

MoMA PRESENTS MAJOR SURVEY OF SERBIAN FILMMAKER GORAN PASKALJEVIC

Director Known for Such Films as *Cabaret Balkan*, *Someone Else's America*, and *How Harry Became a Tree* Celebrated with Retrospective of Thirteen Features and Two Shorts

GORAN PASKALJEVIC

January 9–31, 2008

The Roy and Niuta Titus Theaters

NEW YORK, December 17, 2007— The Museum of Modern Art presents the first major North American survey of the films of Goran Paskaljevic, one of Europe's most respected and critically acclaimed directors. The exhibition *Goran Paskaljevic* comprises new 35mm English-subtitled prints of 13 features and two shorts by the director, presented January 9–31, 2008, in The Roy and Niuta Titus Theaters. The director will be in attendance on January 9 at 7:00 p.m. to introduce his debut feature *Cuvar Plaze U Zimskom Peridou* (*Beach Guard in Winter*, 1976). The exhibition is organized by Laurence Kardish, Senior Curator, Department of Film.

Paskaljevic (Serbian, b. 1947) spent much of his adolescence at the Belgrade Cinematheque, which his stepfather founded. At the age of 20 he studied cinema at FAMU (Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts), the celebrated film academy in Prague, during the brief, heady period of liberalization in Czechoslovakia, but in 1973, during the early years of the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia, Paskaljevic returned to Yugoslavia, where he commenced making short films and documentaries for television.

His first feature, *Beach Guard in Winter*, garnered international critical acclaim, and by the time he had completed *The Powder Keg* (a.k.a. *Cabaret Balkan*) 22 years and nine feature films later, he was one of Eastern Europe's leading filmmakers. As an outspoken opponent of President Slobodan Milosevic, he felt his life would be in danger if he remained in Serbia; the rise of nationalism in Yugoslavia prompted him to leave his country in 1992. With his French wife, Christine, he settled in Paris in 1994, although he continued to make fairly long visits to Belgrade, where his two sons live. As a filmmaker in exile, Paskaljevic made *How Harry Became a Tree* (2001) in Ireland, starring Colm Meaney and Cillian Murphy, a dark fable based on a Japanese short story.

His two most recent features deal with the aftermath of the military conflict in the region: *Midwinter's Night Dream* (2004) deals with a Serbian soldier who returns to his apartment after incarceration for desertion, only to find it occupied by a woman and her daughter. *The Optimists* (2006) is a five-episode dark comedy inspired by life in post-Milosevic Serbia.

Though Paskaljevic's films are narrative-based, they are driven by restless, idiosyncratic, and all-too-human characters, and often veer off in surprising directions. Paskaljevic finds the extraordinary in the reality of the everyday, and his realism, informed by the political

transformations he has witnessed, is inflected with irony. He has written, "The beauty of film for me is its closeness to life. And if it is going to reflect life faithfully, it has to draw on metaphor, just like poetry."

This exhibition is made possible with the cooperation of the Serbian Ministry of Culture (Belgrade), the City of Belgrade, the Yugoslav Cinematheque (Belgrade), and Hungarian Film Laboratories (Budapest). The Department of Film also acknowledges the help of Madeleine and Philip Zepter, and Christine Gentet-Paskalejvic.

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Closed Tuesday

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GORAN PASKALJEVIC

SCREENING SCHEDULE

Wednesday, January 9

7:00 *Mister Hrstka*. 1969. Czechoslovakia. Directed by Goran Paskalejvic.
Paskalejvic's graduate film from FAMU, Prague. 10 min.

Cuvar Plaze U Zimskom Peridou (Beach Guard in Winter). 1976. Yugoslavia. Directed by Goran Paskaljevic. Screenplay by Gordan Mihic. With Irfan Mensur, Gordana Kosanovic, Danilo-Bata Stojkovic, Dara Calenic.

Paskaljevic's debut feature delighted critics and audiences at the 1976 Berlin Film Festival and immediately established the 27-year-old Yugoslavian as a promising filmmaker. A young man, maladroit but determined, takes a job as a beach guard in winter so he and his girlfriend can spend some time alone. But their parents are not happy. Will their passion survive? In Serbo-Croatian; English subtitles. 90 min.

