

## Darinka Pop-Mitić

Darinka Pop-Mitić explores the relationship between history and the space of memory in the former Yugoslavia,\* moving from bourgeois salons “decorated” by images of sites of mass killings from the latest Yugoslav wars to decrepit walls containing half-erased messages of solidarity with “The Third World”. Her objects and paintings thus constitute a trigger for souvenir involontaire,\*\* which reactualises the past for the viewer. Adhering to Chesterton’s aphorism that the most interesting thing about a picture is its frame, that is, that the most interesting thing about art are its “boundaries”, Darinka Pop-Mitić invites us to take a closer look at this “frame”. Her latest work *An Educational Mural on a Little Known History of Painting*, a series of wall paintings on the sixth floor of the public garage in Masarikova Street in Belgrade, shifts us to the historical period when the Exhibition Pavilion in which the very first October Salon was opened in 1960 was located in its place. Building upon the foundation of alternative history, as a subgenre of science fiction, she offers us a passageway towards some other past. Thus we get the opportunity to see the works of some of the best known local artists that (perhaps) were never created, and which carry explicit political connotations connected to the time and place of their (putative) coming into being. As ever in the genre of alternative history, the most interesting thing for us is the question: where is the point of divergence in relation to “our” world? The artist offers no answer to this, but she confronts us with the ghosts of unborn works of art in a building haunted by the ghost of the very first October Salon.

\* It is interesting to note that the artist studied at the Faculty of Political Sciences, but decided to give up her studies there when the only thing she could remember during the Contemporary Political History exam was the Nanking massacre (a horrible war crime committed by the Japanese in World War Two) and the exact number of those killed.

\*\* Involuntary memory. A concept made famous by the French writer Marcel Proust in “In Search of Lost Time”.

Svebor Midžić

## Selected exhibitions:

2004 *Untitled as yet*, VI Yugoslav Biennial of Young Artists, Concordia, Vrsac, Serbia  
2005 *Border Disorder*, SKC, Belgrade, Serbia  
2008 SPAPORT, International Annual Exhibition of Contemporary Art, Banja Luka, Bosna and Herzegovina  
2008 49th October Salon, Artist-Citizen, Belgrade, Serbia  
2009 *Not so long ago, not so far away*, Nova gallery, Zagreb, Croatia  
2009 *Border Disorder*, Tutun Deposu, Istanbul, Turkey.  
2009 11th International Istanbul Biennial: *What Keeps Mankind Alive?*, Istanbul, Turkey.  
2009 50th October Salon, *Circumstances*, Belgrade, Serbia  
2009 *Political Practices of (Post-) Yugoslav Art*, Belgrade, Serbia  
2010 *Ground Floor America*, Den Frie, Copenhagen, Denmark  
2010 *FAQ Serbia*, Austrian Cultural Forum, New York  
2011 52nd October Salon, *It's Time We Got To Know Each Other*  
2012 9th Gwangju Biennale *ROUNDTABLE*

## Awards:

49th October Salon international jury award, Artist-Citizen, Belgrade, 2008, Belgrade, Serbia  
With Monument Group: AICA Award on 49th October Salon, 2008, Belgrade, Serbia  
50th October Salon international jury award, *Circumstances*, 2009, Belgrade, Serbia

**Selected works:**

**On Solidarity**

projects in public space/wall paintings/photos/documentation/2005 – present

**Educational Mural about Little-Known History of Painting**

mural/2009

**Europa, Europa**

wall painting/comic book/short story/2012

**Love Knows no Bounds**

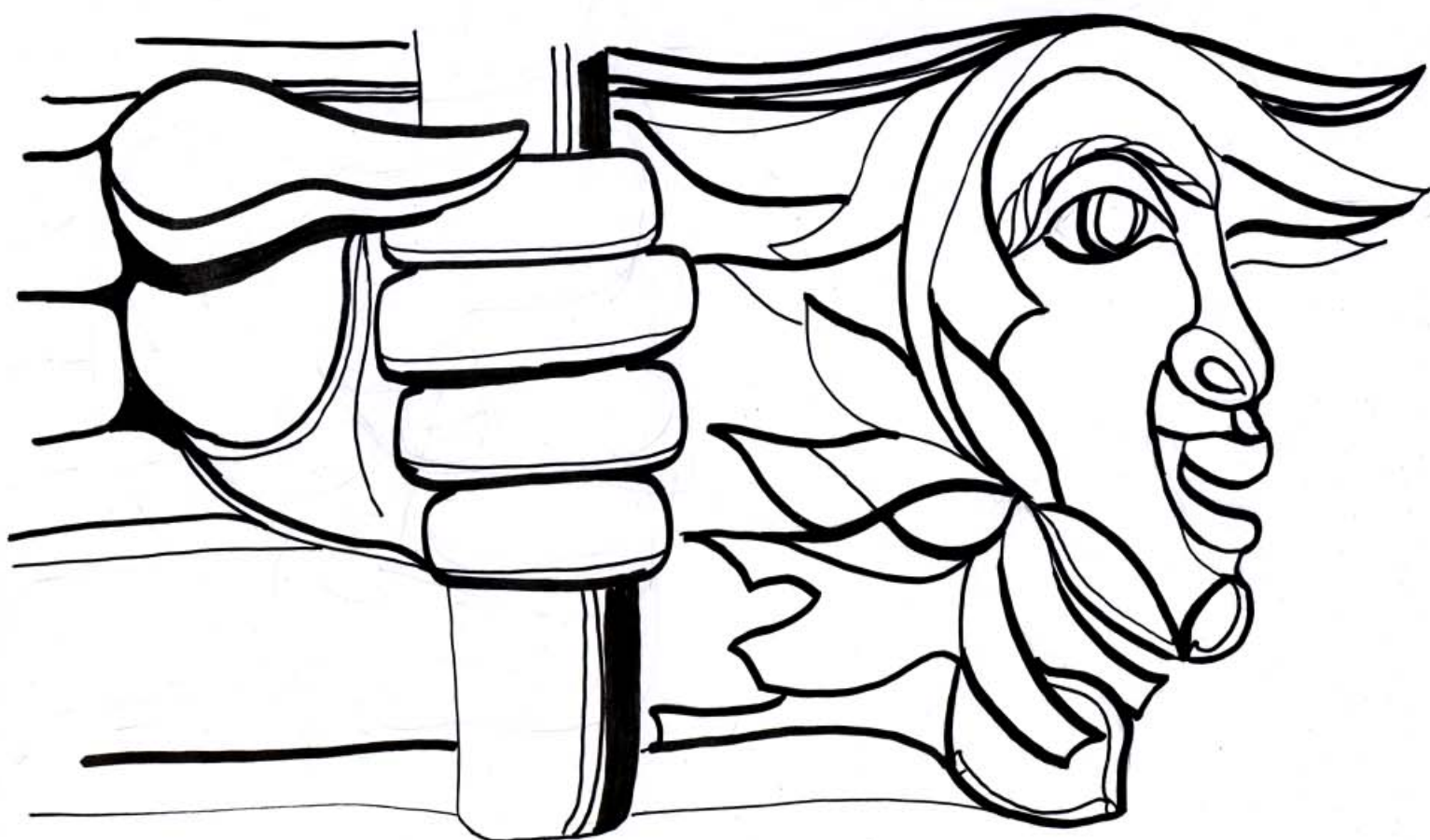
comic book/drawings/2010

**Future Past**

wall painting/drawings/2009

**Landscapes**

installation/ 2004





## On Solidarity/2005-ongoing

When I was very young, little before high school, I would pass by the **Students' Cultural Centre** outer wall almost every day. Students' Cultural Centre (SKC) was the central place of Belgrade (and Yugoslav) conceptual and neo-avant-garde movements.

In the '70s Marina Abramovic and Rasa Todosijevic staged some of their most important performances there. But it was in the '70s and in the '80s I was just a kid and did not know anything about that. I only knew that each time I passed by I was greeted by half-decayed painted images of huge heads coming out of the cloud of almost unrecognizable shapes that covered SKC wall. Suffice to say that I was **frightened** by them.

Years later, in **2005** to be more precise, I had an opportunity to do something inside SKC. Instead I opted to do something on the outside of the SKC. I decided to find out what was the image that haunted me from my childhood. These images have now almost totally faded away but 'thanks' to dissolution of the state, poor economy and general neglect of the building they were not painted over.

To my surprise I discovered that these heads were part of a huge mural **Solidarity of Yugoslav Peoples with People of Latin America**. It was painted in **1977** by a group of Chilean expatriates that were formed in Artistic Brigade Salvador Allende. They were mostly amateurs (they had no 'official' artistic training) and in this they were helped by a group of Belgrade art students. This mural was a part of an event in 1977 called Latin America Week in SKC that included seminars, round tables, lectures (one of them by Che Guevara's brother) and similar stuff.

**These led me to two conclusions:**

**First**, decay of the image was just an aftereffect or symptom of the decay of an idea or even better said a political project. In 1977 there was still Yugoslavia and it promoted idea solidarity of people against oppression. In 2005 there was no Yugoslavia and no solidarity.

**Second**, I had to do something about that image.

So, I decided to 'refresh the paint on the wall'. In that I was partially successful because there was no comprehensive photo documentation of the original event. There were numerous snapshots but never one that would show the whole of the wall.

I documented the whole event (I always thought of it as a more of a performance than a mural) and wrote a short poem about the whole experience.

But since than something **strange** happened. I was invited on several exhibitions where curators expected me to present this work. Easiest way for this appeared to be just to present documentation. I did not particularly like that idea. It seemed cheap to me and not fair to the original piece and its authors. So I decided to do something in addition. I decided to paint a mural.

