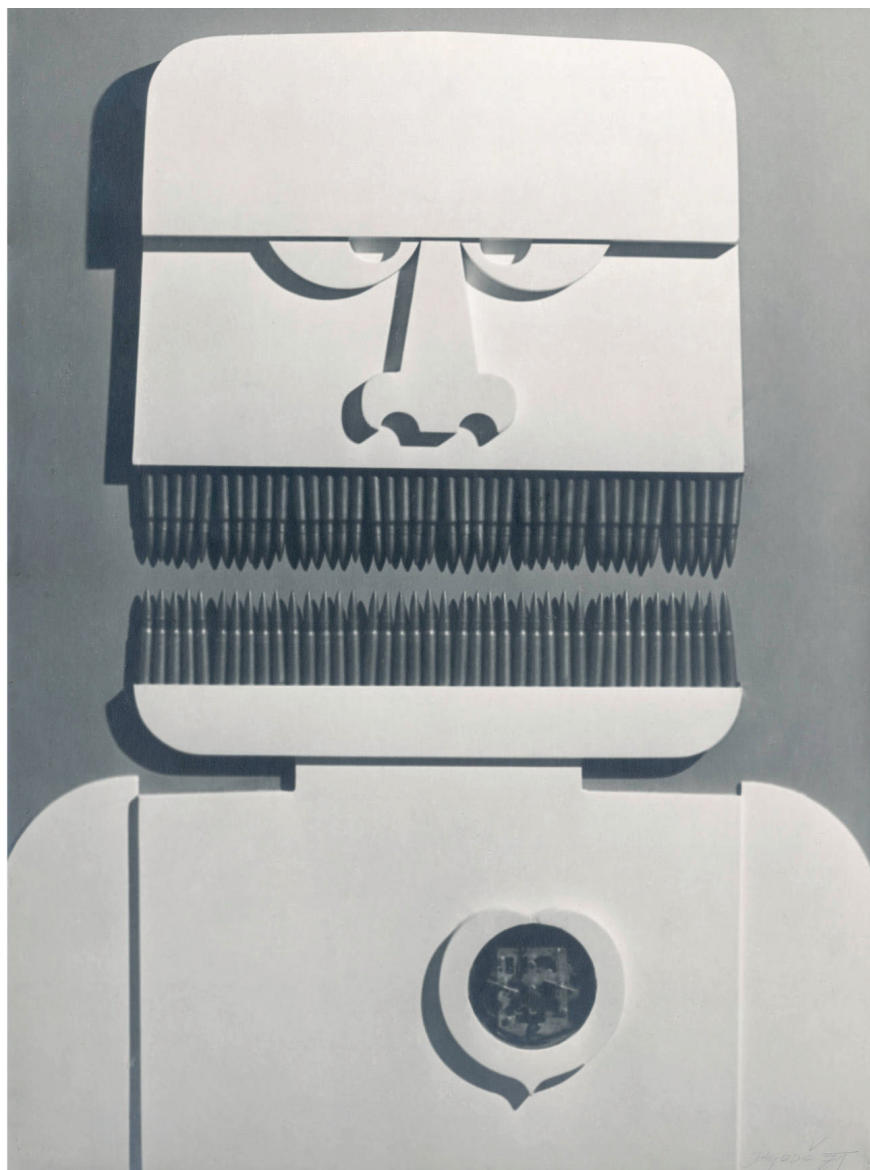


Peace Policies and Practices in Yugoslavia and Beyond



PEACE, UNCONDITIONAL!

Edited by
Sanja Petrović Todosijević and Martin Pogačar

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in Yugoslavia and Beyond

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Sanja Petrović Todosijević and Martin Pogačar

Belgrade, Ljubljana
2025

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Zdenka Badovinac

Peace as a Space for the Third

Abstract The author explores images of peace in the context of today's genocidal wars. It examines enduring symbols, such as the dove and olive branch, rooted in early Christianity and popularized by Picasso in 1949. It also references Gerald Holtom's peace sign (1958), adopted by the hippie movement, noting how such symbols, despite their positive messages, often become tools for manipulation. The author contrasts these traditional symbols with the abstract concept of emptiness, exemplified by Kasimir Malevich's Black Square (1915). Post-Yugoslav and Eastern European conceptual artists and architects have reinterpreted this void as an "open work", linking peace to war and destruction. The text argues that no image can truly depict peace, as it is not a static state but a process. Peace emerges from gaps in the social fabric, where wild thought or nature can grow, offering a third path amidst the antagonisms that fuel war. Peace symbols are empty signifiers, filled with conflicting ideologies, and peace itself is a dynamic, fragile process.

