



The centennial of the “Zenit” review (1921-1926-2021)

Examples of the avant-garde networking

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Due to the Treaty of Versailles and international political circumstances, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (the future Kingdom of Yugoslavia, after 1929), was founded by the end of the World War I, on 1 December 1918. Former Slavic, highly heterogeneous regions, after the collapse of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires, were united. Geopolitical, social, economic and administrative hopes to create a common state were welcomed, given the long-lasting wish to unite South Slavs, without regards to great ethnical, religious, historical or cultural differences. During the centuries of Ottoman domination of the Balkans, the peoples in Serbia (including South Serbia, which would later become Macedonia, present-day North Macedonia), Bosnia & Herzegovina, and Montenegro, on one side, and on the other – the inhabitants of Croatia and Slovenia, under Austro-Hungarian, e.g. K.u.K. rules, had lived with different value systems, traditions and aspirations. Therefore, they had different attitudes towards the ideas of progress, modernisation and emancipation, the appropriation of new European standards and laws, imposed by the new State. Serbs living in Croatia accepted the unification in 1918 with enthusiasm, hoping that the new government would give them more opportunities and possibilities to be closer to Serbia and Belgrade on various points¹. In this respect we can more easily understand the sometimes strange and unexpected statements by Ljubomir Micić (Sošice, Croatia 1895 – Kačarevo, Serbia 1971), at that time a young philosopher, poet, actor, founder, chief-in-editor and *spiritus movens* of “Zenit: International Review for Arts and Culture” (subsequently “for new art”) and his avant-garde zenitism movement² [Fig. 1].

1. Anuška and Ljubomir Micić in Cannes in 1934. Photo: private collection of I. Subotić



¹ See G. Miloradović, *Od anarhizma do šovinizma: Drugi svetski rat i pripadnici avangardnog umetničkog kruga oko časopisa “Zenit” – Ljubomir Micić i Marijan Mikac*, [in:] *Intelektualci i rat, 1939.-1947. Zbornik radova s Desničinih susreta 2012., dio 2.*, Ed. D. Roksandić, I. Cvijović Javorina, Zagreb 2013; L. Seely Voloder, T. Miller, *Avant-Garde Periodicals in the Yugoslavian Crucible: “Zenit” (Zagreb 1921-3; Belgrade 1924-6); Zagreb: “Dada-Jok” (1922), “Dada-Tank” (1922), “Dada Jazz” (1922); Novi Sad: “Út” (1922-5); Ljubljana: “Svetokret” (1921), “Rdec pilot” (1922), “Tank” (1927)*, [in:] *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines Vol. 3: Europe, 1880-1940*, Oxford 2013.

² “Zenit” was published in Zagreb (1921-1923, Nos. 1-24), and later in Belgrade (1924-1926, Nos. 25-43). The last issue, No. 43, was banned by the police, because of the text *Zenitism through the Prism of Marxism*, signed by Dr. M. Rasinov. The author was never identified; it is presumed to have been Micić personally.



³ They were short-lasting reviews, often lacking a clear ideological or specific orientation, concept or collaborators, but in particular – they were without larger support or financial means. For example: “Svetokret”, Ljubljana; “Kinofon”, Zagreb; “Út”, Novi Sad; “Novi oder”, Novo Mesto; “Rdeči pilot” and “Tank”, Ljubljana; “Hipnos”, “Nemoguće”/“Impossible”, and “Nadrealizam, danas i ovde”, all in Belgrade; the proto-futurist review “Zvrk” was planned but never published, etc.

⁴ Micić collaborated intensively with artists both from Flanders and Wallonia/Belgium and Netherlands; “Zenit” featured Theo van Doesburg, Jozef Peeters, Marie Tak van Portvliet, Jacoba van Heemskerck, Edmond van der Cammen, Roger Avermaete, Henrik Berlewi, Emil Verhaeren etc.; Groningen-based editor Hendrik Nicolaas Werkman dedicated his review *The Next Call* (1926, No. 9) entirely to Micić.

⁵ Very intense collaboration was with Geo Milev, the leading figure in Bulgarian modernism, his reviews and his circle – Ana Balsamadziewa, Mirčo Kačulev and Ivan Bojadziew who took part at the First “Zenit” exhibition in Belgrade, in April 1924. See I. Subotić, *The Cooperation of “Zenit” Magazine with Bulgarian Artists*, “Art magazine” (Sofia) 1986, No. 3, p. 7; I. Genova, “The Traffic” of Images in the Avant-garde Magazines – the Participation of Bulgarian Magazines from the 1920s, [in:] *eadem*, *Modern Art in Bulgaria: First Histories and Present Narratives beyond the Paradigm of Modernity*, Transl. M. Petrova Dimitrova, A. Evlogieva Vitanova, Sofia 2013; O. Saveska, *Zenitizam u Bugarskoj – Bugarska u “Zenitu”*, [in:] *Sto godina časopisa Zenit: 1921–1926–2021 = A Hundred Years of the “Zenit” Magazine: 1921–1926–2021*, Ed. B. Jović, I. Subotić, Kragujevac–Beograd 2021.

⁶ See G. Tešić, *Srpska književna avangarda. Književnoistorijski kontekst (1902–1934)*, Beograd 2009.

⁷ The Group of young zenitists from Zagreb called Travellers (Čedomil and Dušan Plavšić, Josip Seissel, Dragutin Herjanić, Miha Schön, Miloš Somborski, Zvonimir Mögler, Vlado Pilar, Višnja Kranjčević and shortly Radeta Stanković) organised first avant-garde performances as early as 1922; see I. Janković, *Jedan mogući pogled na avangardni fenomen grupe Traveller*, [in:] *Sto godina...*

⁸ D. Lj. Metlić, *Lubomir Micić i filmske teme u časopisu “Zenit”*, “Zbornik Narodnog muzeja” 2018, Vol. 23–2.

