

# "I am Jugoslovenka!": Feminist performance politics during and after Yugoslav Socialism

Jasmina Tumbas, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022  
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It is not too often an art historical monograph achieves a comprehensive and engaging marriage of social, political, and cultural contexts. Jasmina Tumbas's book "*I am Jugoslovenka!*", achieves not only this, but also successfully incorporates the intersections of gender and the LGBTQ community. This is

accomplished by means of thorough analysis and case study spanning from the 1970s to the contemporary in the former Yugoslavia. Situated within the Manchester University Press *Rethinking Art's Histories* series, "*I am Jugoslovenka!*" realises this series's aim in progressing past conventional retellings of art history, to advance a

history beyond the limitations of era or location (Manchester University Press).

An Assistant Professor in the Department of Global Gender and Sexuality Studies, Tumbas's monograph builds on her own research and interests in feminist histories of performance, as well as gender, sexuality and contemporary art activism in Eastern Europe (University of Buffalo, NY). Tumbas's work on feminist performance and experimental art in Yugoslavia has been published in journals including *Art Monthly* and *Art in America*. Her upcoming work, *Feminists of the Yugoslav Diaspora: Art and Resistance Beyond Citizenship and Nationhood*, is highly anticipated.

*"I am Jugoslovenka!"* centres around the demographic and identity of the *Jugoslovenka*, or "Yugoslav woman, a term that encompasses multiple generations of women who lived under or were born during Yugoslavia socialism, a multinational and multiethnic state based on the promotion of the unification of South Slav people."

(Tumbas 2022, p.5). Tumbas's work connects these women through their emancipatory performances, which intersect heavily with politics, the avant-garde, and queer communities and practice primarily from the 1980s to contemporary activist art in the former Yugoslav. This work contributes to new historical understanding through its rereading of the body in performance and site-specific art in relation to Yugoslavian socialism. Tumbas links this to a political ideology interrogated through feminist histories, antifascism and resistance during and after World War II (Tumbas 2022). Tumbas successfully demonstrates the role of feminist performance as a brand of Yugoslavian socialism, and in doing so unveils a deeper and more intricate context for art historical feminist performance, specific to and situated in Eastern Europe.

Tumbas details this history and analysis through the five chapters of *"I am Jugoslovenka!"* which lead the reader on a journey of social, political, cultural and gendered exploration of

performance. The monograph relies on a methodology of correspondence, interviews, and case studies, accomplished through author analysis. In the first chapter, Tumbas chronologically details the avant-garde art circles within Yugoslavian major cities from the 1970s and 1980s. In doing so she selects a number of artworks which illustrate the rich feminist history of resistance and performance art, particularly performance concerning and centred around the body of the artist.

The second chapter takes a more direct approach to this history through a focus on three seminal Yugoslovenka: Lepa Brena, Esmā Redžepova, and Marina Abramović. These artists have independent relationships with the political, social, and cultural emancipation of Yugoslavia, which is explored through their personal histories and performance works.

Chapter three focuses on queer Yugoslovenka, and provides a novel reading of the intersections and complexities of gender, sexuality, activism and performance.

Tumbas furthers this exploration through a concentration on the queer and transgender resistance not only in art, but in life in urban and rural Yugoslavia.

Chapter four examines a number of collective groups of artists which emerged and were active in Yugoslavia in the 1980s. This includes Tumbas's rereading of the male-dominated *Neue Slowenische Kunst* (New Slovenian Art, NSK), through a feminist lens and critique of the collective and specific works performed (Tumbas, 2022). A subgroup of this collective, the *Gledališče Sester Scipion Nasice* (Scipion Nasice Sisters Theater), and one of its founders, Eda Čufer, also find their place in this chapter. Here, Tumbas explores the role of the women in these subgroups and provides a nuanced insight into feminine spirituality acting as a form of resistance to Yugoslavian nationalism (Tumbas 2022).

Chapter five investigates the impact of the Yugoslav wars, particularly how these events influenced feminism and shifted political and nationalistic ideologies

from the 1990s onwards. This is achieved through case studies of artists whose performance work is emblematic of the struggles and issues which were present in the post-Yugoslav. For these Jugoslovenka, the post-war shift and its associated creation of a neoliberal space were paramount to the progression of feminist performance.

Through the case studies of emancipatory performance provided, the reader is introduced to electrifying artists, collectives and performances, presented through a feminist lens. The reader, captured by the allure of this history, may find the only shortcoming of this book linked to a desire for this history, and the intoxicating performance case studies contained within this volume, to continue. The scope of this monograph has similar limitations, principally present in the constraint of the monograph's size, which places restrictions on the number of artists and movements included in the author's investigation. With these limitations in mind, there is sure to be further

interest and anticipation for Tumbas's upcoming publications and a hope for a continued link between the history of the Jugoslovenka and contemporary artists of the former Yugoslav.

*"I am Jugoslovenka!"* is a cohesive and original work which accomplishes a championing of Jugoslovenka feminist legacy, a legacy and a history of work which has at times been overlooked and erased. Tumbas's work is well-written and accessible to readers, chronicling the rise and fall of nationalism and its socialist impacts and ideologies in Yugoslavia. This monograph is aimed at readers interested in art historical and performance studies, as well as readers with interests in the intersections of feminist, geopolitical, sociocultural and queer studies. *"I am Jugoslovenka!"* hereby goes beyond a work solely aimed at members of the academic community. Rather, Tumbas's voice, the narratives, themes and stories explored in this work leads readers of all backgrounds and interests through a captivating story

of feminist and queer performance -  
ultimately calling us all to engage  
with and dream to be Jugoslovenka!

## **Bibliography**

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