Thursday, January 10

6:15 *San Zimske Noci (Midwinter Night's Dream)*. 2004. Serbia-Montenegro/Spain. Directed by Goran Paskaljevic. Screenplay by Goran Paskaljevic, Filip David. With Lazar Ristovski, Jasna Zalica, Jovana Mitic.
A dark and moving melodrama about displacement and the birth of love despite formidable odds. A soldier deserts the Serbian army after witnessing an atrocity in Bosnia. His life quickly becomes unstable, and he is jailed after an act of violence. Ten years later, wounded and embittered, he returns to his Belgrade apartment, where he finds two refugees—a woman and her autistic daughter. Inside the cramped apartment an uneasy and fragile affection develops. In Serbo-Croatian; English subtitles. 95 min.

8:15 *Legenda o Lapotu (The Legend of Lapot)*. 1972. Yugoslavia. Directed by Goran Paskaljevic. In Serbo-Croatian. 27 min.

Zemaljski Dani Teku (These Earthly Days Go Rolling By). 1979. Yugoslavia. Written and directed by Goran Paskaljevic. With Dimitrije Vujovic, Obren Helcer, Sarlota Pesic, Mila Keca.

Reporting from the 1979 Moscow Film Festival, *Variety's* Ron Holloway called this film "one of the best pix on the aged made." The film was made with nonprofessional actors and shot in 16mm from a screenplay that was "developed out of the experiences of the personalities on the screen, the two lead actors—the captain and his dour roommate—providing a kind of human comedy." The residents of an old-age home prepare an amateur theatrical show for New Year's Eve, and everyone wonders how to animate the captain's sour and lonely neighbor. In Serbo-Croatian; English subtitles. 85 min.

Friday, January 11

6:15 *Pas Koji Je Voleo Vozove (The Dog Who Loved Trains)*. 1977. Yugoslavia. Directed by Goran Paskaljevic. Screenplay by Gordan Mihic. With Svetlana Bojkovic, Irfan Mensur, Bata Zivojinovic, Danilo Bata Stojkovic.
Paskaljevic's sophomore film is a picaresque tale at once melancholic and delightful. A young woman, a delinquent on her way to a labor camp, escapes and meets up with two tattily charming misfits: a Yugoslav cowboy and a motorcyclist who is looking for his late father's dog, a remarkable canine who was trained to jump trains. In Serbo-Croatian; English subtitles. 89 min.

8:15 *Bure Baruta (The Powder Keg/Cabaret Balkan)*. 1998. France/Greece/Macedonia/Turkey/Yugoslavia. Directed by Goran Paskaljevic. Screenplay by Dejan Dukovski, Paskaljevic, Filip David. With Miki Manojlovic, Lazar Ristovski, Dragan Nikolic, Sergej Trifunovic. Paskaljevic's best-known film takes place over one savage night in the capital as Yugoslavia was being torn apart by fighting in Bosnia and Kosovo. The narrative follows numerous frustrated and angry characters who turn to mayhem in Belgrade. David Stratton of *Variety* comments, "Each of these characters reps an aspect of the Serb character—romantic, fiery, soulful, fatalistic, violent, biting funny, and self-critical yet quick to take offense." In Serbo-Croatian; English subtitles. 102 min. Courtesy Paramount Pictures.

Saturday, January 12

2:00 *Mister Hrstka. Cuvar Plaze U Zimskom Peridou (Beach Guard in Winter)*. See Wednesday, January 9, 7:00.

4:30 *Pas Koji Je Voleo Vozove (The Dog Who Loved Trains)*. See Friday, January 11, 6:15.

7:00 *Posebon Tretman (Special Treatment)*. 1980. Yugoslavia. Directed by Goran Paskaljevic. Screenplay by Dusan Kovacevic, and Paskaljevic. With Ljuba Tadic, Milena Dravic, Dusica Zegarac, Danilo Bata Stojkovic.
Paskaljevic's wry and soulful portrait of practices in an alcohol treatment clinic is a mischievous look at the abuse of power. The head doctor, an autocrat, uses unorthodox tactics—including the music of Richard Wagner, the flapping of hands, eating apples, and amateur theatrics—to cajole his reluctant patients into sobriety. When he brings his wards to perform in a brewery, all does not go as planned. The film may be read as a comic metaphor for a benign totalitarianism. In Serbo-Croatian; English subtitles. 94 min.