⁹ For the concepts on zenitism, Barbarogenius and the Balkanisation of Europe see Lj. Micić, Y. Goll, B. Tokin, *The Zenitist Manifesto*, Zagreb 1921; Lj. Micić, *Man and Art*, “Zenit” 1921, No. 1; *idem*, *The Spirit of Zenitism*, “Zenit” 1921, No. 7; *idem*, *Categorical Imperative of Zenitist Poetry School*, “Zenit” 1922, No. 13; *idem*, *Zenitism as Balkan Totalizer of New Life and New Art*, “Zenit” 1923, No. 21. See V. Golubović, “Zenit” (1921–1926), [in:] “Ze-

Naturally, “Zenit” was not the only avant-garde magazine in Yugoslavia³, but it was among the first, with a six-year history, and particularly complex activities: in the ideological and theoretical sphere, he had an extremely developed network of collaborators from the international scene and links to almost every avant-garde periodical in Europe. Texts and poetry were generally published in original languages – Serbo-Croat in Cyrillic or Latin script, but also in Russian, French, Italian, German, English, Flemish⁴, Bulgarian⁵, Hungarian, Czech, even Esperanto, which was popular at that time. This avant-garde internationalism, on one side, and zenitism’s original, yet to a certain degree fusion ideas, with great attention paid to its visual effects, stimulated very intensive contacts. Therefore, “Zenit” quickly gained a prominent position among other avant-garde magazines and radically critical intellectuals.

In various program texts, manifestoes, poems and polemics, Micić proclaimed his strategy for the social role, thanks to new forms of culture and cultural institutions, covering nearly every creative sphere: literature⁶, philosophy, visual arts, architecture, urbanism, music, theatre⁷, even radio and cinema – as the most updated and very influential media. Supporting them and abolishing relations between life and art, Micić not only followed film production, but included its basics in his fundamental ideas. (He even earned money later by translating films.) Zenitism was considered to be a film about a “literary movement and spiritual revolution”⁸. These statements by Micić were reflexions of well-known dreadful events and personal experiences during the World War I and in his life in general. In spite of his profound belief in peace and brotherhood among peoples, he was very critical concerning all the residues of the prior cultural, political, administrative, and bourgeois systems. Proposing new and audacious transformations of society, he proclaimed the Balkans as the “sixth continent” and the metaphorical, powerful and freshly invented figure of Barbarogenius, “the superior power”, who according to Micić originated from the Balkan Mountains, will conquer the tired European civilisation and thus “balkanise Europe”. This was the opposite of the prevailing official statements, which promoted the need to quickly Europeanise the local culture, due to the long-lasting lingering, during the Ottoman occupation. Zenitism was presented as a “religion” of concepts and emotions with Nietzschean spirit; the Balkanisation of Europe was to create a new type of culture for everyday life and Barbarogenius was to be the man spreading Balkan ethics and deep-rooted humanity⁹. This was also an expression of Micić’s inclination towards leftist ideas, connected with a Russian predilection: predominance of the East over the West, Orient vs. Occident. Yet, when he was forced to flee the Belgrade police and possible prosecution in December 1926, he chose to go to Italy, asking Filippo Tommaso Marinetti to rescue him. He settled in Paris for the next 10 years¹⁰: he did not choose to live in Moscow or Leningrad¹¹.

Zenitism had attractive and provocative ideas, linked to the acclaimed European avant-garde phenomena of the time. It presented heterogeneous contributions – from Expressionist care for social problems and metaphysical reflections on creativity, to adoption of new forms in Cubism and Abstract Art, experiments and interdisciplinary activities in poetry and particularly in fine arts, due to strong links with Italian futurists. Contacts with them led Micić to an innovative approach to poetry – simultaneism and “*parole in libertà*” (“words in freedom”) became Micić’s “words in space”. “Zenit” also glorified the actual results of sciences and technology, above all Nikola Tesla’s inventiveness and his achievements. Micić was particularly impressed by new media, believing that they would help the restoration of institutions and therefore the education for the dynamic changes and a clearer insight into the (un)clear future that he was dreaming of. Yet, he never accepted to become a member of World Futurism, as Marinetti had planned¹².

Dadaist humour and rejection of all traditional narratives were also an important segment of zenitism in its early phase, primarily thanks to Dragan Aleksić, writer, poet and journalist, who, following a very fruitful collaboration with Micić, soon distance himself from zenitism, already in 1922. He organized dada performances named *org art*, together with Branko Ve Poliansky, Micić’s brother, published dadaist periodicals “Dada Tank” and “Dada Jazz”, and took part in the activities of other avant-garde groups¹³. Yugoslav avant-gardists also established connections with Tristan Tzara and German dadaists.

In its early stage, “Zenit” had close ties to the Paris art scene due to Boško Tokin, an important film theoretician and critic, Stanislav Vinaver, Rastko Petrović, and Dušan Matić, later member of the influential Belgrade surrealist circle in the late 1920s and also with close ties to the Paris surrealists¹⁴. In this early stage manifestations and poetics of proto-surrealism were present in “Zenit” through the works Yvan Goll, who became the co-editor of this review for issues Nos. 8–13, as well as Paul Dermée, Céline Arnaud, Pierre Albert-Birot, Max Jacob, Ary Justman¹⁵.

There were several similarities between zenitism and surrealism, such as their international concepts, collaboration with many important European authors, multilingual editions, inclusion of photographs as independent art forms, reproductions and article illustrations, their common inclination towards leftist ideas, acceptance of Marxism as the leading humanistic (but not predominantly political) ideology, combined with the important struggle against capitalist and colonial practices, etc. But, the Belgrade surrealists, led by Marko Ristić were the most arduous rivals of zenitism – until the death of all of them¹⁶.

