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I was born in Skopje Macedonia in 1963, a few months before the catastrophic earthquake that demolished seventy percent of the city. More than a thousand people were killed and six thousand were injured. Although I was too young at the time to remember it, my parents lost everything in that earthquake, and until a new house was built we lived on one of the Dalmatian Islands. In the big reconstruction that followed the earthquake, different international organisations, including Russian and American, worked right alongside each other to assist in the reconstruction of the city. This had happened right after the Cuban missile crisis, and it was a sign of hope that the world might be able to avoid blowing itself apart.

There are three children in the family. My brother Alex and sister Sonja are younger than me. My earliest fond family memories are of spending time by the sea – of beach days spent on the shorelines of the Dalmatian Islands with my siblings and cousins. We either went to Dalmatia or Montenegro in those days.

After Macedonia we lived in Greece where my father

and mother had worked in the Yugoslav General Consulate. My father had abandoned Law Studies and graduated from Art History and Archaeology and travelling with him meant stopping the car every so often to delve into local archaeological sites, monasteries, and churches. I guess you could say I received a very early education from my father in understanding art through being taught to read the semiotics of the church frescos and icons. While I can say now is that it was important and very interesting; but when I was a kid I was more aware of the fact that trips with my father were inevitably going to take a very, very long time.

Early school years were spent at Pinewood - The American International School in Thessaloniki, Greece, that ran classes from kindergarten to twelfth grade. Classes were very small (5 – 8 students in a class) with only about two hundred students in total. We returned to Skopje when I was in high school. My high school was called Josip Broz Tito, after the Yugoslav President. It had a big emphasis on the Sciences (Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics and the like) which I wasn't



particularly interested in. But I was interested in the social studies – History, Geography, Logic, Psychology, the contemporary languages as well as Latin, and a subject that was offered called Marxism, where there was less of an emphasis on the economic aspect of those studies, and more on the socio-political teachings of Marx and Engels, as well as on Self-Management, as the dominating socio-economic system in Yugoslavia (which probably represented the most democratic form of Socialism at that point), as opposed to Etatism (State Socialism) of the Soviet Union and its satellites.

I remember I already knew I wanted to study some kind of artistic subject but that I wasn't sure whether I wanted to go into film, the performing arts, the visual arts, or the humanities. I bought myself a Super-8 camera and started shooting everything I could (too bad the film was so expensive those days). I guess it was inevitable that I'd end up having something to do with art: my father who was studying Law switched halfway and graduated from art history, some of my family members were painters or sculptors, one of my aunts was a famous archaeologist, another a piano teacher, and one of my grandfathers was an art historian, so there was almost no escape. Even my neighbour Nada, who was running Student Affairs at the University, suggested subtly that it would be very good if I applied to be accepted at the Faculty for Art History with Archaeology. At that point I was genuinely interested in Philosophy, but in the end the Art won out. I actually thought that after graduating from Art History I would switch to Philosophy, but that also didn't work out (long story).

Back then you had to go into the army for twelve months if you attended university - fifteen months service if you didn't - so naturally I chose to begin my tertiary studies. During the time of my army service I was stationed in Belgrade where I was part of Guard of Honour otherwise known as Tito's Guard. We had to stand still lined up before dignitaries entering government buildings, or arriving at the airport, and spent most of our time standing by Marshal Tito's grave in the "House of Flowers", as his resting place. This was a year or so after the Yugoslav President for life, Josip Broz Tito, had died, so in those days there were thousands of people lining up daily to pay their respects to the Marshal.

One of the episodes includes my mother visiting the House of Flowers, and she starts crying once she spots me in the Changing of the Guard ceremony which happens every twenty minutes (It is quite an elaborate spectacle really!). One of the officers approaches her and tells her not to cry for the Marshal, as he had lived a unique life and was eighty-eight after all when he died. The thought that she might have cried for her son never occurred to him. That kind of sums up my army

experience – a lot of standing still - but the uniforms and boots were really neat.

After that I returned to study art history and archaeology and ended up torn between Contemporary Art and Archaeology. What to specialize in was the big question! I attended several archaeological excavations in both Macedonia and Switzerland throughout the eighties, on Neolithic as well as digs of the Antique period. In Switzerland I joined the excavations from the Roman period in a beautiful town called Martigny in the Canton of Valais. Each of the thirty-one Cantons in Switzerland had an archaeological centre, and they invited archaeological students from around the world to work with them. They also paid you while you worked in what seemed like a very good profession. I spent a whole summer there. I also made study trips to the museums of Amsterdam. In the end this helped me decide which way to go. Goodbye Archaeology; Hello Contemporary Art!

