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Passengers: 1.10 Roman Ondák

May 27–June 28, 2008

For his installations, photographs, drawings, and performances, the Slovakia-based artist Roman Ondák employs the participation of people that he often does not know. Asking them to follow his instructions while also interjecting their own creativity, the result is a controlled study of collective imagination. *Common Trip* (2000) is a series of drawings and sculptures of places where the artist has traveled, made by people who have never been to these places but to whom the artist has described his memories. To make *Passage* (2004), Ondák gave chocolate bars to 500 steel factory workers in Kitakyushu, Japan, and asked them to make sculptures from the foil wrappers; the hundreds of tiny artworks were then displayed in an exhibition in Kitakyushu, essentially forming a collective, creative view of the factory. *Our City in 3000* (2007), a new work made for this exhibition, is a selection of drawings made by a diverse group of children from across San Francisco. The artist asked each of them to imagine the city in the year 3000 and to make a drawing of the future that included a self-portrait. Suggesting that the future can be glimpsed through the eyes of a younger generation, this work conveys several consistent themes as well as numerous unique and original visions.

East by West

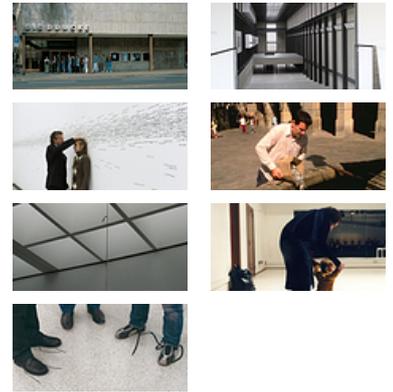
By Jens Hoffmann

As one of the most significant artists to emerge from Central Europe over the last decade, Roman Ondák's understanding of art is fundamentally shaped by the political, economic and cultural conditions of a post-socialist reality. Exploring the space between art and everyday life, the area between the private and the public, and the distance between the personal and the institutional, Ondák's often humorous pieces deconstruct structures, hierarchies, sites or rituals and are based on the temporary dislocation and alteration of objects or actions. Central to his work is an inquiry into the behavior, perception and communication of human beings and an observation of the forms our social exchanges take.

Ondák's neo-conceptual approach and his sober style can be traced back to a generation of Czech and Slovak artists who, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, began to absorb radical developments in Western art, particularly those related to conceptualism and performance. Providing an historical backdrop for Ondák's subversive artistic explorations, the provocative and politicized performances and situations of Jirí Kovanda, the antiauthoritarian Fluxus and Happening-oriented practice of Július Koller, or Stanislav Filko's philosophical investigations of space, are all important points of reference for the artist. Significantly, his predecessors' events took place in the realm of a semiprivate space (whether public or enclosed) given the impossibility or undesirability of showing in any officially recognized gallery. These artists' work thus took on a subversive quality in keeping with the attitudes and process of Western institutional critique or critically oriented work (albeit with an entirely different causality and intention).

Ondák's best-known piece *Good Feelings in Good Times* (2003), originally shown at the Kunstverein in Cologne, consists of a temporarily staged situation in which a group of people was asked to form a queue outside an art institution. In essence, it demonstrates how to create a spontaneous act of institutional critique by displacing the idea of a typical Soviet-era supermarket queue to the front door of a Western museum. Ondák's subtle insubordinate bent can also be found in *It Will All Turn Out Right in the End* (2006) for which the artist, for his solo show in the project space at Tate Modern, built an immaculate model of its infamous Turbine Hall and thereby transferred the museum's largest and most well-known space into their smallest and most indistinct gallery. The artist provided a more delicate and less spectacular intervention when he presented the shoelaces of his summer shoes, tied together and hung from the ceiling of one of the galleries in Munich's Pinakothek der Moderne, for his piece *My Summer Shoes Rest in Winter* (2007). Shoelaces also featured prominently in the piece *Resistance* (2006) for which a group of 20 people were invited to a public event and asked to mingle in the crowd with their laces untied in silent protest, or resistance, for an unknown cause.

The temporary employment of gallery audiences and the participation of groups or individuals located outside the art world has become one of the main characteristics of Ondák's oeuvre in recent years. For *Measuring the Universe* (2007) the artist had, for the full duration of the exhibition, the gallery attendants measure and mark the height of every visitor on the gallery



wall, along with their first name and the date they came to see the show. Exploring the relationship between memory, verbal expression, and representation, Ondák's *Our City in 3000* (2007), made for the group portion of *Passengers*, included over 50 drawings made by schoolchildren in San Francisco, which depicted their city in the year 3000. The piece is a continuation of the work *Common Trip* (2000), in which Ondák spoke in detail about a number of his journeys to faraway places to people in his hometown who were then asked to create artworks based on his descriptions of specific cities and famous monuments (never having visited these places themselves).

For this solo exhibition, Ondák has conceived two new works that follow some of the principals of his previous pieces: *Path* (2008) seems like a simple cut through the exhibition space that slices the white cube horizontally in half at the level of the artist's height, while *Insiders* (2008) is another piece of silent resistance, in which a group of people walk around downtown San Francisco while wearing their clothes inside out.

[«Return to *Passengers*](#)