Early collaboration with Hungarian activists in Vienna began with Micić’s poem *13* published in *MA* 1921, No. 7, and the illustration of Tatlin’s *Sketch for the Monument to the Third International*,



nit 1921–1926, Ed. V. Golubović, I. Subotić, Belgrade-Zagreb 2008; I. Glisic, T. Vujosevic, *I am Barbarogenius: Yugoslav Zenitism of the 1920s and the Limits of Performativity*, “Slavic and East European Journal” 2016, No. 4; K. Pranjić, *Zenitistični koncept barbarogenijakot kritika zahodnoevropske kulture*, “Primerjalna književnost” 2020, No. 3.

¹⁰ Micić tried unsuccessfully to continue editing the “Zenit” review in Paris. Instead he published several documentary novels in French, evocating his heroic zenitist period: *Etre ou ne pas être*, 1922; *Hardi! A la Barbarie*, 1928, with illustrations by his brother B. Ve Poliansky; *Zeniton. L’Amant de Fata Morgana*, 1930; *Les Chevaliers de Montparnasse*, 1931; *Après Saraïevo*, 1933, and *Barbarogénie le Décivilisateur*, 1938.

¹¹ The only direct contact with the Soviet Union was an invitation to take part at the large international exhibition “Revolutionary Art from the West” in Moscow in May–June 1926; “Zenit” was present with some issues of the review, books, posters, photos of works by Jo Klek, Branko Ve Poliansky, Marijan Mikac and Ljubomir Micić. See “Zenit” 1926, No. 43, p. 9.

¹² See G. Berghaus, *Zenitism and Futurism: International Networks in the Historical Avant-garde*, [in:] *Sto godina...* Beside Marinetti, also in contact with “Zenit” were Paolo Buzzi, Ruggero Vasari, Fortunato Depero, Enrico Prampolini, Vinicio Paladini, Giorgio Carmelich, and Sofronio Pocarini, who wrote for it or about it in Italian media.

¹³ D. Aleksić, *Dadaism*, “Zenit” 1921, No. 3, p. 5. See J. Jovanov, *Demistifikacija apokrifā. Dadaizam na jugoslovenskim prostorima 1920–1922*, Novi Sad 1999.

¹⁴ Other writers, artists and composers also contributed to “Zenit”, such as Dragan Bubić, Miloš Crnjanski, Evgenije Dundek, Andre Jutrović, Stanislav Krakov, Mirko Kujačić, Marijan Mikac, Sibe Miličić, Risto Ratković, Vladimir Škerlić Škerl, Josip Slavenski, etc.

¹⁵ Other artists, writers, critics and editors from France were also present in “Zenit”, such as Henri Barbusse, Blaise Cendrars, Jean Epstein, Florent Fels, Tsuguharu Foujita, Antoine-Pierre Gallien, Emile Malespine, Amedeo Modigliani, Pablo Picasso, André Salmon, Michel Seuphor, Marcel Sauvage, and Léopold Survage.

¹⁶ This was particularly evident after World War II, when all the surrealists had become communist protégés, appointed to the most eminent social, cultural and political positions; they prevented Micić from becoming a member of the Associations of Writers, accusing him for Serbian nationalism, even fascism, which meant that he was prohibited from publishing anything during his lifetime; he was denied social security and all kind of financial support. See G. Miloradović, “*Manifest Srbijanstva*” Ljubomira Micića: *Post festum*, [in:] *Sto godina...*

ORIENT >> OCCIDENT

ИСТОК >> ЗАПАД

INTERNACIONALNI ČASOPIS ZA NOVU UMETNOST

Br. 11.

GOD. II.

ZENIT

REVUE INTERNATIONAL POUR L'ART NOUVEAU

SADRŽAJ

- LJ. MICIĆ / Zenit-Maufiert 1922
- I. ERENSBURG / Imk se kreće
- B. PAPHAX / Елеганс топан
- J. EPSTEIN / Amour de Sessue
- D. ALEKSIC / Fabrika Lokota
- A. CERNIK / V biologiju
- P. A. BIROT / Poeme sans nom
- I. GOLL / "aromère" Erique de 1921
- M. EPEHBYPT / *
- C. GOLL-M. EBERSTEIN / Lieder der Herer walde
- T. MILITKOVICH / Этюд постража
- Cesareo Pica
- D. SREMEC / Voskresenje upitnika
- C. ШЛЕЗИНГЕР / Поглед на енеру недоглед
- M. PETROV / Ritmi iz pustinje

Makroskop

"Zenit" i jugoslav. štampa / Rukovodstvo
 revolucionarna lirika / Veće jugoslav.
 pesnika u Frankfurtu / Reprodicija ka-
 gornika / J. Šestert: Nesto v strah /
 Aktivistička poezija, itd.

Reprodukcije

B. Tatlin / Naцрт за споменик 1921
 G. Gross / K. Feige / Linoleum /
 A. P. Gallina / Linoleum

LJUBOMIR MICIĆ

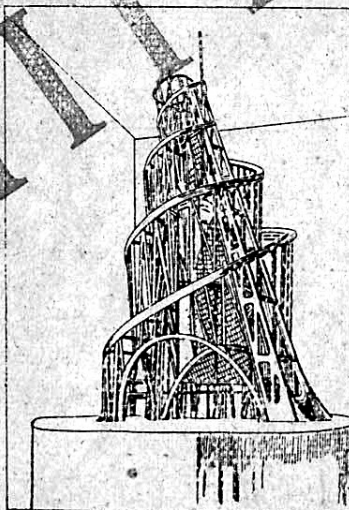
IVAN GOLL

19

FEBRUAR

22

ВЛАДИМКРЪ ТАТЛИНЪ
МОСКВА



VLADIMIR TATLIN
MOSKVA

Нацрт за Споменик 1921 — Maquette du Monument 1921

! ZAGREB - YUUGOSLAVIE - STARČEVIĆEV TRG 10

2. V. Tatlin, Sketch for the Monument to the Third International, "Zenit" 1922, No. 11. Photo: private collection of I. Subotić