Keywords symbol, peace, war, hippies, avant-garde, destruction, emptiness, process, open work

What would be the most appropriate image of peace for today?

Throughout European history, images of peace have most often celebrated rulers who finally brought peace after long wars. One of the earliest monuments of this type is the Ara Pacis (13–9 BC), an altar in Rome dedicated to Emperor Augustus, who established the Pax Romana. In the 14th century, the progressive Republic of Siena commissioned Ambrogio Lorenzetti to paint the Allegory of Good and Bad Government, which promoted peace as an outcome of good government. From early Christianity to the present day, the main



Stane Jagodič, *Aureole*, photomontage, 1985

* This is a slightly adapted version of the text originally published in *e-flux Notes*, 13 December 2023.

symbol of peace has been the dove and the olive branch, which also appear in the first iconological “dictionary”, the *Iconologia* Cesare Ripa (1603), with woodcuts of allegories of virtues, vices, passions, arts and sciences. These two symbols of peace have been used in different social systems and even in the world’s first socialist state, the Soviet Union, where it initially seemed that the old symbolism would be consigned to the dustbin of history. While the Russian avant-garde broke with tradition by using abstract language, Soviet social realism returned to realism and the old symbolism, including the dove and the olive branch, which, especially after the Second World War, also served as a propaganda tool for the Soviet Union as the main propagator of peace in the world.

The socialist authorities of Yugoslavia commissioned the construction of many Partisan-themed monuments, mostly in modernist abstraction, which conveyed the idea of peace as linked, above all, to the victory over fascism. Communist symbols prevailed. The traditional symbol of peace, the dove, also became one of the main symbols and values of the Non-Aligned Movement. Peace is often portrayed as the result of victory over evil, good governance and wise agreements between heads of state.

Traditional symbols of peace have become instruments of various ideologies or are else made into souvenirs and consumer goods. This is what happened to the dove carrying an olive branch, which Pablo Picasso made famous after the Second World War. The first version of his dove, or pigeon, was created at the invitation of the Communist Party for the First World Congress in Paris in 1949 to quickly find its way onto a stamp used for Soviet propaganda. This was also the fate of the first widely known non-figurative modern peace symbol, designed by Gerald Holtom for the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. In a very abstract way, it represents the abbreviations of the letters N and D: the vertical line represents the flag semaphore signal for the letter D, and the downward lines on either side represent the semaphore signal for the letter N. This symbol was adopted by anti-war and counter-culture activists around the world. At that time, hippies also used flowers and slogans such as “Make love, not war” to communicate their anti-militarist views. Although often described as naïve, these peace-loving sentiments nevertheless emerged in a strong climate of social criticism, student protests and anti-Vietnam War demonstrations around the world.

Consider, for example, the 1966 drawings of Marko Pogačnik, a leading figure in the Slovene OHO art collective, whose powerful message is based on witty depictions of flowers, combs and other mundane objects combined with comments on the ease with which young boys are sent to their deaths.¹ All these things are to be understood within

the framework of the OHO philosophy of reism, a view of the world in which man is in an equal and reciprocal relationship with objects. This philosophy developed at a time when Yugoslavia was already in the grip of consumerism, against which counter-cultural movements, especially the hippies, were fighting for a better society, against traditional morality and order, against man’s alienation from man and nature and against the war in Vietnam.

With their anti-war messages, Pogačnik’s drawings are not far from the emancipatory propaganda posters of Vladimir Mayakovsky, whose satirical agitprop was aimed mainly at informing the largely illiterate Soviet population about current events. One of his posters, showing a Russian and a Ukrainian soldier facing each other with their rifles pointed at a fat capitalist, could inspire us to rethink the concept of peace as a victory over a common enemy. This poster, created in 1920 – that is, during the Soviet-Polish War (1919–1921) – reads: “Ukrainians and Russians Have a Common Battle Cry: Pan Will Not Be the Master of the Worker!” When two nations are at stake, it is always necessary to look for a third actor that unites the interests of both, in these cases, the interests of the workers.

