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N . E . W . S .

INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION
UNDER THE TACHANKA PRINCIPLE

Ēriks Božis

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born in 1969 in Liepāja, lives and works in Liepāja/Latvia

Education

1989-93 Applied Art College, Liepāja, Latvia.

Solo Exhibitions

1996 'Booklet' Gallery M6, Riga.

1995 'Telpa un ...' (Space And ...) Club 'Andaluzijas suns', Riga.

1995 '1:1' Club 'Slepenais experiments', Riga.

Selected Group Exhibitions

1998 'Moderna Museet Projekt' City space, Stockholm.

1998 'Manifesta 2' Luxembourg.

1998 'Bīvē upē' Gallery „NOAH”, Riga.

1998 'Ventspils. Tranzīts. Terminals' The 6 annual Soros Center for Contemporary Arts Riga

Exhibition sketches, City space Ventspils/ Latvia.

1998 The Second General Latvian Art exhibition, State Museum of Art, Riga.

1997 'Opera' The 5th annual Soros Center for Contemporary Arts

Riga exhibition, Latvian Daile Theatre, Riga.

1996 'Art GENDA 96' Young Artists' Biennial. Oksnehallen, Copenhagen.

1996 'Geo Geo' the 4th Annual Soros Center for Contemporary Arts Riga exhibition, Pedvāle Art Park, Sabīle

1996 'Survival' Rauma Biennial Balticum '96. City space, Rauma/Finland

1996 'Personal Time. Art of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania 1945-1996' Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, Central Exhibition Hall Manezh, St.Petersburg.

1996 'Multilingual Landscapes' the 4th Annual Soros Center for Contemporary Arts Vilnius

Exhibition Contemporary Art Center, Vilnius.

1995 'Kalācojums' Memorial Museum of Eduards Veidenbaums 'Kalāči', Liepa Village/Latvia

1995 'Pedvālisms' Pedvāle Art Park, Sabīle/Latvia

1995 'Monument' the 3rd annual Soros Center for Contemporary Art Riga exhibition. - City space of Riga, Museum of Photography, Riga

1995 'Farm' Rainis Museum of Literature and Art, Riga

1994 'State' the 2nd annual Soros Center for Contemporary Arts Riga exhibition. Museum of Art 'Arsenals', Riga.

1992/93 Exhibition of Latvian Photography 'Stepping out of Line'. University of Millersville, Philadelphia Art Alliance; University of Southern Maine, Portland; International Images Gallery, Pittsburgh; Silvermine Guild Arts Center, New Cannan/USA

In the vestibule on the second floor of the National Museum in Riga, as part of the World-wide Latvian Art Exhibition, Ēriks Božis' installation was exhibited. It was a line of eleven 50 cm high even-sided white cartons. In the middle, were two named entrances, marked by pointers, with very different rhythmical opening and closing movements. One entrance was designated for the museum's visitors, the other for 'invisible people'. The title seems fitting for the artist, remembering how he introduced himself to the current art scene.

Božis burst on the scene with momentum and conviction, when he first took part in the 2nd Annual Contemporary Art Exhibition 'Valsts' in 1994, organised by the Soros Center for Contemporary Arts in Riga. The unknown artist from Liepāja astounded his colleagues and the general public alike with his installation; a diptych called *Distance*. The first part of the work was a photograph of the Art Museum 'Arsenal's' exhibition hall, devoid of art, completely empty. The second part consisted of a magnifying glass, that allowed the viewer to examine this - with your feet in the air... He made a similar work for the Rauma biennial, when he placed magnifying glasses at a shopping centre. The new perspective altered people's view of a familiar place. Similar works with same basic concept were exhibited at the show 'Personal Time' in Warsaw and St.Petersburg.

It would appear that Božis and his contemporaries, Mikelis Fišers, Gints Gabrāns, Guntis Grabovskis; Andris Fridbergs have truly succeeded in making a radical break through in Latvian art. These artists have perhaps succeeded because of their choice to work with succinct maximum simplicity (minimalism). In their view, a work must be brought closer to its natural conclusion, enriched with documentary precision and social interaction. A most striking example of this 'social interaction' can be seen in Gints Gabrāns installation *Nazis, ar ko sev sagriezt dirsu (A knife with which to slash your arse)* presented at Brinku Estate in Pedvāle and later exhibited in Szczecin at the 'Baltic IKONOPRESS'97'. In the Pedvāle exhibition, the work inspired an anonymous viewer to add his or her own drawings and writings to the walls of Gabrāns installation.