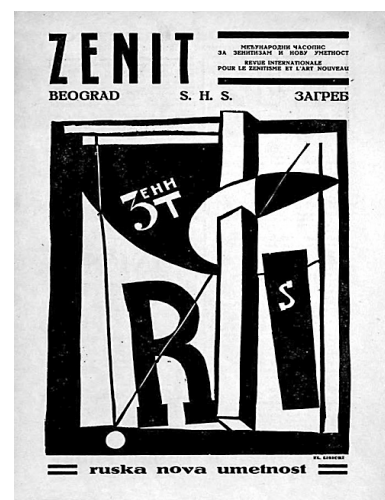
taken from “Zenit” [Fig. 2] On the other hand, Tokin wrote about MA and presentations of Hungarian artists continued in different issues of “Zenit”¹⁷. It is through Lajos Kassák and the Hungarian activists that Micić came in touch with geometrical and constructivist tendencies. Construction as a term was first mentioned in Micić’s *radio-movie Shimmy in the Graveyard at the Latin Quarter* (“Zenit” 1922, No. 12) and soon constructivist principles become an elaborate theory and practice thanks also to the ties with Russian avant-gardists from Berlin.

In its pan-Slavic spirit, “Zenit” expended links with Prague and Brno circles precisely at the crucial moments for Czech avant-garde¹⁸: “Zenit” published reproductions of works by artists gathered around the leftist “Veraikon” and “Devětsil” as well as several experimental poems¹⁹; Poliansky and Aleksić founded the Zenit Art Club and participated in *Revolučna Scena* in Prague, while Karel Teige was impressed by the international nature of “Zenit” and by the presence of German expressionism in it, as he wrote for “Čas”, “Červen” and “Prager Presse”²⁰. In general, as spiritual revolution, zenitism was considered by Czech artists to be pacifist and anthropocentric. Partly preserved Micić’s correspondence with Teige, Artuš Černik, and Voskovec indicates their friendly relationships, while Jozef Čapek, in his letter dated 2 February 1924, explains that the participation of Czech artists in the Zenit International Exhibition in Belgrade in 1924 failed due to lack of financial means²¹.

Micić’s pan-Slavic feelings were expended also in the direction of Polish avant-garde movement. Having in mind that the artists in Poland had developed an authentic form of constructivism, it was not an easy task to establish close cooperation with hybrid zenitism, especially because of the perception of Micić as a Serbian nationalist. As was the case with Czech artists, Polish artists could not participate in the “Zenit” International Exhibition, as Tadeusz Peiper states in his letter to Micić, for two reasons: the invitation came too late, and the artists did not agree to cover the cost of transport for their works. Still, Micić continuously presented reviews of Polish books in “Zenit”, as well as events by Julian Przyboś, Jan Brzękowski, Jan Kurek, and Peiper²². Peiper wrote friendly congratulations regarding “Zenit”’s 5th anniversary: written in French, he declares from Cracow (“Zenit” 1926, No. 38):

*Je deteste le zénith; même les montagnes ne sont détestables, puisqu’elles nous éloignent du sang de la terre. Mais: J’aime le Zénit de Lioubomir Mitzitch; il n’est jamais au-dessus de la voie des avions, vaisseaux capillaires du système circulatoire de la terre. Vive le ZENIT*²³.

In spite of the ideological differences, “Blok” (1924, Nos. 6–7) published Micić’s programmatic text *Zenitosophy or the Energy of Creative Zenitism*.



3. L. El Lissitzky, cover page of “Zenit” 1922, No. 17/18: *Russian New Art*. Photo: private collection of I. Subotić



¹⁷ B. Tokin, *MA and Hungarian Activist Movement*, “Zenit” 1921, No. 6, p. 12. In “Zenit” 1922–1923, Nos. 11, 14, 19/20, 22, he published several Hungarian activists texts and reproductions. Among Hungarian artists, the most fruitful and long-lasting collaboration, beside L. Kassák, was with Sándor Bartai, József Csáky, János Mácza, Mihályi Odón, Lajos Kudlák, Ladislav Medgyes, László Moholy-Nagy, Lajos Tihanyi. The works of last two are part of the National Museum of Serbia collections, as part of Micić’s succession. For Hungarian links with “Zenit” see T. Miller, “Zenit” in the *Mirror of the Hungarian Avant-Garde*, [in:] *Sto godina...*

¹⁸ See J. Toman, “With some Reservations”...: *Early Materials on “Devětsil” and “Zenit”*, [in:] *Sto godina...*

¹⁹ Works by Josef Havlíček, Adolf Hoffmeister, Bedřich Piskač, Ladislav Süß, Karel Teige, Karel Vaněk, and Alois Wachsmann, were reproduced with comments in “Zenit” 1922, Nos. 6–9 and 11; poems by Artuš Černik, Ladislav Dymeš, Adolf Hoffmeister, Jaroslav Seifert, Alois Soukup, and Jiří Voskovec were published in “Zenit” between 1921 and 1924.

²⁰ Several other Czech media (“Česke slovo”, “Fronta”, “Host”, “Most”, “Národní listy”, “Rovnost”, “Rudé právo”, “Pasma”, “Prager”, “Právo lidu”, “Tagblatt”, “Tribuna”) published translations of zenitist manifestoes, poems and texts, presented zenitist editions and various information.

²¹ Documentation in the National Museum of Serbia, as part of Micić’s succession.

²² Particularly on the “Almanach Nowej Sztuki”, “Blok”, “Zwrotnica”, reviews and magazines in “Zenit” 1924, Nos. 26–33.

²³ T. Peiper, [no title], “Zenit” 1926, No. 38, p. unn.