The concept of defeating capitalism as the common enemy of the workers of all nations was later replaced by the political doctrine of *Russkiy Mir*, which, like similar doctrines such as *Pax Romana* and *Pax Americana*, is largely linked to the cultural and political influence of the superpowers. A poster from the 1980s, which visually equates the *Mir* space station with the Dove of Peace, is a far cry from the emancipatory character of early Soviet avant-garde posters and shows how peace is linked to territorial expansion. It is worth noting that “*mir*” in Russian means “peace” and also “the world”. The idea of a “*Russky Mir*” has been taken up by Vladimir Putin and is linked to the reoccupation of Soviet territory and the war in Ukraine. In Putin’s Russia, many anti-war artists have either left the country or are trying to protest as much as they can. Feminist anti-war artists, who are also fighting against patriarchal structures, play a very prominent role. Their actions are taking place on the streets and on social media. One of the most important initiatives of this kind is the Feminist Anti-War Resistance (FAWR), a group of Russian feminists founded in February 2022 to protest the Russian invasion of Ukraine.² On 8 March 2022, International Women’s Day, the Feminist Anti-War Resistance organised a flower-laying ceremony in memory of the civilians killed in Ukraine. They organised women in 94 Russian and international cities to lay chrysanthemums and tulips tied with blue and yellow ribbons on war memorials and in front of embassies. Feminist activists have continued to organise similar actions, constantly changing them to make them untraceable. They wrote anti-war slogans on banknotes, placed art objects in parks, wore black as a sign of mourning, handed out flowers or cried in the Moscow metro. All these are today’s images of peace, unfortunately mostly unknown to the international public.

¹ Marko Pogačnik was a key member of the Slovenian art collective OHO, which operated first as a broad movement (from 1965 to 1968), then as a group with four permanent members (1969 to 1971), and finally as a commune in Šempas (1971 to 1979). From the beginning, the OHO artists developed the philosophy of reism that can be seen as a unique contribution to international conceptualism and similar practices that emerged in the 1960s. Their work is comparable to new practices that emerged in the 1960s around the world, in particular *Arte Povera*, *Land Art*, *Body Art*, *Process Art*, *Conceptual Art*. The context of OHO’s work was shaped by existentialism, structuralism, post-structuralism, semiotics, the mass phenomena of the time and, especially, hippie culture. In 2016, Marko Pogačnik was selected as a UNESCO Artist for Peace. See: “Marko Pogačnik (Slovenia) joins the family of UNESCO Artists for Peace,” UNESCO, published 5 February 2016, accessed 17 February 2025, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1433>.

² In the first month of its existence, FAWR was placed on the so-called “foreign agent” list at the end of the same year; the following year, it was designated as an “undesirable organization”.

In political terms, peace is essentially the result of peace agreements – negotiations over the division of the world. One of the images that symbolizes peace in this sense is certainly the group portrait of the leaders of the anti-Nazi coalition – Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill – discussing the postwar world order at Yalta in February 1945. The Second World War was a war in which, as Gérard Wajcman writes in his book *L'Objet du siècle* (The Object of the Century), the “perfect crime” was invented, the crime that leaves no evidence behind, no ruins for memories to attach to.³ For an age that invented the “perfect destruction” that Auschwitz represents, we need to conceive of a different kind of object. Wajcman sees such objects in Marcel Duchamp’s *Bicycle Wheel* (1951) and Kazimir Malevich’s *Black Square*. For our context here, special attention goes to the *Black Square*, painted in 1915, during the First World War, which went on to claim between 15 and 22 million lives. It is a picture of emptiness, an enormous absence that is impossible to interpret. According to Wajcman, this abstract image has freed itself from reality, yet it points to the real – the real as that which can neither be represented nor articulated, but which can be touched through art. Boris Groys also writes that Malevich’s *Black Square* is an image of destruction as the only thing that survives constant change, and as such, it contradicts the post-revolutionary image of construction and, indeed, the project of building a communist society that strives for perfection. As Groys says, material forces are non-teleological; they never reach their telos nor their end, which is why destruction is the only thing Malevich expects from the future: to be a revolutionary artist is, therefore, to accept the universal materialist flow that destroys all temporary and political orders.⁴

We can follow a similar approach to the state of destruction as the setting for a new beginning in the work of Croatian artist Dimitrije Bašičević Mangelos, whose work was deeply marked by the Second World War.⁵ During the Second World War, when a relative or friend of his died, Mangelos marked the death by painting strokes in his notebook, erasing what was underneath. In this way he made a kind of symbolic grave. Later, these “graves” were enlarged to a quarter page, then half, then a full page. These black surfaces, sometimes accompanied by thin red lines, letters or inscriptions, mark the erasure of memory, which becomes a void, a nihil, like the beginning of something new. For Mangelos, this something new is, above all, a thought – a thought that can lead to inner peace.