So in way I became **possessed** by that image. I painted it on several occasions adding or subtracting some elements and being more or less self-referential. And all the time I have tried to find, by combing archives, some image of the whole mural. In 2012 I have found a Yugoslav television TV show from the 1977 that featured an interview with the members of Artistic Brigade Salvador Allende. They talk about art, politics and art and politics. I agree with them about some stuff and disagree about other. I suppose no big surprise there. But still no complete image.

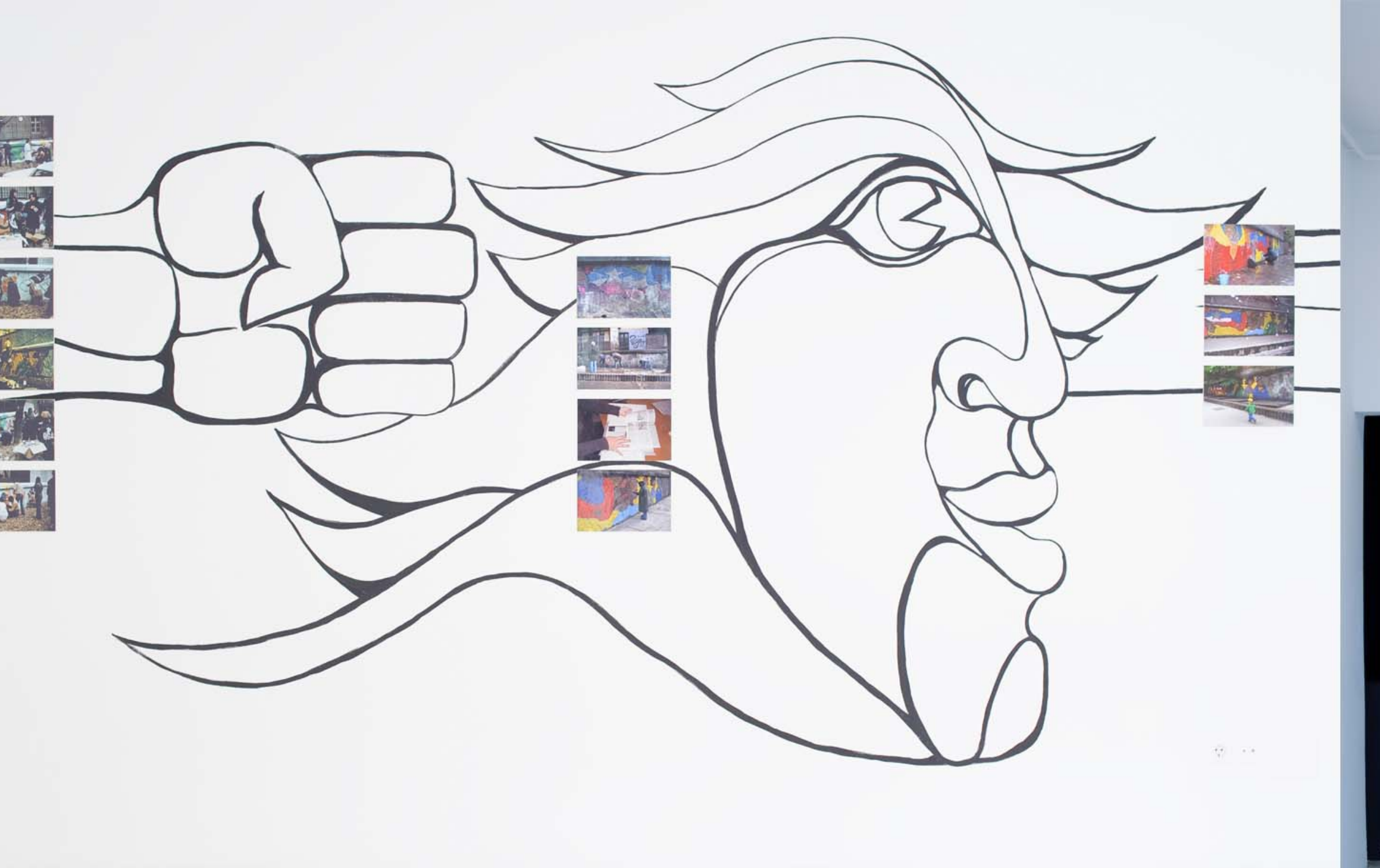
Recently, I have become interested in the **1974** Venice Biennial that was dedicated to Chile as a protest against Pinochet regime and an act of solidarity with people of Chile. I am doing research on that and thinking in which ways I can incorporate that 'protest genealogy' in my work.











Tutun Deposu/Istanbul/2009/**Nova Gallery/Zagreb/2009**/Den Frie/Copenhagen/2010/**Gwangju Biennale 2012**

