

# Please tell us about your city: What would you tell your best friend about the place where you live?

What do you think is special? Do many people live there from other countries? What do you think about the art scene? How does the art scene communicate, through mailing lists, webzines, magazines, or other? Which spaces are most important for the art scene, do they change very often? What do you think about the art schools and institutions, what do you think is special about them?

**From: Aileen Derieg**  
**Date: 23.01.2004, 16:35**  
**Subject: Linz**

Although Linz/Austria is probably best known internationally for the annual Ars Electronica Festival, the independent art scene ("Freie Szene") is very important and highly vocal here, especially with regard to decision-making processes in the context of municipal cultural policies. In addition to many, many single artists and artist groups, the Freie Szene also includes art spaces and collectives such as the Stadtwerkstatt (which is also the platform for the community radio Radio FRO and the art server servus.at), Kunstraum Goethestrasse, Transpublic, KAPU, die KUPF (Kulturplattform Oberösterreich), Time's Up and others. Official institutions include the Ars Electronica Center, the new Lentos Art Museum, the traditional Schölmuseum, the Landesmuseum with the Landesgalerie for contemporary art, but also the O.K Center for Contemporary Art and Posthof as a venue for contemporary music and dance. There are strong connections and many exchanges with art and cultural initiatives throughout the province of Upper Austria. Important nodes for these networks are the KUPF and the association fitfitu (i.e. "52% of the population of the population is female"), and the biennial Festival der Regionen. Students and faculty from the Art University Linz are also very much involved in various parts of the Freie Szene. In general, I would say that the focus of the art scene in Linz is less on representative art, but more on art in the context of everyday life – what people, of us, need to live with. In Spring 2003 the Freie Szene organized a rally in the main square in solidarity with the strike movement against government budget cuts (pension reform and privatization) under the motto "Luxury for All". Luxury in this sense is not a matter of consumption, but of possibilities for enjoying life, which are limited when people have to live with constant worry about their jobs, their future, or when they are constantly bombarded with consumer culture. Since popular local bands demonstrated their solidarity with performances, the rally drew a large crowd and made an important statement.

Since Linz is a relatively small city, cross-disciplinary cooperation is naturally a part of any larger project. As Wolfgang Preisinger from "Die Fabrikanten" once said, there aren't enough people here to develop separate segments and disciplines in the art scene, so that it is always "undisciplined". Because of its history as an industrial city of working people, Linz does not have a tradition of "high culture" like Vienna or Salzburg, so the culture scene here has always been more "experimental". In terms of publicity or recognition, this is sometimes a disadvantage, since cultural journalists from national media have a tendency not to take anything seriously that happens "in the province". One journalist from Vienna even told students at the Art University in Linz that they were better off staying in Upper Austria, where there is, in his opinion, "no serious competition" and money is allegedly available for "any mediocre project". This means that talented young people have to spend at least some time elsewhere in order to gain recognition, but in recent years a number of interesting contacts and exchange projects with artists and art institutions especially - but not only - in Eastern Europe have provided enriching opportunities, also making it easier for people to return to Linz.

A list of links instead:  
 Art University Linz: <http://www.ufg.ac.at/>  
 Stadtwerkstatt: <http://www.stwst.at>  
 servus.at: <http://www.servus.at>  
 fitfitu: <http://www.fitfitu.at>  
 O.K Center for Contemporary Art: <http://www.ok-centrum.at>  
 Transpublic: <http://www.transpublic.at>  
 Kunstraum Goethestraße: <http://www.kunstraum.at>  
 Time's Up: <http://www.timesup.org>  
 Social Impact: <http://www.social-impact.at>  
 Festival der Regionen: <http://www.fdr.at>  
 MAIZ - Verein von und für MigrantInnen: <http://www.maiz.at>  
 Ars Electronica Center: <http://www.aec.at>  
 Lentos Art Museum: <http://www.lentos.at>  
 Cultural Development Plan for the city of Linz: <http://www.linz.at/kultur/kep/k-start.htm>  
 ... and many more

**From: Oliver Musovik**  
**Subject: Skopje**  
**Date: 15.10.2003, 21:59**

Here are my answers to your questions. I will try to give you general insight into the situation in Skopje and in the attachment I am sending you a situation analysis of the Macedonian culture context, that I wrote a year ago for Art Council of Switzerland – Pro Helvetia (where I work).

-What do you know about the art scene?  
 I am afraid I can not be very enthusiastic, although the art scene is quite resistant and survives despite all setbacks. The art scene in Macedonia is quite small, and it is buried in Skopje, almost nothing at all happens in other cities in Macedonia. In the moment I can not be very positive, I think the scene is in a crisis, the production is very small and the audience is generally not interested in contemporary art.

From the text of Zoran Petrovski I guess you have already an idea, who are the main players, and I think his review of the scene is accurate. In Skopje there are several institutions for contemporary art, they are all still active, but they are struggling with financial difficulties, bad management and some of them with old infrastructure. There are even new spaces appearing like the second space of the National Gallery, which is not able to keep regular exhibitions since it is too big space, and the local artists can not produce works that are big enough, or the Cultural Centre "Tocka" (Point) which is a new multipurpose space, that exhibits a lot of young Macedonian artists, but without clear concept and leveled quality, than there is the gallery of Pro Helvetia "Press to Exit" Gallery that me and my colleague are running, we tried to focus mainly to regional (Balkan) contemporary art, but we also have problems establishing this space, we work on a very small budget that does not allow regular program and also the audience is staying away (one could always expect more audience to exhibitions of foreign artist, even if they are very good). So, basically there are enough art spaces in Skopje, what they lack are money, interesting program and capable management.

The politics has a lot of influence on the running of state institution, with each new government; new directors are appointed, because of their party alliance and not because of their professionalism. Main financial players are Ministry of Culture, Open Society Institute (Soros), Pro Helvetia and maybe some others, but the assets available are very limited. Since the state of the economy is in a very bad shape, there are almost no sponsorships in contemporary art. Also there are some things that may sound strange, but this is how things function here, for example money for exhibition are usually granted and spend on catalogues and not on production of works. If you decide to work in Skopje, I would strongly suggest looking for money upfront, and I doubt (maybe Bundeskulturstützung, if I understood you are based in Germany?) I already you will find the money here.

Here is a list of curators that you may want to contact:  
 - Suzana Milevska. She is our most active curator, she also writes and knows quite a lot. Currently she lives in London, attends Goldsmith. She was running the Open Graphic Art Studio, and she was the one my generation artists started with in late 90s.  
 - Nebojsa Vilić has an NGO called "359" Network for local and subaltern hermeneutics" that is very into theory, he had a space of his own but he closed it last year.  
 - Sonja Abadjieva from the Museum of Contemporary Art, she also runs the magazine "Golemoloto Staklo" (Large Glass).  
 - Zoran Petrovski from the Museum of Contemporary Art, you got already a text by him on the Macedonian art scene.  
 You should also check the Contemporary Art Centre at: [www.cac.org.mk](http://www.cac.org.mk) where Melentiev used to work, you could contact now Kalina BunevskaKalina. Ministry of Culture of Macedonia: [www.kultura.gov.mk](http://www.kultura.gov.mk) and [www.culture.mk](http://www.culture.mk)

I am afraid all of this people are older (in the 40s or older), but there are no new young curators that have the knowledge, the vision or the commitment. As for the artists, the community is small maybe 100 people active in "contemporary art", there are also more traditional artists and recently a new generation of painters (the allege "return of modernism") emerged, but I do not find them very interested and new. If you are interested in artists I could also give you contacts of some.

Nevertheless, I would say that Skopje is very interesting city, and in Macedonia it is a place to be. It is basically anew city, rebuild after a devastating earthquake in 1963, and in my opinion architecturally and urbanistically it is worth investigating. Other point of interest for you might be the fact that Skopje is a multicultural city (Macedonians, Albanians, Romas, Turks) with all conflicts resulting from this. Visually, very interesting for the foreigners is Shukta, the largest Roma settlement in the world, which is basically a shantytown.

More facts about Skopje you could find at: <http://www.soros.org.mk/mk/skopje/en/>  
<http://faq.macedonia.org/travel/cities/skopje.html> and <http://www.skopjeonline.com.mk/> and probably you could find some others. In my opinion what Skopje needs is community based action in the suburbs, trying to involve more actively the ordinary people, I think there is quite a potential there.

-What do you think about the art schools in that city?  
 Just forgot about the art school (Faculty of Fine Arts), it is totally traditional, bureaucratic and very closed. There are maybe couple of people there that I respect, but they do not have much power in the school, which is basically run by conservative mediocrities. The students are a bit lethargic and lost; everything depends on their own initiative and if there are not a couple of talented, open students that could take the initiative, and pull the others the whole generations are lost. Just to illustrate, I and artists of my generation are still the young generation, and I am in the thirties now.

**From: Lise Jugert**  
**Subject: Städte**  
**Date: 03.12.2003, 21:19**

Ich habe mal versucht ein paar antworten zu finden auf eure Interessenslage, und zwar in bezug auf Frankfurt (1) und Berlin(2).