Ēriks Božis is another of the most radical representatives of this type of art. Using a variety of objects, in spaces and fragments, he not only uses materials to examine society's psychology, society's attitude to today's art, but he also presents this as art. 'The Invisible' incorporated such things as a telephone booth. The artist accomplishes a minimal correction to objects by altering certain details of fragments of these objects. Božis likes to observe and predict the observer's reactions (because, as he says 'I like things that work with time'). He declares, that what are most important are those few seconds when the observer notices the difference, takes a good look, and this becomes the reason why his work is created at all.

Božis' work is usually totally integrated into the environment, but still retains its power. At the National Museum of Art in Riga, a dramatically contrasting version was shown. Then the background (and what a background!) was consequently forgotten, ignored, and even with denial, the observer was offered the possibility of a dialogue. As Božis says, 'the invisible person's idea gives the space a mystic atmosphere'.

This ironic attitude and distancing, characteristic in Božis' work actually could be considered as a symptom of contemporary Latvian art, indeed of the international style. As he says, the past is to be regarded as 'the dinosaur time in art'. Although the world famous 'dinosaurs' like, Robert Rauschenberg, Frank Stella, Tony Cragg, Bruce Nauman, Christo (yes, really! what would be more magnificent that wrapping the Reichstag!), are still alive. One should also remember how radically the historical situation and society's mood has changed. Ah! Forget about the rest of world (Latvia exemplifies these recent changes! 'The moral code' established in Soviet times and representing cultivated society, however, has as yet has not been replaced with something equally noble and positive. 'The dangerous enemy' - the capitalist, has become the best (most trusted?) friend. The young artist has no alternative but to capture the quickly changing tempo, at the same time retaining the possibility of distancing his or herself.

As artist says himself, he likes 'minimal and gentle movements'. Perhaps by this statement he is looking for a way of protecting himself against the 'dinosaurs' and simultaneously the authorities of Latvian art. He suggests that 'now you must make small movements, so the sudden or unexpected result will be given an artistic status'. He is convinced that 'a big part of the feel or art is there, where maximum energy is applied, so that the result could be minimally recognised'. Božis maintains 'I work with millimetres'. I think that this superficial view testifies to the fact that there is a border between, that which has been, and that which is now. So Božis 'invisible person' actually makes not only 'an extension of space' (as Solvita Krese said of his work in the European Contemporary Art Biennial, Manifesta 2, but also offers the possibility of an 'extension of time.'

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Installation at The Rauma Biennale
Balticum, 1996

A new version - the next stage of 'invisible person stories' has been made for N.E.W.S. Ēriks Božis concept is to make an installation that will be shown at a Concert Hall. Two bases and a horizontal bar will be placed on the stage. Before the camera are the fixed motions of some person, but since the image was made using infrared film we can only see on the monitor these movements as shadows or silhouettes. The title of this installation is *The invisible person takes a risk*. The piece has been made to show the contrast between the space where it will be exhibited and almost unseen motions. The space itself seems to be ignorant of the work, even it is in front of the spectators, because it is hard to recognise something fixed on infrared film. Here are Božis' 'minimal and gentle movements' protecting one's person in a maximum effort to stay invisible. The greatest effort is needed to keep one's balance on the bar but who would believe this attempt is so invisible? There is an irony mixed with some desperate hopelessness but balance has been maintained. Božis himself takes the risk of questioning contemporary society's perceptions of trust, belief, and hope. As a true representative of his generation he wants to show his own doubts through a high level irony and as he always loves to remind us in 'millimetres' or 'invisibility'.

I believe that even being invisible Ēriks Božis work could reach any viewer. Everyone has had a similar experience when his or her efforts have been ignored or not fully appreciated. In spite of this, people are still prepared to take risks. I think that Božis' ironic manner provides a new perspective on a well-known, even banal, subject. Perhaps today an invisible reality might be more attractive and effective than the existing and observable, because artificial conditions provide stimulation for the spectator's imagination. Given this I hope that the viewer will be able to recognise Božis' originality and entry into contemporary art. The rest - as the artist wants, will be done in time. It should be remembered that the artist has a right not to announce his usual arrival time. This is a minimal result for which maximum effort and strength have been exerted to remain invisible.

Irēna Buzinska



Invisible person (detail), State Museum of Arts, Riga, 1998



Installation at 'Manifesta 2', Luxembourg, 1998