The idea of suffering that defies representation is also present in a proposal for a memorial to the victims of fascism in Auschwitz-Birkenau, submitted to an international competition in 1958 by Oskar Hansen and his Polish team of architects and artists.

In addition to Zofia and Oskar Hansen, the team included Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz, Julian Pałka, Lechosław Rosiński, Edmund Kupiecki and Tadeusz Plasota.⁶ The jury for this international competition, which attracted more than 100 entries, was headed by the renowned British sculptor Henry Moore. The Hansen team’s proposal treated the entire site as a memorial. They proposed creating only an asphalt road through the camp, leaving the grass and weeds to slowly overgrow the decaying camp buildings, marking the passage of time since the tragic events. The proposal was also open to individual acts of remembrance; people could place stones related to Jewish traditions or other objects of remembrance on the road. All those affected, dead and alive, are present here and left to their own time, some in memory, others in real time. All of this should also be understood within the framework of Hansen’s theory of the Open Form, which saw art as a process that involved the viewer, the recipient and the user.



Marko Pogačnik (The OHO Group), drawings published on the front page of the student newspaper *Tribuna* alongside a statement by the university committee against the war in Vietnam, 26 October 1966. Courtesy of Moderna galerija, Ljubljana.

³ Gérard Wajcman, *L'Objet du siècle* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1998).

⁴ Boris Groys, *Becoming Revolutionary: On Kazimir Malevich* (Moscow: Ad Marginem Press, 2014).

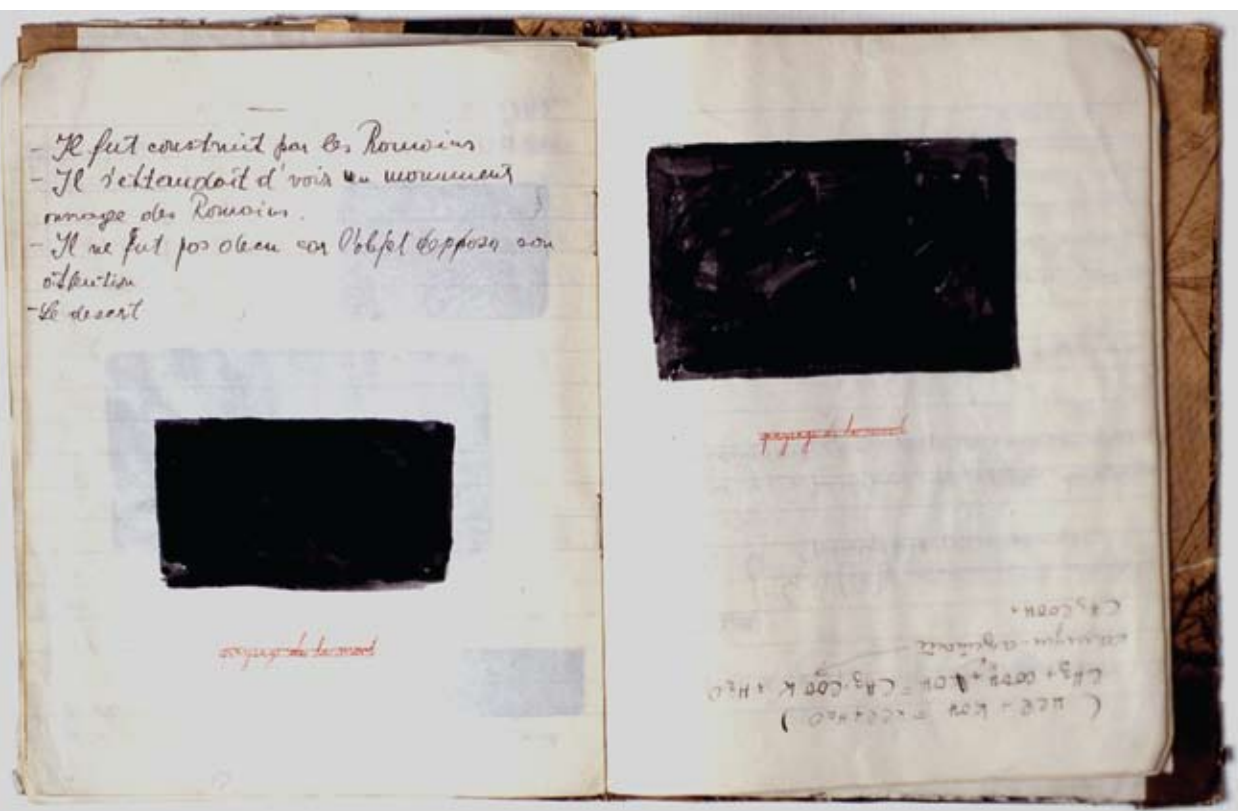
⁵ Dimitrije Bašičević (1921–1987) was a Croatian art historian, critic, curator and artist who worked under the pseudonym Mangelos. His traumatic experience of the Second World War is reflected in the titles of his groups of works: “Paysages de la mort”, “Paysages de la guerre”, “Paysages” and “Tabula Rasa”. These are monochrome surfaces with text underneath, developed from his school exercise books, which he defined as noart. He was a founding member of the avant-garde group Gorgona.

