

SFRJ



СФРЈ

SR BOSNA I HERCEGOVINA  
СР БОСНА И ХЕРЦЕГОВИНА

Banja Luka

Zlatko

Ćosić

Ivo

12.09.1972. godine

Banja Luka - Priječani

SR BiH

BH04395356



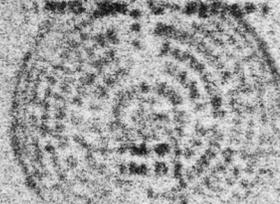
Banja Luka

Priječani - bb

11.07.1989. godine

11796/89

5 godina



*Alij Džur*

BH04395356





**STILL ADJUSTING**

# Zlatko Ćosić

**Gallery 210, UMSL, St. Louis, January 25—March 22, 2014**



**WHILE STANDING  
I WONDER IF, 2011,  
VIDEO, 2:00**

**PREFACE** We inhabit multiple worlds. They seem to come in pairs: inner/outer, old/new, major and minor, forking endlessly into multiple realities and multiple selves. Identity grabs on where it can, trying to form a connective tissue. Imagine, then, the complex inner landscape of Zlatko Ćosić, with roots in a crumbling, socialist Yugoslavia and a free-form, capitalist America. Imagine the broken spaces, the interrupted stories, and the jump-cuts needed to bridge them. Yet, in our own fragmentation we can understand why Ćosić had to become an archaeologist of the self. We can imagine him sifting through the rubble of experience, examining mismatched puzzle pieces in the light of a new day. We resonate as he fashions dissonant memories into a fragile harmony. Only art can do this. And in this show, Ćosić's unique power creates a microcosm where accident and chaos are managed, felt, and transformed, and where the artist and his audience can, in spite of it all, become whole.

Van McElwee, Media Artist, Professor, Webster University School of Communications

# What's in a Name

“Usually in a battle sequence when a bomb is going off, you forget you’re acting.”—Charlie Sheen

For the Balkan diaspora, the idea of a pan-Slavic “Yugoslavia” is both a distant memory and a bitter loss. Ducking and diving through three years of the war in Yugoslavia, Zlatko Ćosić and his parents were forced to leave their home in Banja Luka, Bosnia. While his parents were placed in a refugee camp in Croatia, Ćosić used a faked identity to escape to Belgrade in Serbia. This proved to be jumping out of the Bosnian frying pan into the Serbian fire when military police attempted to arrest him as he worked his shift at a McDonalds restaurant.\* Three years later in the United States, he arrived in a new world that was both alien and

\*The police came to arrest him to take him back to Bosnia, either to fight in the war or as forced labor. Although the reason is still unclear, it is thought that since the McDonalds was owned by an international company/franchise, they had no jurisdiction and could not remove him from the building.

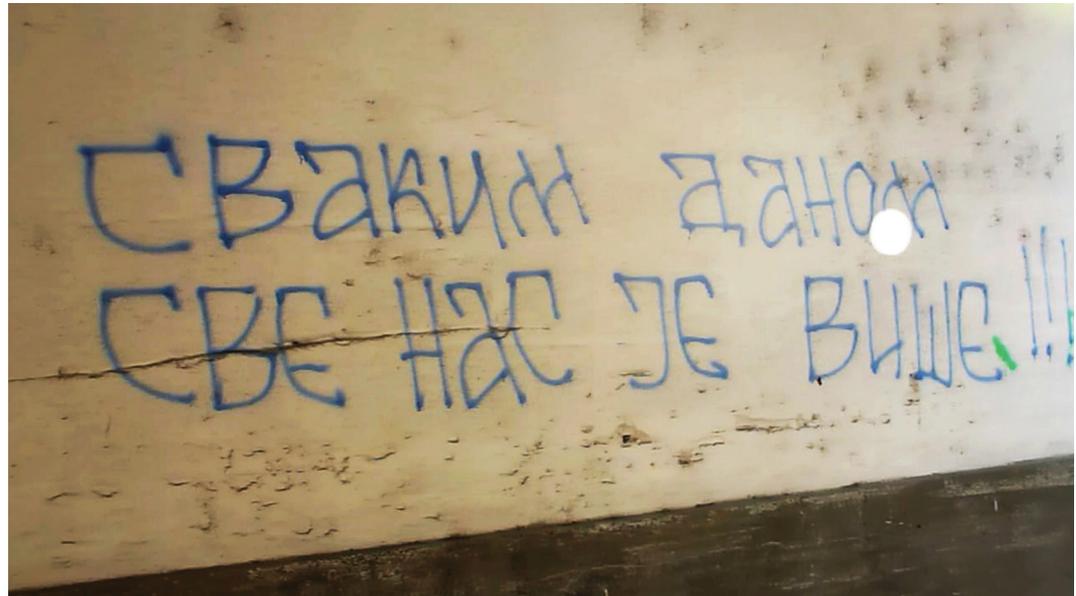
eerily familiar: a unified political state torn by multicultural and multiracial forces. The displacement to a new environment and culture of the Midwestern United States has become a stage for Ćosić, and a means to adjust to the reality of his present life. Many are thrown into such an identity, but some are chosen for reinvention. It is the borderland between past and present that shapes the content of Ćosić’s current work, exploring themes of culture shock and self-identity as they connect to issues of otherness through experimental and non-fiction short films, all inspired by his experience of dislocation as a result of the 1990s conflicts in the former Yugoslavia.

