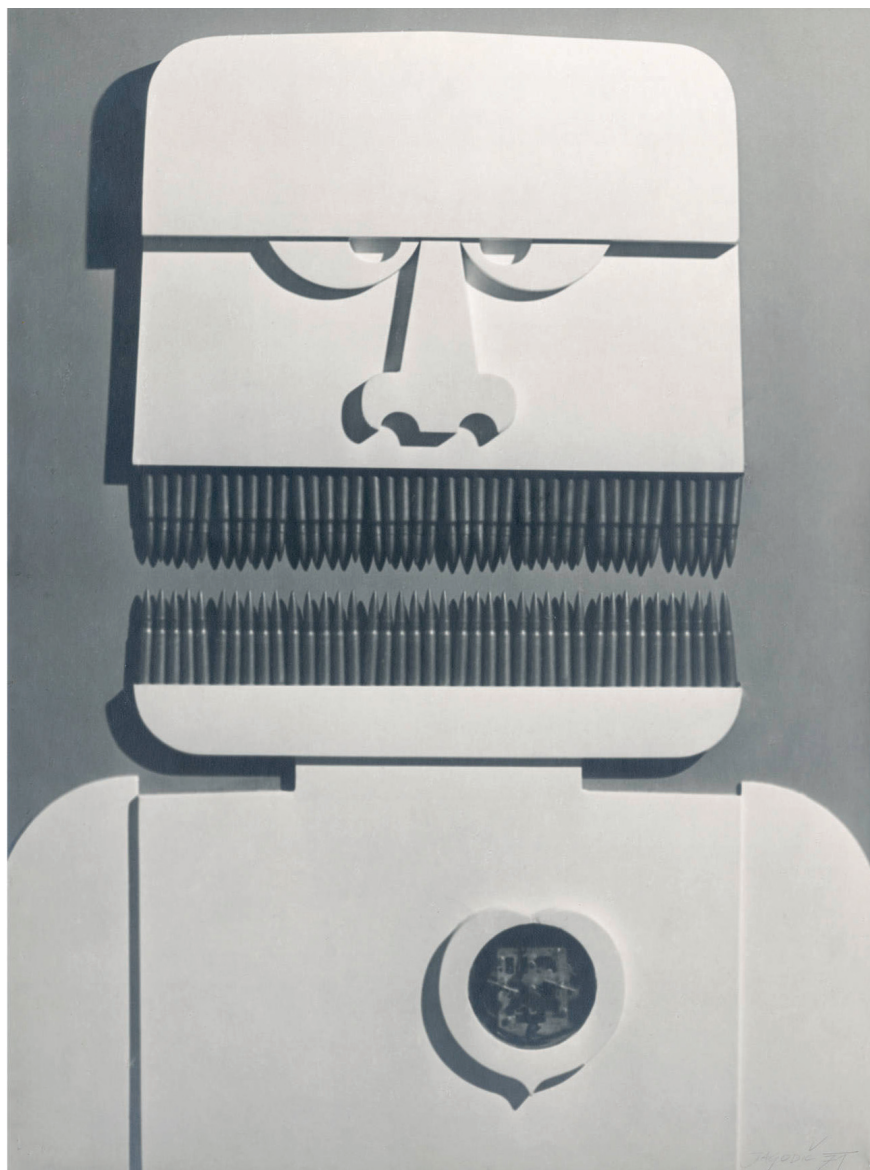


Peace Policies and Practices in Yugoslavia and Beyond



PEACE, UNCONDITIONAL!