(1) Frankfurt am Main  
 -Kunst-Kulturszene  
 Frankfurt hat eine relativ überschaubare Kunstszene, für die Größe der Stadt (ca.600 tsd Einwohner) allerdings relativ viele institutionelle Kunsträume, allerdings weniger gute Galerien (vielleicht 4 nennenswerte). Die Kunstszene ist allerdings nicht nur auf Menschen aus dem Kunstbetrieb begrenzt, sondern findet auch ihr Publikum bei anderen Personengruppen (das wäre dann wohl Kulturszene) z.B. vielfach Leute aus der Musikszene, Kunsthistoriker, Theoretiker, Architekten, Theaterleute, etc. (was andersrum kaum der Fall ist.)  
 Über Käufer, Sammler oder sonstige Förderer weiß ich selber zu wenig. Es gibt auf jeden Fall immer ziemlich viel und viel junges Publikum, es ist jedenfalls erstaunlich wie willig immer wieder Publikum zu allem möglichen erscheint. Zudem verfügt Frankfurt mit zwei der wichtigsten dt. Zeitungen (FAZ und Frankfurter Rundschau) über ein wichtiges Feuilleton.  
 Interessante etablierte Künstler wohnen hier nicht viele, dafür sind immer wieder viele Gäste in der Stadt, besonders auch wegen der Institutionen für Zeitgenössische Kunst. Durch den Portikus, der mit der Städtelschule verknüpft ist, zentriert sich dieser Künstlerbesuch auch oft auf die Schule und ihre Umgebung.  
 Sehr auffallend ist momentan (das gilt aber für fast gesamt Deutschland) der Trend zum Wegzug aus Frankfurt nach Berlin. In den 2 Jahren, die ich hier bin haben sich alle interessanten "offspaces" aufgelöst, vielfach auch wegen dem Wegzug der Initiatoren. Frankfurt hat sich aber auch viel durch den Verlust Kaspar Königs verändert, der die Kulturszene hier sehr gefördert aber auch dominiert hat. Zeitschriften kenne ich keine. Allerdings gibt es ein paar Plattenlabels (MillePlateaux z.B.), eine rege Musiker und DJ scene, dafür aber nur einen guten Club und der ist in Offenbach (Nachbarsstädchen, aber ganz nah mit S-Bahn). Im Vergleich mit anderen Städten finde ich die frankfurter Kunstszene interessant und aufgeschlossener. Es sind wirklich oft viele interessante Leute da, im Allgemeinen scheint ein hohes Interesse an junger und neuer Kunst zu bestehen. Ich habe auch festgestellt, daß die Szene hier viel offener und freundlicher Fremden gegenüber ist, im Gegensatz zu anderen Städten, wo man sich fast abschottet gegen Neukömmlinge.

In vergangenen Jahren gab es auch viele unabhängige Projekte von jungen Künstlern, oft auch verbunden mit einer Partyszene. Veränderung eben durch Zentrierung auf Berlin und Wegzug K.Königs. Berlin scheint eben so attraktiv zu sein, weil nu eben "alle" da sind. Früher splinterlerte sich die Szene eben auf viele Städte, nun wollen alle "dabei" sein. Besondere Interessen fallen mir jetzt nicht unbedingt auf. Förderungspolitik ist staatlich fast gar nicht da; die Galerien und insbesondere der Kunstverein mit seiner Reihe "fresh & upcoming" sind sehr interessiert an jungen Künstlern und fördern sozusagen damit.

Dinge die "in" sind...  
 Ich glaube es war und ist schon immer cool, Musik zu machen. Aber nicht nur hier. Momentan kenne ich viele Künstler die Kunstmachen an sich in Frage stellen. Aber ich weiß nicht ob das als cool angesehen wird. Es ist eher Verzweiflung und Ablehnung. Also eine theoretisch bedingte Unproduktivität kann ich beobachten. Vielfach kann ich aber auch sehen, daß es eine zeitlang sehr cool war, wenn Künstler andere Künstler kuratiert haben. Aber ja eh nicht nur hier. Im Grunde genommen würde ich eh wagen zu behaupten, daß Frankfurt mehr international und überregional ist als andere Orte. Was mir noch auffällt, ist daß man sehr viel zusammen was Trinken geht und Tanzen in Clubs/Partys. Es wird sehr viel getrunken hier.

- Wie würdest Du die Stadt allgemein beschreiben?  
 Komische Stadt mit vielen Widersprüchen wie: Finanzzentrum und Privatwohlstand vs. offensichtliche Armut. Frankfurt hat eine hohe Ausländerquote (28%), ist aber sehr tolerant und man spürt eigentlich nie Ausländerfeindlichkeiten. Gegensätze bestehen nebeneinander ohne großes Aufsehen. Viele Junkies, Asis. Modernität (Hochhäuser) vs. Tradition (frankfurter Apfelweinstuben etc). Die Stadt lebt auch von der Fluktuation. Größter europäischer Flughafen, Bankenzentrum (Geldfluß), viele Berufspendler, die

also gar nicht hier wohnen. In Frankfurt scheint die Hauptzahl der Menschen nur vorübergehend zu bleiben, und zwar aus beruflichen Gründen. Ich finde diese Gegensätze wunderschön und inspirierend. Ich finde Frankfurt sogar hübsch und ehrlich, eben aber auch widerlich und nervig. Interessant ist besonders die ständige Veränderung und die Internationalität trotz der überschaubaren Größe. Schätzl finde ich, daß Frankfurt soweit weg ist von Berlin...und doch nur begrenzte Möglichkeiten im Vergleich eben mit Berlin.

- Kennst Du Kunstschulen in der Stadt und wie findest Du die?  
 Es gibt aber 2 schulen im Raum Frankfurt. Eben die Städtelschule und die HfG (Hochschule für Gestaltung) in Offenbach. HfG ist wie die Angewandte, Städtelschule ist sehr international, was Studenten (40% Ausländer) und Lehrer betrifft. Kleinste Kunsthochschule Deutschlands, extrem unbürokratisch, Finanzierung durch die Stadt (einzigartig!), bedingt durch Stiftungsurkunde des privaten Stifters Johann Städel). Dadurch inhaltlich völlige Unabhängigkeit. Es gibt fast gar keine Lehrpläne und nach dem Vordiplom nach 2 Jahren macht man gar keine Scheine mehr. Alles ist freiwillig und wird trotzdem gerne besucht. Es gibt hauptsächlich Philosophieseminare und viele Vorträge und workshops eingeladenen Künstler und Theoretiker. Während des Semesters ist das Angebot manchmal fast überbordend. Meines Erachtens ist es die beste schule des Landes...Professoren finde ich persönlich fast alle interessant: Tobias Rehberger, Wolfgang Tillmanns, Simon Starling, Ayse Erkmen, Isabelle Grav, Michael Krebber.

Ausstellungsorte:  
 Portikus, Kunstverein, Schirn, MMK; Galerie Grässlin, Neff, Voges und Partner, hm... Ansprechpersonen könnten sein, die Chefs und Kuratoren dieser Orte: Daniel Birnbaum (Städtelschule und Portikus), Jochen Volz, Max Hollein (Schirn), ... Die Jungs von der Oskar-von-Millersraße(vertreten dich die Gabi Senn in Wien), diverse Leute der Städtelschule, Tobias Rehberger z.B., der kennt Frankfurt echt schon lange.

(2) Berlin mach ich mal kürzer  
 Kunstszene:  
 Berlin scheint eine rieseeige Kulturszene zu haben. Da trennt es sich aber in zwei wichtige Gruppen und zwar in die vielen vielen schlechten lowbudget-künstler und massigen Offspaces, kleine Kunststädle, selfmade Galerien etc. In Berlin scheint sowieso jeder zweite Kunstbetrieb zu sein. Die andere Gruppe ist eine internationale Szene an der Kunstinstitut integriert. Vielfach aber auch sehr junge und erst im Aufstieg begriffene Künstler, für die sich der billige Standort Berlin vorteilhaft erweist.

Künstler die man so kennt zB: Thomas Demand, Ceal Floyer, Christian Jankowski, Simon Starling, ähm und so weiter. Es gibt eine überschaubare Anzahl an Offspaces und Projekten, sicher auch ein Zeitschriften. Am Besten vor Ort recherchieren was davon echt überhaupt interessiert. Aber im Grunde genommen ist Berlin ständig im

## CITIES REPORTS

In January 2003 we started a research on cities, investigating the view different persons have on the place where they work and live. We addressed people from the field of art and culture by email, asking them to send a description of a city they live or lived in. The received texts are rather informal and personal and don't give conclusive information about cities. This wall newspaper juxtaposes these different and also similar views.

Professionals who are active in artistic and cultural production express their private view on what they do and where they live. We think that one can observe a tendency towards overproduction in many fields of art and culture. At the same time we know that many people work overtime in order to achieve perfect results. The long term range of the messages offers a retrospective view to changes of art scenes and ideas, to conceptions of spaces and groups in different cities of the world.

Apart from the emails we present some texts which reflect in a more profound way on the conditions of artistic production in various countries. We are very glad that we received permission from the late Igor Zabel to reprint his essay as an introduction to this series.

This wall newspaper is the first issue of an occasionally published series dedicated to the presentation of informal texts.

We wish to thank all the contributors for their generous permission to present their texts. Although we were unable to get permission for reproduction from all authors in time for this print, copyright remains with the authors/producers. This project was funded by the Bundeskanzleramt Austria.

*Fouad Asfour and Catrin Bolt, 2002*

**Haven't we had enough?**  
*by Igor Zabel*

After Moderna Galerija presented, during the opening days of Manifesta 3, the 2000+ Artestat Collection, in which the majority of works are by Eastern European artists, I spoke to an art critic and curator who didn't seem to be too enthusiastic about the event. "Why this East again?", he said. He almost seemed somehow insulted. "Haven't we got enough of that in the last years?," he asked. Indeed, have we or haven't we? One could hardly say that Eastern European art—even now, a few years after this talk—has been over-represented in the world of international contemporary art. Why then this feeling of being fed up with Eastern European art? When the curator said, "we have had enough of that," what exactly did he mean?

I believe he actually had two different things in mind. First, by that time Eastern Europe was not fashionable any more. Well informed as he is (or considers himself to be), he probably had the feeling that the whole event was somehow obsolete, not in accordance with the latest trends in art. He has always tried to follow such trends and respond to them immediately. His need to be always up-to-date with the new events is connected to the second reason why he disliked the exhibition of predominantly Eastern artists. Actually, he did not at all like the idea of Eastern European art as something separate. Coming from Eastern Europe himself, throughout his professional career (that started sometime in the 1960s) he has been trying to oppose the idea that there is any essential difference between Eastern and Western art. His position has always been: there is only art. If the situation in Eastern European art has been different in any way, it was because genuine art has been repressed, limited, or even replaced by political propaganda disguised as art. He has always felt that it is his mission to confirm himself and the art scene he belongs to as natural parts of the international art scene. The idea that this art scene (or even himself) belongs to Eastern Europe is exactly what he wanted to resist.