Life in a new environment requires “an act” in order to dwell within a dominant culture: “a mask is put on and the face grows to fit” as Orwell put it in

*Shooting an Elephant*. Ćosić explains: “I feel as if I am part of a performance, caught between my past and the present. I adjust how I communicate with the people who are not from

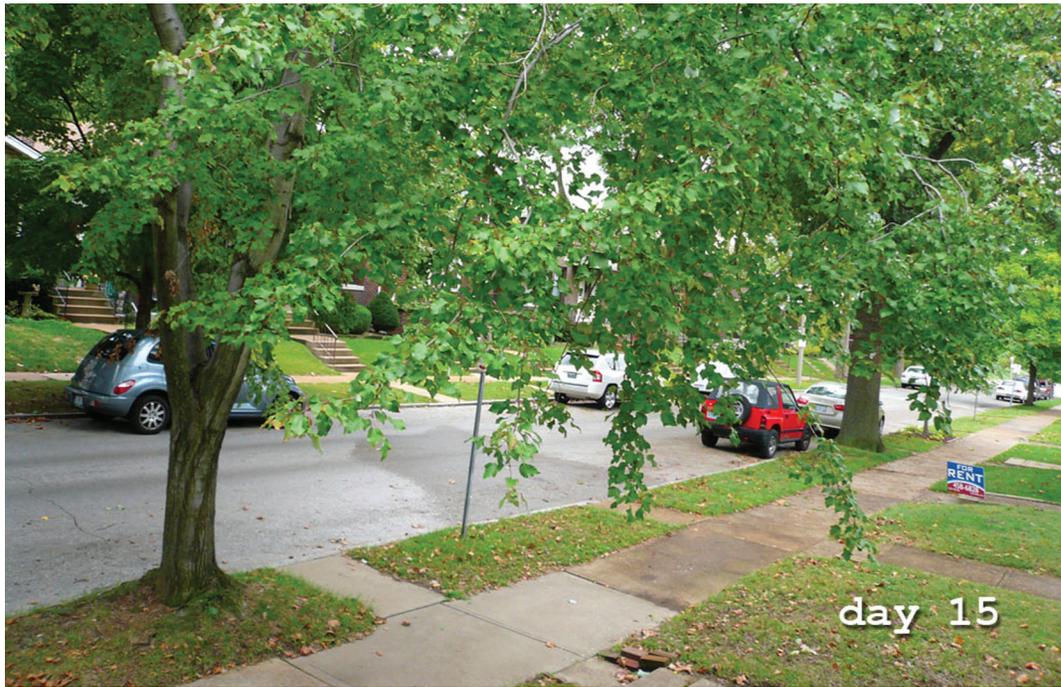
my culture. At the same time, this other society has altered the way I communicate with people from my country.” While evading the war, he acquired a uniform belonging to a soldier

whose identity he used to cross a border. Becoming a convincing soldier required make believe to prolong his life. Developing acting skills like modulating a dialect, inventing a past