Edited by
Sanja Petrović Todosijević and Martin Pogačar

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Belgrade, Ljubljana
2025

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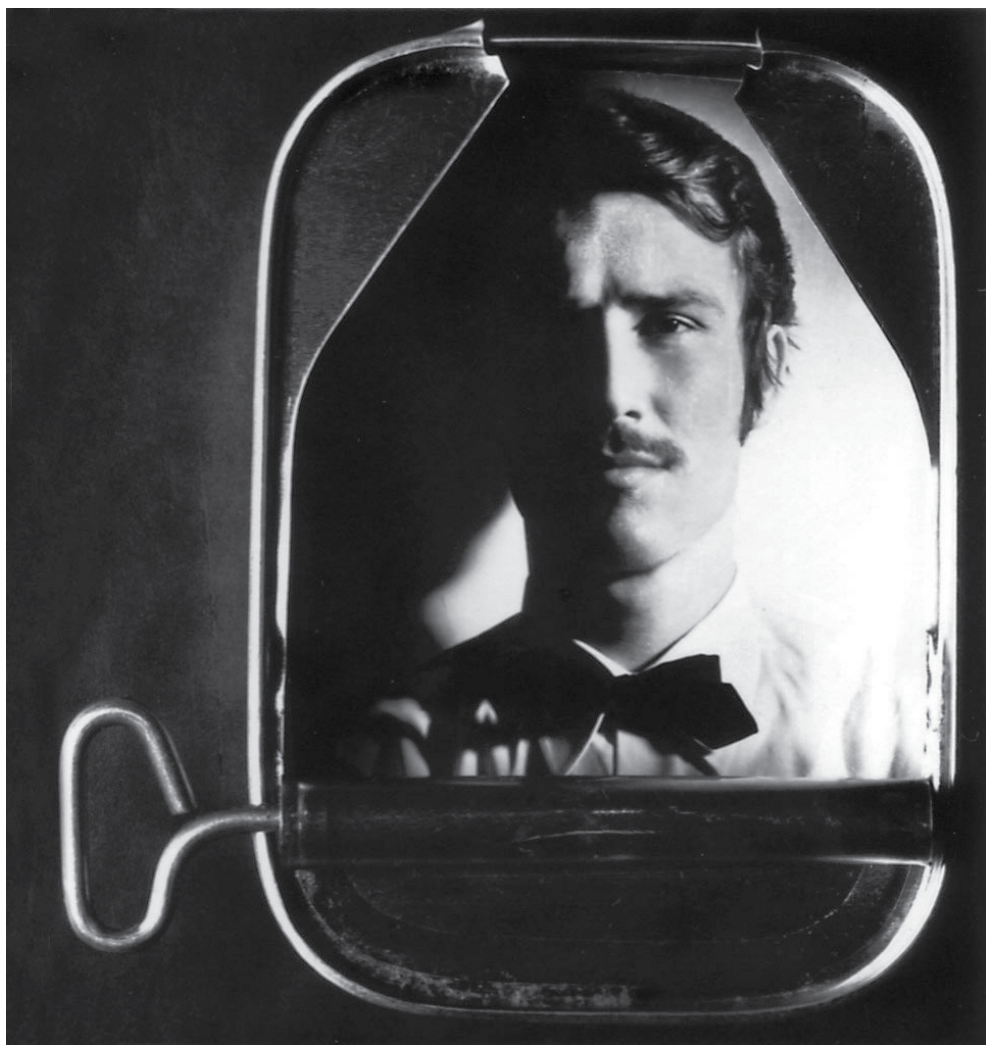
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Martin Pogačar*

Anti-Militarism in the Art of Stane Jagodič



Stane Jagodič, *Konzervirani portret SJ*, montage, 1972

Stane Jagodič is a freelance artist engaged in painting, graphics, spraygram, x-ray art, caricature, photomontage, collage, assemblage and performance; a multimedia artist and a writer.¹ Throughout his career, he has engaged with nature and ecological challenges, machines and technologies, taking a firm stance against militarisation and war. Since the early 1960s, Jagodič has dealt with and appropriated and commented on the world through binding, fusing, combining, extrapolating the visual (image and object) and the body (human and non-human). This gives his work a quality and resonance that transcend each particular space and time. Thus, starting his practice in socialist Yugoslavia and continuing in post-1991 Slovenia, his techno-critical and anti-militarist interventions are in fact a trans-historical testimony of the latter part of the 20th century. As such, his career-long critique of militarism is all the more relevant today ... in a world at the beginning of the 21st century riddled with war and conflict, a world that seems to have learned very little from the troublesome 20th century.