⁶ Oskar Hansen (1922–2005) was a visionary architect, designer, theorist, educator, painter and sculptor. His theory of Open Form is based on the avant-garde tradition, which has always been about art merging with life or, as Hansen put it, about “processual composition formed by life.” See Axel Wieder, Florian Zeyfang (eds.), *Open Form, Space, Interaction, and the Tradition of Oskar Hansen* (Sternberg Press, 2014).

The statement above reads: “We’ll put you on (Planika) [a Slovenian shoe factory], We will clean you, We will arm you, We will kill you (Vietnam).”

“I am not a soldier at heart. I love literature and music. I should have been an artist, not a soldier.” (Nguyen Cao Ky)

Pogačnik’s drawings also allude to propaganda advertisements, conveying the message that capital was also behind the war in Vietnam – like this drawing of a grid that resembles prison bars accompanied by the phrase “Vietnam brings new windows to your home.”



Dimitrije Bašičević Mangelos, Fragmenti 1 0. m. 3 (1936–1942). Collection Mario Bruketa.

Hansen’s proposal was, of course, too radical to be accepted, least of all by the survivors of the concentration camp. But it is certainly a concept that could also be interpreted as an image of a kind of peace that comes after annihilation and that can no longer be the result of negotiations between people alone but also with nature, which is becoming increasingly urgent. The image of emptiness is an image of all those who are absent, but at the same time, through their very absence, those who are present. Emptiness makes absence present and thus, in a sense, creates peace between these two states.

But emptiness is not something that in itself guarantees peace; conditions must be created for the emptiness to be inhabited by hitherto uninvited agents.

Like Hansen’s proposal, emptiness is the theme of Reflecting Absence, the national 9/11 memorial at Ground Zero in New York City, designed by Israeli-American architect Michael Arad in collaboration with landscape architect Peter Walker.

Here, too, the emptiness of the footprints of the Twin Towers is juxtaposed with nature – a forest of oak trees symbolizing life and rebirth. The designers intended this forest to be enjoyed by tourists as well as workers from the surrounding offices. The memorial is a kind of centrepiece of the new World Trade Center, which, according to Daniel Libeskind’s master plan, will eventually be surrounded by six towers dedicated to world trade, symbolizing the indestructible power of the American state and economy.⁷ In such a void, there is surely no room left for the other and the different.

We can only guess what aesthetic solution, if any, will commemorate those who have died in the void created by the Israeli bombardment of Gaza.

What image of peace will accompany the end of this tragedy?

Is peace even possible after genocide?