TEMPORARY GRAFFITI: BANJA LUKA-ST. LOUIS, 2013, VIDEO, 20:00

31 DAYS,  
2011,  
VIDEO,  
10:00



and changing demeanor all added to the confusion he now experiences as an “American.” Subtle differences in a name or use of a word in a seemingly similar language throw off, or define in concrete terms, a sense of stable identity. Conscious name changes, redefined social class, the region you come from and your religious affiliation, move you from one culture to the other. Ćosić moved from a place where a name like “Ćosić” has meaning to one where subtlety in dialect means nothing.

*Identity Artifacts*, 2013, is an installation containing a collection of IDs, passports, military permits, letters and other personal papers that reflect the transition from the past (socialist European youth) to the present (capitalist American adulthood). The performance of identity alteration became Ćosić today, from acting, to something very real when survival is at stake and then a sort of personal mythology that acts once again. This metaphorical and actual border crossing happened twice

to Ćosić, once while living in Belgrade and the second while assimilating into American culture. Unlike our regional differences that shift only slightly between states hundreds of miles away, dialects in language in addition to given and family name, especially in the former Yugoslavia, can vary from town to town only a few miles away and designate one as a friend or potential enemy. Which process stripped Ćosić of his identity more? Was it the trauma of war, or the trauma of migration

and assimilation? The result is an enigma as reflected in the variety of gestures and ritual performances documented in this exhibition.

In the video *Only the Chimney Stays*, 2010, Ćosić searches for a familiarity with his birthplace, a house that was taken from his family during the war. As a result of the war, he lost his Yugoslavian identity and refused to follow other Yugoslavs in choosing national and religious affiliations: Serb, Bosnian, Croat. His neutral position is a rare occurrence. In the multiple channel film he moves through a proverbial “warscape” specific to the Bosnia/Herzegovina region, as he poetically reconstructs images of war-damaged architecture in a dichotomy that pushes and pulls between horror and prettiness. Rhythmic transitional moments of reflection through a grid formation gradually transform from the concrete to the abstract and then back again. The visual play is both a symbolic and aesthetic strategy meant to illustrate customary ways of managing traumatic emotions. The fragmentation of the visuals and carefully choreographed soundtrack by John Consiglio also mimic the displacement

of experiences and the way memories are processed, an effect of not belonging here or there. Visuals of war torn homes are paired with tranquil images of nature. Composed together, the images show a balance between destruction and regeneration. Time is a critical component, as past and present visually interchange in the narrative. Bombed out buildings representing tension and uneasiness align with images in nature that, for some, provide strength in the midst of turmoil. Although the work is visually dense and active, sound plays an important role in establishing grace while the eye consumes each traumatic still frame. A woman singing an ethnic folk song, the pitter-patter of raindrops, a train in the distance; and children playing are overlaid with uncomfortable, tense images. Visually and audibly, this work is continually balancing disruption and harmony.

The video installation *31 Days*, 2011, is developed from a daily exercise that followed a set of rules, combining ritual, poetic writing, experimental photography, and daily documentation. Ćosić blindly took one random photograph from behind his back. After

this, he recorded thirty seconds of sound at the same location and jotted down any and all emotions in a stream of consciousness. Throughout the project duration, he was forbidden to use a camera for any other purpose and avoided any attempt to look through a lens. After thirty one days, he assembled the photographs and chance sounds and added fragmented narration drawn from his daily journal entries. That's just the start. Recorded news reports are layered over ambient, accidental sounds, adding an external perspective to the personal voice of the work. Documentation taken during the thirty one days becomes its own ritual, adding to a feeling of normality and a static connection to place. Each instance transforms into a meaningful experience of being present in the world that dwells in his current landscape. The daily reflections proved to be an emotional rollercoaster, hopping from positive observational narration such as "the leaves are changing" or "another blue sky" to depressive negations: "can't move" and "nothing fits anymore." The simultaneous stillness of the photographs and the passing of time through

sound deliberately disconnect, providing a metaphor for being stuck, or on the optimistic side: being rooted in place.