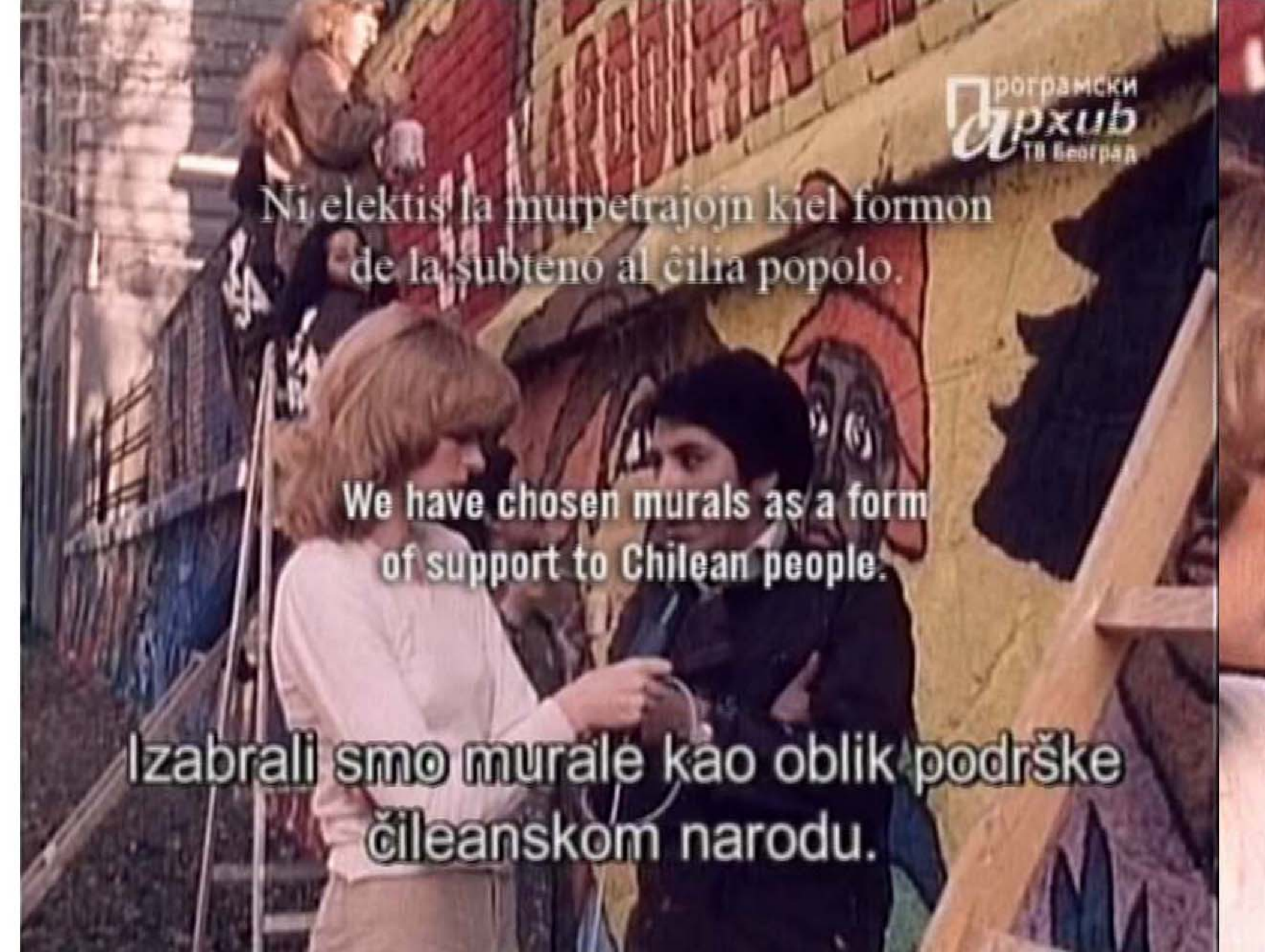








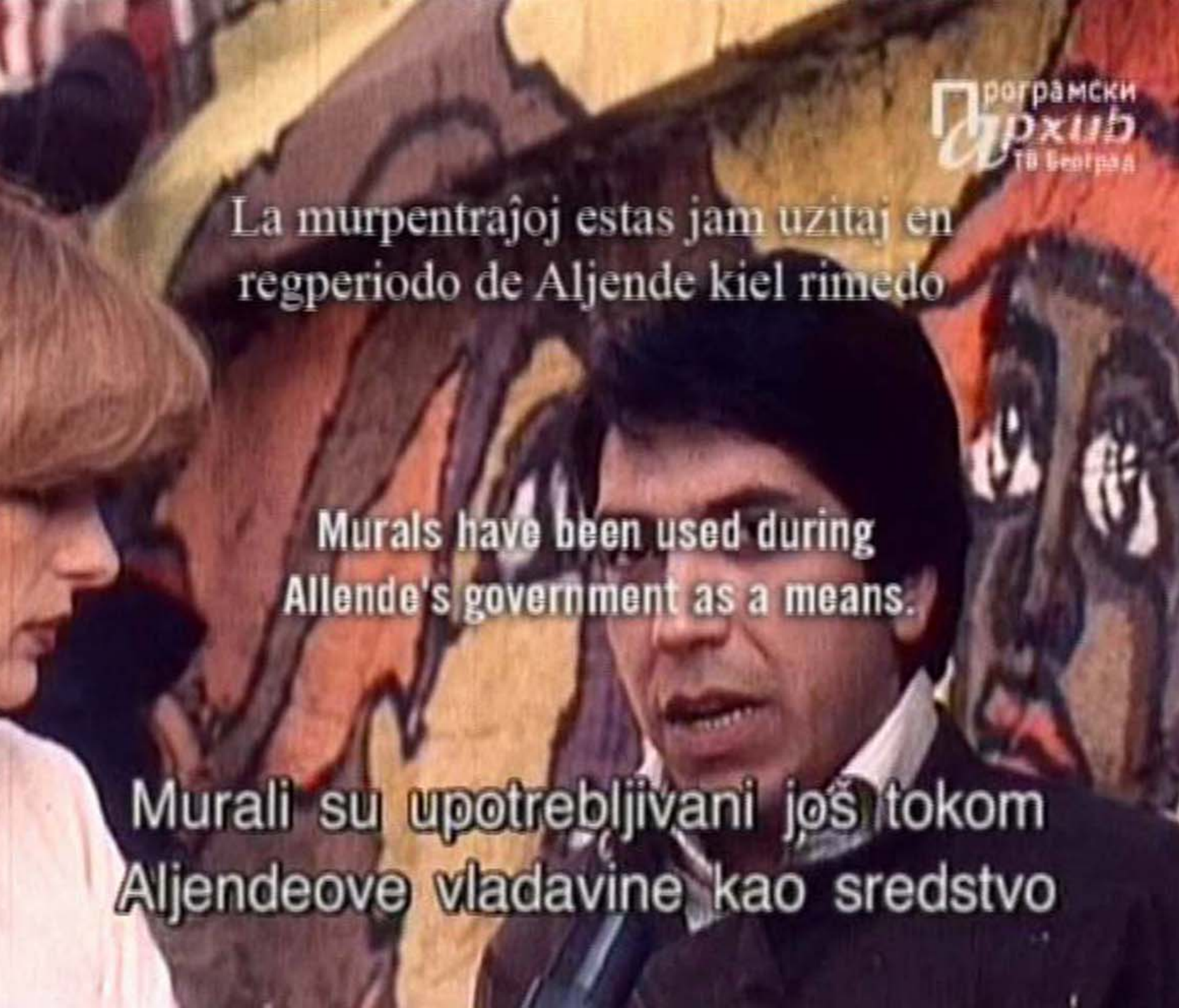




Ni elektis la murpetraĵojn kiel formon  
de la subteno al ĉilia popolo.

We have chosen murals as a form  
of support to Chilean people.

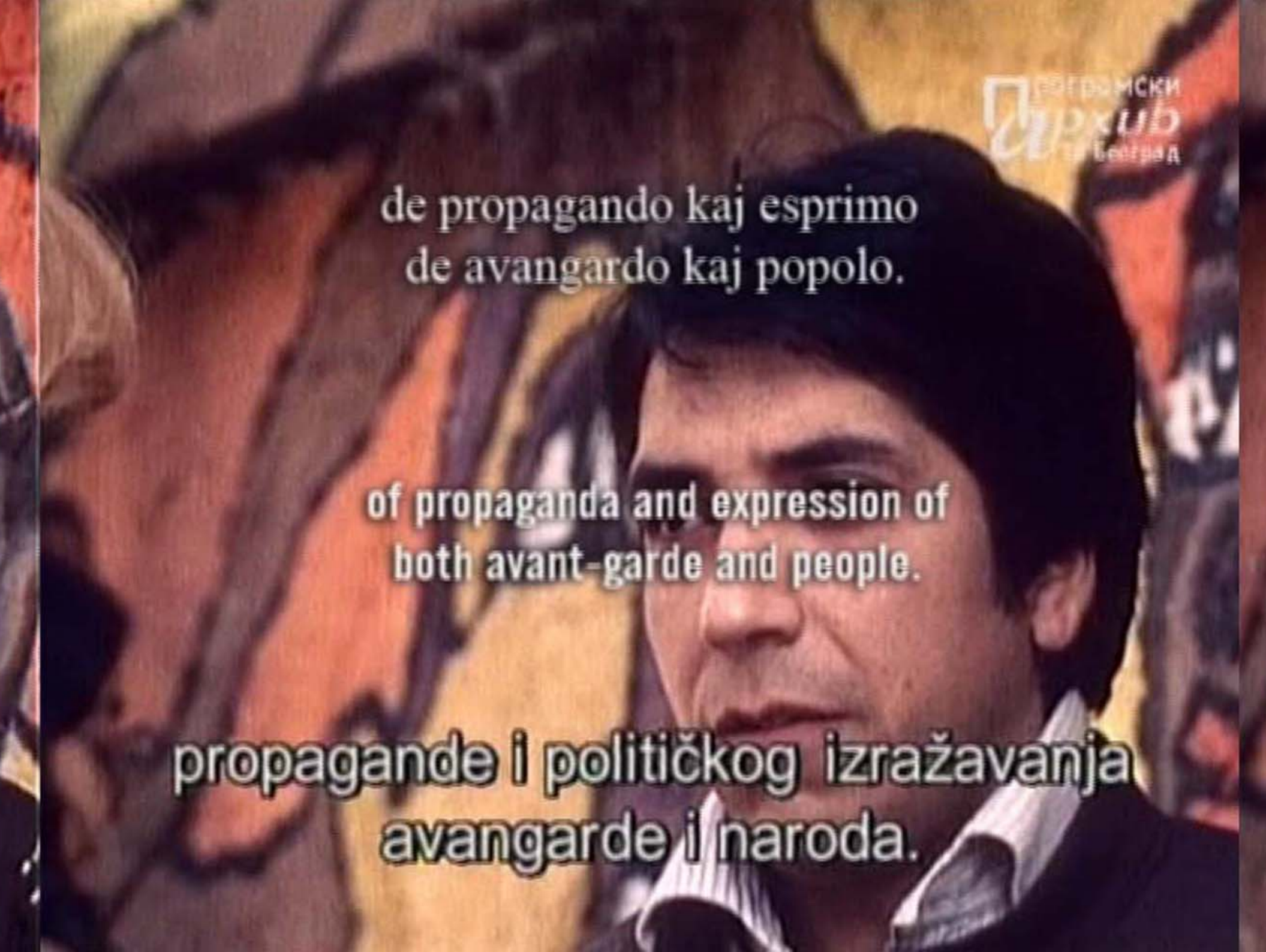
Izabrali smo murale kao oblik podrške  
čileanskom narodu.



La murpentraĵoj estas jam uzitaj en  
regperiodo de Aljende kiel rimedo

Murals have been used during  
Allende's government as a means.

Murali su upotrebljivani još tokom  
Aljendeove vladavine kao sredstvo



de propagando kaj esprimo  
de avangardo kaj popolo.

of propaganda and expression of  
both avant-garde and people.

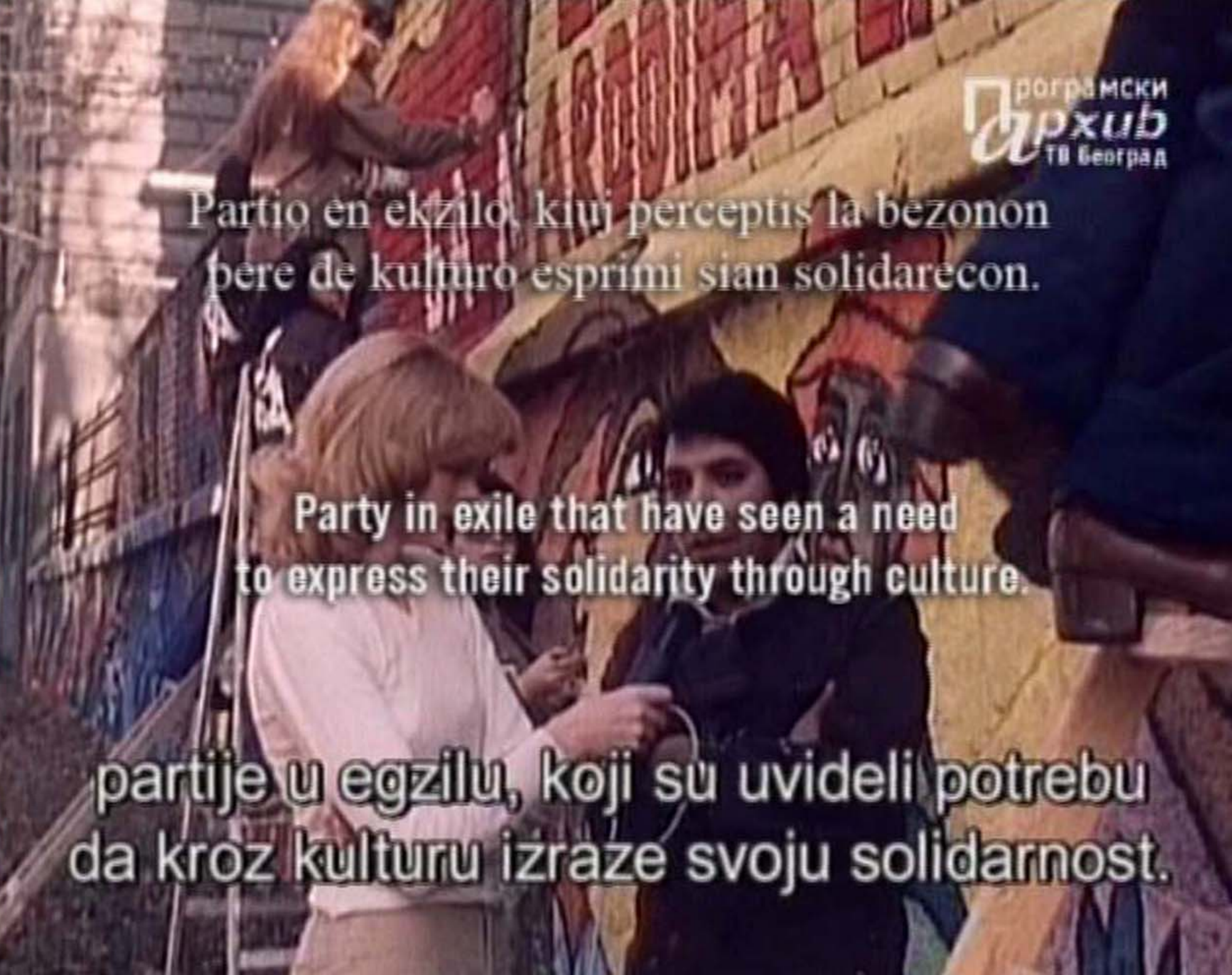
propagande i političkog izražavanja  
avangarde i naroda.



