

Kiss and Tell

From waiting for a telephone to ring to making eye contact with strangers, for over 30 years the 'actions' of Czech artist **Jiří Kovanda** have explored the limits - and joys - of what freedom might mean *by Noemi Smolik*





On 10 March 2007 at Tate Modern, from 11am to 8pm, Czech artist Jiří Kovanda stood behind a large window, holding up a note asking passers-by to kiss him through the glass. And kiss him they did, an action which, in spite of the physical barrier, was accompanied by embarrassment, hesitation, caution and, occasionally, tenderness.

The piece at Tate (*Kissing Through Glass*, 10 March 2007) was not the first occasion that kissing had featured in the 'actions' of Kovanda, who still lives in his native city of Prague. For one of his first ever actions he asked a man and a woman to kiss each other while standing barefoot in freshly mixed concrete. As if noting the results of a scientific experiment, Kovanda then typed his observations on a sheet of paper, including the title – *Kiss* – location and exact date (11 May 1976). Below this note, mounted on a sheet of paper, are photographs of the protagonists and of their concrete footprints.

This action took place in Prague eight years after the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Soviet-led Warsaw Pact troops, during a period of grim totalitarianism that paralyzed many areas of public life. Around the same time, Emmanuel Lévinas, a philosopher who was born in Russia and living in France, perceived a parallel between totalitarian ideology and the Western idea of individuality: both, as he saw it, were founded on a quasi-tautological understanding of self-identity, rather than of a connection to 'the other'. Those in Eastern Europe who read Lévinas saw his ideas as a welcome confirmation of the conclusions many intellectuals in the region had arrived at about totalitarianism and individualism. Against such a background, the philosopher was not alone in viewing love as the event that promises to free the subject from false alternatives. That the kiss as a symbol of love should mark the beginning of Kovanda's artistic development thus resonated with his time; from such a position he was able to create spaces that made conceivable an opening up to 'the other'.

Kovanda's next action, realized the same year, was a case in point. For *Untitled (Waiting for someone to call me ...)* (18 November 1976) the artist sat next to a telephone and waited. As in all his subsequent actions, the artist himself was the protagonist, yet surrendered his active artistic self to the decisions of others. One month after completing this work, Kovanda stood in Prague's Wenceslas Square in front of the National Museum (whose bullet-pocked façade provided a lasting reminder of the Soviet-led invasion) and declared: 'I follow a previously written script to the letter. Gestures and movements have been selected so that passers-by will not suspect that they are watching a "performance".' In other words, the artist's gestures were perfectly 'normal' and 'untheatrical' – which is precisely why Kovanda entitled the piece *Theatre* (1976).

Kovanda's role as an artist is obviously performative and based on the imitation and repetition of existing elements. He once asserted: 'I use only that which already exists.'¹¹ Yet in order to open up new spaces for meaning, his role-playing also allows the performer to act upon personal decisions within the repetitions. These performative spaces of opportunity offer, above all, encounters. In a documentation – consisting again of a sheet of paper and two photographs – of an untitled action that took place on 3 September 1977, again in Wenceslas Square, the artist described his proposition as follows: 'On an escalator ... turning around, I look into the eyes of the person standing behind me.' (This piece was also recreated recently at Tate Modern.) These actions have often been interpreted as metaphors for a lack of communication in contemporary society. In fact they are the exact opposite. Communication as such is in plentiful supply – but what is really important, what can change the course of one's life, must take place in the context of an unexpected encounter such as an act of non-verbal communication.

Again and again, Kovanda stages encounters that allow those involved (by choice or by chance) to experience being affected in this way: by deliberately



Above:
Untitled (Waiting for someone to call me ...)
18 November 1976
(detail)
Prague
Photograph and ink on paper
30×21 cm

Opposite:
Untitled, (I arranged to meet a few friends ... we were standing in a small group on the square, talking ... suddenly, I started running; I raced across the square and disappeared into Melantrich Street ...)
23 January 1978
Old Town Square, Prague
Photograph and ink on paper
30×21 cm

bumping into people coming towards him on the street, (*Contact*, 3 September 1977), standing with outstretched arms in the middle of Wenceslas Square obstructing the flow of passers-by (*Untitled*, 19 November 1976), pushing between two people in conversation (an untitled action he realized in late 2006 at the Kunstverein Frankfurt), inviting friends to follow his attempt to meet a female stranger (*Attempted Acquaintance*, 19 October 1977), or simply confusing them: 'I arranged to meet a few friends ... we were standing in a small group on the square, talking ... suddenly, I started running; I raced across the square and disappeared into Melantrich Street ...' (*Untitled*, 23 January 1978).