*No/rmal*  
 So, once again, what did he actually mean by claiming that there had been "enough" Eastern European art? I guess he had in mind that art that could be recognized as Eastern European and that would appear in a context that would point at its easternness somehow represented a minor, "ethnic" type of art. He could tolerate it as long as it remained fashionable (I have known him long enough to be able to say that), but once concept of the East seemingly went out of fashion, he felt only embarrassed or almost humiliated by it. What he wanted then (and still wants today) is to belong to the art world in a normal way. Simply, he wants to be a part of the normal art scene, not the Eastern European one. Art and criticism produced in the West are his ideals, but he is not interested in them because of any particular westernness, but because they are "normal." His words, "We have had enough of Eastern art," therefore meant, "We simply want to produce normal art and criticism. We are interested only in art, not in any ethnic Eastern European art. In such a way, we want to be one with the West." Yes, it seemed then and to a certain extent still seems today that the West has the unique ability to produce "just art," while all other parts of the world produce culturally specific types of art. Representatives of marginalized communities are often confronted with this dilemma and frustrated by it. Such frustrations, in Turkish culture for example, as described by Orhan Pamuk, correspond well to the situation in Eastern Europe:

Wandel. Richtig hip ist Berlin eh erst seit 5 Jahren, das sieht man jetzt in Mitte besonders. Es gibt in Berlin ein großes Interesse an Mode und Design, Lifestyle. Dafür gibt es wenige gute Institutionen für gute Zeitgenössische Kunst. Der Hamburger Bahnhof ist eine lahm und behäbige Institution mit einer klassischen Sammlung an Serras und Kiefers. Selten gute Sonderausstellungen. Ebensolches gilt für den Neuen Kunstverein. Guggenheim Berlin öfters mal gut, dann gibt es das recht junge und unabhängig gestartete nun staatlich geförderte KW Kunstwerke), was doch recht okaye Sachen zeigt. Vor allem sehr groß - über 4 Stockwerke. Neue Gesellschaft für Kunst ist eher lahm, versucht aber hip zu sein. Ansonsten eine abartige Zahl an Galerien, in den letzten Jahren kamen ein paar gute dazu, aber das kriegt ihr ja leicht selber raus, das ist mir jetzt zu aufwändig das aufzuschreiben. Sehr sehr wichtig für Berlin ist besonders daß es sich ständig verändert, immer cleaner und teurer wird und eine Künstlerische Zentralisierung in Deutschland bewirkt hat, wie es sie seit der Existenz der BRD vielleicht noch nie gab. Nicht nur Künstler en masse ziehen daher, sondern auch viele andere kultureller Krams, wie viele Musiker, Musiklabels und Produzenten, sogar ganze Festivals (Popkomm aus Köln nach B.), Universal von HH nach B., sogar Galerien (oder auch Zweifilialen wie z.B. Galerie Nagel aus Köln), TextezurKunst aus Köln nach Berlin. In Berlin geht man auch viel Trinken und viel Tanzen, aber hier verläuft es sich natürlich eher in Gangs. Coolness ist aber immer wichtig. Und man sollte wissen, welcher Club gut ist. Andererseits gibt es auch die Tendenz sich in der Anonymität der riesigen Stadt zu verstecken und zurück zu ziehen. Förderungspolitik der Stadt auf dem absteigenden Ast wegen Verschuldung der Stadt. Doch es ist schon was möglich (s. KW).

Im Grunde genommen würde ich Berlin so charakterisieren, daß viele Künstler dort wohnen und arbeiten, aber im Grunde gibt es wenig zu holen, denn es gibt kaum Jobs, die allesamt total mies bezahlt sind, es gibt wenige gute Orte zum Ausstellen, und die Sammler bekommen sich auch kaum nach Berlin. Also wohnt man in Berlin, aber beruflich muß man beweglich bleiben. Im grunde kann da Berlin aber als Verknüpfung- oder Kommunikationsort dienen, an dem man viele einflußreiche Bekanntschaften machen kann, die einen dann aber bestenfalls aus Berlin heraus vermitteln. Berlin als Stadt ist erstmal recht häßlich, hat aber fast wieder Charme, ist sehr groß und weitläufig, hat viele Türken, viel Döner, billiges Essen, hatte mal billige Mieten. Ist ständig in Veränderung, wird wohl immer modischer, was aber ganz gut sein könnte. Vielleicht ein zweites NYC. Ja, ich finde Berlin irgendwie erschreckend durch die Größe und die Masse an Künstlern, allerdings etwas anziehend durch das große Angebot an guten Clubs, netten Menschen, Veranstaltungen, etc. Für die Größe ist das Überleben in Berlin im Vergleich zu anderen Großstädten allerdings doch recht möglich, weil alles vergleichsweise günstig ist. Berlin ist schon die zukunftsträchtigste Stadt Deutschlands, was wohl auch auf Kosten anderer Städte gehen wird. Schulen: Da gibt es die UdK und die in Weißensee. Sind beide ziemlich schlecht für bild. Kunst. Sagt jeder. Glaube ich auch. Gute professoren kaum. Müßt ihr mal kucken wer da jetzt ist.

The Kurdish youth whose uncle lived in Germany was the most outspoken on this point: "When they write poems or sing songs in the West, they speak for all humanity. They're human beings—but we're just Muslims. When we write something, it's just ethnic poetry." But there is, I think, a hidden contradiction in the wish of the curator with whom I talked to be "normal." This wish only indicates that we are, in fact, not "normal"—otherwise we would probably not be aware of this issue at all. What is, then, the reason that Eastern European art cannot be normal art, art as such, just art, etc.?

*The Trauma*  
 I think that the basic answer is rather obvious. There is no "art as such," since art is always produced, distributed, and consumed in particular circumstances. These circumstances are not only an outer framework that does not touch the essence (as the person I talked to would probably like to believe). They determine not only the choice of the materials, subject, ideas, and issues, but also the meaning of the work; not only its means and sources, but also its availability, distribution, and conditions of reception. It is clear therefore, that—even if we speak about art that is "just art"—have to be able to speak about its particular context and conditions, as well as those conditions that determine it as "just art."

One of the most basic facts of post-war Europe was (and through its consequences, to certain extent still is) the political division and balance of the two superpowers and their political, economic, and cultural systems. Even in today's Europe, the division is felt as a trauma that demands endless repetitions and re-enactment. Even if contemporary research points to the fact that the divisions of the Cold War period were more complex than it seemed (e.g., that the division of Europe and the rest of the world between the USA and USSR was based on an agreement that both sides, in spite of occasional crises, basically respected and kept the situation balanced), they nevertheless confirm that the division was very radical and that there has been very little communication or exchange, economic or cultural, between the two sides.

*The Power of Exclusion*  
 The political and cultural division of Europe was based on a balance and tension between powers. The strategies of division were therefore also strategies of power. Even if the two superpowers remained in agreement about dominance over their respective zones, thus avoiding a direct (armed) conflict, they nevertheless developed these strategies of division in such a way as to ensure their own side a certain primacy or advantage. They used these strategies to increase their political, military, and ultimately, economic power. In this context, art and culture, too, were used as strategic means. Not only artistic production as such was important here, but also its conditions and contexts. It was, for example, possible to use the strategies of division, i.e. of inclusion and exclusion, to secure a globally dominant position for its own artistic and cultural production. Strategies of inclusion and exclusion are effective if they produce the idea of the primacy of the space they regulate. We could therefore say that the cultural power of the West was (and is) based on the fact that it promoted its own dominant artistic language(s) as "normal" art (i.e., established it as the norm of art), as "just" art. For those excluded from it, it became not only a norm, but also the space of desire.

*The Two Art Systems*  
 The political division in Europe found its expression in the dualism of the two systems of artistic language and production that could be roughly described as Modernism and Socialist Realism. I do not want to imply that the two systems are somehow equal, in the sense that they have produced equally strong and important art. In fact, it is hard to speak about terms of equality between the two art systems. They imply essentially different value systems and mutually exclusive aims. From the point of view of cultural theory, of course, there are, in principle, no basic differences between them, as they are clearly two cultural forms in two types of societies. But for someone dealing with art and not primarily with society, works of art cannot be merely cultural and social documents. They have their particular value that transcends their role as a document.

We may know that the value system on which our own appreciation of art is grounded is socially based; yet we are nevertheless determined by it. Socialist Realism should not be mistaken for a simple and naive system; it was, at least at its best, a complex theoretical apparatus based on a developed social theory and critical aesthetic thought. For us, however, the values developed by Modernism and subsequent currents are more natural than those advocated by Socialist Realism.

The trouble with Socialist Realism, however, is not only that it represents a different conceptual and aesthetic system that does not generally correspond to those artistic values we take for granted. An even bigger problem is that it has been (by its very essence) an actual and rather effective tool in organizing and disciplining a society we felt was extremely repressive, even directly totalitarian.

For a long time, Socialist Realism has only been understood as a cultural document, if not merely as pseudo-art used to break down not only any genuine artistic production, but also any aspiration toward meaningful and free life. Only after the breakdown of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, when the structures and approaches derived from Socialist Realism lost their actual political function, did it become possible to perceive it differently and to allow even the possibility to think about it as art.

*The Strange Case of Socialist Realism, Part One: Is it Art?*  
 I remember very well a discussion with Joseph Backstein, who came to Ljubljana to give a lecture connected to his project Monumental Propaganda that was presented at the Moderna Galerija. The project dealt with the then highly urgent issue of what to do with the numerous monuments from the time of the Socialist regimes—the topic was important for the relationship to aesthetic and cultural concepts from the immediate past. The discussion naturally moved towards the issue of Socialist Realism

**From: Magda Tothova**  
**Subject: Re: Amsterdams**  
**Date: 7.12. 2003, 7:04**

also um es schön zu erklären, die stadt ist fad die uni noch mehr und die kunstzene, die ich bisher nur periphär kenne sehr einseitig und nicht so jung, hab echt schlechte erfahrungen hier gemacht mit den profs und verlasse amsterdam demächst, also im jänner, manche der fragen kann ich dir beantworten, manche müsste ich selber herausfinden, die stadt an sich wär vielleicht interessant für eine recherche, weil sie sehr eigenartig ist, klein, geschlossen, voller homos und kiffer, das is keine übertriebung, und die holländer an sich von sich glauben sie seien die grössten, die academy will studenten und keine künstler haben, ist auch sehr geschlossen und versucht die studenten bis zum diplom nicht aus rauszulassen, alles flos nach strenger prozessbeschreibungen wie in der schule und wer nicht entspricht oder nicht anwesend ist wiederholt das jahr, die galeries bieten viel holländische kunst an, kaum werden andere kunstler gezeigt, es gibt auch eigeninitiativen natürlich, die ich nicht so gut kenne, aber ist auch klar in einer stadt, die so hippiveerseucht ist und es eine heldenadt zu sein scheint, wenn man ein haus besetzt hat, gibt es für mich wenig zu entdecken, die profs sind fast nur holländer und viel tanzen, aber hier verläuft es sich natürlich eher in gangs. coolness ist aber immer wichtig, und man sollte wissen, welcher club gut ist. anderserseits gibt es auch die tendenz sich in der anonymität der riesigen stadt zu verstecken und zurück zu ziehen. förderungspolitik der stadt auf dem absteigenden ast wegen verschuldung der stadt. doch es ist schon was möglich (s. kw).

