

# **IGOR ZABEL** **AWARD FOR** **CULTURE AND** **THEORY 2022**

## **Igor Zabel Award 2022 Laureate**

### **Bojana Pejić, art historian, art writer, and curator, Berlin**

The 2022 Igor Zabel Award Laureate is **Bojana Pejić**, an art historian and curator who has transformed the way we see postwar art from Eastern Europe. Her writings, and particularly her complex international exhibitions such as *After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe* (1999–2001) and *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* (2009–2010), have had worldwide impact, critically marking our understanding of art during state socialism and also providing critical analysis of post-socialist culture after 1989.

Bojana Pejić's understanding of Eastern Europe transcends ideological pictures of an oppressed and underdeveloped East. She explores its many cultural histories, treating them not as derivative products of Western exemplars, but as heterogenous and specific, and having their own unique importance. In particular, *After the Wall* and *Gender Check* were not mere additions to the existing Western discourse but created their own debate and exerted a lasting impact on (historical) writing about global art. Her consistently feminist reading of art from Eastern Europe was never a straightforward application of existing theoretical and methodological models, but rather went beyond a simple narration of the particularities shaped by state socialism and the post-1989 history of the region. What's more, her writings and exhibitions generate conclusions that are valuable beyond Eastern Europe: they provide lessons on art, society, and power structures relevant to audiences around the world. Her projects are test grounds – full of cross-references – that show rather than assume, and history is never petrified in them. With her work, Bojana Pejić invites us into a never-ending critical process.

The jury is awarding Bojana Pejić for her lifelong research into the constituent elements of Eastern European art and culture. She orchestrates transnational teams or works alone as she surveys what Eastern European countries have in common, and how their art makes visible the history, nationalism, and gender politics of the region. She is responsible not only for the international recognition of many artistic voices, but also for creating critical self-reflection knowledge about our shared history. Her curiosity, opinions, strength, and ongoing self-assessment has made her one of the most respected figures in her field. Virtually all attempts to historicize the art of Eastern Europe make reference to her work, and virtually all discussions on gender construction take place in the context of what she has established and shaped. She has fought many battles while remaining supportive and being a mentor to many.



# **IGOR ZABEL** **AWARD FOR** **CULTURE AND** **THEORY 2022**

**Bojana Pejić** was born in Belgrade in 1948 and graduated in art history from the Faculty of Arts, University of Belgrade (1975). She started to write about contemporary art as early as 1971. From 1977 until 1991, she worked as a curator at the Student Cultural Centre (SKC) of the University of Belgrade. In the 1980s, she was a contributor to *Artforum* and other international publications. Bojana Pejić has lived in Berlin since 1991. She was the chief curator of the exhibition *After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe* organized by Moderna Museet in Stockholm (1999), which travelled to Budapest (2000) and Berlin (2000–2001). She was one of the curators working on the exhibition *Aspects/Positions: 50 Years of Art in Central Europe 1949–1999* at the MUMOK – Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig in Vienna (2000). She was a chief curator of *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe*, shown at MUMOK in Vienna and the Zachęta National Gallery of Art in Warsaw (2009–2010). She also pursued her research interests in gender representation and power relations in her doctoral dissertation entitled “The Communist Body – An Archaeology of Images: Politics of Representation and Spatialization of Power in the SFR Yugoslavia (1945–1991)”, completing her PhD in 2005 at the Karl von Ossietzky University in Oldenburg, Germany. More recently she co-curated *HERO MOTHER: Contemporary Art by Post-Communist Women Rethinking Heroism* (MOMENTUM Gallery, Kunstquartier Bethanien, Berlin, 2016). She is currently a senior non-resident Fellow at New Europe College (NEC) in Bucharest (Getty Program) in the context of the seminar “Periodization in the History of Art and its Conundrums: How to Tackle them in East-Central Europe” (2018–2022).

The jury wishes to praise the type of cultural worker **Bojana Pejić** represents. She is an opinionated thinker who nevertheless succeeds in uniting many different researchers into a choir of distinct voices. Working mostly as a freelancer, she has created large and insightful projects. She is an art historian and also an activist for whom academia is never sufficient. She compels us to reread our past in order to change our common future.

## **2022 jury members**

**Marta Dziwiałńska**, philosopher and curator, Kunstmuseum Bern

**Ahmet Ögüt**, artist, Berlin/Amsterdam

**Tomáš Pospiszył**, art historian and curator, Prague