La brigado konsistas el ok kamaradoj.  
Ĉiuj estas anoj de Socialisma partio.

There are eight comrades in the brigade.  
All are members of Socialist party.

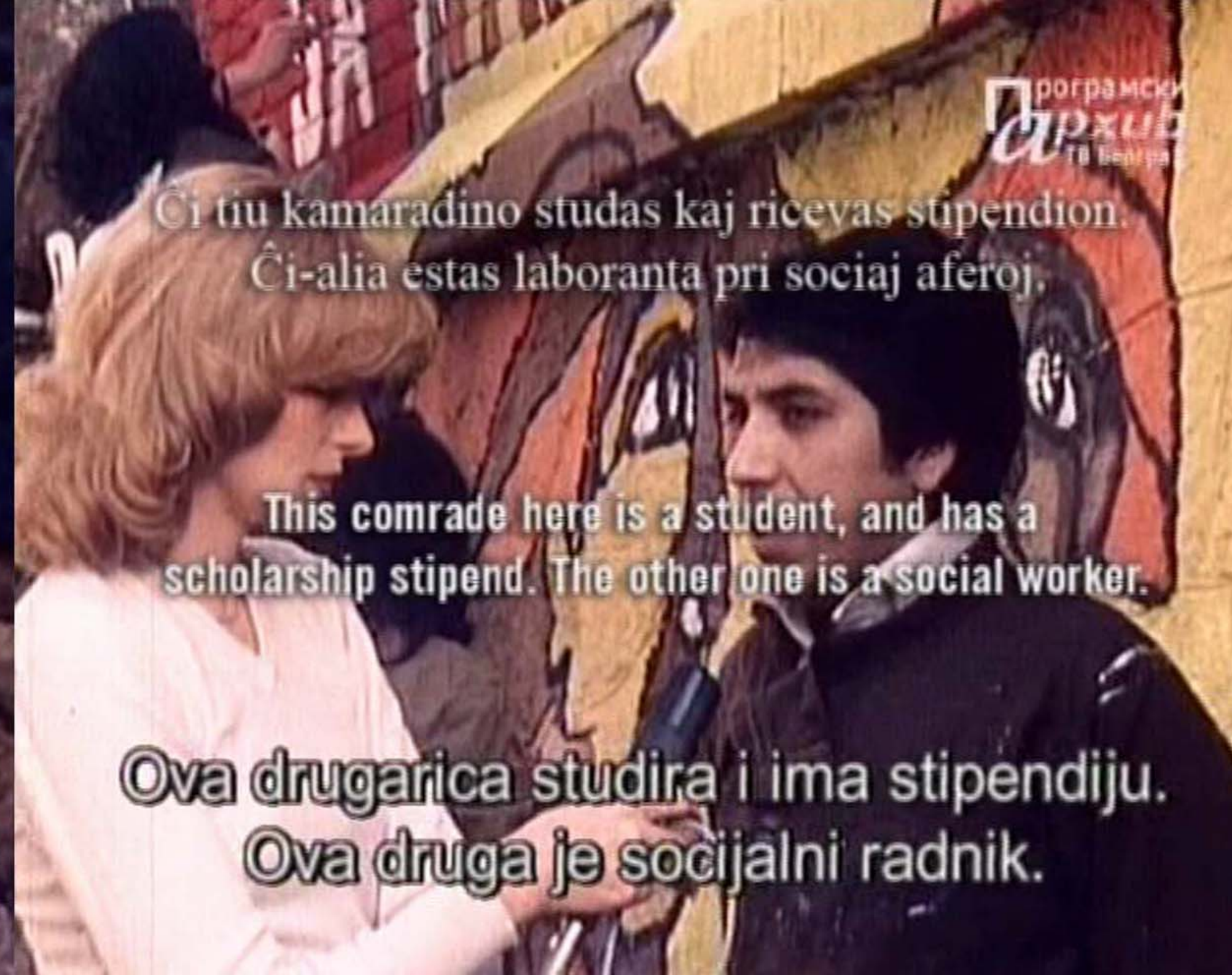
Brigadu čini osam drugova. Svi su  
članovi Socijalističke partije.



Partio en ekzilo, kiuj perceptis la bezonon  
pere de kulturo esprimi sian solidarecon.

Party in exile that have seen a need  
to express their solidarity through culture.

partije u egzilu, koji su uvideli potrebu  
da kroz kulturu izraze svoju solidarnost.



Ĉi tiu kamaradino studas kaj ricevas stipendion.  
Ĉi-alia estas laboranta pri sociaj aferoj.

This comrade here is a student, and has a  
scholarship stipend. The other one is a social worker.

Ova drugarica studira i ima stipendiju.  
Ova druga je socijalni radnik.



La tria estas laboristino.  
Tria estas laboranta pri sociaj aferoj.

Third one, she is laborer.  
Third one, she is laborer.

Treća je radnica.  
Treća je radnica.





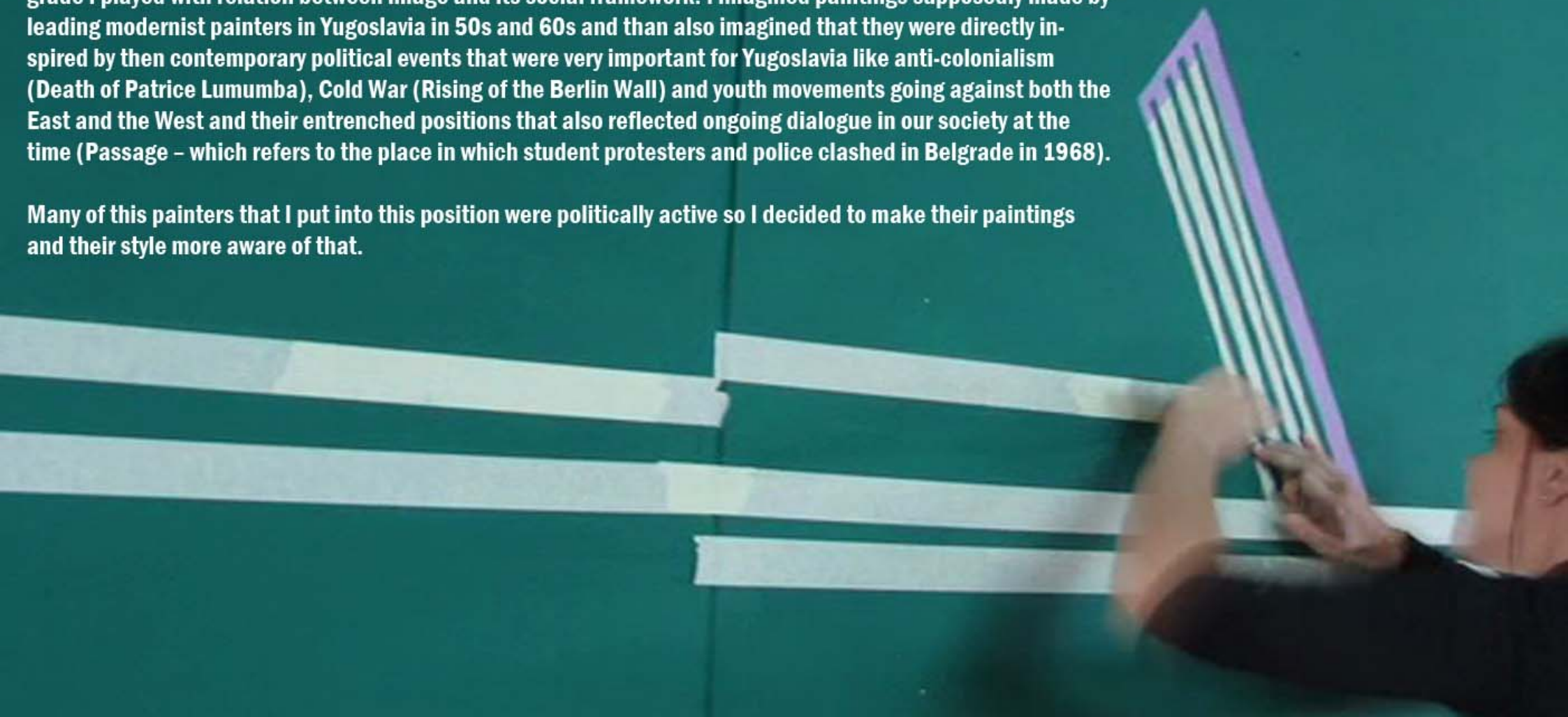


## EDUCATIONAL MURAL ABOUT LITTLE KNOWN HISTORY OF PAINTING/2009

High modernism was dominant style in socialist Yugoslavia. Contrary to other socialist countries that were part of the Eastern bloc Yugoslavia never had strong tradition of socialist realism. It can even be said that since the break with USSR the only imperative that was present in art was that you couldn't be socialist realist. No sweaty workers, glorious leaders or Volga boatman just Armory show and Clement Greenberg. This dream of autonomy of art was possible due to Yugoslavia's unique political position as one of the leaders of the Third World that espoused idea of an alternative modernization between East and West. There was definitive political framework that made this art possible. As always with the modernism.