²⁴ The special German issue of the “Zenit” 1922, No. 16, was published on that occasion, with manifestoes, poems and texts by Micić, Poliansky, etc. Direct or not, collaboration was established with Franz Richard Behrens, Rudolf Belling, Herbert Behrens–Hangel, Carl Einstein, Hermann Freudena, Georg Grosz, Raoul Hausmann, Kurt Heynicke, Kurt Liebmman, Erich Mendelsohn, Rudolf Pannwitz, Fritz Reichsfeld, Rudolf Schlichter, Kurt Schwitters, Alfred Sperber, Claire Studer, Conrad Veidt, Herwarth and Nell Walden. See **J. Čubrilo**, *The Yugoslav Avant-garde Review “Zenit” and its Links with Berlin*, “Centropa” 2012, No. 3.

²⁵ El Lissitzky also designed the cover page for this issue, in the style of his Proun constructions. It was no coincidence that this issue was published in October!

²⁶ Poliansky wrote very precisely and with perfect understanding about the “First Exhibition of Russian Avant-Garde”, held at the Galerie van Diemen (*Across the Russian Exhibition in Berlin*, “Zenit” 1923, No. 23). Many Russian artists, poets and writers appeared in “Zenit”: Alexander Archipenko, Nikolai Assayev, Alexander Blok, Mark Chagall, Maxim Gorky, Helen Grünhoff, Velimir Khlebnikov, Liubov Kosintzeva, Kazimir Malevich, Vladimir Mayakovski, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Valentin Parnakh, Boris Pasternak, Grigorij Petnikov, Alexander Rodtchenko, Igor Severyanin, Alexander Tairov, Vladimir Tatlin, Sergei Yesenin, etc.

²⁷ **Lj. Micić**, *Kandinsky*, “Zenit” 1921, No. 5; **W. Kandinsky**, *Abstract Art*, Transl. Nina–Naï, “Zenit” 1925, Nos. 36–37. See **M. Stanković**, *Kandinski, Micić i “Zenit” – ambivalentan odnos prema tradiciji*, [in:] *Sto godina...*

²⁸ “Zenit” 1924, No. 25 served as the catalogue, with a list of artists and Micić’s text on new art. See **I. Subotić**, “Zenit” as *Ideological Foundation of the 1924 International Exhibition of New Art*, [in:] *Years of Disarray 1908–1928: Avant-gardes in Central Europe* [Exhibition cat.], Ed. **K. Srp**, *Arbor vitae societatis – Olomouc Museum of Art*, Praha–Olomouc 2018.

²⁹ Micić’s collection, now are in the National Museum of Serbia, as part of his succession, included works by almost all these artists.

³⁰ Abbreviation of *Papier–Farben–Malerei*, translated as ARBOS in Serbo–Croat (*art-boja-slika*).

³¹ See **J. Denegri**, *Modernizam – avangarda. Ogleđi o međuratnom modernizmu i istorijskim avangardama u jugoslovenskom umetničkom prostoru*, Beograd 2012.

The “Zenit” review promoted other avant-garde tendencies connected to Purism and Neoplasticism, Bauhaus and Functionalism, concerning social role of creativity for everyday life and abolishing the notions of “pure” and decorative art, e.g. “high” vs. “low” culture.

Most important were the connections established with Russian avant-garde leaders in Berlin during Micić’s visit to the exciting German capital in the summer of 1922, together with his wife Anuška Micić, translator and poet, known in zenitism as Nina–Naï²⁴. The result of this visit was the special Russian double issue of “Zenit” (1922, Nos. 17–18, September–October), edited by Lazar El Lissitzky²⁵ and Ilya Ehrenburg, founders of “Вещь”/“Object”/“Gegenstand”. “Zenit” was the first Yugoslav review to present various Russian art movements, tendencies, groups and disciplines, from scythism and egofuturism to imaginism and constructivism, from productionism and suprematism to abstract art²⁶. Kandinsky’s ideas about abstract art influenced Micić’s metaphysical approach to the spiritual and the absolute; he wrote about Kandinsky and Kandinsky’s text was published in “Zenit”²⁷ [Fig. 3].

As a sign of his emancipatory ambitions, Micić founded a high-profile collection of avant-garde works, open to the public at his editorial offices in Zagreb, Belgrade and later for, a short while, in the Meudon suburb of Paris. This collection presented a variety of nonfigurative, e.g. non mimetic works – symbols of different avant-garde expressions, to be the signs of new era of new societies, as he declared in his texts. In April 1924 he organised the impressive First (and last) International “Zenit” exhibition²⁸, with the participation of some 110 works of art by 26 artists from the Kingdom of SCS, USA, France, Bulgaria, Belgium, Denmark, Hungary, the Netherlands, Russia, Germany, and possibly Italy, including El Lissitzky, Kandinsky, Charchoune, Moholy-Nagy, Delaunay, Gleizes, Peeters, Archipenko, Lozowick, Zadkine, etc.²⁹ The featured local artists included Vjera Biller, Vinko Foretić, Vilko Gecan, and two paradigmatical representatives of “Zenit”: Mihailo S. Petrov and Josip Seissel, known in zenitism as Jo Klek. Petrov’s first linocuts, made especially for “Zenit”, were a radical Expressionistic evocation of the syncretism between poetry and fine arts going towards the first steps of Abstraction. Klek, on the other side, was the first Yugoslav artist to create his abstract works in the frame of “Zenit”, so-called PAFAMAs³⁰ as well collages, montages and photo collages, with close ties to Russian and Bauhaus constructivists³¹ [Fig. 4].

One important characteristic of the “Zenit” review and other zenitist publications, posters, leaflets etc., is the very elaborate and innovative style of layout and typographic solutions, as well as the intentional and premeditated use of artwork reproductions. The first issues in 1921 used Secession lettering, based upon modernised Gothic script, very popular in the early 20th c., in the spirit of Expressionist disposition, with reproductions of works by Egon Schiele, Vilko Ge-



4. Cover page of “Zenit” 1924, No. 25: catalogue of the “First ‘Zenit’ International Exhibition of New Art” with portrait of Ljubomir Micić by Mihailo S. Petrov. Photo: private collection of I. Subotić



5. Cover page of “Zenit” 1926, No. 41 with the caricature *Capital*. Photo: private collection of I. Subotić



³² For example, Tatlin’s *Sketch for the Monument to the Third International* and Malevich’s suprematism were analysed and reproduced on several occasions underlying the inclination of zenitism towards Russian constructivism and its postulates, but also towards other forms of Russian avant-garde.