Kovanda's actions also include scooping up rubbish with his bare hands in a park (*Untitled*, 19 May 1977) or scratching away at hearts that had been scrawled on an old wall (*Untitled*, 29 June 1977). As gestures of self-abasement, they are disconcerting. At the same time, they are executed with a degree of care that, on the one hand, bears witness to infinite patience, even tenderness, while on the other is quite absurd: take the time in 1977, for instance, when Kovanda lovingly carried handfuls of water taken from the River Valtava in Prague and placed them back in the river a few metres downstream.

Jirí Kovanda's role as an artist is based on imitation and repetition. He has declared: 'I use only that which already exists.'

Taking the same care over his interventions, a form he began exploring in 1978, Kovanda placed a flowerpot containing a stunted plant in front of a column in an empty room (*Installation I*, December 1978). Once again, everything was meticulously documented, with the photographs and sheet of paper joined by a precisely drawn floor plan. More clearly than with the actions, Kovanda's elaborate documentation of his interventions is out of proportion with their often minimal, banal character, as if the artist is parodying the factual, distinctly dry modes of documentation favoured by his Conceptual colleagues in the West. For in his early years, Kovanda was by no means working in total isolation in Prague. From photographs and texts, it is apparent that he was familiar with the performances of Vito Acconci and Chris Burden, who visited Prague in the 1970s, and with certain works by Western Minimalists and Conceptualists. Kovanda was also in contact with Polish artists who had better access to information and opportunities than their Czech counterparts. And in 1969, at the Vaclav Spala Gallery in Prague, he happened upon an exhibition of Marcel Duchamp's readymades, an experience that was crucial to Kovanda's artistic approach.

So what is the relationship between Kovanda's work and that of his Western colleagues? In her definition of performative identity, Judith Butler emphasizes the element of the parodic: each repeated performance means a slight shift that feeds on parody.² For the documentation of *Installation 4* (1979), Kovanda slips into the role of the 'good' Conceptualist: beneath a photograph of scattered earth in the corner of a room is written: 'I hit the ground with four lumps of soil aiming towards the corners of the room.' When, in 1979, the artist placed a barely visible thin sheet of glass on the floor in the corner of a room, this might have still been considered a factual statement about objecthood; yet when Kovanda, again alluding to the Minimalist aesthetic, modelled a corner in salt and an arc in sugar along the balustrade of a Prague bridge and titled the installation *Salty Angle, Sweet Curve* (1981), the parodic element becomes obvious. However, these kinds of interventions don't make Kovanda a Minimalist, as some label him. Rather his approach is reminiscent of an artist such as John Baldessari, who has also been wrongly labelled a Minimalist: both artists share a refreshingly cheerful lack of respect towards the universalist claims of Modernist aesthetics and Conceptual-Minimalist orthodoxy.

Parody can undermine authority; although Kovanda had already decided by the age of 15 to take on what he terms the 'role' of the artist, he never sought admission to any Czech academy of art due to his deep mistrust of the authority of such institutions. Until 1977, he worked as a surveyor on the construction of the Prague underground, followed by a job in the depot of the Prague National Gallery. Since 1995, he has been an assistant in the painting department at the Prague Academy of Art. It is no coincidence that his very first artistic attempts were abstract drawings that ignored the lines on ruled paper. His actions, too, are directed against interiorized barriers to political, societal, cultural, ethnic, religious or sexual otherness. In this sense, his invitation to kiss him through a window at Tate Modern can be understood as a paradoxical challenge to overcome barriers that are seemingly insurmountable.

Kovanda's parodic approach – which includes the objects, collages and painted pictures he has made since the 1980s – has never slipped into cynical irony. On the contrary, his work always has something lovingly nurturing about it. No one is being laughed at – not even when Kovanda used found pieces of wood to make Minimalist objects that can be read as clumsy reconstructions of Carl Andre's sculptures (*Autumn Piece*, 1980) or when, between 1996 and 1998, he painted a series of untitled white pictures as a re-staging of artistic procedures developed by Robert Rauschenberg. Instead, what is at stake is more a sense of mourning over the irretrievably lost expectations and promise that motivated these artists. This becomes clear in pictures with such heavy-weight titles as *The Sperm of Che Guevara* or *The Promised Revolution* (both 1997), which allude to a melancholy, diffuse void.

