rhetoric of Guy Bonsipe. While, on the other hand, the issues of technique and effectiveness, defined by Shannon and Weaver, assume foundations from the economic propaganda theory of Richard Barton, and Yugoslav marketing theorists Dušan Mrvoš and Flora Sokolović, as well as the social psychology of professor Nikola Rot. The mentioned framework is internalized and supplemented in terms of content in several didactic tools that Nedeljković, as an author or co-author, publishes in several editions.

Nedeljković, in the spirit of "radical liberation of visual art from facade-mimetic, on account of structurally metaphorical values", actively and self-reflexively expresses himself artistically in accordance with the general program directions of the seventh decade (Arsić, 1985)⁶. Works of art from this period are recognized as a catalysis of the influence of art and international collective creativity, as the cycle from this period is followed by a cycle of manual prints titled *Multiplication*, and a cycle of luminoplastic paintings, where Nedeljković uses art techniques and technology to affirm reciprocity of the contemplated and economic, and at the same time thematically, unique new creation and politically ancient (paintings *Red Cosmonaut...*(Figure 8); *Polis which did not accept defeat* (Nedeljković, 1985); *Pannonian Rhapsodies*; *Who Killed Christ...*). These cycles and each subsequent one encode, each for itself, a unique message whose target factor is precisely the message itself, that is, its visual representation in individual works where constant and alternative expressive elements participate in relationships.

⁴ Selected titles of Miodrag Nedeljković: *Economic Propaganda I and II*, (Nedeljkovic, 1968a, 1968b). textbooks; *To whom, what, how, why, how much*, manual, self-published (Nedeljkovic, 1974). *Messages and their effect in the system of market communications*, Pula, 18-20 May 1988. 7th SPID-JU Congress (Nedeljkovic, 1988); *Textbook Graphic Design and Type*, Textbook Institute Belgrade, in three editions: 1988, 1998 and 2006 (Nedeljković & Nedeljković, 1988); *Marketing manual: What a graphic communication designer needs to know about marketing*, Dnevnik, Novi Sad, (Nedeljković M., 2001).

⁵ Selected titles of Miodrag Nedeljković: *Subject and its culture*, Index, Novi Sad, November (1971); *From art craft to electronic technology*, Catalog text in celebration of the 10th anniversary; UPIDIV, Novi Sad, 1974; *Aesthetic product design: Design from factory practice*, Pobeda, Novi Sad, March 1976; *Aesthetic factors in design*, Novi Sad, December 1985; *Theses for conversations at Spens on the occasion of Design Day at "Forma-10"*; *Opinions and proposals for faster overcoming of the problem of modern staff training for the graphics industry of Vojvodina*, Novi Sad, March 1987. *Interview with the Chamber of Commerce of Vojvodina*; *Design—art of the ages*, Novi Sad, April 1994. *Consulting on design at the Novi Sad Fair*; *Program proposal for the establishment of the College of Design in Novi Sad*, UPIDIV, Novi Sad, 1972 (group of authors); *Applied art in Vojvodina and other texts for the Encyclopedia of Novi Sad*, 2001.

⁶ Miloš Arsić refers to works from three cycles of graphics and paintings: *Relationships*, *Transposition* and *War*; each of which presents self-reflexive notes on: geometric abstraction, optical structuralism, new expressionism and neo-surrealism.



Figure 8: “The Red Cosmonaut Conquers the Left Side of the Sun”, oil on canvas, 110x110 cm, 1973 (left).



Figure 9: “The Polis Which Would Not Admit Defeat”, tempera on canvas, 110x110 cm, 1977.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The overall result, seen through the applied art work and the theoretical pedagogical work of Miodrag Miša Nedeljković, is difficult to grasp, therefore even more difficult to comprehend. It is precisely in the synthesis of these two domains that one cannot clearly discern whether the practice of designer and inspired artist developed from theoretical and ontological reflection, or whether epistemological knowledge was based on constant circulation from concept to realization.

Nedeljković had 27 solo exhibitions in Yugoslavia and 20 group exhibitions abroad⁷. As an author, he was constant in the perception of the actual, which was reflected in practical interpretation, as well as in introjection through visual rhetoric. Nedeljković’s clear principles exude with human and sincere presence, hence they endure until today. His principles are reflected in his art and design works, could be read in his notes and books, and finally, but most importantly, they are recognized in the individuals he educated.

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⁷ Nedeljković frequently participated in numerous Delegations and Working Groups at international gatherings and bilateral meetings.

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