

**Bojana Videkanić, *Nonaligned Modernism: Socialist Postcolonial Aesthetics in Yugoslavia, 1945-1985***

Montréal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019

**Milica Popović**

---



**Electronic version**

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/balkanologie/4100>

DOI: [10.4000/balkanologie.4100](https://doi.org/10.4000/balkanologie.4100)

ISSN: 1965-0582

**Publisher**

Association française d'études sur les Balkans (Afebalk)

**Electronic reference**

Milica Popović, "Bojana Videkanić, *Nonaligned Modernism: Socialist Postcolonial Aesthetics in Yugoslavia, 1945-1985*", *Balkanologie* [Online], Vol. 17 n° 1 | 2022, Online since 30 September 2022, connection on 08 October 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/balkanologie/4100> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/balkanologie.4100>

---

This text was automatically generated on 8 October 2022.

All rights reserved

---

# Bojana Videkanić, *Nonaligned Modernism: Socialist Postcolonial Aesthetics in Yugoslavia, 1945-1985*

Montréal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019

Milica Popović

---

## REFERENCES

Videkanić, Bojana, 2019, *Nonaligned Modernism: Socialist Postcolonial Aesthetics in Yugoslavia, 1945-1985*, Montréal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 302 p., ISBN : 978-0-7735-5946-2.

- 1 Standing together with a new generation of scholars who are bringing to light the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and its relevance for the political and social history of the twentieth century,<sup>1</sup> Bojana Videkanić delivers a well-researched, strongly argued and, moreover, inspiring work. Dedicating her book to “all true Yugoslavs,” Videkanić does not shy away from positioning her excellent theoretical insights within a political outlook onto the future and a call for solidarity across the Global Majority.
- 2 Bojana Videkanić is an artist, curator and art historian. She was born in Yugoslavia (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and came to Canada in 1995 as a refugee. Today, Videkanić is an Assistant Professor of contemporary art and visual culture in the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Waterloo, Ontario. Her research focuses on twentieth century socialist art in Yugoslavia and its interconnections on a global scale. As an artist, Videkanić engages mostly in performance art, but also in video, text and installation, mining experiences of displacement, movement and identity.
- 3 Throughout the book, looking at archival photographs that Videkanić has collected, we dive into the world of art and politics, intrinsically connected. Already in the introduction, Videkanić clearly establishes the aims of the book: to examine emergence and development of nonaligned modernism in Yugoslavia and its varied artistic and

cultural trajectories. She bases herself in a materialist approach to history, successfully contextualizes the researched cultural and artistic practices in wider global developments of the time, and criticizes the work of scholars like Ljiljana Kolečnik and Miško Šuvaković in her aim to establish “nonaligned modernism” as a key concept for understanding artistic (and) institutional practices in Yugoslavia after the Second World War. For Videkanić, nonaligned modernism refers to “an aesthetic-political practice” which encompassed nonaligned political intervention, artistic diplomacy and the institutionalization of socialist state arts and cultural policies.

- 4 Structured in four chapters and a strong conclusion, Videkanić embeds her theoretical reflections within various case studies. Her first chapter “From Socialist Realism to Yugoslav Alternative Aesthetic 1945-1954” guides us through the unsuccessful attempt at socialist realism in Yugoslavia, which was in the author’s view, nevertheless successful in outlining specific modernist elements and tendencies. A strong feature of Videkanić’s book is her success in reclaiming subjectivity for the discussed artists; she acknowledges them as political subjects by depicting, for example, the heated debates that were taking place within the art workers’ unions. With the break of Yugoslavia from the Soviet Union in 1948, a new era began. Videkanić overcomes the common tendency to represent the Tito-Stalin break as a clean rupture and demonstrates the continuities in the development of the artistic and cultural scene in Yugoslavia. These continuities stretch back even before the Second World War and the establishment of socialist Yugoslavia. Acknowledging the differences in the Yugoslav republics, but avoiding the traps of methodological nationalism and a nationalization of Yugoslav art, Videkanić places the political subjectivity of the artists within the colonial history of Yugoslavia and the liberation and revolutionary struggles of the Second World War.
- 5 Underlining the importance of Krleža’s 1952 and 1954 speeches in which he developed his idea of an anti-colonial approach to art practices, Videkanić continues in her second chapter –“Coexistence, Cultural Diplomacy, and the Ascent of Socialist Modernism”– to demonstrate the further development of socialist modernism in the 1950s, and equally importantly, the establishment of strong institutional and diplomatic practices within the Yugoslav arts world. Putting socialist modernism on a par with Western modernism, Videkanić compares the cultural and artistic diplomatic efforts of Marko Ristić to those of George Keenan. Yugoslav artists exhibited at the Venice Biennale and at Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) exhibits in Yugoslavia. For Videkanić, the 1950s and the 1960s entailed an institutionalization of state investment in infrastructural conditions for artistic and cultural production.
- 6 In the third chapter, “Nonaligned Modernism in the Making: Building Parallel Transnational Culture,” Videkanić brings forward her concurrence with Vijay Prashad’s concept of the Third World as a project,<sup>2</sup> and makes another important intervention in scholarly research on the same period by bringing back from oblivion important figures like Tibor Sekelj. The author argues against understandings of the Non-Aligned Movement as a pretense for dictators, as well as against the misrepresented role of Yugoslavia in the NAM. Videkanić asserts the place of the development of nonaligned modernism in the politics of anti-imperialism, anti-fascism and anti-colonialism. Seamlessly, Videkanić guides us through the entanglements of artistic practices and diplomatic efforts of Yugoslavia and its leader, Josip Broz Tito. Closely cooperating with and through the structures of the United Nations, like