**From: Christian Izc**  
**Date: 16.12.2003, 08:22**  
**Subject: Re: Frage wegen Budapest Teil**

1 applied arts uni, 1 fine arts, mostly locals living in bp stadium = 5 jahresplan, recht genaue kurse je nach department, kurzlich mehr möglichkeiten zu, als grafikerin auch ein bischen foto zu machen. artscene - mixed :)

spaces in budapest: not many, i found 3 interesting for me, and maybe 3 not so interesting for me, there is the young artists association supporting young hungarian artists, they help a lot, also by doing contacts to artists from abroad, maybe they are much better suited to answer your questions.

where/what is everywhere?  
 "dynamo", ist so ne art offspace, erst seit wenigen monaten offen, sehr szenen- ubergreifend (haben mit einer ausstellung von graffiti-artists begonnen) und auch indymedia/hb connects mit. interesting

ungarn ist wirtschaftlich sehr liberal, dh, multis koennen sich sehr frei ausbreiten, budapest ist ja auch recht bejakt fuer grosse und zahlreiche malls mit langen oeffnungszeiten, mcdonalds an jeder ecke in der stadt, aber zeitgenoessische kunst gibts eigentlich recht wenig, hab auch selten logos von firmen oder so gesehen, aber in ungarische architektur fliesst viel kohle, haben da so einen "uniquen" stil entwickelt, scheint mir aber in so ne nationalstische richtung zu gehen.

grundsätzlich ist das ja so ne sache mit der politik, dass es ja keine nennenswerte "linke" im westeuropaischen sinn gibt, sondern das gegenueck zu den konservativen parteien die liberalen sind (postkommunisten spielen ja auch kaum mehr ne rolle), dh, die, die bei uns gruene waehlen, wuerden sich in ungarum vielleicht bei den liberalen zuhause fuehlen, darunter auch viele kuenstlerInnen, entsprechend vielleicht auch die jewelligen kuenstlerischen ziele.

stadtbild:  
 auch sehr neoliberal dominiert, viele bueros/malls im stile der 'neuen ungarischen architektur', leer steht da abernix.

**From: Dobra Denecri**  
**Subject: Questions, a bit changed**  
**Date: 29.12.2003**

Regarding Belgrade for me is hard to be so specific – actually I think that it is very interesting place to be for certain time and explore – just because of the special political and social situation – sure it is very instable for the people who are living there, but for who comes from outside can be context full of inputs of different kind (creative as well).

There is a scene that got established in the period of the early '90s till now – it is totally different thing respect how it was – a totally new way of functioning (even if there are a lot of people who remained the same). Politics is much more involved I all.# Life is less expensive so you can stay for half a year or more for much less money than in other places. Scene is structured differently since money either comes from the state either from all this foreign aids or foundations – and that is determinant factor. There is no market or structured system. Many "alternative" situations can be created. Balkans are still fashionable (in spite or because of all that exhibitions). People are friendly. Better to be there in the spring / summer.

You can check on net (I guess some of them have also info in English): Muzej Savremene Umjetnosti – Beograd / museum of contemporary art Centar za savremenu umetnost Beograd – [www.djajragma.com](http://www.djajragma.com) (I think Dom Omladine Beograd Remont, Beograd Kulturni Centar, Beograd Cinema Rex, Beograd Padjion Velkovic, Beograd

Rome /the art scene (e.g.: interesting artists – At the moment I have a difficulty to identify something really fresh – of course, there are some artists of younger generation (25-30) that are working in the interesting manner – maybe the best among them is the artist that was included in the last Venice biennial within the selection of Gioni; her name is Micol Assal (or at least I liked a lot of the work she presented in Venice – maybe you remember it was sort of "electrified" small room). That is something on individual level which is good according to me, but I do not see that there is something like movement that is bringing up some new spirit and fresh ideas. I feel that there are young artists still working in a sort of the '90s spirit, still in this kind of wave and still linked to the circles that has been formed in the last decade.

/groups the scene is mostly fragmented, and artists are working individually. Of course there are some groups that are doing some interesting research in the fields of art and architecture – in particular are well known STALKER – but they are generation 35-40 (or at least most of the members of the group).

/spaces on the institutional level there is a big change in Rome – there are two big institutions starting their activity: city and state museum of contemporary art, MACRO – Museo d'Arte Contemporanea di Roma (where I am curating certain programs) and MAXXI – Museum for the art of XXI century. First is operating in two spaces in the city and there is a big new part under construction. Second is active with it's (I guess) 20% of potential – it is about to become a new architectural wonder according to the project done by Zaha Hadid. It is run by Paolo Colombo.

Anyway, it is for the first time that in Rome there are some museum-like structures for contemporary art which injected some extra energy to the art scene. Everything is still on the beginning and there are -for the moment- big expectations. This is though, a sort of trigger that caused sort of more dynamic atmosphere and in consequence opening of some new galleries and spaces for experimentation.

/projects there are some project slinked to the city / urban planning and "recovery" of certain areas – in this sense there have been realised interesting actions and projects by Stalker group, young curator Lorenzo Benedetti and some others in the area called Ostiense. There are interesting things but sporadic.

/magazines regarding magazines the situation is quite still – there is a magazine called "Arte & Critica" that is very general – bringing up almost everything that is going on in small reviews. In the last years there have been different tries to start up some sort of more "serious" or more "interdisciplinary" magazines, but after one or two issues they would be closed. Big lack.

/audience there is a new audience – huge. At least for the opening of museum exhibitions – really impressive (comparing to situation before). In general there is new interest in art and also new generation of collectors (30-40 years old) willing to buy, of course not for big money, mostly interested in artists of their generation and younger. If you think there's something especially interesting you could mention more and more artists (mostly well known and affirmed) are moving to live in Rome. Situation is changing fast – difficult to predict if it is going really to take of or not

/how you see it in comparison with other cities? it has some special dimension due to the overwhelming presence of history – there is a great beauty in it & also certain felling like being capture in the "still frame" you have the feeling that time is moving differently, no kind of XXI century speed certain decadent spirit



**From:** Christian Mayer  
**Subject:** Saarland  
**Date:** 10.02.2004, 3:37

also erstens ist das saarland ein von arbeltern gepragter landstrich deutschlands, wichtig geworden mit der industrialisierung durch stahl- und kohleproduktion, aehnlich wie das ruhrgebiet, kunst und kultur kam in dieser zeit sehr kurz, ist in der bevölkerung nicht verwurzelt, dann gab es diesen ministerpresidenten lavontaine der spaeter auch bundeskanzler werden wollte aber nicht durfte, und dieser gab sich sehr weit- und kunstfossen und wollte aus dem saarland ein kunst und kulturland machen, deshalb hatte er auch die idee eine kunsthochschule zu gruenden im jahre 1989 oder so, die ist also sehr jung, aber sehr wichtig da es sonst wie gesagt kaum kunstverwurzelung gibt in der stadt, und deshalb ist es auch ein bisschen komisch und deplatziert diese dort zu haben, also die schule bietet kunst (malerei, skulptur, neue medien...) und design (industriedesign und grafikdesign) an und hat ungefaehr 300 studenten.

grob gesagt: fuer industriedesignist sie sehr gut, fuer grafik nicht so und fuer kunst auch nicht so, das gute: du kannst interdisziplinær studieren, d.h. du studierst design kannst aber auch kunstvorlesungen besuchen und bekommst das angerechnet und viele versuch auch kunstvorlesungen besuchen und bekommst das angerechnet und viele versuch, das grundjahr ist gemeinsam kunst und design was ich sehr gut fand, das problem: du bist abgeschrieben vom rest der welt, keine interessanten leute und ausstellungen kommen nach saarbruecken ohne dass du sie einlaedst, und es wurden zu wenige eingeladen, die naechste grossere stadt ist weit weg, zweitens: die professoren sind grossenteils nicht oder nicht mehr wirklich erfolgreich in der szene und koennen deshalb auch dahin gehend keine impulse geben, die aber gerade dort wichtig waeren, drittens: das Umfeld interessiert sich nicht wirklich dafer was du tust, kein grosses kunstpublikum, keine galerien die mit jungen kunstlern arbeiten etc. wobei ich sagen muss dass im nachhinein betrachtet das fuer die ersten jahre studium nicht so schlecht war, mit keinem markt konfrontiert zu sein, sachen ausprobieren und das klima war sehr freundschaftlich und geborgen dort, auch die mentalitaet der saarlaender ist eher gemuetlich freundlich aufgeschlossen. ueber professoren kann ich folgendes schreiben:

ulrike rosenbach: fruher ein star, jetzt will sie keiner mehr was sie betruebt, sehr starke personlichkeit, hart im nehmen, aber gut wenn sie ueber den markt spricht, sie kennt sich aus, sie ist da durchgehenden, unterrichtet neue medien und performance, was auch ganz gut eine gewisse schizophrænie in ihrer personlichkeit ausdruckt: sehr emotional warm und rational kuehl auf der anderen seite, harte aber gute schule irgendwie, fuer manche die houe auf christina kubisch: soundkunstlerin, aber auch skulptur irgendwie, sehr kleine klasse, aber ganz aktive leute immer, sie lebt in berlin und kommt nicht so oft, hatte meistens immer was mit musik, hat tollvalesverhaeltnis mit rosenbach was es manchmal schwierig macht bei beiden zu sein, beides sind diven, bei den anderen hab ich nicht wirklich studiert, grosses manko an der schule ist die theorielehre, da gibts nicht viel interessantes, was interessant ist, ist dass ein teil der schule ausgelagert ist nach voelkingen, und dort in einem sehr alten stahlwerk ateleiers hat, das unesco kulturerbe ist und in dem auch immer so riesen ausstellungen spektakel stattfinden.