But Kovanda doesn't spare himself from parody either. In 2006, he had his first 'official' exhibition in Prague – excluding earlier, small, isolated shows – not at a major institution but at the commercial space of the Zdeněk Sklenář Gallery. He called it 'Kovanda's First Retrospective'. On the walls and on and under shelves, were works from different series arranged alongside each other and mingled together, like a show imitating a retrospective. Baruch Spinoza assumed that any truly free imagination is an act of deliberate self-deception. What else are Kovanda's actions if not deliberate deceptions, simulations and distortions, tentative but admirably tenacious attempts to do something impossible: to knock holes in totalitarian constructions – be they designed by politicians, philosophers or artists – and fill them with moments of freedom? 'Emancipatory politics', says Alain Badiou, 'always consists in making seem possible precisely that which, from within the situation, is declared to be impossible.'³ Kovanda always resists being perceived as a 'political' artist, and within the definitions of the conventional meaning of the word, he isn't one. But since the evaporation of most political Utopias – a development which in Prague already seemed sealed by the invasion of the Soviet troops – political artists are, perhaps more than before, those who reveal to us an insight which is as simple as it is uncomfortable: that it is not revolutionary avant-gardes that matter, but the ability of individuals to imagine 'non-existent things' – Utopian ideas of a projected future – and treat them as if they were already existing in the present.⁴ And, lest we forget, the ability to confront self-declared authorities with a smile. In this sense, I would go so far as to claim that Kovanda is a deeply political artist.

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Translated by Nicholas Grindell

1 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, Routledge, London and New York, 1990

2 Judith Butler, 'From Parody to Politics', in *Gender Trouble*, op. cit. p.142 ff.

3 Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, Verso, London and New York, 2001

4 On the role of the power of imagination in contemporary art, see Charles Esche, 'Imagine Resistance', *Whenever It Starts It Is The Right Time: Strategies for a Discontinuous Future*, exh. cat., Frankfurter Kunstverein, 2007

X X X

23. ledna 1978
Praha, Staroměstské náměstí

Dal jsem si sraz s několika přáteli... stáli jsme v hloučku na náměstí a hovořili... náhle jsem se rozběhl, utíkal jsem přes náměstí a zmizel v nejbližší ulici...





This page and opposite:
 'Kovanda's First
 Retrospective'
 2006
 Mixed media
 Exhibition view,
 Galerie Zdeněk Sklenář,
 Prague

Interview

Born in 1972, *Ján Mančuška* is a conceptual artist who explores the materiality of language and film. Here he interviews **Jiří Kovanda** about his pioneering work of the 1970s – an encounter between two generations of artists

Ján Mančuška I'm interested in the initial impulse that led to your 'actions'.

What did you do before them?

Jiří Kovanda I was doing drawings in a notepad. Then I did collages.

JM Have you ever exhibited them?

JK Last year, for the first time.

JM So your first public events were your actions?

JK I had my first exhibition in Warsaw, in a student gallery, with photographs of my actions. *Untitled (Standing on Wenceslas Square with arms outstretched ...)* (19 November 1976) was in it, as was *Untitled (Waiting for someone to call me ...)* (18 November 1976) and other things I had done.

JM How did you end up in Poland?

JK I went there for the first time in the spring of 1975 with friends. By chance we visited Repassage Gallery – a small student space in Warsaw's old town – and started talking with some guy there. Through him we met Zofia Kulik and Przemysław Kwiek, who showed me around the local scene. Paradoxically, it was through them that I got Petr Štembera's phone number here in Prague. When I got back, I called him right away. He was really helpful and invited me over. That's how I met Jan Mlčoch and Karel Miler, too.

JM What led up to that first exhibition in Warsaw?

JK Kulik and Kwiek arranged it at the Mospan student gallery.

JM Did you do any actions there, or simply present them in the form of documentation?

JK There was only documentation.

JM Did you conceive your actions, or the documentation of them, with an exhibition space in mind from the outset?

JK The documentation was intended for exhibition spaces from the start, but the actions happened elsewhere.