Wars and genocides are a constant part of human history, and it is as if we have learned nothing from them. What makes all wars alike is that the suffering and social problems continue for decades even after a peace agreement has been made. In a recent interview, Lana Bastašić, a Bosnian writer living in Germany, linked her experience of the Bosnian war to the current siege of Gaza. She does not believe that peace is possible after ethnic cleansing. “Bosnia is still deeply divided. People can’t agree on what to call the language they speak. War criminals are venerated on all sides. Bosnia’s brain drain grows every year. Traumatized children have become traumatized adults, unable to find work or access decent healthcare”. Anyone in Germany today who supports the Palestinians who are suffering a fate in Gaza similar to that of the Muslims in Srebrenica is in danger, suggests Bastašić, of being branded an anti-Semite. Many cultural events featuring Palestinian artists have been cancelled or postponed in Germany since 7 October.

⁷ Daniel Libeskind is a Polish-American architect, artist, professor and set designer. One of his most famous works is the Jewish Museum in Berlin, which opened in 2001.

“Yet while artists and writers are cancelled for their alleged anti-Semitism, real neo-Nazism is on the rise, with the far-right party AfD (Alternative for Germany) winning local elections and mainstream politicians floating the idea of doing deals with them”.⁸

At the same time, the far right in Germany has also usurped the dove as a symbol of peace and advocates for peace between Russia and Ukraine in the service of pro-Putin politics. Yet, the situation is even more complex when the peace dove, or indeed any call for peace regardless of its political or ideological provenance, is instantly labelled pro-Putin as well.

How can peace regain its value in such an atmosphere? Is it even possible to have an image that does not run the risk of becoming an instrument of manipulation?

One possible answer lies in the open structure of the artwork, which today can serve as a space for various live encounters. In his work *Remembering and Forgetting* (2020), which deals with the fate of the Jožef Plečnik Stadium (1923–1940) in Ljubljana, the Slovenian artist Jože Barši, like Hansen’s proposal based on his theory of Open Form, creates space not only between people and their memories but also between species.⁹ He touches on two different wars: the war between capital and social interests and the cultural war. The owner of the collapsing Plečnik Stadium wants to turn the stadium into a profitable business, while the interest of the people from the neighbourhood is to keep the green spaces around the stadium for their own use. During the fifteen years of debates about its fate, the stadium has been overgrown with grass, in which Jože Barši sees particular beauty, and he proposes to leave the inside of the stadium wild and overgrown, limiting human interference to minimal renovation. Barši’s art installation includes a photograph of the overgrown stadium and documents from the stadium’s history, including a photograph of the oath taken by the Slovenian Home Guard, under the command of General Leon Rupnik, on Adolf Hitler’s birthday in 1944. Soon after the war, Leon Rupnik, a staunch anti-communist and anti-Semite, was sentenced to death and executed. More than seven decades later, Slovenia’s Supreme Court overturned Rupnik’s sentence and sent the case back to the trial court. Rupnik’s story is just another chapter revealing the deep divide between the descendants of the left and right in the countries, defined as a cultural war. Barši’s installation compares this old cultural war with the antagonism between those who advocate a society of the commons and those who support neoliberal interests. He sees that all these antagonisms are about human beings, but there is always a third party of non-human actors who will solve the problems in their own way.



Plečnik's Stadium, Ljubljana, 2020. Photo: sportsport.ba.



Jože Barši, *Remembering and Forgetting*, 2020. Installation. Photo: Dejan Habicht.

8 Lana Bastašić, “I Grew Up in Bosnia, Amid Fear and Hatred of Muslims. Now I See Germany’s Mistakes over Gaza,” *The Guardian* 023 October 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/oct/23/bosnia-muslims-germany-gaza-ethnic-cleansing-palestinian>.

9 Jože Barši began his career as a sculptor in the late 1980s. In recent years, he has been engaged in the artistic transcription of books on political philosophy and art, which he processes and distributes to the public.

A similar situation, where an overgrown area in the middle of Ljubljana awaits the decision of the parties involved, can be found in the former Yugoslav People's Army Ljubo Šercer barracks. Part of this land was earmarked for a state administration building, but no building permit was ever issued. This empty land became profitable when people started mining gravel there. The two craters created as a result of this excavation have been inhabited by a group of artists, architects, biologists and designers who call themselves the Krater Collective.¹⁰ They have created their own production space, where they make paper, create objects from invasive and other wild plants, record sounds and facilitate other interspecies encounters. Peace is not only something that puts an end to territorial wars. It is also the result of negotiations around other kinds of wars that are fundamentally connected – the invisible wars that are waged between public and private interests, different histories, different cultures and different ideologies.