³³ See G. Tešić, *Zli volšebnici: Polemike i pamfleti u srpskoj književnosti 1917–1943*, Beograd 1983; S. Boynik, *Marxist-Leninist Roots of Zenitism: On Historical Avant-Garde Corrections Introduced by Karpo Godina’s film Splav Meduze*, [in:] *idem*, *On the Cinema of Karpo Godina: Or a Book in 71383 Words*, Transl. G. Kirn, Frankfurt am Main 2013.

³⁴ Among the first to write about “Zenit”, in the late 1950s and during the 1960s, were Aleksandar Flaker, Radomir Konstantinović, Zoran Konstantinović, Slobodan Ž. Marković, Miodrag B. Protić, Michel Seuphor, Miklos Szábolczi, and later on Ješa Denegri, Aleš Erjavec, Vida Golubović, Vera Horvat-Pintarić, Želimir Košćević, Peter Krečić, Lev Kreft, Zvonko Maković, Zoran Markuš.

³⁵ See “Zenit” and the Avant-Garde of the 1920s [Exhibition cat.], Ed. V. Golubović, I. Subotić, 1 February – 15 March 1983, National Museum – Institute for Literature and Arts, Beograd 1983; exhibition design: R. Novak. The exhibition was transferred to the City Gallery of Contemporary Art in Zagreb in April.

can and Carry Hauser. Very soon there were changes in the direction of more contemporary solutions: after an almost conventional magazine layout, new asymmetric solutions appeared, with accentuated graphic designs, such as horizontal, vertical and diagonal lines, geometrization of the page – so dear to constructivist ideals. Furthermore, the care for rhythmic and dynamic presentation, with exclamations or other graphic marks, often in big, bold, impressive letters provocative effects close to futurist and dada publications. The appealing visual appearance of “Zenit”, with the semantic significance of its layout, typography and deliberate selection of reproductions, rendered by Micić himself, remain one of its main characteristics³².

Joining together contradictions and antinomies, culture in zenitism was considered as a necessary act of protest and emancipatory behaviour. It was an important critical power with humanistic and moralistic ambitions, with a utopian ideology against conservative bourgeois and capitalist societies, against social injustice, hypocrisy, colonialism, authoritarian politics, and ossified institutions. These statements were close to the ideas of dadaists, as well as future surrealists and constructivists [Fig. 5].

Although it was considered in Europe to be among the most prominent Yugoslav avant-garde phenomena of the 1920s, the history of Micić and his work was tragic: the “Zenit” review and publications were on several occasions prosecuted by the authorities for blasphemy, anti-national interests, anarchic behaviour, promotion of communist ideas, and even organising a revolution, in connection with articles by Léon Trotsky on Lenin, by Anatolij Lunarcharski on Proletkult, and by Dr. M. Rasinov on zenitism vs. Marxism³³. Micić’s poems, manifestos and polemics on the cultural and national situation, as well as his attacks on the Orthodox Church and the Monarchy, particularly his protest against the secessionist political struggles in Croatia and his insults of charismatic writer Miroslav Krleža, were crucial elements of his destiny.

After the World War II Micić’s name was erased from public life, he was persecuted and even imprisoned. “Zenit” and zenitism were almost forbidden and consigned to oblivion. In 1960s, when the political situation became a bit more liberal, the avant-garde movements attracted new attention, both among Yugoslav and foreign scholars³⁴.

The status of zenitism in Yugoslavia was similar to that of futurism in post-war Italy and worldwide: only after political ostracism declined it was possible to examine thoroughly the inherent values and both the local and international importance of these avant-garde movements, disassociating them from the general accusations. Anyhow, when the first exhibition dedicated to Ljubomir Micić’s succession, titled “‘Zenit’ and the Avant-Garde of the 1920s” [Fig. 6] was organised in 1983 at the National Museum in Belgrade³⁵, it was immediately attacked for “concealing Micić’s nationalism”. Radivoj Cvetičanin, the secretary for culture of the Central Committee of the



6. “Zenit’ and the Avant-Garde de the 1920s” exhibition, February 1983, National Museum in Belgrade. Photo: private collection of I. Subotić

7. Cover page of *Sto godina časopisa Zenit: 1921-1926-2021 = A Hundred Years of the "Zenit" Magazine 1921-1926-2021*, Ed. B. Jović, I. Subotić, Beograd-Kragujevac 2021, design Isidora Nikolić, published by Gallery RIMA, Kragujevac, and the Institute Literature and Arts, Belgrade. Photo: RIMA



³⁶ R. Cvetičanin, *Consealing "Serbianhood", intentional or not*, "Borba" 1983, No. of 19-20 February. See I. Subotić, *Sudbina Zenitove kolekcije*, "Književna smotra" 2010, No. 1; G. Miloradović, *Ljubomir Micić's Manifest...*

³⁷ The most completed bibliography on zenitism, prior to 2004, was published in the monograph *"Zenit" 1921-1926...*; at the same time all the issues of "Zenit" were reprinted and the review was digitalised and included in the World Digital Library and Europalia.

³⁸ Including the exhibition described in: *Konstruktywizm w Jugosławii. "Zenit" i jego krąg 1921-1926* [Exhibition cat.], Introd. I. Subotić, September-October 1986, Art Museum in Łódź - National Museum in Cracow.