Sunday, January 13

2:00 *San Zimske Noci (Midwinter Night's Dream)*. See Thursday, January 10, 6:15.

5:00 *Bure Baruta (The Powder Keg/Cabaret Balkan)*. See Friday, January 11, 8:15

Wednesday, January 16

6:15 *Posebon Tretman (Special Treatment)*. See Saturday, January 12, 7:00

8:15 *Andjeo cuvar (Guardian Angel)*. 1987. Yugoslavia. Written and directed by Goran Paskaljevic. With Ljubisa Samardzic, Jakup Amzic, Neda Arneric, Saban Bajramovic.
Paskaljevic's mordant view of gypsy life was made in Yugoslavia two years before Emir Kusturica's fantasy *Time of the Gypsies*, but there is nothing romantic in Paskaljevic's treatment of white slavery. In order to survive, families sell their children, who are transported west, trained as pickpockets and thieves, and viciously abused if they do not comply. A journalist, appalled by the situation, tries to rescue a boy. Conceived out of sheer outrage, *Guardian Angel* is the closest Paskaljevic has come to making a thesis film. In Serbo-Croatian, Romany, and Italian; English subtitles. 90 min.

Thursday, January 17

6:15 *How Harry Became a Tree*. 2001. France/Ireland/Italy/United Kingdom. Directed by Goran Paskaljevic. Screenplay by Paskaljevic, Stephen Walsh, Christine Gentet-Paskaljevic, based on the story *Lao Dan* by Yang Zhenguang. With Colm Meaney, Adrian Dunbar, Cillian Murphy.
Although Paskaljevic's *The Powder Keg/Cabaret Balkan* (1998) was a public success in Serbia, the escalating conflict in the former Yugoslavia and the artist's criticism of Milosevic made it difficult for him to return to his home country. But Paskaljevic kept working as a filmmaker, and he was determined to show the emotional and physical costs of hatred with *How Harry Became a Tree*. Set in Ireland in 1924, the film centers on Harry (Meaney), a farmer, who, years ago, lost his son in the civil strife with England and, in the present, decides to hate his neighbor, a powerful man. Harry becomes bedeviled by a recurring nightmare of turning into a tree that is chopped down for coffins. 99 min. Courtesy Irish Film Archive.

8:15 *Varljivo Leto '68 (The Elusive Summer of '68)*. 1984. Yugoslavia. Directed by Goran Paskaljevic. Screenplay by Gordan Mihic, Paskaljevic. With Slavko Ctimac, Danilo Bata Stojkovic, Mira Banjac.
Of all of Paskaljevic's films, this most vividly recalls the headiness of the New Czech cinema of late 1960s, when Paskaljevic was studying film and Milos Forman, Ivan Passer,

and Jiri Menzel were setting examples of a fresh, modest, low-key type of filmmaking—chamber comedies inflected by the absurd. Young Peter, in the full blush of puberty, has crushes on many girls; his father, an avowed Marxist, disdains what is happening in neighboring Czechoslovakia; and his grandfather gets himself admitted to a clinic where he can while away his time winning at cards. Paskaljevic's film celebrates a time of hope. In Serbo-Croatian; English subtitles. 88 min.

Friday, January 18

6:00 *Someone Else's America*. 1995. France/Germany/United Kingdom. Directed by Goran Paskaljevic. Screenplay by Gordon Mihic. English dialogue by Mary Popvic Rose. With Tom Conti, Miki Manojlovic, Sergej Trifunovic, Maria Casares.
Someone Else's America could be everyone's: although set in Brooklyn, the film was shot in Hamburg by a Serbian filmmaker and a Greek cinematographer, with a polyglot cast of Spanish, Yugoslavian, Chinese, and American characters. But the America imagined by Paskaljevic, drawn in dark, broad strokes in this film, is essentially an interior continent whose inhabitants are displaced and buffeted, yet hopeful. Of particular interest is the performance of Maria Casares, who brings the same grace to Paskaljevic's project as she did to those of directors like Marcel Carné, Robert Bresson, and Jean Cocteau. 96 min. Courtesy UCLA Film and Television Archive.

