

Text by Adriana Rispoli

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The exhibition brings together seminal works from Igor Grubić's (Zagre, 1969) artistic practice, the full potential of which would only be realised in subsequent decades through projects that are now considered to be of historical significance, such as *366 Liberation Rituals* (2008–2009) and *Angels with Dirty Faces* (2006). These early works reveal a revolutionary tension that would become a defining feature of Grubić's entire artistic practice: **the use of art as a means of political intervention, a tool capable of impacting society, and a device that activates an ironic shift.** This shift is essential for processing trauma and capturing the viewer's attention, thereby fostering critical engagement with reality.

These works reveal their explicit roots in movements united by a shared revolutionary ideology, ranging from **Russian Constructivism** to **Fluxus**. The defining features of his practice emerge through a variety of stylistic experiments, from early collage work to performative actions of more or less explicit critique, such as *Black Peristyle*, *Breathless*, and *Sculpturing the Wave/Fragmentation of the Wave*, which are presented here for the first time. Another defining feature is the careful calibration of ironic slippage in relation to context, as seen in *Evolution of an Object*.

**Performance, appropriation and direct engagement with public space** thus become foundational elements of a consistent *modus operandi*, outlining a body of work in which art and life are ultimately deeply and inextricably intertwined.

#### **COLLAGES, 1995 — 1999 variable dimensions**

This series of collages reflects Grubić's interest in Russian Constructivism, which emerged in the 1990s, and his belief that art has the power to inspire, motivate and nurture the human spirit. They represent his initial critical exploration through art, influencing his future poetics. Using red and black colours and playing with shapes, the artist created messages that serve as a minimalist agitprop campaign. Taking the form of simple, clear ideograms accompanied by lettering and iconic images of prominent figures ranging from Mayakovsky to Eisenstein, these early works suggest that art can find its way through advertising and that politics can use art to convey revolutionary ideas. Through these collages, Grubić sought to offer a vision of a utopian future following the trauma of the 1991–1995 Croatian War.

#### **BLACK PERISTYLE, 1998, photo, documentation, action in public space**

The Black Peristyle was a public art installation that took place on 11 January 1998 to mark the 30th anniversary of the Red Peristyle. It involved colouring a large black circle in the middle of the Split Peristyle, a heritage monument. This referenced The Red Peristyle of 1968, establishing a direct connection with the artistic practices of the 1960s. These practices introduced a new artistic vocabulary, counterculture elements and the democratisation of art, as well as the emergence of art in public spaces. By choosing a black circle, the artist also evokes the continuity of the avant-garde and the visual language of Suprematism. The abstract black circle in the middle of the Peristyle symbolises not only a collective 'stain' of social apathy, but also represents a radical political and aesthetic act that speaks of the social traumas of the Franjo Tuđman era: nationalism, privatisation theft, regression, repression, and war. Media statements by artists and media coverage, as documented in newspaper archives, form an integral part of the documentation of this controversial work, which led to the artist being investigated by the State Attorney's Office. The Black Peristyle is one of the most significant artworks of the 1990s in Croatia and the former Yugoslavia.

**BREATHLESS, 1999, photo-performance, 111 x 84 cm**

*Breathless*, a photo performance, was first presented at the Rijeka Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art. Building on Grubić's earlier works, it commented on the state of culture in 1990s Croatia. At that time, independent culture did not receive any systematic support through public programmes, as the political establishment prioritised funding events that strengthened the national identity. In this piece, Grubić reimagines a shot from the final scene of Godard's iconic film *Breathless*. Grubić's photograph refers to the scene in which Michel Poiccard (played by Jean-Paul Belmondo) bends down and reaches for a gun while fleeing from the police. While Michel is shown from behind, Grubić faces the camera, reaching for a pen with one hand and holding a piece of paper in the other bearing the words 'Support art and culture'. By assuming the role of the film's protagonist, who ultimately dies, Grubić acknowledges that his advocacy for institutional support for culture may already be destined to fail. Nevertheless, he persists in the struggle for his ideals to the last breath, even at the cost of failing and declaring his own act futile.

**SCULPTURING THE WAVE, Happening, 1997, 45 x 30 cm each****FRAGMENTATION OF THE WAVE, Happening, 1997, 45 x 30 cm each**  
**Ston, Croatia**

The two photo installations, 'Sculpturing the Wave' and 'Fragmentation of the Wave', originated from Grubić's performances at a multimedia festival in Ston on the Adriatic coast in the summer of 1997. During these performances, the artist engaged directly with the sea. In the first, he stood in the water and attempted to 'sculpt' a wave using a wedge and a mallet. In the second, he entered the sea fully clothed and tried to cut out a square section of water with a saw. He then placed this 'fragment' of the wave into a plastic bag. Afterwards, the plastic bag filled with seawater was exhibited on the façade of a nearby house as a real object — an artwork. Rooted in the minimalist tradition of Fluxus happenings of the 1960s and 1970s, the absurdity of these actions reflects Grubić's critique of humanity's impulse to forcibly shape nature according to its own rational systems in a direct and deliberately simple way.

As Grubić himself stated: 'I tried to illustrate (and humorously point out) man's meaningless relationship with nature, and how man tries to "order" nature according to his own understanding. That wave enclosed in a bag has no vitality, no life. Its meaning and beauty lie precisely in its spontaneous flow, and we often exploit nature as well as our own lives". These two 'ephemeral' water-related works should be seen as the artist's personal quest to reconnect with nature. They express his spiritual need for a reconnection between humans and the environment, and above all, his personal desire for something sacred in the aftermath of the tragic events of the 1990s civil war.

**EVOLUTION OF AN OBJECT, 3 bricks, 1995- 1999**

This installation, made up of three identical bricks, highlights the irony of an object's valuation when it appears in different contexts: as a brick, a weapon, and a sculpture. This humorous critique of art and capital is part of the larger Micro-Museum of Revolutionary Heritage project, a multimedia installation conceived as a 'portable museum' containing works that address inherited revolutionary ideas in art. It is directly connected to the closure of several Museums of Revolution across former Yugoslavia in the 1990s during the socialist period.