ja schliessendlich sieht es so aus: nach dem studium musst du spaelstens weg oder du hast wenig chancen, denn dort wird dich niemand entdecken, viele bleiben, kriegen kinder, machen was anderes, freunde von mir hauptsaechlich im computer internet bereich, maler koennen sich mit verkaufen im saarland durchschlagen und es gibt natuerlich viele foerderungen, da es ein sehr kleines land ist aber trotzdem diese mittel hat und die werden eigentlich nur unter den studenten verteilt, wie sich das jetzt veraendert kann ich nicht sagen, angesichts des sparzwangs in deutschland kann ich mir schon vorstellen dass da so eine kleine schule in der pampa unter legitimationszwang geraet.

an institutionen gibt es:

an interessantesten fuer mich war immer die stadtgalerie, ein von der stadt finanziertes ausstellungshaus in der mitte der stadt dass immer sehr eigenwillige ausstellungen und kunstner praesentiert hat und nach sb geht hat, viel so klangkunst auch, also sachen die man sonst nicht so sieht auch in grosseren staedten selten und die doch sehr gut sind, und die haben auch so eine reihe laufen mit der hochschule und lassen absolventen eine einzelausstelung machen auf einladung.

dann das saarlandmuseum mit einer grossen guten sammlung, von malerei 17. jhd bis ganz neue videoinstallationen und so, kunstverein oder kunstlerhaus oder so, zeigt meistens saarbruecker kunstler, nicht die besten

dann gibt es immer mal wieder private kurzlebige ausstellungsraeume eine produzentengalerie die auch so hies, weiss nicht ob es die noch gibt, auch alles absolventen

interessante kunstnergruppen etc.:

syndikaton (siehe www.syndikaton.org/net/com/de einzige kunstlerin die es gross gemacht hat aus meinem freundeskreis ist ingrid mwangi, lebt aber mittlerweile in ludwigshafen stephan matthieu guter elektronikusmuseu, gibt auch kurse an der schule gibt noch ein paar leute, aber nicht sovielle interessante kunstlerisch gesehen

also ich koennte jetzt noch viel mehr schreiben aber ich kann nicht mehr, aber als fazit: das ganze klingt vielleicht ein bisschen negativ, aber gerade deswegen ist es auch interessant fuer so ein projekt wie eures, das ja wahrscheinlich nicht nur in den top trendy angesagten staedten gedacht ist, ich glaube dass man mit all den parametern die in sb gegeben sind sehr interessant arbeiten kann, und es gibt auch finanziell hilfestellungen, denn wenn mal jemand kommt sind alle ganz froh.

**From:** Jana Oravcova  
**Subject:** Bratislava  
**Date:** 11.02.2004, 03:28

Our institution works on the field of the arts (visual arts, performing and cinematography). Our activities we are devoted to the free projects and others -aimed to education, grant program, exhibition program, publishing program, informations, documentations of the Slovak artists, organising the competition for the young artists the Oskar Cepan award etc., international program, co-operations with the institution in abroad. The part of our activities belong to Open Gallery.

In our institution you can find the files with art works of Slovak Visual artists. We are supporting arts organisation, please see www. scca.sk Most of activities in Slovakia you can find in Bratislava. Here is the concentration of the cultural activities of the each kind. There are several galleries as the most active are Priestor-Center for contemporary arts, Medium gallery, Hiti gallery.

I don't know what you expect as interesting but I think that in each country and town you can find something different and interesting.

The Academy of Fine and Design based in Bratislava is the best of the academy for the visual arts. The magazines Profil, Vlna, 3/4 revue are based in Bratislava. In general Bratislava has a good reputation and many travellers come here. You can find very nice places in the down town. That's what I want to say very briefly about Bratislava. Don't hesitate to contact me with questions about visual arts.

**From:** Marko  
**Subject:** Zagreb  
**Date:** 12.02.2004, 18:20

- Tell us something about Zagreb.

M:FOR SURE I AM NOT THE ONLY ONE AND PROBABLY NOT THE BEST PERSON TO ASK THESE QUESTIONS, WHO I REALLY AM AND WHAT WE REALLY DO, WE=PLATFORMA 9.81...www.platforma981.hr\_YOU SHOULD TRY TO FIGURE OUT FROM OUR MESSY LITTLE WEB SITE

-What do you know about the art scene?

M:CRISIS IS THE PERFECT ENVIRONMENT FOR ANY KIND OF CREATIVITY, THAT IS PROBABLY WHAT PEOPLE HERE HAVE, EVEN MORE THEY COPERATE\_MMMM???

-What would you like to mention about the city in general?

M:ZAGREB IS A TYPICAL MITTEL EUROPA/BALKAN/POST SOCIALIST/POST WAR/MARGINALIZED CITY, WHAT IS INTERESTING IS THAT THIS CONDITION IS GENERATING DIFFERENT PROTOURBAN PHENOMENONS, I MEAN ZAGREB IS AT ZERO GRAVITY STATE, SOME THINGS ARE REALLY HARD TO PREDICT, ON THE OTHER HAND EVERYTHING WILL BE OVER IN SAY 5 YEARS TIME, IF YOU WONNA DO SOMETHING YOU DO IT NOW

-What do you think about the art schools in that city?

M:NOT INTERESTING

MY TIME IS UP, SORRY, ATTACHED IS A SHORT DESCRIPTION OF A PROJECT THAT COULD BE THE BASIS OF OUR COLLABORATION (invisible-zagreb-all.pdf), PLEASE LETS STAY IN TOUCH FOR YOUR NEXT QUESTIONARY

**From:** Nebojsa

**Subject:** Re: some questions

**Date:** 12.02.2004, 21:31

I am a bit confused with your requests. I feel like a "National geographic" correspondent. Yes, I could say that I am well-informed about cultural life and general situation in several Serbian cities. I have to say that, a part from Belgrade and to some extent Novi Sad, art-scene here is poor. So to you, when you ask me to express my opinions on art-scene and infrastructure in some towns, we should first talk about the very content of that scene. What prevails there is hopeless traditionalist-academic approaches to making art. There are some alternative authors, doing comics or low-fi movies, but there is no thing like art-scene. There is much to be mentioned about each city, but I have to fully understand the purpose of your project - otherwise, I could talk for hours - in vain. So, lets start with introduction: who are you, and what do you do? As far as I understood your idea, you pian to initiate "art project in residence" in several cities here. Followed by an investigation of local cultural life. I think such an project can be interesting and fruitful, and that I can give you some guidelines and contacts. But let's start from the beginnings: how do you plan to do it and, the last, but not the least, why?

**To:** Nebojsa

**Subject:** Re: some questions

**Date:** 19.05.2004, 7:06

In this interview we would like to ask you some questions about contemporary art scene in Serbia. We are interested in many topics, therefore we'll address the specific aspects one by one - first we'd like to talk about the situation of the contemporary art scene in Serbia generally.

One of the initial thoughts, which made us start this project was that since the 90's there have been many shows on "eastern european art" culminating in last years exhibition in Search of Balkania (curated by Roger Conover, Ede Cufar and Peter Weibel, Graz 2002), Blood and Honey (curated by Harald Szeemann, Klosterneuburg 2003), and In the Gorges of the Balkans (curated by René Block, Kassel 2003) - in July the show BELGRAD ART INC. (curated by Stevan Vukovic in cooperation with Marko Lulic) will start in Secession, Vienna. Along with this there were and are many discussions about the fact that art of eastern europe enters the "market" and phenomena connected to this process, as it is discussed for instance in the recent Springerin "Diachotic Culture".

In our mind the simple question arose, if and how much of this, what was and is on display in western European countries is presented in the context it comes from, how these exhibitions were received and discussed in general and what you and the people you know think about it. Also we would like to know if the art presented in these shows is representative for the art scene in the respective countries.

**From:** Nebojsa

**Subject:** Re: some questions

**Date:** 2.06.2004, 18:13

I didn't see the exhibitions mentioned, so I can have an "outside" opinion.

I think that texts from Zeman's and Graz's catalogue are very bad. I think that student of ... let's say third year of art history should not pass any exam with such texts... they are full of prejudices and chip analogies, showing incomprehensible cynical distance from the shows themselves...

I think that there were very good works on exhibitions, but that no-one didn't come there to see art works but works from Eastern Europe.

People complain very much about such exhibitions here. Of course, there are more complaints by authors that didn't participate. If we put aside the quality or "representativity" of exhibitions, the productive question would be: on what ideological screen these exhibitions reflected upon, or to put it simple: what was displayed by this exhibitions, what is their hidden agenda? I think that Nebojsa Jovanovic's article from Springerin gives some fruitful answers.

It is important to note that there is no teitorial or political domain called Eastern Europe any more. There can hardly be such domain like Western Europe neither. There is probably only the capital and the position that we hold in it's universe.

I further think that artists from Euro-east are not in position to refuse participation in such exhibitions. In this situations they are something like proletarians. Reasons for their participation could be:

- recruiting to the international art-community
- the rise of respect in the domestic scene
- so called "art-tourism"

It is fact that no one takes care of the ideological construct promoted by exhibitions, but this is not the case only with this exhibitions but with the "cultural exchange" in general. This lack of interest for ideological basis reflects also in the fact that no one cares too much for the very concept of the exhibition! One of the most successful artists from this region said that he had never read the texts written by curators. I think this is wise but cynical to avoid being involved into consideration of artists own position in universes of capitalism, that is to say, their ideological position. I have to say that art-theory and critics here in Belgrade foster the tabuisation of the ideological content of artistic and curatorial practices. One could say that partly due to the absence of this sort of critical reflections artists here are not able to consider invitations to exhibit abroad out of reasons mentioned.

**From:** VasaJ Lebaric  
**Subject:** Ljubljana  
**Date:** 12.02.2004, 8:34

first about art: We have bunch of old artists, mostly professors at the Academy (there is a small number of younger Prof. very open and in contemporary arts). Most of them keeps living in modernism. But art situation here is very interesting. There are almost two separated parts. Oldies, very well accepted, respected and always in local galleries from one town to another and also in the city. Any conservative book you look in you'll find them. They are here and they stay here, and are proud of that. There is another part of artists, who have a broader view of art. Being, studying or showing also elswhere then slovenia. some: Vuk Cosic, IRWIN, Marjetica Potrc, Ziga Kariz, Marko Peljhan, Tobias Putrih, Joze Barsi... I don't know if this counting makes sense.

The art scene is a bit strange. For example, there is no place for showing contemporary arts. There is a gallery Kapelca (run by a guy named Krpan), and there are lots of foreign artists showing and having performances, but the space is small and thus limited to actions, happenings, video as smaller exhibitions. It is not possible to show a big object that needs space, or to make big light exhibition...