A displaced identity is split into many shards, while constantly adjusting and performing in a new environment. Layering in an affecting soundtrack by Anthony Accurso, *Re-Birth*, 2013, is another example of Ćosić's commitment to performative video. Wrapped tightly, as if mummified, Ćosić shifts positions in a cold dark room of a basement. Using appearance and disappearance to activate his ideas in a series of mesmerizing momentary glimpses of the figure, he explores his new self through film, playing on the eye as lens and film reel as the passing of memory. Acquiring a new position in society makes one both invisible and relieved, opening the possibility to create and memorialize the past. The confrontation of self through the dichotomy of entrapment and movement is an inward exploration. *Still Adjusting* is a dense exhibition of videos, films and ephemera that explore his ideas of belonging while looking for a respite from confusion and emptiness through acts of conscious assimilation.



ABOVE:  
RE-BIRTH,  
2013,  
VIDEO, 4:10

BELOW:  
COLOR-  
BOARDING,  
2013,  
VIDEO, 3:40



ZLATKO ĆOSIĆ STILL ADJUSTING



**ON THE COVER: IDENTITY ARTIFACTS, 2013, INSTALLATION**  
**INSIDE COVER, LEFT: ONLY THE CHIMNEY STAYS, 2010, VIDEO, 5:30**  
**RIGHT: WITHOUT A NUMBER, RACHEL ČOŠIĆ AND ZLATKO ČOŠIĆ, 2013, VIDEO, 2:00**

#### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

On behalf of Gallery 210 I want to thank Zlatko Čosić for his dedication, hard work, and good humor in the realization of this exhibition "Still Adjusting." It has been a pleasure to work with him. I also want to thank Dana Turkovic, Curator of Exhibitions, Laumeier Sculpture Park and Van McElwee, Media Artist and Professor Webster University School of Communications for their insightful contributions to the exhibition catalog.

I wish to express my appreciation to Cindy LaBrecht for designing the graphic material for this exhibition. I am grateful to the gallery's assistants, interns, and volunteers for their work on this exhibition. As always, it is their dedication, creativity, and hard work that makes this exhibition, and all of the gallery's programs, possible. I especially want to thank Steve Forman for his designing of the movable walls in Gallery A at Gallery 210 and his help in installing them for this exhibition.

I want to acknowledge the support of Jean Miller, Dean of the College of Fine Arts and Communications, Diane Toulaiatos and Karen Lucas of the Center for the Humanities, the Gallery 210 Advisory Committee, Dr. Louis Lankford, Chair for the Department of Art and

Art History, and my colleagues in the Department of Art and Art History for their support of the gallery's programs.

This exhibition is supported in part by the College of Fine Arts and Communication, the Regional Arts Commission, the Center for the Humanities, and the Missouri Arts Council, a state agency. Gallery 210 wants to thank Schlafly Bottleworks, St. Louis for their support of this exhibition. All images are courtesy of the artist.

#### **GALLERY ASSISTANTS**

Veronica Ross, Michael Nash, Ashley Latimore, Michael Palm, Chelsea Angel, Katyn Dierksen, Jheryca Williams and Douglas Buchanan

#### **GALLERY 210 ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Richard Hunt, Dr. Ruth Bohan, Phil Robinson, Isaac Douglas Kirk, Dr. Louis Lankford, Katherine Rodway-Vega, Barbara Savan, Todd Lannon, Kim Lutz, Alex Lasko, Roseann Weiss

#### **BROCHURE EDITING**

Bailey Dolnec

#### **BROCHURE DESIGN**

Cindy LaBrecht, West Yarmouth, MA

#### **PRINTING**

Midtown Printing, St. Louis, MO



**GALLERY 210** UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI—ST. LOUIS

44 East Drive, TCC, One University Blvd.  
St. Louis, Missouri 63121

**HOURS** Tuesday–Saturday, 11:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.

**GALLERY** 314.516.5976 **OFFICE** 314.516.5952 **FAX** 314.516.4997

**EMAIL** gallery@umsl.edu **WEB** www.umsl.edu/~gallery/