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* Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3818-7942>

1 "Stane Jagodič Biography Factual data * 1943," <https://stane-jagodic.com/Biography>. Since the early 1970s, Jagodič produced numerous works, many in cycles: Tinned Laughter, Captured Dimension, Mirror of the Absurd, Symbol of Existence, Injured Organism, Zoo Poetics, Eco End, Magic Panorama, Panta Rhei, Power of Energy, Worshipper of Light, Poetry of Light and X-Ray Art. In the second half of the 1970s and later, other cycles followed: Silver Horizon, Steel Horizon, Magic Core, Mirror Design, Mail Art Satire, Metamorphosis Veneris, Horizon of Rust, Satirical Homage to 1985, Graphisms of Plasters, Anatome-Secare, Art Paradox, Good morning, Mr Orwell!, Technicos Poeticus, Zoo Poetics.

Jagodič was the initiator and cofounder of the group of artists Grupa Junij (June Group), an international fine art movement active in 1970–1985.² The group was oriented towards engaged social, political and technological critique, and their exhibitions were “outcries against: the ecological crisis, against the deformity of contemporary saturated urbanism, alienation, consumerism, the obliteration of values, bureaucratism, reactionary tendencies, the threat of the militarization of society, the division of the world in power blocs, imperialism, hegemony, racism”.³

The approach was framed in the Group’s Manifesto:

NEW MEDIA . BREAKING DOWN BORDERS AMONG DIFFERENT
TECHNIQUES AND GENRES . EMPHASIS ON NEW SENSITIVITIES .
UNCONVENTIONAL INTERVENTIONS INTO URBAN AREAS
AND LANDSCAPE . NEW EVALUATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT,
THE NAKED HUMAN BODY . EXPLORING THE PSYCHE OF
MODERN MAN AND SOCIETY . PENETRATIONS INTO UNKNOWN
DIMENSIONS OF THE MACRO AND MICROCOSMOS .

The protest and engagement part of the exhibition echoes like a CRY against the ecological crisis, the deformation of the contemporary saturated urbanism, alienation, consumerism, the annihilation of values, bureaucracy, reactionary tendencies, the threat of militarisation, bloc division of the world, imperialism, hegemony, racism, and evil of any kind. [...] The interwoven spiritual, ideological and technical orientations are logical results of life and the world with all its laws: birth – life – death / nostalgia – contemporary commitment – visionary spirit / real – surreal – abstract / micro – man – macro.⁴

This laid the foundation of his work in which, according to art historian Lev Menaše, it is possible to observe a “type of abstraction, or rather, synthesis which takes him along the inevitable path of artistic logic to absolute symbols”.⁵ At that, his ideas are based “on a philosophical and humanistic knowledge of the world and influenced by socio-political circumstances at home and abroad. [...] As a humanist he has always been sensitive to

human relationships. His creativity then is a response to numerous impulses and expressions of our technically absurd and consumerist-driven world”.⁶

In this context, the fusion of ecological and anti-militarist critique in the context of techno-reflexivity demonstrates the admiration of the machinic and the technical, in both their visual and material aspects, as well as in their radical entanglement with the present-day social and political conditions. Yet, it also emanates a critical awareness of the potential effects of “careless control exercised over dangerous devices that have the potential to wreak both individual and mass destruction”.⁷ Not least – and this is also one of the reasons for including his work in this volume, Jagodič has consistently opposed “fear-mongering perpetrated by militants who are visibly losing any sense of ethical and moral values, values that have been constructed and enriched over thousands of years”.⁸

✱

Jagodič’s artistic path began in the midst of the Cold War, at the time of the Vietnam War and the decolonial struggles in a number of Global South countries with which Yugoslavia was connected through participation in the Non-Aligned Movement. His life (and) work are (is) thus coterminous with an increasing awareness of human impact on the environment, giving rise to a number of ecological initiatives and movements in both the socialist East and capitalist West.⁹

