“Adventure of Dissidence”
Between Channels
Biennial of Dissent ‘77
Archives in Translation
Exhibition in Kumu Art Museum
14 September – 11 November 2007

Maria-Kristiina Soomre
“Adventure of dissidence” between channels
Excerpt from the newspaper „Sirp ja Vasar” No 51 (1774), 23 December 1977

More than a month has passed since the opening of the “dissidence biennial” in Venice. In the Western world, but especially in Italy, it was reputedly preceded by heated discussions. The organisers had various difficulties, including finding suitable venues for the event. One by one many business circles turned their back to the dissident undertaking: they were more interested in maintaining and developing good commercial connections with the socialist countries than in ranting to dissidents. The Venice biennial has extensively been reflected in the press and in other means of mass media all over the world. In all progressive circles the fact that this artistic event with such honourable traditions extended a hand to dissidentism has been regarded as a rude provocation towards socialist countries, and as an event that has nothing to do with cultural interests. All this is convincingly confirmed by a “theoretical” seminar “Socialism and freedom” held at the same time, which for the dissidents developed into a place where to announce their political views.

Through articles from the “Literaturnaja Gazeta” we will display below some excerpts of articles on the Venice biennial.

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The morbid anti-Soviet and anti-communist nature of the views expressed at the biennial was a shock also to many participants from the West. It is asserted that the event does not offer anything new. The exhibition showing the works of dissident artists was opened in the cellar of the Venice Palace of Sports, because a better room could not be
found. The main thing that attracts attention at entry is the crowd of school children. As it appears they are called away from their lessons to the palace to leave an impression of a “storm of visitors,” as the Venetians actually boycott the exhibition.

The press stresses the low artistic level of most of the artworks that have been gathered there. Often their authors are not even aware of the political labels the organisers of the biennial attach to their works. It is especially evident in the case of the exhibit of the so called self-publishing (samizdat). I was surprised to find publications by the publishing houses „Hudožestvennaja Literatur” and „Sovetski Pissatel” among the presented books. The animosity of the organisers of the biennial is shown also by their attempt to show many prominent Soviet film directors including S. Eisenstein as dissidents.

The film-makers’ symposium with an anti-Soviet agenda failed. Also the discussion about alleged religious persecution in the Soviet Union had no success.

Most Italians had already deciphered the real meaning of the machination by the name of “dissident biennial.” This undertaking had a clearly anti-communist nature.

Ivan Botšarov, APN korrespondent for LG

(LG 1977, No 49)

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ČTK [Czech News Agency] spread the comment by the Czechoslovakian Television made about the “Biennale del dissenso” opened in Venice. According to the comment the Czech and Slovakian cultural public is well aware that the Venice biennial has had a deep ideological, artistic, and financial crisis already for years, which seriously damage the
purpose and the international reputation of the event. The committee
organising the biennial crowned the crisis with moronic and provoc-
tive actions. After machinations the organisers of the “Biennale del
dissenso” and their emigrant helpers exhibited also the works of some
Czechoslovakian artists, mostly without the consent from the latter,
 hence showing them as dissidents.

Protest letters from involved artists followed, which disapproved
the misuse of their names and works of art, and the use of the latter to
provoke against the homeland of the artists and other socialist coun-
tries.

The deceitful and impudent nature of the cunning Venice exhibi-
tion has aroused a storm of indignation and resentment in Czecho-
slovakian artists. They see it as another premeditated political provo-
cation, which inevitably undermines peaceful cooperation and the
exchange of genuine masterpieces.

The comment stresses that the Czech and Slovakian artists wish to
keep cooperating with the favourable colleagues and organisations that
have honest intensions. They wish to leave a legacy of highly valued
artworks from the victorious socialist era to the generations to come.

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An article published in the Yugoslavian newspaper “Borba” notes that
the “Biennial” is an internationally competent cultural organisation
that has a tradition of 80 years, and which is now ready to become a
cultural misapprehension with an uncertain political background.

The organisers did not probably understand the outcome of their
decision to dedicate the exhibition to the works of dissidents from so-
cialist countries in the Eastern Europe. Although it can be believed
that it was a conscious decision.

Objectively, the organisers of the biennial laid the foundation for the anti-Soviet and the anti-socialist propaganda in general. Although they point to the Helsinki final act, their actions do not meet the objectives of the Europe-wide discussion.

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The organisers of the Venice biennial announced that they plan to show also the “dissident theatre,” including “fragments” of the plays by the Theatre on Taganka in Moscow; they also announced their wish to interview the head director of the theatre, Juri Ljubimov.

A correspondent of the “Literaturnaja Gazeta” M. Maksimov asked for J. Ljubimov’s comment. The director answered that he would like to repeat what he had already said in the interview for the newspaper “l’Unita.” everyone is entitled to do whatever they want as long as their freedom does not set limitation to other people’s freedom. To put my name on a program that I do not know, that I do not accept–this is amazing.

But that is not the only issue. Why do people talk about “dissident theatre,” “standoffish theatre?” What does it mean? Where is it inclined to? Is a scandal the aim of it? We work actively here in our homeland, our society. This has brought acknowledgement and support to us. Yes, we were criticised, we had difficult moments. But we have always worked for the sake of the Soviet theatre to be on the frontline. And now some people of the Venice festival want to put tags on us and use my name and my theatre’s name to achieve their own objectives. This is totally unacceptable.

*(LG 1977, No 44)*
As it appeared the key persons of the Venice biennial tried to catch also the artists from Moscow into their net. Becoming aware of the fact the painting sector that consisted of artists came together, discussed the issue and sent a public letter followed by 43 names to the editorial board of the “Literaturnaja Gazeta.”

The letter states: unfortunately some cultural figures from the West use our creation for establishing an anti-Soviet hysteria that does not harmonise with the development of art and the spirit of normal cultural cooperation.

We, the artists, do not consider us suppressed or outsiders. Furthermore, if the Italian public wishes to see our works, we are ready to show our creation through cultural exchange.

The biennial ‘77 does not correspond to the spirit of free development of art. We oppose to our works being shown at an exhibition with a speculative political purpose, an exhibition that has an anti-Soviet attitude.

Via “Literaturnaja Gazeta” we wish to inform the organisers of the Biennial ‘77 that we, the artists, are indignant and wish to have no connection with the exhibition. (List of signatures follows, including those of S. Bleze, N. Vetštomov, V. Gluhhov, A. Goguadze, A. Kretov-Dožd, A. Lepin, V. Lenitski, K. Naganepetjan, V. Nemuhhin, L. Povzner, V. Saveljev, I. Snegur, M. Šapiro, V. Jakovlev etc.)

(LG 1977, No 46)
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  Kädi Talvoja

- **Concept of Play**
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  Anu Allas

- **Virtual *documenta***
  Eha Komissarov