Communist League of Serbia, published his text in the main Communist newspaper "The Struggle" (Borba)³⁶. Naturally, the hidden backbencher was Marko Ristić with his team. Many media from all across Yugoslavia followed this official statement with severe critiques, and although there were no direct consequences, and despite the fact that there had been dozens of studies and articles published about "Zenit"³⁷ and many works from Micić's collection included in dozens of exhibitions worldwide³⁸, the uncomfortable, ambivalent and partial feelings about Micić's controversial personality and his zenitism remain to this day. For some he was an anarchist and communist, for others a Serbian nationalist or fascist, for some an insignificant editor and pretentious writer, or a hero and unprecedented courageous herald and even inventive prophet of the new era. In that respect it was interesting to follow the centenary celebration of the first issue of "Zenit", in 2021.

Obscured by very intriguing zenitists slogans on the Balkanisation of Europe, barbarism as culture, mysterious Barbarogenius, or the anti-European discourse and anti-Croat behaviour, which in principle were the only subjects of worldwide interest, there were many other ideas expressed, actions realised, and persons involved in "Zenit" that deserve to be elaborated on and presented thanks to modern historical and theoretical approaches. The centennial was such an occasion.

Several articles on Micić and "Zenit" were published in various literary magazines and online publications, including the *Review* published by the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad (No. 9, 2021) where



8-9. “The Review ‘Zenit’ (1921-1926)” exhibition, February 2021, Gallery RIMA, Belgrade. Photo: RIMA



10. "To All the Zenitists of the World", December 2021 – April 2022, National Museum in Belgrade. Photo: National Museum of Serbia in Belgrade

the special section, dedicated to the centennial, contains eight studies by authors from Serbia, Slovenia, Hungary, Canada, Australia, and Japan, on specific issues and less known subjects, such the impact of Japanese poetry on the authors published in “Zenit” or the interview with Krisztina Passuth, the author of the book *Les Avant-Gardes de l'Europe Centrale 1907–1927*, which was the first comprehensive presentation of “Zenit” on the international scene.

The most ambitious publication was the large (760 pages) collection of texts, *A Hundred Years of the “Zenit” Magazine 1921–1926–2021*³⁹ [Fig. 7], involving 37 experts from Serbia, Slovenia⁴⁰, Croatia, Romania⁴¹, Bulgaria, Germany, Russia⁴², and United States. Articles are divided into five chapters: *Zenitism in the Context of the Avant-Garde*; *The Historic Framework of Zenitism*; *Zenitism in Transnational Context*; *Zenitist Achievements in the Light of New Interpretations*; and *Documents and the Zenitist Legacy*. The authors discussed unknown or misinterpreted documents on zenitist activities and historical events that influenced its destiny, provided new insights on prominent artists or remarkable works of art in Micić’s collection, analysed the international network in light of new communicational means, discovered the links that Micić has established with similar or different avant-garde movements in various milieus, using various methodological approaches, including semiological, neo-Marxist, communicational, etc. It was considered very important for this publication to include young researches, alongside experts with considerable reputations. This collection of articles is often quoted and is considered to be a very important contribution with new approaches to zenitism.

DAH Theatre, one of the most successful civic art groups in Serbia, included in the celebration of its 30th anniversary its play on “Zenit” and its centennial. Experts from the Institute for Literature and Arts in Belgrade – Bojan Jović, Stanislava Barać, Vesna Matović, Jovan Bukumira, Žarka Svirčev, and Zorana Simić – presented the results of their research on zenitism at a special scientific round table. On the other hand, Slovenian colleagues organised an online international conference, titled *Cosmic Anarchism*, and the Student City Cultural Centre in Belgrade dedicated seven consecutive evenings to various disciplines and problems connected to “Zenit”, regarding ideology, literature, visual arts, film, theatre, and Micić’s legacy.

There were several documentary exhibitions: two titled “The Review ‘Zenit’ (1921–1926)”, prepared by the private Gallery RIMA, in Belgrade and Kragujevac⁴³ [Figs. 8–9], one in Zagreb, thanks also to the private initiative by the Marinko Sudac Collection, and the exhibition titled “To All the Zenitists of the World”, at the National Museum in Belgrade, where the entire “Zenit” art collection from the Micić succession is kept⁴⁴ [Fig. 10].

The Association of Fine Artists of Serbia organised a huge presentation of the actual visions on zenitism in various new media. Professors and students from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade



³⁹ Texts were published in Serbian, Croat, English and Russian with several hundreds of documents and reproductions following the ideas of “Zenit” layout. The book got the award as the best publication edited in Kragujevac in 2021. Gallery RIMA published on the same occasion reprints of four zenitist books: *Zenitist Manifesto* by Lj. Micić, Y. Goll and B. Tokin; *Paris Brennt* by Y. Goll – both from 1921; *The Rescue Car* by Lj. Micić from 1922 and *77 Suicides* by B. Ve Poliansky from 1923, followed by V. Golubović’s study in a special book *Biblioteka časopisa “Zenit”*.

⁴⁰ M. Dović, Anton Podbevšek, *the Three Swans and the Failure of the first Wave of the Slovenian Avant-garde*, [in:] *Sto godina... “Zenit” published works by brothers France and Tone Kralj and on young avant-gardists*; Poliansky was in contact with Anton Podbevšek and his circle in Novo Mesto, and Micić had in his collection works by August and Tea Černigoj, and Eduard Stepančič.

⁴¹ I. Carabaş, *“We wrap up the Century in Newspaper / And Wear it as a Paper Flower: Journalism and the Avant-Garde in Bucharest’s Constructivist Magazines*, [in:] *Sto godina... Micić established particular connections with the reviews “Contempuranul”, “Integral” and “Punct”, as well as with Marcel Janco, János Mácza, Max Hermann (Maxy), and Ion Vinea.*

⁴² N. Zlydneva, *Russians in “Zenit”: In Search of Self-identification and the Concept of Will*, [in:] *Sto godina...*

⁴³ Authors of the exhibition: **Nevena Martinović** and **Marija Stanković**, Design Isidora Nikolić, February and June 2021, with a catalogue “Časopis ‘Zenit’ (1921–1926)” by the same authors.