JM I'm very interested in the transition that occurred between the performance of your actions and their translation into documentary photographs. There are no audiences present at some of your actions. The only people who know they're art are you and the photographer. But the resulting photograph isn't the art work, it's the action, isn't it?

JK The question is when communication takes place. I think it's at the moment when the thing is referred to as art. That means that if an action has an audience, it happens straight away. If no spectators have been invited, however, I think it doesn't take place until afterwards, in the artistic space – in other words, either at an exhibition, or in print, it doesn't matter. In short, when it's presented as art.

JM In retrospect, then?

JK Yes in retrospect, although you can't draw a clear dividing line. Without the action, it wouldn't exist. The action has to take place.

JM In this respect time has quite a particular status. In the act of documentation, you're calling attention to something that happened earlier: the action without an audience.

JK But the action has to be there. An idea isn't enough, it has to really take place. I've had many ideas and scripts for different actions that I haven't carried out, but I've never published the ones that didn't happen.

JM Could you imagine doing 'remakes' of the original actions today?

JK I've already done so. For instance at Tate Modern last year I not only reinterpreted the kiss through the glass (*Kissing Through Glass*, 10 March 2007), but also the one on the escalator (*Untitled (On an escalator ... turning around, I look into the eyes of the person standing behind me ...)*, 3 September 1977). I don't have anything against 'remakes' in principle, but I have to say that my experiences of them haven't been good. As I said, it's important for me that an action really takes place. And when it's happened once, it doesn't make much sense for it to happen again. My experience of it is completely different then, substantially weaker.



JM Did you perform any of your original actions more than once during the 1970s?

JK No, never.

JM Let's come back to what was going on in the 1970s in Prague, to the Body art scene represented by people like Štembera and Mičoch. Your pieces are quite different. But you actually worked together, didn't you?

JK They had started about four years before me; for a while we worked simultaneously, until it all ended at around the same time.

JM It seems to me that you rejected the fervent, expressive language of Body art. You've never worked with the body or with pain; you've never even staged your actions, which is quite an essential difference. Did you ever talk about that? Did you approach them critically?

JK No, not critically. We never talked about things that way. At the time I didn't notice such a big difference. I liked Miler's work the most. But I wasn't trying to set myself apart from them at all: in fact, they fascinated me. The first action by Štembera I saw live profoundly moved me.

JM Which one was it?

JK He was barefoot; there was a heavy iron rod lying by the wall and he walked up to it and tied the iron rod to his feet. He jumped with all his might away from the wall, but the rod held him, so he didn't jump far. After that, he untied it and poured some acid on the spot he'd jumped off from. Next, he made a mark at the spot he'd jumped to and turned around and then he jumped back without the iron rod. But the wall was there; normally, without the iron rod he would have jumped further. He fell feet first into the acid. It was a powerful experience for me.

JM So you think the differentiation was rooted in your personal dispositions instead?

JK It wasn't calculated in any way; it came from inside. It was my way of seeing and feeling things. We never did things together; we never sat down and worked together on one thing, for example. Each one of us always did his own work. Although, at the time I thought we were closer. But – as opposed to Štembera, for example – I set myself apart from performance, imposing a limit that was uncrossable. I had to make do with the way I was. Štembera used different props, for instance. I just always wanted to be, with nothing else. And I stuck to this with absolute awareness and consistency.

JM What were your views on happenings and on what The Plastic People of the Universe, the underground rock group founded by Ivan Martin Jirous, were doing?

JK There was no direct link. As for happenings, I liked some of Milan Knížák's things, his really simple demonstrations. When happenings tended too much towards 'theatricality' I never enjoyed them.

JM Speaking of Knížák, what was your relationship to Fluxus?

JK Fluxus never interested me, because of what I've just said. Fluxus seemed like little theatre pieces to me.

JM When I encounter the term 'Eastern European art' I always assume that different scenes are subsumed under one term when in fact they were

isolated from each other. But you entered the art world through Poland. So there must have been some interconnection?

JK I'd take issue with making such a distinction between 'Eastern' European and 'Western' art. Although contact with the West was highly restricted, there was some interaction – even if it might not have been direct. In my view, you can't think of Eastern European art without the West. Eastern European art *is* European art.

JM Did you have contacts anywhere else, besides Poland?

JK I didn't personally, but Štembera certainly had many.

JM Was there any contact with what was happening in Slovakia? For example, did you know Július Koller?

JK I knew Koller and some other Slovak artists, too. But there was very little contact with them.