Krater Collective (Danica Sretenović, Gaja Mežnarić Osole, Andrej Koruza, Rok Oblak, Amadeja Smrekar, Sebastjan Kovač, Primož Turnšek, Anamari Hrup, Eva Jera Hanžek, Juan José López Díez, Louisa Selleret, Edern Haushofer, Altan Jurca Avci), *Feral Occupations*, 2023. Photo: Amadeja Smrekar

¹⁰ Krater is a transdisciplinary collective working in a crater-like construction site near the centre of Ljubljana. It is a site-specific production station that includes a papermaking workshop, a wood workshop and a myco-design lab.

If there is permanent war, there should also be permanent peace, a peace that isn't an ideal harmonious state but a state of constant negotiation that always includes those who are present in their absence. In this sense, peace doesn't come after atrocities. It isn't an absence of war. It is rather part of the same reality defined by permanent destruction.

What, then, is the most appropriate image of this kind of peace, which lives the same life as destruction?

Any image of peace can only be an image of war.

The same image can serve two completely different purposes – to manipulate and to unmask that same manipulation. We live in an age of surveillance, which is carried out using bird's-eye view images – not from the perspective of the dove of peace but from satellites and drones. A video by artist Nermin Duraković shows Mount Plješevica, where the border between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina is located.¹¹ With European Union funds, Croatia has created a void in the landscape by cutting down trees so that any migrants crossing the border will be visible from above. Duraković shot the video from a drone – i.e. with a mechanical eye – and thus provided a quasi-objective picture of reality. This image, like any image, does not mean much in itself. It is its viewers who give it meaning: some see it as an image of a forest where they can find personal peace, others as a situation they have to master and control. In Duraković's video, this image is presented as a tool of surveillance, violence, and even killing.

No image in itself can depict peace. Peace cannot be depicted. No symbol of peace has power in itself; it is an empty signifier that can be filled with contradictory content and ideologies. Peace is not a state of being. It is a process, made possible by voids in the social fabric where wild thought or wild nature can grow. Voids as symbols are only tools. For example, the Trg Republike (Square of the Republic), a vast empty space in the middle of Ljubljana, is alternately filled with national celebrations and protests. There was a time between 2020 and 2022 when protesters on bicycles against the Janez Janša government occupied the square to help overthrow the authoritarian government in Slovenia. As Lorenzetti's 14th-century fresco teaches us, peace can only come from good governance, so rulers must be constantly pressured. But today, things are very different than they were in the 14th-century Republic of Siena. Unlike the local rulers of the past, today, our rulers have become more abstract and distant, so negotiations with them must be more complex and unrelenting.

Perpetual war cannot be ended by peace negotiated between parties driven by self-interest. It can only be ended by permanent negotiations open to a third interest, a planetary interest that goes beyond the interests of capital and nationalism. It may sound paradoxical, but one more nation-state needs to be created so we can move in this direction of planetary peace, and that is a Palestinian state.

¹¹ Nermin Duraković is a visual artist, working within the field of contemporary social and politically engaged art. He was born in the former Yugoslavia and lives and works in Denmark.

Summary

The text asks what the most appropriate image of peace should be today, at a time of genocidal war so close to us. Using historical examples, the author focuses on the most enduring symbols of peace, the dove and the olive branch, which date back to early Christianity and have survived almost to the present day. The most famous depiction of the peace dove was by Pablo Picasso in 1949, and the iconic image of peace is Gerald Holtom's peace sign (1958), which was later adopted by the hippie movement.

Peace symbols carry positive messages and hence quickly become tools of manipulation.

The author then moves on to compare traditional peace symbols with the abstract image of emptiness, first depicted in this sense in Kasimir Malevich's painting Black Square (1915). Subsequently, many conceptual artists and architects – the author focuses on those from the post-Yugoslav and wider Eastern European region – have labelled this image as an open work, thus reversing the void as an image that speaks of peace only in relation to war and destruction. The main thesis of the text is that no image in itself can depict peace. Peace cannot be depicted. No symbol of peace has power in itself; it is an empty signifier that can be filled with contradictory contents and ideologies. Peace is not a state of being. It is a process made possible by the gaps in the social fabric, where wild thought or wild nature can grow as a third actor in the midst of the same matrices of antagonisms from which wars grow again and again.

REFERENCE LIST

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