There is another gallery SKUC, operating since 80's also interested in contemporary arts (run by Alenka something) also a small space in the old part of the city, but was always keen on new art, before also a lot on alternative art. Another place, very interesting is Metelkova mesto (Metelkova city) it is a larger complex of several buildings, which are now, concert halls, pub, party place, there was also a gallery Celice (cells) etc. The place was a military base before, when we were Yugoslavia. Then a group of people called Mreza za Metekovo ( a net for metekova) squatted the place and legally fought for it. After years they succeeded I guess. Before I remember there were people, foreigners coming and staying in one of those houses, having an apartment from somebody else who left, or was just absent, or they made their own squat or something. There are theatre shows and concerts quite regularly there. There is also the first Ljubljana (or even Slovenian) official hostel there, open last year. Everything I mentioned in Metelkova is in Military buildings rearranged and also the hostel.

Then there is Equrna (run by Taja Brejc) - a gallery selling and showing art. Mostly there are Slovenian artists. And there is Modern gallery which is the biggest gallery meant for todays art, but unfortunately showing in permanent collection lots of old stuff (modernism). It was built in 45, and therefore it's clear that it can not show just anything, but is more appropriate for small pieces, and pieces not actions, are happenings... for example too small doors to put in something big, (can be done through the ceiling, but...), rooms are not big, it is old white cube kind of gallery. As the government doesn't give a shit about making a new gallery, this is the representative gallery of the country. There is a National Gallery showing bunch of old stuff, but their top: Slovenian impressionists and Slovenian baroque artists (we did not have renaissance here anyway).

**The Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts, Ashkal Alwan**

*By Christine Töhme and Rasha Satti*

"The other Mediterranean." The invitation is troubling. What are the implications of being interpellated and invited to speak in the name of an – not the – "other"? "Other" to whom and "other" how?

If the reference is to a marginal, subversive "other" in contrast to hegemonic, dominant "self" within the mosaic of the Mediterranean, then it has to be plural and speak of the multitude of dominant "selves" and "others" among the people, locales, states, and countries that make-up the Mediterranean.

If the reference is cast in the postmodern signified of "other," whereby we would be invited to speak in the name of the southern bank of the non-European Mediterranean, then an informed, purposeful exchange is perhaps more problematic, considering the interpretive frameworks that guide our mindset and inform our work.

A world polarized and dismembered by the postmodern, postcolonial twist on the "self" and "other" binary is flat (not spheric) and drafted in the stark black(s) and white(s) of essentialisms. It is anti-historical, linear, and cannot accommodate for lived experience and critical reflection. This binary tension is too narrow and one-dimensional to accommodate for a complex, textured reality, its organic historical layering and its embeddedness in the world at large.

In that regard, "the other Mediterranean" does not necessarily speak for ill-intention. Rather, it is emblematic of a chronic mistake on behalf of the West to disregard history, our history, the Mediterranean's history, your history, distant and recent. If the dominant discourse posits us as the "other" simply because it fits the interests of an economic elite at risk, it does not necessarily mean that we live our lives as an "other," that you live your lives as "selves," and that we interact in the confines of that imaginary dichotomy.

The point here is precisely to problematize notions such as "other," "identity," "nationalism," and "global culture" in the question that frames the project, namely, whether there is an Arab cultural identity that exists outside an identity imagined and coerced by nationalist dogma, specifically in the present era of a global culture.

The Arab world is diverse and fraught with paradoxes and competing ideologies. Unless the notion of "identity" is presumed to be complex, polyvalent, fluid, and ever-changing, then the discussion will operate de facto within a simplistic, anti-historical framework – totally abstracted from lived experience. When speaking of "nationalism" in the Arab world, it is important to consider Arab nationalism on par with all other nationalisms. In the modern formation of the Arab world, Arab nationalism was a powerful force in imagining the nation. But it is not the sole factor constituting people's consciousness of themselves or articulating their being in the world. Arabs today still think of themselves as Arabs regardless of the fact that the Arab nationalist project has long been defunct, and that regimes and political forces at rule now in the individual Arab states are almost all autonomous to the ideology of Arab nationalism. And the notion of "global culture," too, presumes a set of givens that fail the test of lived experience. If by "global" the implication is a melting of borders, a more seamless movement between states and regions, then the reality of the Arab world as well as of Arabs poses serious problems. Movement between Arab states is very difficult for Arab citizens, at times more difficult than movement for Arab citizens to Europe and Asia. If the implication is the erosion of the "national" to the favor of the "global," in terms of social behavior, values, systems of meaning and the propagation of ideal types, then the hold of the "global" is grossly over-estimated, and the Arab world is far from becoming "homogenized," particularly if one considers the stark class distinctions within the Arab world and the multitude of identifications that operate across the social classes that make up countries within it.

At the margins of imperial terror and the oppression, indifference, blighting poverty, and blinding class cleavages produced by every "national" regime that makes up the Mediterranean, the Arab world, the Near East and the Middle East, is where Ashkal Alwan – and the artists, arts organizations, collectives, galleries, and institutions we have and continue to collaborate with – lives and works. And while those margins have been tenuous, fluid, and structurally unsound, our work has been central to the cultural, artistic, political, and democratic practices in our world, challenging boundaries, articulating what is silenced, and representing what is obscured. Central to our mission has been a keen sense to reclaim our own public spaces, our own geography, our own history, our own collective memory, and our own lived reality. At the same time, we have engaged in exchange and dialogue with colleagues from Beirut, Cairo, Ramallah, Istanbul, Tehran, Marseille, Paris, London, Rotterdam, New York, and São Paulo.

The goal of Ashkal Alwan has been, from the start, to establish a platform for artistic and cultural practices outside the precincts of the market. Ashkal Alwan was founded in Beirut a decade ago, born in the midst of a city that had embarked on a project to rebuild and rehabilitate itself after almost seventeen years of civil war. Ashkal Alwan grew from the collective desire and commitment of artists, cultural practitioners, and intellectuals to create an institutional framework for artistic and cultural practices that did not find a home in established institutions or existing ventures.

Although Ashkal Alwan is now a decade old, it still feels young. The past ten years have not been easy. In fact, they have been so fraught with obstacles and adversity that sometimes we cannot recall now how we made it, how we did not break down, how we did not fold.

Ashkal Alwan's achievements were made possible because they were, and remain, the fruits of a labor of love. In some respects, the expression "labor of love" is redundant. Etymologically, the Latin root for "labor" actually means love. Labor at Ashkal Alwan has inexorably signified and articulated that Latin inflexion. It's not simply that we love what we do; it is mostly that we do it with love. Were it not for the love, friendship, solidarity, courage, and loyalty of all those who have worked with us, we would not dare speak with self-assurance, and none of the accomplishments claimed by Ashkal Alwan would have been possible. We may call the group of artists and institutions we have collaborated with a "network," but the word does not express the sense of community born from the collective struggles we face everywhere.

Breaking with convention in post-war Beirut, Ashkal Alwan began as an institution that would curate and organize exhibitions and projects throughout the city, open to the public and free of charge. Every project has been documented with a catalogue or publication for the purpose of establishing a permanent archive of local artistic and cultural practices. The first project of Ashkal Alwan was an exhibition staged in the Sanyeh Garden. The idea was for artists to interact with public spaces, and the projects that followed were staged in the Sioufi Garden, the seaside Corniche that stretches along Beirut's encounter with the Mediterranean, the long winding stairway of Daraj al-Fann and, finally, in Hamra Street, one of Beirut's most renowned commercial thoroughfares. While local officials deemed our use of public spaces unorthodox, fighting prejudice and censorship proved a far more challenging and tedious struggle. In one instance, two works in a collective project offended the sensibilities of conservative religious institutions to the extent that the authorities intervened to have both works removed.

Throughout, Ashkal Alwan has encouraged and provided the resources for artists to innovate and interact with the spaces in

There are some groups and artists, who work on good projects and are well excepted also abroad. For example Marjetica Potrc, worked in New York and got a Guggenheim prize, if I remember right.

IRWIN- Part of NSK. NSK means Neue Slowenische Kunst. It is a huge organization of visual artists IRWIN, music band LAIBACH, theatre group NOORUDJ, designers NOVI KOLEKTIVIZEM and more I guess. IRWIN is the group whid did a lot on articulating the eastern (europe) art. They organized embassies around the world, and made their own state, publishing their own passports. A state in TIME, no borders. They called their way of thinking and working RETROAVANTGARDA. I am sure you know them. I could tell you a lot more but I will when we meet, haha, too much to write.

There are also quite a lot of concerts going on in summer, Druga godba festival - for music around the whole world, good fest, Jazz festival - as it says, both held in Krizanec, the place made by most famous Slovenian architect Joze Plecnik (dead for a long time). There is excellent TRNest in KUD France Presern in Trnovo, one of the central parts of Ljubljana, which goes on every august every evening and all the concerts, shows, theatre plays everything FREE, aaaaaaa. One of the last things of socialism. The street theatre festival, which is very well accepted in Ljubljana is ANA DESETNICA, it is at the end of June and beginning of July, also everything free. In summer the city is quite vivid.

The city is also very well known by the architect Joze Plecnik. The guy made a lot in Prague, and so tourists sometimes see Ljubljana as a small Prague.

back to art scene: The scene is strange as I've written, the problem is it has a group of people which runs the academy and want to be important, there is NO writing on contemporary arts, there is NO magazine on contemporary arts (there was MARS, but it does no exist any more) there is a wrong attitude what is contemporary art, and there is a magazine Likovne Besede, which are like magazine on art, but not on contemporary arts, at least doesn't have critical texts on it. Though I must say, that lots of young artist work more open and want create something new. But there are too much of them all who want to just be famous, fancy, "excellent" artists, well acknowledged, just being super cool, and of course super intelligent. But they are just doing everything to serve the fucking system. The problem is also the country is too small (2 million people and the art is I guess not so important) there are no people supporting it. And now I am approaching the most interesting part, haha:

The difference between socialism and capitalism in our country from my point of view: The main difference is that most of the people are not happy. The gap between poor and rich in widening. For example: before there was a communist party, which was the other to blame everything people didn't like, but it was politicians and that's it. But now we play democracy, which is complete bullshit. Parliament is just not capable to run the country. They discuss but without end, not capable to find a solution, the problem appeared just now, when some people did not apply for the citizenship after the separation in 1991, and they are now without it, and must leave their homes. It was a governments mistake at that time and they want to make a solution now, but

which projects are hosted. Their work has been, with few exceptions, deeply political and engaged with controversial questions about official representation and the official record of history. In the "Hamra Street Project," for example, multi-media artist Nadine Touma tackled the history and industry of prostitution, for which Hamra Street's nocturnal life is known. In the same project, Akram Zaatari produced a short video, Red Chewing Gum, which narrated a love story, mediated through an emblem of everyday life on Hamra Street, a poor young boy selling chewing gum, peddling for a living.