JM What did you think of Koller back then?

JK That's an interesting question. For me his work was almost embarrassing. UFO – 'Universal Futurological Orientation'. Was he crazy? What was he on about? To tell the truth, I kind of looked down on Slovaks generally at the time. Today, you can see clearly how the interpretations of things has shifted from back then. There was a lot more expressiveness, there were more personal layers than we allow ourselves today. I don't know why, but Koller was absolutely incomprehensible to me at that time. Today our approaches might seem similar, but at the time they were totally different.

JM Were you in sustained contact with anyone from the West?

JK I wasn't in any sort of sustained personal contact with anybody. Štembera handled all that, actually. He was in touch with various people – through letters and things they'd send each other, and so on. With Chris Burden, for instance.

JM Did they tend to be chance personal connections?

JK I don't think so. Burden was very important for us then. Štembera kept in touch with him for a long time. So you see, our scene wasn't all that isolated. A lot of the things we did were reactions to what was being done abroad, even if it was mediated. For example, *Following Piece* (1969) by Vito Acconci was a big discovery for me.

JM And what about the Viennese Actionists?

JK I never liked them; I thought they went 'out of bounds'. But back when we were doing performances people talked a lot about them; they were always part of the scene.

JM I wanted to ask about the turning point in your work from actions to interventions.

JK The earliest interventions arose in places where others were doing actions and to which an audience had been invited, so they could take part in the performance. Like the flower behind a column which was my very first intervention (*Installation 1*, December 1978), these works were carried out before people arrived, my physical presence remaining as a trace in the space, as if I'd just disappeared. At the time I didn't think of the works as objects, but as traces of activities after an action: I'd hide a flower behind a column, or tie two slats together and lean them against a beam supporting

the ceiling. Back then interventions were a smooth transition from actions; it was just that I personally had disappeared. As in my last action, in which I ran away from a group of people in the Old Town Square [Untitled (I arranged to meet a few friends ... we were standing in a small group on the square, talking ... suddenly, I started running; I raced across the square and disappeared into Melantrich Street ...), 23 January 1978].

JM Did you knowingly make that your last action?

JK No, that's just it. I had no idea it wouldn't be followed by any others. I'd always directed myself towards people in my actions, but in the last one I was running away from them. The first impulse behind the interventions that followed weren't the objects themselves, but the activity which led up to their being there.

JM Did photographs play a similar role in the interventions as in the actions?

JK I think they played exactly the same role. The transition from one to the other was smooth; there was no watershed.

JM Why did you 'disappear'?

JK I can't say. I've always done things in an intuitive way. My ideas have always appeared out of the blue. They've never been the result of some intensive reflection or rational justification. My presence just died out, somehow. It's interesting that it happened to everyone at around the same time. My fellow artists did go on doing performances for a while, but they acquired a somewhat different character; they didn't seem to be as intensively charged as they were in the beginning. There was something about them that just wasn't quite right anymore. They'd depleted themselves.

JM Then in the 1980s you started painting?

JK Unlike my colleagues, I had continued drawing the whole time I was doing my actions and interventions. As a matter of fact, I understood them as documentations of simple activities - traces left on paper.

JM Were they meant to be drawings? They weren't 'instructions'?

JK No. They were intended as drawings, even though they straddled the line between 'art' and documentation. They always involved a contrast between a geometric form and something organic. For instance, I once outlined a square in ink and then traced it out in pencil by hand. The title itself often indicated that it was a record of some activity: *I Drew Copies of Two Squares* (1977), for example. The format gradually got bigger, and in the late 1980s I started with a couple of paintings.

JM Did your environment change a bit back then as well? You did things with Vladimír Skrepl a lot.

JK That was related to the transition. My former colleagues had abandoned art completely. So naturally I looked around for someone who was doing things that interested me. The form of the new painting at the time was quite powerful. There was a strong opposition to the received forms. It might seem today as if those paintings were a return to something conventional or conservative. But it wasn't like that at the time at all. At least I didn't see it that way; they really were 'new'.

JM There were no actions involved in any way: were the paintings a reaction to those earlier works in some sense?

JK It was more as if suddenly they were of no importance; as if they'd been forgotten. But today it's clear that the experience persisted.