His anti-war works thematise the First and the Second World Wars, the Middle Eastern crises, the wars in the Balkans, Slovenian independence and the war in Ukraine. The *Tinned Time* series (1971–1992), for example, is situated in the post-WWII period that paradoxically bore the promise of a better tomorrow and was at the same time riddled with existential exigencies, perpetual conflict and echoes and very material consequences of the impending ecological crisis. It comprises 24 photomontages and collages that take the tin can in its metallic, techno-industrial, as well as metaphorical capacity to comment on or critique the present. According to art historian Aaron Scharf, the tin can “holds a special fascination for Jagodič. Used symbolically, it seems an appropriate metaphor for imprisonment, regimentation, and release. In sardine tins we find an extravagantly chimerical variety of objects and physiological fragments: an eye, tearful, with a menacing fork beside the open tin”.¹⁰

2 “Stane Jagodič Biography Factual data * 1943,”

3 Jože Volčand, “The Painful and Proud Adherence to Art,” in *Stane Jagodič*, 7.

4 “Grupa Junij (June Group) Factual Data, Letters to Junij Group,” <https://www.stane-jagodic.com/Grupa-Junij-Factual-data>.

5 Lev Menaše, “The Opus of Stane Jagodič, 1959–1989,” in *Stane Jagodič*, eds. Lev Menaše, Drago Medved, Danilo Domajnko, Greta Jagodič, Stane Jagodič (Zagreb: Globus, 1989), 8.

6 “Stane Jagodič Biography Factual data * 1943.”

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 The Club of Rome published the Limits to Growth report in 1972, <https://www.library.dartmouth.edu/digital/digital-collections/limits-growth>; see also Rudi Supek, *Ova jedina Zemlja* (Zagreb: Globus, 1969).

10 Aaron Scharf, “Mocking at the Vulnerability of Mankind,” in *Stane Jagodič*, 15.

The series and the works can be read in terms of Jagodič's anti-militarist and ecological stance, foregrounding the issue of war and violence, a commentary on the global situation, indicating the shortage of food and the prominence of armed conflicts amounting to a critique of political and economic priorities, all the more relevant today when the recently agreed increase in bomb-spending actually frames the ensuing radical militarisation of planetary society on account of sustaining life. What is more, the very use of the tin can, an industrial object symbolically related both to army diet and conquest as well as to the starving and the victims of armed conflicts, frames a commentary on the relationship between the dispossessed, the soldiers and the marginalized. As such, this relationship references the opacity of regimes of power and subjugation in everyday life and the related fact that military and political domains rely on the idea of disposal (to be at disposal and the very disposability) of life. In this sense, the tin can as an industrial object used in Jagodič's art further alludes to the industrialization of killing, an echo of the Second World War, the challenges of decolonial and anti-imperialist struggles and a premonition of future violence and death.

What is more, if the essential metaphorical quality of the tin can is taken into account – when the can is opened, the magic of expectation is gone – the assemblage becomes even blunter: once the war starts, it cannot easily be contained: instead, much like everything we touch, after opening the can is covered in oil, and everything that war touches upon is covered in blood.



In this light, Jagodič's anti-militarist artwork reflects his "desire to symbolically express the world of imagination nurtured on reality"¹¹ and indeed frames a broader commentary on socio-political processes and phenomena, from war and militarization to suffering and joy and back, again, to war. Jagodič's art is thus akin to, as author and journalist Franc Šetinc noted, a "philosophical idea which says that people take themselves up human dimensions, by not reducing people to things, but changing objects in nature into their own objects, humanly created and formed".¹²

Jagodič's anti-militarist artworks – into the predicament of entrapment of the human in an over-technologized, over-industrialized and increasingly over-militarized world – articulate a singular yet networked perspective on the question of war and peace. At the same time, they allude (and have for a long time) to the need to overcome the conditioning of the techno-political and military-industrial complex of life on the planet, riddled with antagonistic, agonistic, ambiguous contradictions. As such, the artist's antimilitarism is a call for peace.

¹¹ Lee Sung Man "Today's True Illustrator," in *Stane Jagodič*, 17.

¹² Franc Šetinc, "Stepping Down from Olympus to the People," in *Stane Jagodič*, 25.

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