In April 2001, Ashkal Alwan launched its most ambitious project to date, a forum on cultural practices, conceived as a gathering of artists, intellectuals, curators, institutions, and non-profit collectives to debate, exchange, share concerns, and reflect critically on each other's work. Entitled "Home Works: A Forum on Cultural Practices in the Region" and planned to recur every eighteen months, it came as a response to the hard-felt need for a regional and international encounter within the community. From its first edition in April 2002, the Forum unraveled precisely and literally as that, a forum. It provided a platform for artists, intellectuals, and cultural practitioners otherwise separated by political, social, and economic barriers, along with discursive and material configurations and the geopolitical policing of states and regions. In our contemporary world, shaped increasingly by isolation, fragmentation, and dislocation, the Forum has provided for the discovery and formation of links between talents, voices, agents, and institutions.

The program of the Forum is designed to articulate an ongoing series of lectures, panel discussions, exhibitions, installations, film and video screenings, performances, and publications. Ashkal Alwan also allocates funds for the production of videos and books by emerging artists selected to participate in the event. A catalogue documenting each edition of the Forum is published in Arabic and English, and this has served to further dialogue on contemporary cultural and artistic practices in the Arab world and beyond (They included: Sherif El Azma's Pilot for an Egyptian Air Hostess Soap Opera (Egypt); Rita Ibrahim's Paradox... A Story About Phobia (Lebanon); Roy Samaha's Untitled for Several Reasons (Lebanon); Samar Kanafani's Mounzer (Lebanon). An artist book by Tony Chakar entitled The Eyesless Map, a collection of essays by Bilal Khebeiz entitled Globalization and the Manufacture of Transient Events, and a cinematic diary by Samer Abu Hawach entitled The Journal of Illustrated Nicteties.).

The first edition of the Forum was subtitled "A Forum on Cultural Practices in the Region." The region as we conceived it then was not restricted to the Arab region; it was more the Near East or the Middle East or whatever we found ourselves saying to those foreign to the "region" when we wanted to delineate a geographical expanse that includes Turkey, Iran on one end, Egypt on the other end, and Palestine in the middle. The point was not to define geographical representation to ponder to funders. Rather, it was to insist on cultural continuity, exchange, and dialogue.

For the second edition of the Forum, held in October 2003, we decided to drop the "regional" attribute from the subtitle, as the level of cultural affinity and continuity stretched to the far corners and borders of the region's diaspora.

"Home Works II" cannot be described as an exact sequel to "Home Works I," but it certainly picked up on a great deal of what the first edition made possible. And the mere fact of convening these artists – presenting their work and providing the space for encounter – was in itself a profoundly subversive act.

To give a few examples, a participant on a panel for "Home Works II," an Iranian living in the US, entered Lebanon on a Swedish passport so as to avoid harassment when re-entering the US. Another participant, an Iraqi national living in Syria, without any papers whatsoever – he'd been stripped of a passport in 1991 because he refused to serve in Saddam Hussein's army – had to be issued special permission to travel to Beirut. And another participant, a Palestinian living between Ramallah and New York City, had to obtain a second American passport, so as to present a travel document clean of Israeli stamps to the Lebanese customs' authorities, in accordance with Lebanese law. Upon landing in Lebanon, another guest, a Palestinian traveling on an American passport, was held at the passport security counter for interrogation. While Lebanese security forces had no grounds to prohibit his entry to Lebanon, they were enforcing the government policy to harass and deter Palestinians from entering the country. They claimed he was suspect because the passport read his birthplace as "Jerusalem" and not "Palestine," and on those grounds they demanded he provide proof that he was an Arab. He is actually of Armenian descent, but in a conscious act of political resistance, on his Palestinian papers he had registered himself as an Arab, not an Armenian. He could not, however, use his Palestinian papers to provide evidence of his "Arabness," because Palestinians living in the occupied territories are not allowed entry into Lebanon. After two or three hours of interrogation, he was deemed not subversive enough to turn away and granted a visa for 48 hours.

From the collection of individuals gathered for the Forum, there surfaced another geography and another history. It emerged from the cracks and fissures of living memory, emboldened by the poignancy of lived experience, cultural affiliations, and a political and social articulation of the self that stood in defiance of the hegemonic mapping of the world and its people today. Kinship and solidarity are not born solely from formal encounters, such as debates and discussions. They are also born in informal, unrehearsed instances. At the breakfast tables of the hotel where our guests were lodged for "Home Works II," Mohammad Maazun, an Iraqi poet, met with Peyman Hooshmandzadeh, an Iranian photographer. In spite of their broken English, they soon realized they had been on opposite sides of the firing line during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. Their exchange was facilitated with the help of their peers at the table, all entranced by the surreality of the moment.

Exchanges like these – born from a yearning to dissolve more borders and search further for critical reflection and an open-ended dialogue unencumbered by dogma and ideology – cannot possibly be narrated by a concern for identifying "Arab identity in a global culture." When identity does not account for a collective lived experience, it is merely a rhetorical device, decorum for theory. In our own reflections and articulations, we generally avoid using the category for all its shortcomings. When asked to map cultural practices in the Arab world, and the parameters for being in this world as Arabs, we have collaborated with artists whose work remains true to, and does not shy away from, the social, political, and economic reality in which it is created. In conclusion, we borrow from the eloquence of Arundhati Roy:

What is happening to the world lies, at the moment, just outside the realm of common human understanding. It is the writers, the poets, the artists, the singers, the filmmakers who can make the connections, who can find the ways of bringing it into the realm of common understanding. Who can translate cash-flow charts and scintillating boardroom speeches into real stories about real people with real lives. Stories about what it's like to lose your home, your land, your job, your dignity, your past, and your future to an invisible force. To someone or something you can't see. You can't hate. You can't even imagine.

*This text was commissioned by Pro-Helvetia for "Territoire Méditerranée", 2005, Editions Labor et Fides.*

they can not. They will put it on the referendum. And now they realized they will need two of them. And we already had referendums on some issues also before. I think we have most referendums in the whole world. Another thing is that we want desperately to join european union. And people do all the shit to reach the goal. We also joined NATO, which was the biggest mistake. We are two million country, less that a normalize european city. We can not afford being in this organisation, cause too much money goes in military purposes, and after all lots of people do not share the view of the NATO policy. I think the voting was falsificated. When our politics have a wish they just put all the money in the propaganda to reach it. All the money for propaganda for EU equation campaign went to promote joining. But it ought to be separated in half for not joining and for joining.

In our city as the capital this manifests so that we have the parliament here, in front which we demonstrate, we have all the biggest companies here which take all the money. We have the most poor people in the city. The problem is, and it goes all the time, when you watch TV, hear people on the street talking, being bombed with the printed adds etc., the main criteria, especially in the last 10 years became MONEY. People think of money as of ethical good. The grounds for all the things is money. All the factories that are closed especially in the last time, like the Tobacco factory, which was a tradition, operating for more than 100 years, had it's own collection of production, was closed now. The factory was sold in the recent past to some english company, and they easily closed it. Nobody gives a shit for workers. Very frequent phenomenon is that people are selling you old capitalistul bullshit, thinking they are very "in," à la: "time is money". People are adopting all American bullshit at this point I will turn to TV: we have three main TV channels: national TV SLOVENIJA 1, TV SLOVENIJA 1, Pop TV. The TV is being americanized. In 80ies, there was a strong video art production, now an outlook became a CCN style and the content is very empty (especially Pop TV). There are american magazines in the country: Man's Health, Cosmopolitan, Playboy, and people want to be beautifuluuuuu, very beautiful. It is very "IN" to be a graphic designer, uaaaau architect, film actor and plastic doctor and above all to be a rap.

Be well dressed and have a special kind of slang you speak. Be gente and vulnerable etc. Shortly it is about image. People charge a vast amounts of money, for fancy designs we shit etc., directors of the companies get enormous money, and poor people, workers get a small salary, which is hard to make a living with. Some people in politics work for some years and then they are allowed to retire, and get very good money till they die, some even become directors of the biggest companies. For example one from the government became the director of the biggest and only telephone company TELEKOM, easy like that. There are people from government making their own bank, which went bankrupt, they spent the peoples money, but nobody was accused. It was not well arranged when we separated what to do with all the companies and everything what was owned by the people. For example post office, telekom etc... These were companies made, paid by working class. And now we have some capitalists taking it over and charging a lot for phone and internet providing ... and more and more and more.

It's cool to sell all kinds of verbal bullshit. It is very cool to be very open and allow everything, but when it comes to basic human rights, people shit themselves. For example, unbelievably!!!, government propagates democracy, but now when muslims wanted normally to build a mosque, people found thousands of reasons, why they shouldn't build it. And you couldn't believe what everything they said: from the esthetical reasons, national image, aid, terrorists, parking spaces, all kinds of danger, morning singing etc... SICK SICK SICK! The whole thing is an image. funding policies: there were SOROS SLOVENIA, lots of years here, but now it is gone. They supported lots of projects. I guess you know what is SOROS. It is in all eastern developing countries.

There is MOL (municipality Ljubljana), they have a fund every year for art projects etc. there is JSKD (this is public fund for culture) also every year. There is http://www.artservis.org/english/ a site that provides all kinds of information, where



wenige interessante galerien, die mielen recht leuer sind, und man leider nicht das gefuehl hat, das hamburg politisch viel interesse an seinen kunstlern zeigt. groeßer kunstler aus den letzten jahren, die in hamburg hervorgegangen sind: daniel richter, christian hahn, jonathan meese, peter pillar, etc.... von den vielen kunstler:in die hier leben, machen viele sehr spannende arbeiten und sind sehr engagiert in ihrer kunst. ich finde es schade, das zur zeit eine bestimmte richtung von kunst unterstuetzt wird durch eine vitamin b zusatzarbeit von bestimmten galerien mit dem direktor des kunstvereins und 1-2 kunstkritikern. dies ist wirklich verhaengnisvoll, weil eine handvoll leute die scene, aber noch mehr die gelder bestimmen, da diese leute z.b. jury mitglieder bei vielen wichtigen stipendien sind, das meiner meinung nach fatale daran ist, das dabei keine kunstlerische position behauptet wird. es da leider keine kuratorisch interessierten leute hier gibt, die mal versuchen positionen aus der vielfalt der kuenstlerischen arbeiten aufzuweisen, sind viele andere kuenstler als einzelgaenger unterwegs.

