



PRESS RELEASE

Hay, straw. Artworks in landscape, and natural processes in art

Opening: **May 29 at 5 PM**, sound performance event, with the participation of hay and straw, by **Martin Janíček**.

The exhibition introduces land-art based works that use natural processes, reflect on changes of the environment, or make subtle interventions in the landscape. The title comes from the legendary 1969 exhibition *Seno-sláma (Hay-straw)*, by one of the presented artists Zorka Ságlová, in which she filled in the spaces of the Špála gallery in Prague with packages of hay and straw. These, as well as other “poor” materials that are available in fields or woods – clay, leaves, grass, stones, or wood – are used by most of the artists in the exhibition. The presented artworks were at the time driven by the specific political context influencing its character and acceptance. This development was parallel with the more international land art movement in the West. In Central Europe though, it gained a different format with rather intimately conceived events aimed at a small circle of fellow artists or allied curators. Only years later it became known from the documentation (photographs, exceptionally also film), nowadays almost the only source left. The movement was never a coherent group of artists with a strict program. They were also related to action art, happening, or body art.

The exhibition focuses on the artworks made from the 1960s till the 1980s, some of them connected with Vysočina region: **Ivan Kafka** made his installations at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s in the surroundings of Branišov near Jihlava; the activities of **Vladimír Havlík** took place in the 1980s in the Žďársko area; the event *Pocta jasným hvězdám (A tribute to bright stars)* by **Olaf Hanel** was realized at Melechov hill by Světlá nad Sázavou; **Zorka Ságlová** was born in Humpolec. Landscape based art in Slovakia had similar features, and included ritualized events in nature or various recordings of observed natural processes. In Slovakia, ecology was reflected more explicitly, also in the works by **Peter Bartoš**, **Michal Kern**, and **Jana Želibská**. Apart from the artists from the former Czechoslovakia, Polish artist **Teresa Murak** is also included. She is the author of poetic events that often involve a process of growth; she works with seeds of fast germinating cress, with leaven, or river mud. This will be the first presentation of the artist in the Czech Republic. The eight chosen artists represent different approaches to landscape, and their work is also a starting point for reflection on the relevance of land for current today.

EXHIBITING ARTISTS:

Ivan Kafka (CZ)

Ivan Kafka situated his first landscape installations in the surrounding of the family residency in the rectory in Branišov. Until 1981 he has been working mostly on realizations in nature which can be perceived in connection to land art. New spatial situations were created by putting objects in the landscape. In the early events he used wind sleeves (*Tale about Folding, Flapping, Raising*, 1975-76). At the turn of the 1970s and 1980s he often worked with the shape of a cube. In the *Untitled Cycle* (1979-80) the cubes were made from various materials – stones, straw, snow, branches, ice, leaves, or sand. The cycle *Delimitation - Trunks* (1979) is based on the contrast of trees in a birch tree grove and the structure of a duralumin cube. Another shift in his work emerged from re-assembling slabs of clay cut away, in a field by a plough (*Assembled reflection*, 1982-83). The author documented the works himself, trying to make the most neutral photo registration.

Vladimír Havlík (CZ)

Vladimír Havlík began to realize his events in the Vysočina region where he was born, (mostly around the villages Dalečín and Nyklovice), around 1978 and 1979. Most of them were of a solitary character, but at the same time they attempting a dialogue, with an ironic undertone. The performances in natural environments can be seen as land art, and at the same time they almost always include the work with body. In *Attempt to Sleep* (1982) the author submerged himself in a piece of meadow, in a desire to blend with nature. Often the artist created lines and geometric shapes in nature, using a black and white contrast (white lines on a field, a black square on snow, etc.). The event *Fires on the River* (1981) consisted in burning fires and torches on stone cairns and on rafts on the Svratka river. During the happening *Wedding* (1982), a wedding ceremony for a tall pine tree and a young birch took place.

Olaf Hanel (CZ)

In 1945 the family of Olaf Hanel moved to Vysočina, first to Havlíčkův Brod and later to Světlá nad Sázavou. Since the 1960s Hanel organized a number of happenings in the landscape like *Blue bags in colza* (1965) or *Uniting of Seine and Sázava* (1967). Hanel was a member of an art group called *Křižovnická škola čistého humoru bez vtípu*. In spring 1972 he organized a fire performance *A Tribute to bright stars* on the Melechov hill near Světlá. In autumn of the same year he made a performance in the swamped quarry near Lipnice nad Sázavou – *The burn-out of the pond of František Chramza and sons (Planetarium)*. Hanel dedicated himself also to drawing, painting, and – especially after his emigration to Canada at the end of the 1970s – three dimensional objects from meshwork. Some of his objects were realized in the Scottish Highlands.