In 1987, when I was twenty-four, I presented my first solo exhibition, a media art show, in the gallery of the Youth Cultural Centre in Skopje. The sculptural installation includes many broken TV screens, videos – things that are quite common as materials now, but at that time it seemed ground-breaking in Skopje. I had to dumpster-dive for the materials and work on them by breaking them and re-assembling them. I can recall being drenched in the poisonous silver nitrate that I was exposed to while cutting my hands frequently when I smashed them. But it didn't worry me at the time. Some of them were suspended, after being smashed into beautiful glass elements, others were arranged on the floor, and there were performative elements that happened between and around them. I can remember one brave woman who smashed some of the TVs on the marble gallery floor. The sound was of a room being bombed, or similar. On the opening night, I kept the audience of two hundred people waiting for the door to open for about two hours; in the interim I went to town to buy some good-looking shoes for the opening. On the way back to the gallery, seeing that these two hundred people were still waiting for me, I guess I felt like I was the local Nam June Paik (the practice was similar) or even Andy Warhol, as I did get my world famous for fifteen minutes moment for sure!

All the while I was traveling, the university had been sending me nasty letters reminding me that I hadn't sat for my final exam yet. In that university system it doesn't matter that you've passed all your subjects and courses – unless you sit your final exam, nothing counts. So I did, and I graduated.

After that I decided I had to get serious and started working. I took on a number of jobs including as a Public Relations Officer for a chain of casinos. I then started my own computer company for a while, and



I also worked in Catholic Relief Services – a US-based institution that would take ships laden with wheat, rice, oil, lentils and other provisions to the Balkans during the wars of the nineties. The ships would travel from the Bay of Mexico through the Mediterranean, Aegean and Black seas, docking in Burgas in Bulgaria, where the goods were unloaded to be driven to a central warehouse in Kumanovo, Macedonia. They were then dispensed where needed for the refugees from Bosnia, Kosovo, etc. At first I was a field monitor and then I worked as a co-ordinator. While I was engaged in the field we were working with International Red Cross and Local Red Cross branches, providing food and lodgings for refugees who had moved to Macedonia and were trying to find their way back to their war-torn countries.

Although fully immersed in humanitarian activities, I was made an offer to work with the Soros Foundation, otherwise known as Open Society Institutes, who were about to open a Soros Center for Contemporary Arts in Skopje, Macedonia, as a part of the SCCA Network of contemporary art centres. It was named after George Soros, an American entrepreneur of Jewish Hungarian descent, who used his wealth to develop the first Open Society Foundation in Hungary in the eighties. Following that, Soros Foundations were established in each of the ex-socialist countries (the new democracies) in Central and Eastern Europe, charged with the aims of democratising the formerly communist societies and making the transition from communism, building bridges between the west and former communist societies, and re-building those societies. The Open Society has expanded in the past few decades to become the largest private funder of groups that work for human rights, justice, and democracy around the world. Interestingly enough, George Soros was mentored by Karl Popper, a philosopher who advocated the concept of open society.

When we were given the Soros Centre for Contemporary Art in Skopje, Macedonia, we became active in a range of activities in the domain of arts, including financially supporting individual artists. One of the first projects of the SCCA Network was organizing a big presence of artists from Central and Eastern Europe at the Sao Paulo Biennale in 1994. Each of the Centres was organising big annual exhibitions of artists, comprehensive databases, and a big production of catalogues for the artists (seen as something which was lacking). The Centre also operated as a sort of a private arts council, financing even the state museums and galleries. In the final instance we started curating our own exhibitions, and even opened our own gallery in Skopje.

I stayed for almost ten years – at first as Deputy Director and then Director – it was a very fulfilling job. Another initiative I am proud of is the Skopje Electronic

Art Fair, which launched the careers of media artists from around the world, which I curated for 6 years in a row.

One of the projects of the Soros Foundations was 'Artslink' (I was the Macedonian Coordinator for the project) which provided a connection between the US and Central and Eastern Europe by providing International Fellowships to hundreds of artists and arts managers – there was a high level of exchanges in the areas of visual, performing, media arts, music, etc.

In addition to this, I became active with the newly established networks in Europe, such as Net-Time, concerned with issues of the quickly developing net culture, and the 'Syndicate' Network which was a link between artists in the West and Eastern Europe. I was even given an honorary Viking helmet in Sweden, for my contribution to one of the memorable actions of the group!

In 2002 I was invited to run the Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide so I moved to Australia with my wife and my two year old daughter Isidora in 2003 (it took about eight months to get the Australian visa). It also signified the severing of the connections with Europe. For example, the tyranny of distance prevented me from participating at the opening of "Blood and Honey", an exhibition of seventy-three Balkan artists at the Sammlung ESSL Museum in Vienna. One would say that it is a low price to pay in order to start a new life and move to Australia, but on the other hand I spent a few years of my life conceptualizing and coordinating this very exhibition, as Director of the Balkan Art Network, with its Curator, the late Harald Szeemann, numerous artists from the Balkan countries, and even the industrialist Karlheinz Essl, founder of the Sammlung ESSL Museum.