In the work Educational Mural about Little Known History of Painting that I did for 50th October salon in Belgrade I played with relation between image and its social framework. I imagined paintings supposedly made by leading modernist painters in Yugoslavia in 50s and 60s and than also imagined that they were directly inspired by then contemporary political events that were very important for Yugoslavia like anti-colonialism (Death of Patrice Lumumba), Cold War (Rising of the Berlin Wall) and youth movements going against both the East and the West and their entrenched positions that also reflected ongoing dialogue in our society at the time (Passage – which refers to the place in which student protesters and police clashed in Belgrade in 1968).

Many of this painters that I put into this position were politically active so I decided to make their paintings and their style more aware of that.





## Angel

There is a well-known but also uncommonly ambivalent allegory by Benjamin (Theses on the Philosophy of History): an angel with outspread wings, carried by the wind of progress blowing from the beginning of time, his gaze glued to the scene of desolation he watches entirely helplessly, for the wind is too strong and there is no going back. The angel in question, of course, is the hapless angel of history.

## Midgets

In Terry Gilliam's film *Time Bandits*, a group of midgets, God's foremen in the business of building the world – which probably makes them a kind of lower-rank, unfinished angels – steal a map of Creation, which contains shortcuts for travelling through history. Dissatisfied with their low pay and the post of designers of bushes and other low plants, they decide to use this map in the manner of real, greedy dwarfs from fairy tales, that is, to rob history.

Perhaps Benjamin's angel is too bulky and long-limbed to fight the heavenly wind of progress – is not the possibility of eluding the inexorable (iron) law of history only left to "lower-rank" beings?

However, the dwarf-sized criminals do not have a clue when it comes to history, that is, the historical events that they encounter (they like Napoleon, for example, because he is as short as they are, they have never heard of the "man-eater from Corsica", etc.). In the course of their journey, they enter mythological non-time, Satan's empire that precedes history, but dare not step into the future, thus respecting what Benjamin marks as the Old Testament – or to put it more precisely – Judean ban on fortune telling and foretelling the future. Complete ignorance of history, the past as well as the future, is the only map on the journey through time. Perhaps one could say that the precondition of the possibility of travelling through time is their lack of knowledge of the past and the absence of a wish to peek into the future?

## Dog

Even though, in the course of attending school, every day he passed by the material remains of Russian avant-garde (for example, Konstantin Melnik's constructivism in architecture, etc.), when asked about his attitude towards Russian avant-garde, the well-known Russian (Soviet?) artist Ilya Kabakov replied: "Yes, it was all there, but I ran through all that like a dog running through the Parthenon."

This admission on the part of Kabakov should not be read as proof of some Orwellian totalitarian conspiracy of silence on the subject of Russian avant-garde; on the contrary, we can understand this claim in the key of the dominant Stalinist historicism (which Althusser wittily, and quite rightly, described as "the posthumous revenge of the Second International"). Historicism knows only the empty flow of time wherein events pile up, and on the other hand, the subject of historical knowledge, in the guise of the Party, possessing privileged insight into the iron law of history. The gaze of a historicist is turned towards the future, whereas the past appears solely in the nostalgia mode – which is why Ilya Kabakov is a "man who never threw anything away"; he feels a certain nostalgia towards things that say, that is, mean nothing to him. He uses those things to "anchor" himself in the present. But perhaps the virtue of ignorance is precisely what enables both a dog and a dwarf to walk freely through the Parthenon of history?

## Walls

The artist Darinka Pop-Mitić may be neither a midget nor a dog, but she certainly offers herself, through her series of works in public spaces, formally linked by the technique of wall painting, for the role of a mediator between history and the present.

In her work *On Solidarity* (2005), she attempts an incomplete and impossible reconstruction of the mural on the outer wall of the Students' Cultural Centre in Belgrade, created as part of the Week of Solidarity of the People of Yugoslavia with the Peoples of Latin America in 1977. *The Future of the Past* (2009), a work realised in the mining city of Bor, reinterprets, in the manner of a collage having the form of a mural, a series of graphics by the Serbian artist Đorđe Andrejević Kun entitled *The Bloody Gold*, created in the 1930s, depicting the life, work and resistance method of miners from Bor.

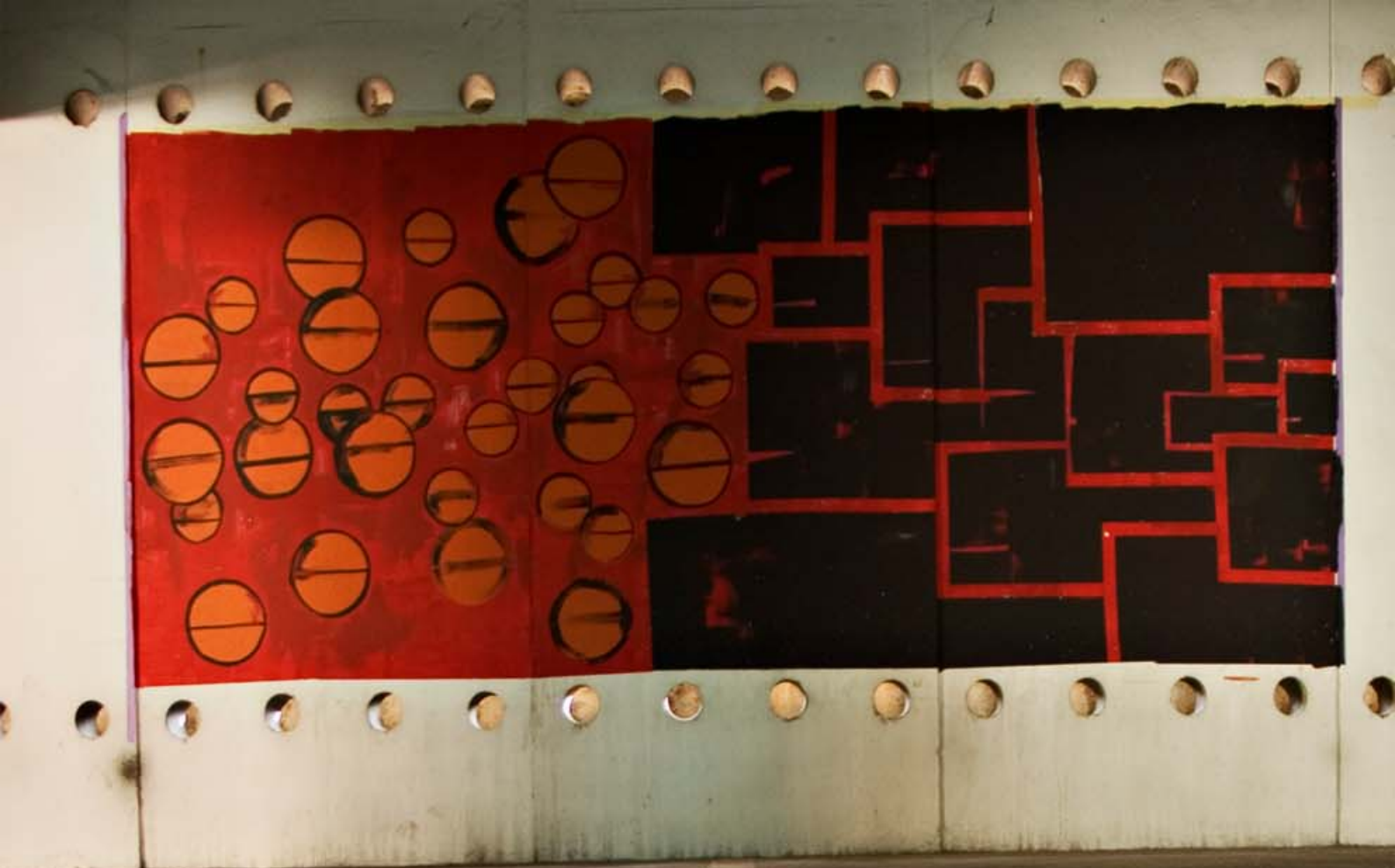
*An Educational Mural about Little-Known History of Painting* (2009), builds upon the foundations of the subgenre of alternative history, making up a separate and somewhat controversial segment of the science fiction genre, that is to say, offers us a passage leading to another past. Thus we get the opportunity to see the works of some of the most famous domestic artists that (perhaps) were never created, carrying explicit political connotations connected to the time and place of their (putative) creation. Their hyper-political character, hinted at in the title, is related to entirely recognisable formal consistency with the opuses of their putative authors, thus creating a strange dialectics arising from the juncture of two arrows of time: one pointing towards the past, and the other, aiming for the future, that is, the end.

All these works have a common origin, but also produce an unexpected result: they do not extract segments of the past in order to throw them under our feet for us to reinterpret them (the trap of historicism) – on the contrary, according to Benjamin's precise formula, these works fill the past with the present.