Teresa Murak (PL)

One of the early Polish land artists presents her work in the Czech Republic for the first time. In contrast to the Czech artists at the show, she deals directly with living material and works with natural growth. Since the beginning of the 1970s she has been using cress, in Poland taken as a symbol of rebirth and connected with the Easter festivities. Fast germinating cress was used for cultivating on the various materials in the Sowing (*Zasiew*) cycles: she literally grows the dress which she wears during her performances (*Procesja*, 1974), cress covered an Easter carpet (*Dywan Wielkanocny*, 1974), or she lets it germinate in her own palm. In the following works the author used leaven, river mud, or handmade paper. The works by Teresa Murak take place predominantly in the city, and deal with the relationship of the natural process with the human body and the social organism of the city. A certain ceremonial character and a strong ecological and ethical undertone are typical.

Jana Želibská (SK)

In the 1960s, Jana Želibská's performances involved art interventions. Though her work is rather solitary, she has been active in organizing unofficial art events. The collective happening *Wedding of Spring* (1970) is a celebration of spring and a ritual of adolescence. In the following events she used the seeds of plants, mud and sculptural objects from organic materials. The gender subject is noticeable in her whole work that can be read in the context of eco-feminism. The installation *A piece of land* (1974) relates to the basic sexual signs; in the work *The grass taken in the place A grows in the place B in a given shape* (1981) she replanted grass into a wooden rhombus-shaped form. The installation *Breasts (Stones)* is formed by stone stacks with golden "nipples" on top. The motives of a rhombus-shaped womb and female breasts are part of the artist's typical symbolism and reappears in her later work, in which she dedicates herself more to video and installation art.

Michal Kern (SK)

The work by Michal Kern is connected to his family residency in the former mill in Močiary in the Low Tatras, though he kept close contacts with Bratislava's unofficial art community. He exhibited in Jihlava already in 1969 with the *Klub konkrétistů* group. He followed the conceptual and action art, and at the same time he worked with the direct inspiration from nature. Diary recordings and sketches are important components of his work. Natural space was confronted with geometric shapes and reflective surfaces, showing sometimes only shadow of objects. Kern conceived his events in nature as a form of protest, commenting on the destruction of the environment, and reacting to the situation in his immediate surroundings (e.g. inundation of the villages due to the construction of a reservoir). He was one of the participants of *Terrains*, which were unofficial action art symposia organized in Slovakia since 1982.

Peter Bartoš (SK)

Peter Bartoš distanced himself radically from his education as a painter, and began to deal with conceptual art. He uses mainly drawings in the form of recordings of real or fictional segments of landscape, as well as reclamation projects accompanied with text. He makes land art and zoo art interventions, and belongs to the first Slovak artists who since the end of the 1960s performed activities in nature. His recurrent theme – apart from the breeding of pigeons – is above all the landscape adaptation of various parts of Bratislava, especially the zoo, where he used to work for a long time (*Zoo – a continuous landscape concept*), and of the areas under the castle or city parks. In *Ecological solution in the city* (1978) he deals with the ecological reclamation of various areas in Slovakia. In his drawings-proposals he critically comments on the current state, calls for the protection of the landscape and monuments, and proposes new solutions, often with an idealistic character.

Zorka Ságlová (CZ)

The work of the Humpolec-born artist comes back to Jihlava after almost fifty years. Zorka Ságlová exhibited in the Gallery of Vysočina already in 1966. In August 1969 she made the exhibition *Hay-Straw* in Václav Špála gallery in Prague, in which she transferred rural work into a gallery space. In one room she put packages of straw and dried alfalfa, and in the other hay, that was being spread around by a group of participants while the rock music records played on. A ban on exhibiting followed for her. Ságlová dedicated herself to happenings in the countryside shortly between 1969 and 1972. At the beginning of March 1970 the *Tribute to Gustav Obermann* was staged in Bransoudov near Humpolec. After sundown, a group of participants set bags filled with jute on fire, on the snowy plains. It was a location where at onetime pagan rituals had been held. This was intertwined by the story about a shoemaker, who used to throw fire balls in the fields as a protest against the German occupation. The same year Ságlová organized *Laying Napkins near Sodoměř*. 700 white squares were placed on a field where a Hussite battle had taken place. The action was related to a protest from Hussite women who tried to prevent the knights on horses from trespassing, but also it contained references to female work in general, as well as to the homely activity of the artist herself and her care about a little daughter at that time.

EXHIBITION *Hay, straw. Works in landscape and natural processes in art* / May 29 – August 24
SYMPOZIUM *Alfalfa = Artists + [Landscape + Fields + Agriculture]* / June 19, 2014, 11 AM – 5 PM

ACCOMPANYING PROGRAMS:

Pilgrimage through Železné hory (from Ronov nad Doubravou to Kameničky) July 21 – 23
Posedy, hunters and animal paths (KRA, Hranice u Malče) August 18 – 24

The project is realized in cooperation with The Bratislava City Gallery and Labirynt Gallery in Lublin, and with the support of International Visegrad Fund (<http://visegradfund.org/>) and Polish Institute in Prague.

Oblastní galerie Vysočiny v Jihlavě, Komenského 10 (<http://www.ogv.cz/alfa/>)