JM I want to ask you about recycling, mainly in connection to the object-related pieces you did in the 1990s, although it has a bearing on your entire oeuvre. Some of your pieces came back from exhibitions in a box. Then you took that box and put it back in circulation as a new work of art. As in your actions, you chose to make do with what you had, to use only what was at your disposal. There's nothing added.

JK That's very important. I've always been attracted by the idea of making do with whatever I have at my disposal. That's why I was so deeply impressed and immediately influenced when I first encountered Conceptual art. You didn't have to know a craft, you didn't need expensive materials, you didn't have to be extremely skilled - and yet you could still do something worthwhile. That absolutely fascinated me and I wanted to come into contact with it somehow.

JM You've never had a studio. Does that have anything to do with it?

JK It does. But it wasn't some sort of programmatic refusal to have a studio. I just didn't have one and didn't particularly want one, either. I felt I didn't even have the right to one. At the time, only those who were a member of the Foundation of Czech Visual Artists or who were graduates of some art school could. I never went to any art school and I wasn't in the Foundation. I never really felt the lack of a studio, though, because I enjoyed doing small things in big series much more than doing one single big thing. So it was kind of a combination of what I wanted and the possibilities open to me.

JM It's only now that a lot of interest is being shown in your work. What's your view on that? I know you stopped working for an indeterminate period. Do you think it's typical that the system is capable of understanding simpler concepts only when they've actually become historical?



Opposite:

Kiss
11 May 1976
Střelecký Island,
Prague
Photographs and ink
on paper
30×21 cm

Above:

Untitled (On an escalator ... turning around, I look into the eyes of the person standing behind me ...)
3 September 1977
(detail)
Wenceslas Square, Prague
Photograph and ink on paper
30×21 cm

JK Of course I'm pleased about the current interest, but I also ask myself what it would have been like if my art had been widely recognized when I first made it. It doesn't really bother me all that much, though, that it's only come after so many years.

JM And what are you working on now?

JK I'm doing things that are related to the work I was doing in the late 1970s and early '80s. Often they're interventions/installations for a particular space: objects in which materials from previous works are recycled; performances that deal with interpersonal relationships. The difference is that now I conceive of them for gallery spaces from the start.

Ján Mančúška is an artist living in Prague and Berlin. His exhibition at Kunstballe Basel runs until 6 April.

Jiří Kovanda's work was included in documenta 12, and his next solo shows will be 'When I Was a Little Boy I Played with Girls' at Galerie Klatovy, Klenovca, opening on 8 March, and 'Two Cushions' at gb agency, Paris opening on 15 March.

Glossary

Zofia Kulik and Przemysław Kwiek
During the 1970s, they lived together in their Warsaw flat, where they hosted numerous events embracing art and documentary. From 1970 until 1987, they were the artist duo Kwiekulik. Kulik's photographs were shown at documenta 12 in 2007.

Petr Štembera

The most influential figure of the Czech Body art movement, Štembera carried out his first actions - most of which explored the limits of the human body - in 1971. He also fostered links with foreign artists and critics, providing a valuable source of information for fellow Czech artists.

Jan Mlčoch

From 1974, Mlčoch's performances fluctuated between radical activities involving the body and more non-confrontational social situations. His last work in this vein was *Noclehárna* (Lodging House, 1980), in which he transformed the De Appel gallery in Amsterdam into a free lodging house.

Karel Miler

Miler's Conceptual and performative work often took the form of a photographic record of bodily activities. He concluded his artistic career in the late 1970s.

The Plastic People of the Universe and I.M. Jirous

This leading Czech psychedelic band were founded in the summer of 1968 by writer Ivan Martin Jirous, just weeks after the Soviet invasion that crushed the Prague Spring. In 1970, the government revoked the band's professional license, but their infrequent, unofficial concerts remained big events on the underground scene.

Milan Knížák

In the 1960s, Knížák was an organizer of noteworthy happenings and worked with the Fluxus movement. Today he is a university professor and Director of the National Gallery in Prague.

Július Koller

Koller was a Slovakian artist (1939-2007) whose works took the form of simple diagrams, conceptual paintings or ironic interventions in public and private spaces, often involving table tennis or the acronym UFO, which variously signified Universal Futurological Organization (1972-3) or Underground Fantastic Organization (1975).

Vladimír Skrepl

In the 1980s, Skrepl became a notable figure on the Prague art scene, making expressive, rawly energetic paintings and objects. Today, as a teacher at the Prague Academy, he is an important figure for young artists.