UNESCO, nonaligned modernism interwove material and symbolic networks. Videkanić depicts this culture as a form of resistance.

- 7 In her fourth and final chapter, the author looks into the case study of the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts, uncovering its sociopolitical context and the soft power that played an important role in socialist Yugoslav diplomacy. Concluding her analysis, Videkanić looks into Mladen Stilinović's artwork "Exploitation of the Dead 1984-1990," presented at documenta 12 in Kassel in 2007. This she sees as a "museum of the end of the socialist world, and a museum of its future" – exactly where we could place her work, as an important historical research and a call for future solidarities. Most certainly contributing to the canon of global art history, Videkanić fills a research gap. Presenting rich archival research, uncovering artistic works and diplomatic relations, the author successfully presents new theoretical paths for understanding two modernisms of the twentieth century – out of possibly many more.
- 8 As this extremely rich book provides important theoretical and empirical insights into the South-East cooperations, it would benefit from further reflections upon the (forgotten) heritage of the world in which the United Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement played such a strong role – for example, by referring to the diminished prestige and activity of UNESCO in the present. The book also invites further comparative examples, as much as a stronger analysis of the gender roles in cultural and artistic diplomacy practices. Seeing the Yugoslav first lady, or better to say first comrade, Jovanka Broz, in a large number of photographs of the highest-level visits to various exhibitions, the readers might be intrigued by a more gendered analysis of the cultural diplomatic efforts of Yugoslavia in the Non-Aligned Movement and the place of women in the development of nonaligned modernism.

---

## NOTES

1. To name only a few: SPASKOVSKA Ljubica, "'Crude' Alliance – Economic Decolonisation and Oil Power in the Non-Aligned World," *Contemporary European History*, vol. 30, n° 4, 2021, p. 528-543; SPASKOVSKA Ljubica, MARK James, BIEBER Florian, "Introduction: Internationalism in Times of Nationalism: Yugoslavia, Nonalignment, and the Cold War," *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 49, n° 3, 2021, p. 409-412; SPASKOVSKA Ljubica, "Constructing the 'City of International Solidarity': Non-Aligned Internationalism, the United Nations, and Visions of Development, Modernism and Solidarity, 1955-1975," *Journal of World History*, vol. 31, n° 1, 2020, p. 137-163; TURAJLIC Mila, "Filmske Novosti: Filmed Diplomacy," *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 49, n° 3, 2021, p. 483-503; BONFIGLIOLI Chiara, "Women's Internationalism and Yugoslav-Indian Connections: From the Non-Aligned Movement to the UN Decade for Women," *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 49, n° 3, 2021, p. 446-461; BONFIGLIOLI Chiara, "The First UN World Conference on Women (1975) as a Cold War Encounter: Recovering Anti-Imperialist, Non-Aligned and Socialist Genealogies," *Filozofija i Društvo*, vol. 27, n° 3, 2016, p. 521-541.
2. PRASHAD Vijay, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World*, New York, The New Press, 2008.

---

## AUTHORS

**MILICA POPOVIĆ**

Central European University

popovicm[at]ceu.edu