**EDUCATIONAL MURAL ABOUT LITTLE KNOWN HISTORY OF PAINTING**

**Rising of the Berlin Wall / by Petar Lubarda**



MIĆA  
POPOVIĆ  
PODVOŽNJAK



EDUCATIONAL MURAL ABOUT LITTLE KNOWN HISTORY OF PAINTING

Passage May '68 / by Mića Popović



STOJAN ĆELIĆ  
SMRT PATRISA  
LUMUMBE



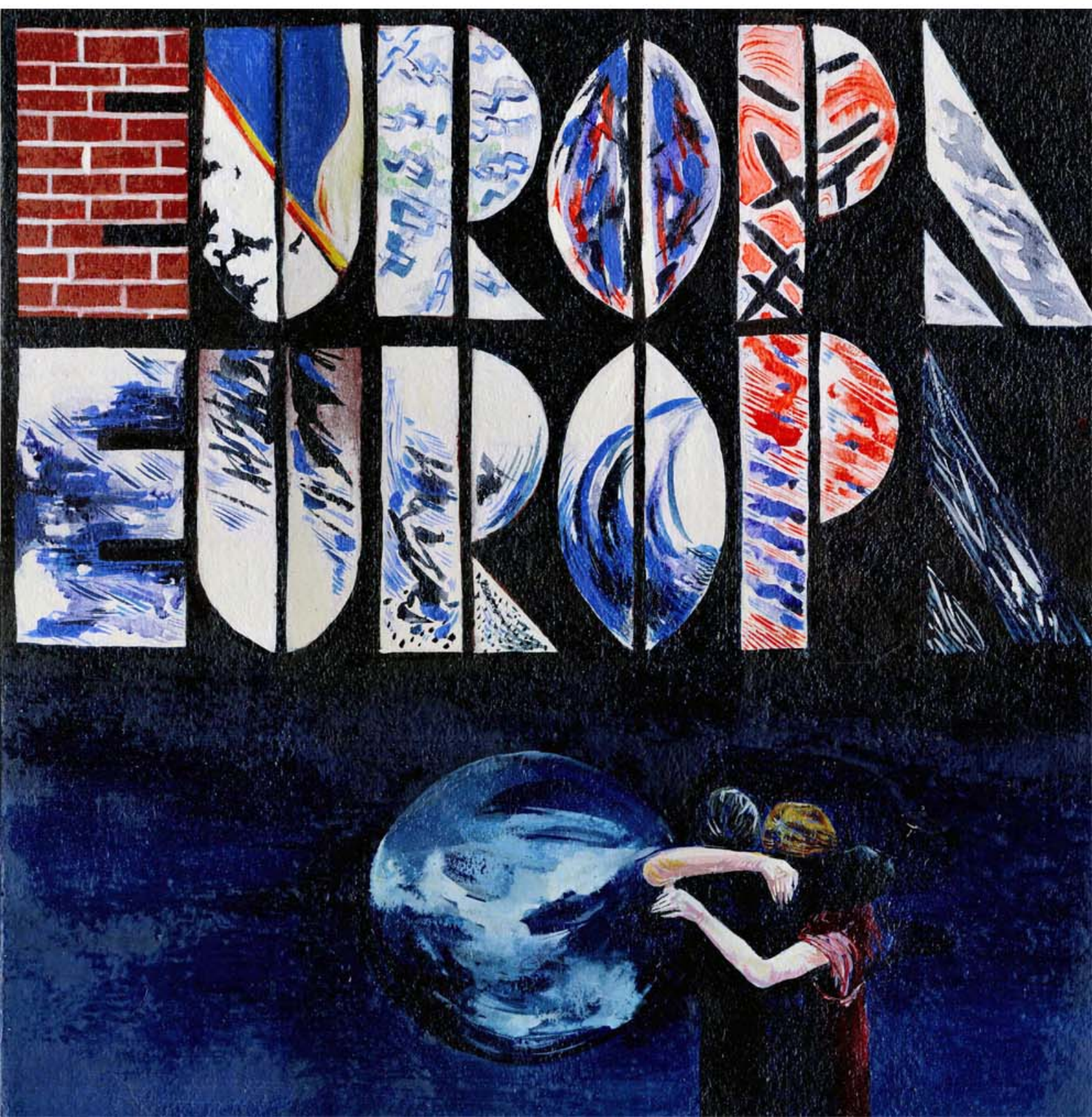
EDUCATIONAL MURAL ABOUT LITTLE KNOWN HISTORY OF PAINTING

Death of Patris Lumumba/ by Stojan Ćelić



**EUROPA, EUROPA/ wall painting/ 2012**

**An Experiment in Petty-Bourgeois Realism or A Salon Experiment on Europe**





In Roberto Bolano's novel *Nazi literature in Americas* author catalogues a succession of far right poets and writers and their often bizarre and comical search for meaning of art. Of course they are all imaginary characters. But you know the type.

Recently I have started sharing this fascination with something existing on the fringe yet ready to leap on to center stage at the moments notice. I am speaking of course about right-wing painters and artist. They are (and were) quite ubiquitous where I come from.

One of them Dragoš Kalajić was very popular guy. Again you know the type: tall, handsome, elegant suit, studied painting in Rome in '60s, keeps Ezra Pound's photo on his work table and always quotes Evola. He painted quite a bit but wrote even more and was equally at home among pages of women magazines and theoretical art journals. He was what we call in my country "salon fascist". It was strange because socialist Yugoslavia officially did not have bourgeoisie to organize salons.

He was also, not surprisingly, ardent European. During Yugoslav wars he wrote numerous texts trying to explain to anyone who would read his writing that Serbs were fighting for Europe against Moslem threat. So he had quite a clear idea what a Europe was. In 1967 he laid his philosophical and artistic credo with a painting titled *Europe, Europe*. He was probably the only painter or artist in my country that persistently claimed that he was European. True Euroman.

When I was invited to contribute to the exhibition, in Slovenia, that was part of the European Capital of Culture Maribor and curator told me that he would love some piece, mural if possible, concerning the European identity I had no doubt what it would be.

I painted a mural, draw a comic book and wrote a short story on the subject of Dragoš Kalajić. Unfortunately, unlike him, I am very bad European.











But as it is widely known, with cosmological revolutions of the Renaissance, the new age begins and, Man's central position is lost...



EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK "THE END OF THE WORLD"  
BY DRAGOŠ KALATIĆ; BELGRADE, 1979.

With this process of transformation life of the European Man changes drastically with "The lost Center" and both the hierarchy of values and classical axiology change.



In the modern days, the paths of culture lead in the opposite direction from that in which Knights of the Round Table galloped: to the Grail, to the chalice of the Center.

"THE LAST EUROPEAN"

D. KALATIĆ; OIL ON CANVAS, 1993.

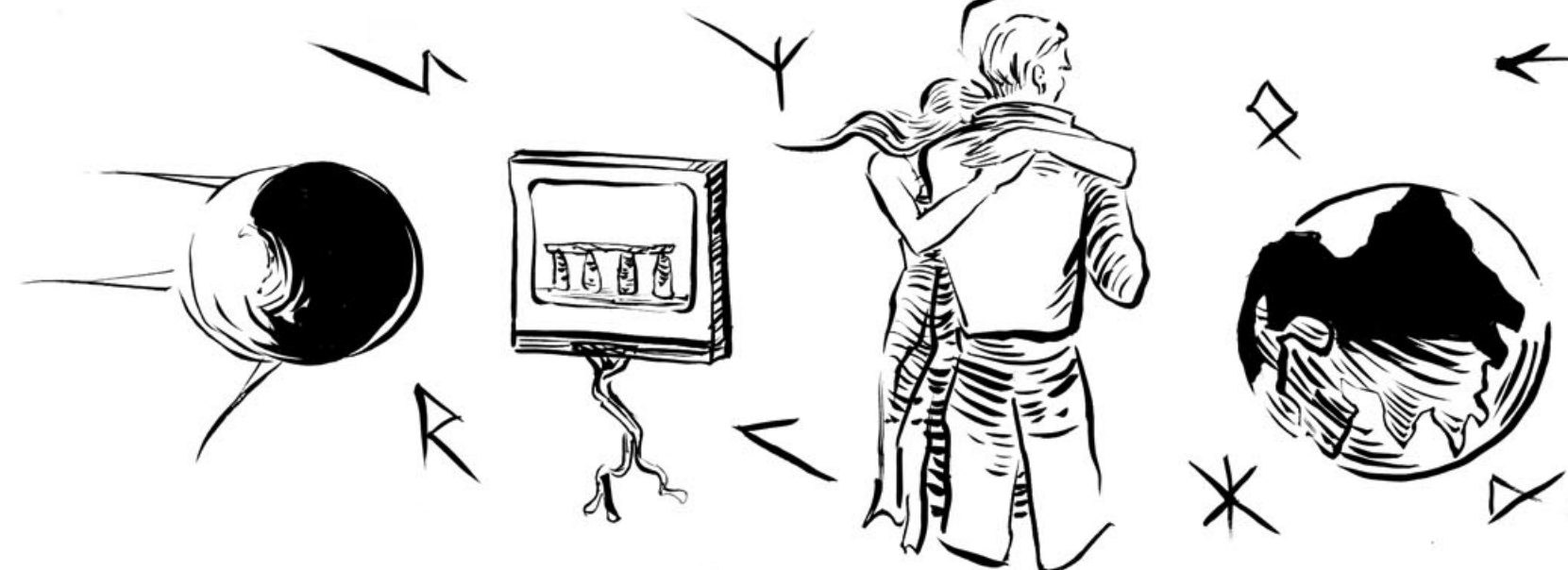
In search for terms and ideas for this dictionary I stumbled upon beautiful feminine noun: "decadence". It was standing in the sentence that compared Modern with Roman decadence.



"FORMULA OF COSMIC DEVELOPMENT"

D. KALATIĆ; OIL ON CANVAS, 1993.

For the moment I put aside this text and, I started to stare in to the night sky over Belgrade, I was thinking how the protagonists of the Roman empire decadence were completely oblivious to the fact that they were living at the end of an Empire.