8:30 *How Harry Became a Tree*. See Thursday, January 17, 6:15.

Saturday, January 19

2:00 *Legenda o Lapotu (The Legend of Lapot)*.
Zemaljski Dani Teku (These Earthly Days Go Rolling By). See Thursday, January 10, 8:15

4:30 *Andjeo cuvar (Guardian Angel)*. See Wednesday, January 16, 8:15

7:00 *Tango Argentino*. 1992. Serbia. Directed by Goran Paskaljevic. Screenplay by Gordan Mihic. With Mija Aleksic, Nikola Zarkovic, Miki Manojlovic, Ina Gogalova.
This chamber piece concerns a young boy, Nikola, coping with domestic change as his family adjusts to life in post-Communist Serbia. Nikola's father earns a meager living teaching music. His mother, who cares for the elderly, feels she must reinvent herself. Nikola, all but abandoned by his parents, finds comfort in being with the elderly. The title refers to a catchy tune, full of sensuality and vitality that recurs throughout the film. In Serbo-Croatian; English subtitles. 93 min.

Sunday, January 20

2:00 *Someone Else's America*. See Friday, January 18, 6:00

4:30 *Posebon Tretman (Special Treatment)*. See Saturday, January 12, 7:00

Monday, January 21

5:00 *Optimisti (The Optimists)*. 2006. Serbia-Montenegro/Spain/Switzerland. Directed by Goran Paskaljevic. Screenplay by Paskaljevic, Vladimir Paskaljevic. With Lazar Ristovski, Bojana Novakovic, Petar Bozovic.
The director's most recent feature is a very dark comedy inspired both by life in post-Milosevic Serbia and by Dr. Pangloss's assertion in Voltaire's *Candide* that, despite appearances to the contrary, "All's for the best in this best of all possible worlds." In five

separate episodes that share a slight narrative connection and a proclivity for the ridiculous, people who experience the very worst keep hoping for the very best. Somehow there is humor to be found in such outrageous expectations. In Serbo-Croatian; English subtitles. 100 min.

7:00 *Vreme Cuda (Time of Miracles)*. 1990. Yugoslavia. Directed by Goran Paskaljevic. Screenplay by Borislav Pekic, Paskaljevic. With Predrag Miki Manojlovic, Dragan Maksimovic, Svetosar Cvetkovic, Mirjana Karanovic. Communism comes to a small Yugoslav town in 1945. When the school burns down and classes are moved into the town church, the local Party leader insists—despite protests—that the church's icons be painted over. Soon the icons reappear through the whitewash, and the schoolteacher Lazarus, who died of injuries sustained in the fire, rises from the dead. Or maybe he didn't die at all? Paskaljevic plays with the clash of faiths, religious and secular, and the fervor they engender. In Serbo-Croatian; English subtitles. 100 min.

Wednesday, January 23

6:15 *Varljivo Leto '68 (The Elusive Summer of '68)*. See Thursday, January 17, 8:15.

8:15 *Legenda o Lapotu (The Legend of Lapot)*.
Zemaljski Dani Teku (These Earthly Days Go Rolling By). See Thursday, January 10, 8:15.

Saturday, January 26

5:00 *How Harry Became a Tree*. See Thursday, January 17, 6:15.

7:30 *Bure Baruta (The Powder Keg/Cabaret Balkan)*. See Friday, January 11, 8:15.

Sunday, January 27

2:00 *Mister Hrstka*.
Cuvar Plaze U Zimskom Peridou (Beach Guard in Winter). See Wednesday, January 9, 7:00.

4:30 *Pas Koji Je Voleo Vozove (The Dog Who Loved Trains)*. See Friday, January 11, 6:15.

Monday, January 28

7:30 *Tango Argentino*. See Saturday, January 19, 7:30.

Wednesday, January 30

6:15 *Varljivo Leto '68 (The Elusive Summer of '68)*. See Thursday, January 17, 8:15.

8:15 *Optimisti (The Optimists)*. See Monday, January 21, 5:00.

Thursday, January 31

6:15 *Vreme Cuda (Time of Miracles)*. See Monday, January 21, 7:00.

8:15 *Andjeo cuvar (Guardian Angel)*. See Wednesday, January 16, 8:15.