My second daughter Isabella was born in Adelaide in 2005. I ran the EAF for six years and one month, and this made me the second longest serving Director in the forty-two year history of the EAF. (Sounds good, but I was eleven months short of getting Long Service Leave when I left!). At first I was very excited – the name itself was exciting – and the logic behind its formation was encouraging too – the emphasis on the 'experimental' and 'radical and only incidentally aesthetic' were the best bits. And I liked the history of the place – how it had emerged from the shared dreams by a small group of Adelaide artists and theorists, such as Donald Brook, Bert Flugelman and Ian North. The story I heard, and believed, was that they had conceptualised the EAF in 1974, while gazing at the magical waters of the Gulf of St Vincent. Apparently they agreed that what the world really needs is an Experimental Art Foundation! Of course their motivation was that there was no place in Australia to exhibit experimental art. And they succeeded, despite all odds, in establishing a model



of an ideal but practical art space that subsequently resulted in tens of other similar spaces opening around Australia.

But, wait a minute! Just remember that this is a time that seemed as if the world had gone mad – the Vietnam war was raging, Greece and Turkey were in serious military confrontation over Cyprus, the United States President Richard Nixon resigned from office, the IRA begun the bombing campaign on mainland Britain, the global recession deepens, there is U.S.-led clearing effort for sweeping of mines in the Suez Canal following the Yom Kippur War between Egypt and Israel in 1973; there are gasoline shortages and price increases throughout the world, the world's population reaches 4 billion. Against this background there's no wonder that I liked the concept they dreamed up that experimental art would save the world!

However, it seemed to me that the Adelaide scene had grown a little more stale after the energy of the early years, so I tried to reinstate the experimentation by venturing in the area of new media. We did many exhibitions with robotic art, biotech art, virtual reality, as well as more traditional media. I remember inviting Stelarc to do a show at the EAF. After his initial shock after hearing this, (due to a rift in his relations with the EAF from 32 years before, caused by the EAF suspending what was going to be EAF's first exhibition and Stelarc's first 'hanging performance') he agreed, saying: "if you can do it, I am in!"

Not only was the exhibition at the EAF spectacular, but I managed to get Donald Brook (the first Chair of the EAF and by default responsible for cancelling Stelarc's exhibition) to open it. And Donald did, with a great speech invoking many memories, in a spirit of forgiveness, but not of the EAF towards Stelarc, but the other way around, as stated.

I continued to invite artists such as Chico MacMurtrie and Amorphic Robot Works from Brooklyn, who did inflatable robotic sculptures, Van Gogh TV – a cutting edge Virtual Reality group from Germany, one of the first video installations of Shaun Gladwell and TV Moore, Eduardo Kac's 'Genesis' Bio-tech Art installation, included in the 'Art in the Biotech Era' exhibitions, Misha Kuball's light spectacle, conferences such as 'Ideology of the Imaginary in the 21st century ... the list is quite long. We tried different media to see whether the experiments were still producing positive results.

While I was there I started my PhD focusing on biotechnology and contemporary art at the University of South Australia, with the late John Barbour as Supervisor. But when I moved to back to Skopje in Macedonia in 2009 I transferred and completed the thesis there. I had to formally defend the thesis. The

university system over there requires candidates to send a synopsis of the PhD to ten 'blind adjudicators' from different schools before you present your defence. It all went well, and the PhD with a title 'The Formation of the Bio-Political Apparatus' was awarded in 2011 in the area of Cultural Studies.

Following that, I moved to Canada where I ran Video Pool Media Art Centre in Winnipeg in the province of Manitoba. I stayed there for five and a half years. One night in January 2014 the temperature reached minus fifty-five! But the Canadians do a wonderful job of cleaning the snow every morning and the town is set up so it can cope with problems brought by the cold; the city centre (the iconic Portage and Main intersection) is underground and the buildings in the nearby streets are connected on the first floor. The summers are wonderful – it's a prairie – a vast expanse that runs from Hudson Bay to Texas. The land is similar to South Australia in some ways, and the sun looks huge, although the rays don't seem to have the same impact. Because the summer is so short, the plants grow very quickly. The province of Manitoba has about one million two hundred thousand people and one hundred and ten thousand lakes – a lake for every ten people.

In the Canadian summer of 2016 I was offered the position as Director of the Riddoch Art Gallery and Manager of Cultural Services with the city of Mount Gambier, in charge of cultural plans, running the cultural fund and developing public art strategies.

We're on the verge of starting something new here – consolidating the visual art scene, through the Riddoch Art Gallery, the Railway Lands project, numerous Public Art initiatives and the overarching Cultural Plan for the City of Mount Gambier. We have also established various new media art initiatives, such as the inaugural International Limestone Coast Video Art Festival, Virtual Reality/Augmented Reality programs, and Video Editing Suites. We're also in the process of dreaming up a big Land Art project. Some thirty years ago there was sculptural symposium held here in one of the quarries, and we're moving towards re-developing a similar kind of focus on the land. Perhaps the Limestone Coast will grow a reputation of Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty at Rozel Point, the northeastern shore of Great Salt Lake, Utah, or Marfa, Texas, with Donald Judd's and others' huge indoor and outdoor installations, where so many people travel from all across the planet to see what's happening here.

Watch this space!!

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