## Useful Idiocy

### An Experiment in Petty-Bourgeois Realism or A Salon Experiment on Europe / **short story**

Way back in 1967, a painting in eisel format and it could be said, in realistic style, was created in socialist Yugoslavia (at that time, something called new figuration was pretty hot and it closely followed new trends in painting such as hyperrealism). The painting was adorned by what could be called a mythological message, so the artist gave it the name Europa Europa!

When I try to recall those times more clearly (although I was not even born back then) this artistic herald of the shape of things to come made an entire series of works dedicated to Europe in late 1960s. And in all those pleiads of related paintings, he prophetically points the way towards an united Europe for his painter colleagues or tackles European cultural heritage by lining up the giants of European pasts one next to another and then cramming them all into Stonehenge and so on. (I wish to point out that in our neck of the woods socrealims as an art style never gained momentum (god forbid!) as is the prevalent opinion regarding the lands behind and around the iron curtain. On the contrary, everything was covered in abstraction and strict Greenberg-style modernism)

The author of this painting was, after all, the first to use the term “post-modern” in our neck of the woods. He openly supported right-wind ideology and he claimed that he was not at all a painter, but rather a promoter – via painting – of an ideology, so a confused reader could come to a conclusion that it was after all just a really perverted sort of socrealism. Instead of oil, we have politics on canvas. And not only that – we have the entire iconography of European tradition. In a discreet oil-on-canvas format, fit for a salon.

And so this painter, with that kind of an approach towards day-to-day life in Yugoslavia, with its modern and good-looking people and pleasant environments, what could be called a modernizing European atmosphere, somehow obtrusively established himself as a side-follower of trends in great art metropolises such as New York, Paris or Rome. He was more well know as an avid entertainer at dinner parties, Slovenian ski resorts, Dubrovnik getaways or Belgrade salons, than for his paintings. His charming nihilism while talking about a man among ruins, went nicely with the mild decadence of those that called themselves “The Belgrade Spiritual Vertical”. Soon he became a host of his own TV show, where he demonstrated his vast karate skills, drove in carriages around New York City and did interviews with Giorgio de Chirico.

For years, whenever I heard the word “Europe”, I would think of this painter. It would seem to me that in my country he stands as a sort of a “placeholder” for this not only geographical reference, but also an idea. He called himself a “man of Europe” and I have a habit of trusting people. I personally do not consider myself “a woman of Europe”.

And so on and on – until finally his Europe had moved from art studios into ever bigger institutions and then on to the streets. He, too, did not remain in the salon, but rather he followed his idea everywhere. He did not just sit in his salon, where his witticisms could delight the intellectual elite of a country that was no more.

Here I will quote a reputable film professor from Belgrade, who coincidentally subscribes to the same intellectual and certainly hyperborean view of Europe as our artist: “Well, what kind of fascist can you have except a salon fascist? And when you say such a thing for a communist, well then he has a big problem.”

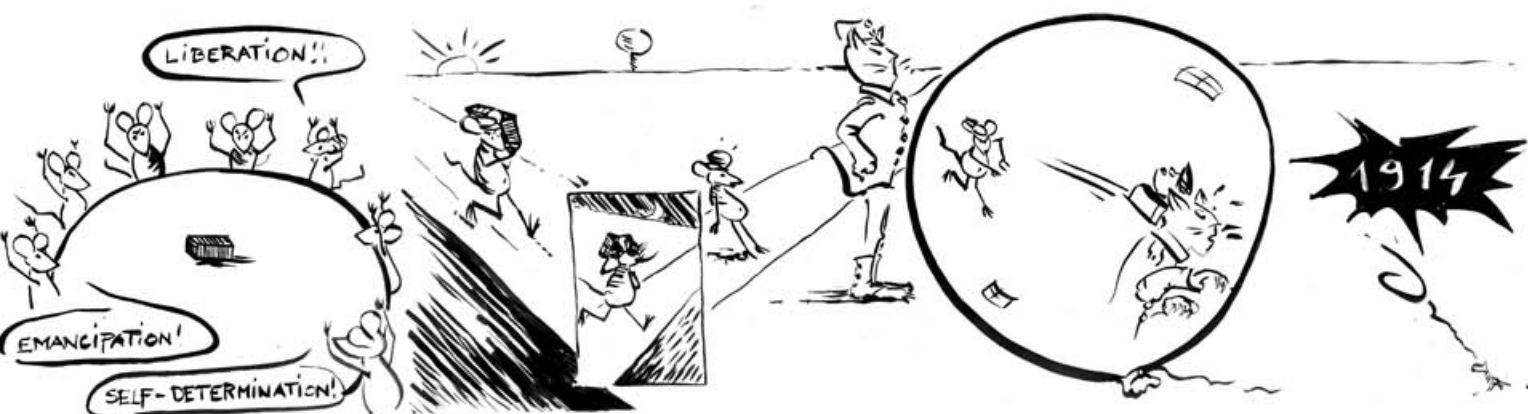
But, what happens when you oust the fascist from a salon? Does he, then, have a problem? Or do those around him?







## LOVE KNOWS NO BOUNDS



## mural / comic book libretto for the mural (2010)





## History of Relations between Austria and Serbia/**as seen from New York/**

asks quite simple question: What if there was politically engaged American daily cartoon chronicling relations between Serbia and Austria?

Obviously it was mainly inspired by George Herriman's Krazy Kat. As you probably know Herriman is considered to be a Chaplin of daily comics and his Krazy Kat strip ran for more than 30 years and was enjoyed both by the high-brow (including Joyce, Duchamp and Picasso) for its Dadaist humor and identity questions and by 'common' people enjoying adventures of mouse and cat. Basically, Krazy Kat was (and still remains) outstanding example of Modernism in comic strip format.

In the cartoon, Krazy Kat, a cat of indeterminate sex, was in love with Ignatz Mouse. Ignatz, in turn, had a somewhat antagonistic attitude toward Krazy, which he demonstrated by tossing bricks at her/his head. Alas, Krazy took the hard knocks as a sign that Ignatz truly loved him/her. The eternal love dynamic, with all accompanying confusion, humor, violence and pathos.

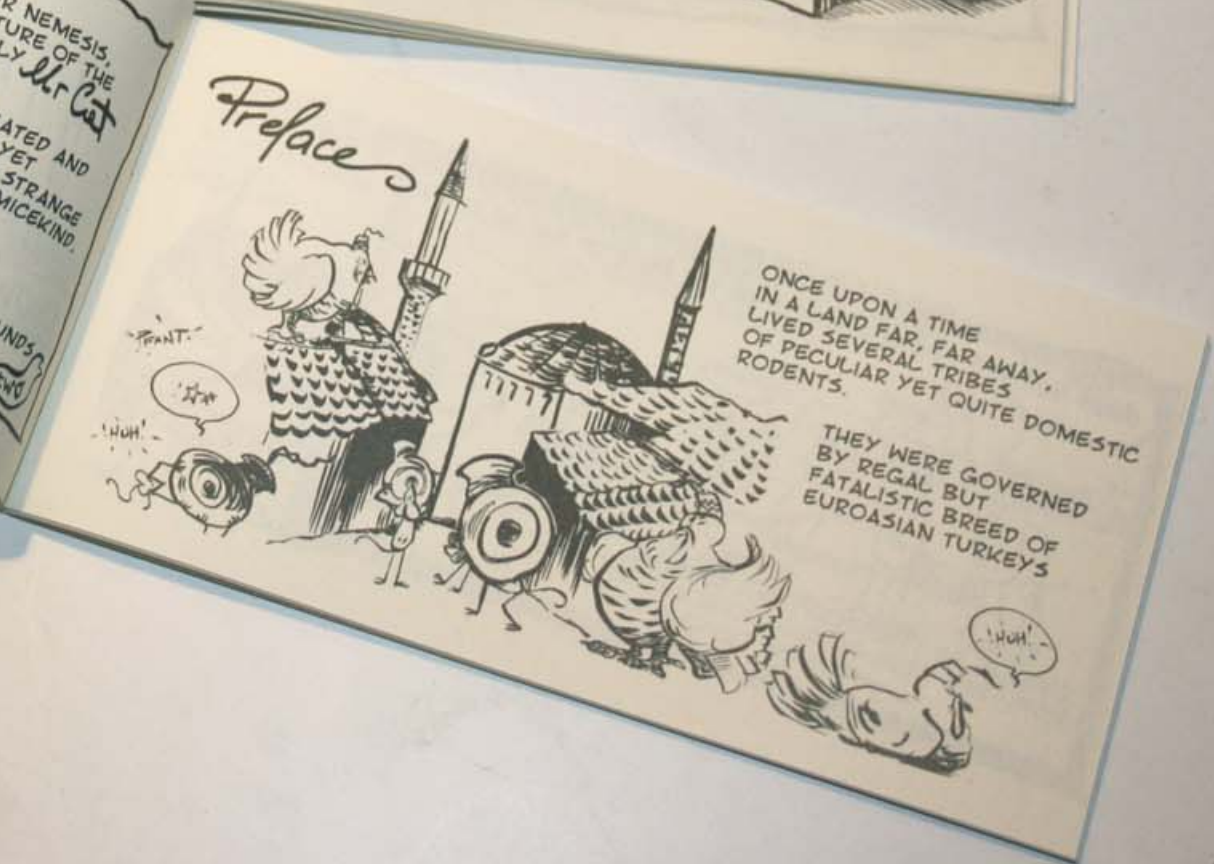
Just like real life politics and inter state relations.