⁴⁴ Author of the exhibition: **Gordana Stanišić**, Design Irena and Igor Stepančič; December 2021 – April 2022, without a catalogue (as of September 2022). The Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade celebrated the centennial by lending an important painting from the “Zenit” collection (*The Struggle between the Day and the Night* by J. Bijelić, 1921) for this exhibition. The Museum of the City of Belgrade did not show any interest in this celebration.



⁴⁵ According to the Julian calendar, this date marks the beginning of the New Year, as is still practiced by the Serbian Orthodox church.

and the Academy of Visual Arts in Zagreb established their own collaboration: “Zenit” was the intermediary and their relationship has extended to new subjects. The most interesting were initiatives from smaller cities all across Serbia, their libraries, cultural centres, sometimes museums, private galleries or schools, to give lectures or present new editions on “Zenit”. This was the case in Novi Sad, Čačak, Kragujevac, Obrenovac, Novi Pazar, Sremska Mitrovica, Kraljevo, Čuprija, an even in Podgorica, the capital of Montenegro. Some books and articles on Yugoslav avant-garde were also published in Russia.

In early 2022, at 20:22h on 13 January⁴⁵, “Zenit”, zenitism and Ljubomir Micić were the fundamental matrix for a very special European event: the inauguration of Novi Sad, Serbia’s second largest city, as the European Capital of Culture. The multimedia spectacle, titled *Zeniteum: 2022*, was written and directed by Dragan Živadinov, a prominent Slovenian director, who has created a great number of post-Modern performances and other art forms all around the world since the 1980s, based on the experiences of the historical avant-gardes, primarily Russian, but also Slovenian constructivism and particularly Yugoslav zenitism and its utopian *Zeniteum* [Fig. 11].

The set design, a special futuristic construction and inventive costumes created by Dunja Zupančič, played a very particular role in this sense. They were all inspired by avant-garde artists and their concepts – from the international dada movement with its social rebellion, Italian futurism with its syncretism of art and science, to various Russian movements and ideas, such as cubofuturism, *budeltianstvo*, productionism and suprematism, with also some surrealist elements.

This complex spectacle connected four prominent individuals from the first half of the 20th c. with ties to Novi Sad, linking art and science: two artists, Ljubomir Micić with his utopian ideas, and Nikola Brašovan, a prominent architect whose most brilliant building was erected in Novi Sad in 1930s, on one side, and on the other two mathematicians and physicians, Mileva Marić, who was married to Albert Einstein and worked with him on his discoveries, and Milutin Milanković, considered by NASA to be one of the most important researchers in the fields of climate change, time, reform of calendars, and planet Earth in general. The message was clear: arts and sciences together must be the leading force in the 21st century. The achievements of the previous eras, particularly the 20th c. experimentations and modernisations, should be taken into account today more than ever, as the world is moving forward so quickly, almost without rational control, forgetting or neglecting humanistic endeavours that brought about civilisation.

Under the slogan “Reason, Emotion and Imagination”, the spectacle *Zeniteum: 2022* used state-of-the-art technology, involving 22 singers, 22 actors, dancers, acrobats and musicians. Their sounds,



11. *Zeniteum*: 2022, Dir. Dragan Živadinov; Stage & Costumes Design Dunja Zupančič, January 2022, Novi Sad. Photo: Z. Jesić, Novi Sad – European Capital of Culture

movements, images, gestures and costumes were based on historical avant-garde reflexions and recalled the great names from the recent past who had contributed to the actual visions. As Živadinov was the first to explore and practice “theatre without gravity”, in the late-night finale, his spectacle and all of Novi Sad were greeted by a Russian cosmonaut and a German astronaut from on board the International Space Station.

Unexpectedly, Novi Sad – the European Capital of Culture 2022 – marked the 100th anniversary of “Zenit” in a particular fashion: Micić would surely have been surprised and pleased to witness how his Utopian ideas about the links between art and science have been celebrated worldwide and introduced to our lives – at least for one night.

These decentralised events, which were not officially orchestrated, confirm that “Zenit”, zenitism and their creator Ljubomir Micić have become a common part of our culture, in spite of the lack of institutional attention. It is evident also that it is all up to private initiatives and professional consciousness, and not cultural policy – which is almost non-existent, or exists only if there are lucrative financial or basic political interests, what naturally greatly effects the activities of Serbia’s major national cultural institutions.

Słowa kluczowe

„Zenit”, przeglądy awangardowe, Ljubomir Micić, jugosłowiańska sztuka XX w., międzynarodowe kontakty awangardy, *Zeniteum*

Keywords

“Zenit”, avant-garde reviews, Ljubomir Micić, Yugoslav 20th c. art, international avant-garde network, *Zeniteum*

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Summary

IRINA SUBOTIĆ (University of Novi Sad) / The centennial of the “Zenit” review (1921–1926–2021). Examples of the avant-garde networking

“Zenit. International Magazine for New Art” (Zagreb–Belgrade 1921–1926), founded by philosopher, writer, poet and critic Ljubomir Micić (1895–1971), was the prominent avant-garde review with particular and attractive but often confusing ideas about the Balkanisation of Europe or Barbarogenius. The paper summarises the review’s positions and zenitist ideology, Micić’s activities established during the six years of its existence, as well as his international connections. “Zenit” was also considered to be an important magazine on the world avant-garde scene in the 1920s because of its wide spread collaboration and its particular, innovative and attractive typography and layout. The paper also presents the decentralised 2021 celebration of the centennial of the review’s first issue, with some important scientific publications, exhibitions and conferences held in Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia. The utopian construction *Zeniteum*, where arts and sciences meet, served as the basis for the solemn spectacle entitled *Zeniteum: 2022*, organised on the occasion of the proclamation of Novi Sad as the European Capital of Culture, in January 2022. Written and directed by Dragan Živadinov, this spectacle combined multiple experiences realised by various historical avant-garde movements in the world, including zenitism.