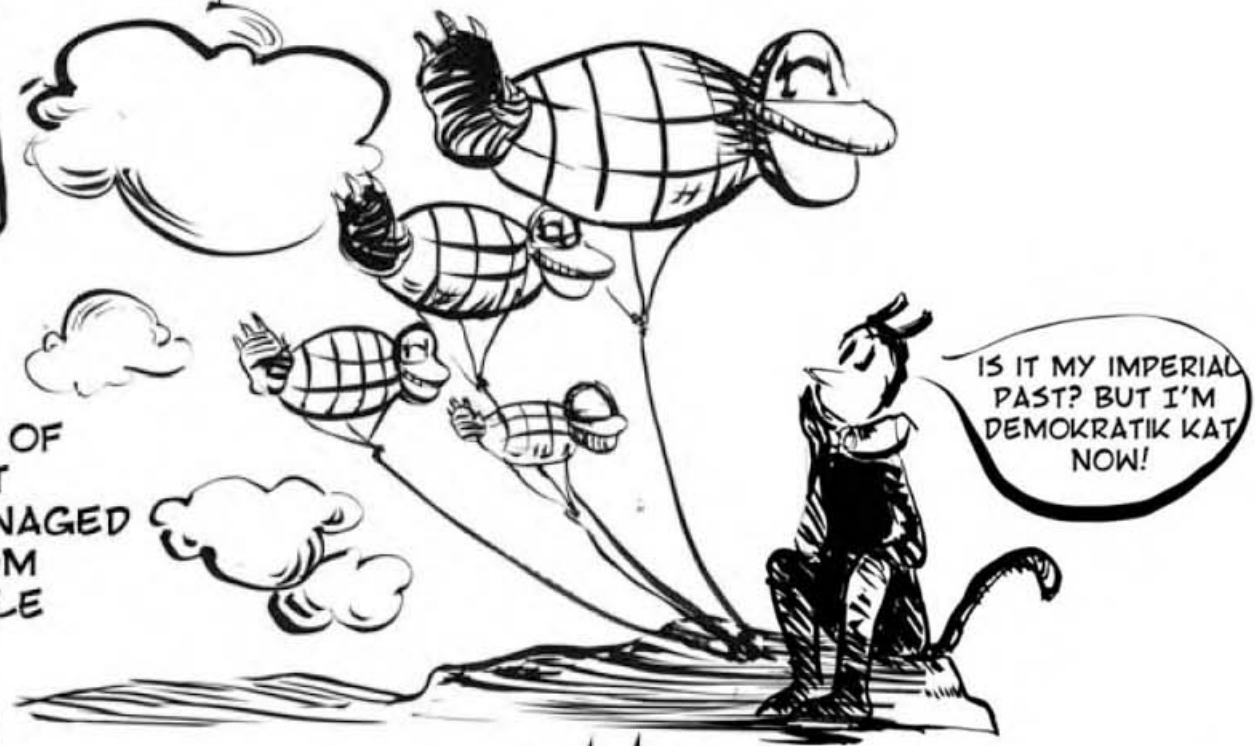




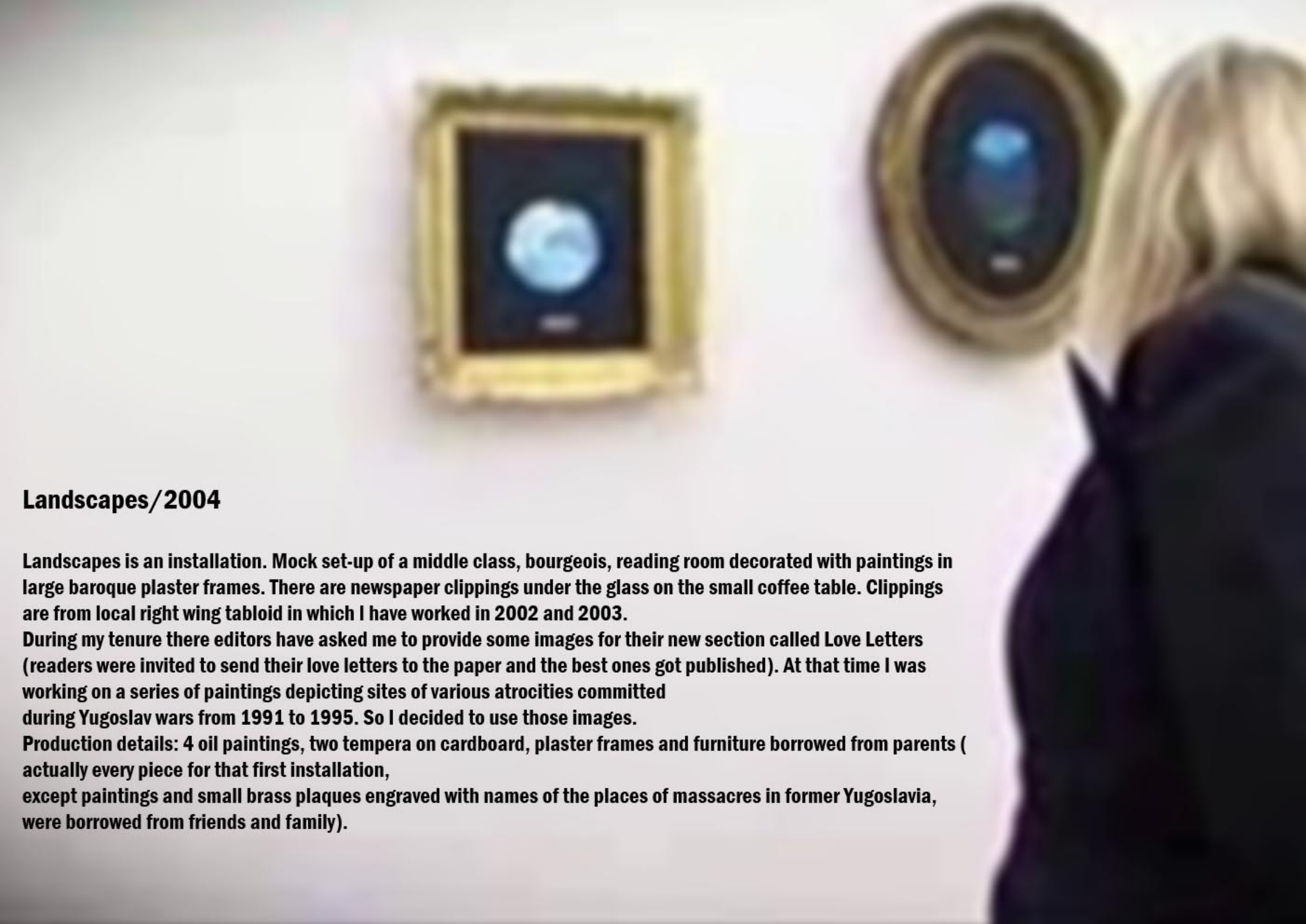
# WAR

in pictures

SIMPLIFIED AND ILLUSTRATED PICTONARY OF  
ONE JUST AND UNPROVOKED WAR THAT  
THESE SMALL RODENTWOROUS CREATURES WAGED  
AGAINST DESPOTIC UND CRUEL KINGDOM  
OF CATZ OF WHICH MANY OF THEIR NOBLE  
YET BARBARIC CITIZENS DIDN'T SAW  
ANY OPPORTNITY FOR FRENDSHIP OR  
MUCH LESS MERCIFULL COEGZISTENZ







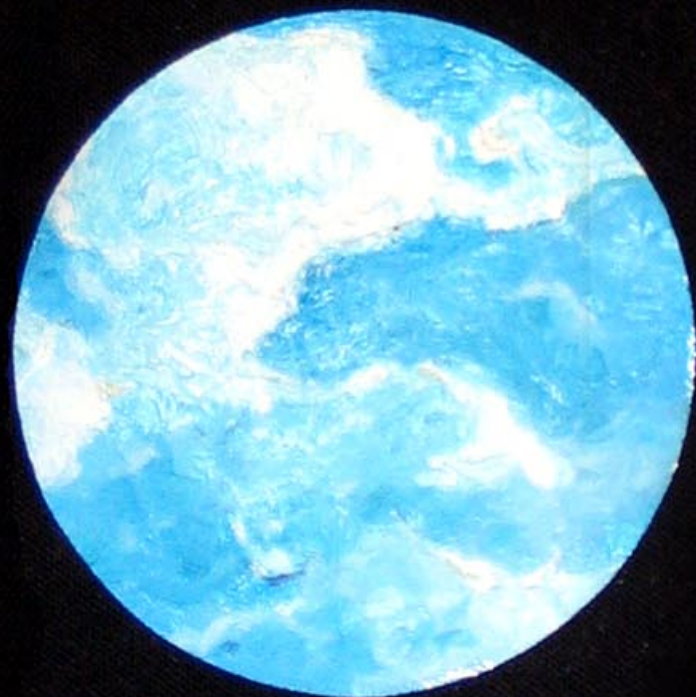
## **Landscapes/2004**

**Landscapes is an installation. Mock set-up of a middle class, bourgeois, reading room decorated with paintings in large baroque plaster frames. There are newspaper clippings under the glass on the small coffee table. Clippings are from local right wing tabloid in which I have worked in 2002 and 2003.**

**During my tenure there editors have asked me to provide some images for their new section called Love Letters (readers were invited to send their love letters to the paper and the best ones got published). At that time I was working on a series of paintings depicting sites of various atrocities committed during Yugoslav wars from 1991 to 1995. So I decided to use those images.**

**Production details: 4 oil paintings, two tempera on cardboard, plaster frames and furniture borrowed from parents (actually every piece for that first installation, except paintings and small brass plaques engraved with names of the places of massacres in former Yugoslavia, were borrowed from friends and family).**





Вуковар