Kunsthochschulausbildung  
Meiner Meinung nach ist die HfBK einer mit der besten Ausbildungsstaetten fuer kunst in deutschland. Man kann das zwar nicht an Professorennamen erklæaren, sondern eher durch seine offene struktur. In Hamburg lernt man in aller erster Linie, das man selber machen muss. Du musst fuer dich herausfinden, was du willst, es gibt keine kurstruktur, das ist zwar am anfang sehr schwer, aber es lehrt, das man selber kann kann, was immer man will. leider gibt es keine statistik, wie viele absolventen weiterhin kunst nach dem studium machen, aber so im bekantenkreis sind eigentlich alle noch dabei.

mein fazit ist, das hamburg ein absolutes potential zu einer lebendigen kunstszene mit verschiedenen schwerpunkten haette, die auch eine grossere oeffentlichkeit erreichen koennte, aus irgendeinem dubiosen grund, der u.a. fehlendes kuratorisches engagement ist (weiter punkte koennten mir noch einfallen) wird dieses potential nicht benutzt.

dazu kommt natuerlich das die oeffentlichen gelder gerade in der kunst stark gekuerzt werden, z.b. jaehrlicher kampf um die jahresstipendien der stadt.

hier einige links der ausstellungsraeumlichkeiten:

http://www.hinterconti.de  
http://www.taubenstrasse.de  
http://www.elektrohaus.de  
http://www.dieblauekugel.de  
http://www.westwerk.de  
http://www.kunstverein.de  
http://www.deichtorhallen.de

leute, die ihr noch anschreiben koennt: Elena Winkel, Mitinitiatorin der Hamburger Botschaft und Organisatorin der Ausstellungen "Hamburg Junger Kunstmarkt", Volko Kamensky, Kuenstler

**From:** Ilina Korzalova  
**Subject:** Leipzig  
**Date:** 23.02.2004, 08:32

Thank you for your e-mail and your interest in Bulgaria in general!

Regarding my current job in Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst though, I would rather answer your questions about the situation in Leipzig (as long as I can) than about Sofia. It is not that I'm disconnected from the life in my own town but still there are things that have recently developed, about which I'm not so well informed. In any case, if you give me a postal address I can send you these two texts of mine mentioned by Daniela Kostova.

As for Leipzig, What I find interesting here is the initiative by a music club, called Inseln Erika who invites female DJs to perform every wednesday in the club. The music most of these DJs choise is really very good and the club has a spirit. So, this is definitely a place to be visited. The art-scene I find not as vivid as the music-scene. Of course, there are some interesting artists, especially Tilo Schulz of whom you most probably have heard already. Leipzig is famous with the so-called Leipziger Schule of painters and nowadays there is a tendency to talk about Die neue leipziger Schule but this is definitely not a relevant claim. The most prominent artist from this "school" is by no means Neo Rauch who still lives and works in the city, despite his international fame. There are many young and not so young artists following his aesthetics but their works are deprived of any content.

The art-academy has a strong books design department (which was well-known already in the DDR times) but also rather interesting classes in photography and new media.

An interesting place is the so-called Baumwollspinnerei - abandoned industrial buildings where occasionally exhibitions and music events are organized. There is a tendency some private art-galleries, namely Eigen & Art, Kleindienst, etc. to move their spaces to this industrial zone. The plans are that this place, which played an important role at the beginning of the 1990s to become a trendy place for living and doing music and art.

Let's see. In connection to the Eigen & Art Gallery it is important to note that this is the first private art-gallery in Eastern Germany. And Leipzig in general was the leading city in the movement against the totalitarian regime. Back to the private galleries I want to mention also the Dogenhaus Galerie, which alongside with Eigen&Art is the best in the city.

Not only because I work here, I want to say that actually the most interesting place is the Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst which operates on the local as well as on international level. The focus this year is Eastern Europe. Another important event is the new building of the gallery to be officially inaugurated in September 2004. This new building will introduce a completely new concept about an exhibition space with its moving walls which offer 8 different scenarios for division of the rooms.

Leipzig is an interesting city in terms of its past, present days and its future. Rich historical heritage, socialist modernism, western desires and a view into the future. Sounds a bit like in a tourist guide but its true.

I guess, that is what I can tell you for now. I would like to underline, however, that that's my own personal opinion and these are thoughts that came into my mind. It's very likely that I have missed something but if you need more information, please don't hesitate to contact me.

**From:** Fabrizio Gallanti  
**Subject:** info  
**Date:** 23.02.2004, 19:59

I think the people below can know better than me what's going on right now in Italy. In Torino I think you should also contact Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and Marcella Beccaria, both working at the Castello di Rivoli.

In Biella, a small city not far from Torino, la Fondazione Pistoletto developed several very interesting activities: [www.cittadellarte.it/](http://www.cittadellarte.it/).

Emanuela De Cecco, curator, knows very well the art scene in Milano and Torino, while Roberto Pinto can inform you about Genova too. And then I think that you should also contact Massimiliano Gioni, who will curate the next manifesta. All the complex and extended galaxy revolving around multiplicity (documenta 11) is of extreme interest in Milano.

Moving between Berlin and Milano, Luca Cerizza is a young interesting curator. Then in Milano, all the events happening around the cantieri Isola are really to be better known: <http://www.cantierisola.org/>. It is an association between politics and art. All Milanese artists (at least the interesting ones) are involved. The artist Bert These seems to be the pivotal figure of that association.

Another no-profit space in Milan is viafarini: <http://www.viafarini.org/>  
In Genova, there is a good gallery: Pinksummer (<http://www.pinksummer.com>). Another good contact there could be Anna Costantini, sice a very long time assistant of Germano Celant.

Working between Genova and Milano is gruppo A12, a collective which I am member of, [www.gruppoa12.org](http://www.gruppoa12.org).  
In Pisa, Fondazione Teseco is a good space for exhibition: <http://www.teseco.it>  
Francesco Jodice, photographer, can be an excellent source of info concerning Napoli and Italian photography in general.  
Bartolomeo Pietromarchi, from the Fondazione Olivetti would be an excellent guide for Rome (<http://www.fondazioneadrianolivetti.it>) as well as the members of Stalker, the architecture / art collective, also from Rome. You can contact Lorenzo Raimio and Francesco Careri.

**From:** Debra Dolinski  
**Sent:** 25.02.2004, 17:22  
**Subject:** Como

Como is a provincial town: a suburb of Milan, a major art hub, and a border town: a few kilometres from Switzerland. Consequently Como has a rather uncertain identity which the current administration is trying desperately to shake off with a series of cultural events aimed at encouraging tourism in Como. Como's reputation is essentially due to the silk and textile industry but recent years have seen the Far East dominating this market and putting this sector into crisis. Thus it is an interesting turning point for Como. Will we be able to change our dubious identity or even find an identity?

There are not a lot of artists residing in Como and the art schools are certainly not the caliber of Brera, Milan. There are few private galleries, and the existing museums have, to date, made no important cultural incursions. Currently a large exhibition of Miros is being planned by the city in the hopes of changing this sorry situation. The only cultural association concerned with contemporary art events is Borgovico 33. We too are new on the scene, and it remains to be seen if we can continue our activity. Como is a wealthy city but there is virtually no funding, either private or public for cultural events. This, we hope, is beginning to change, if not perhaps our efforts and the efforts of others will continue to be a struggle. Please consult our website to see the interesting proposals we have presented so far: [www.bv33.com](http://www.bv33.com)

**From:** Antonella Berutti  
**Subject:** Genoa  
**Date:** 26.02.2004, 18:39

Genoa is a strange city, we (Francesca Pennone and I) work here, we have contemporary art gallery (see [www.pinksummer.com](http://www.pinksummer.com)), but sometime we feel ourselves like a U.F.O., in the sense that in Genoa exists a contemporary art museum, Villa Croce, but until one year ago it worked in a very confined way: the artists were contemporary only in the chronological and not objective sense, now something is changing. The same about the genoa art school Accademia Ligustica di Belle Arti.

The class of Contemporary Art at the University is History of Art and far from that happen before the history reducing to its basic elements. In the same time in Genoa, during the time, has always been one good, and not more, good private gallery, that normally doesn't survive more than ten years (Bertesca '60 in which the first arte povera show, Forma and Samman Gallery in the '70, Locus Solus '80, Galliani '90), that presented international contemporary art and shaped very clever, but few collectors.

The Architecture University is good and some artists/architects group as Gruppo A12 (Fabrizio Gallanti Group that realized the Zona in the last Venice Biennial) starts from here, but after moves to Milano.

Before the political Summit of G8 in 2001 we organized a public performance of Vanessa Beecroft with black women in Palazzo Ducale, but without any helps from institutions, but only with the money of the artist dealers. Now in 2004 Genoa is european capital of culture, but it will be only a contemporary (historical) show of Germano Celant "Art and Architecture" (october 2004), also if Celant is a contemporary art critic and the director of 2004 events. We presented a public project of Gelatin, but the institutions of Genoa are afraid from contemporary art risks, also if VB 48 has been a very important event with many press.

Noneless Genoa, like city, seems very dynamic it is changing in a very fast way. The historical centre is very nice and dirty, its isn't a museum like Florence or Venice, it is something of true until now. Other galleries Guidi & Shoen, Leonardi +idea, Rebecca containers Gallery, Andrea Ciani (perhaps a bit local, but you have to check alone in this case).

**From:** Francesca Pennone  
**Subject:** Genova  
**Date:** 26.02.2004, 11:32

1. The art scene in Genova is very provincial. This because the city is too small and there is not interesting program by public space as for example the museum or the art academy. Quite all the artists born in Genova (as well as architects and philosopher or...) moved away. Few of the people that decide to remain are connected with a national and international network. No magazines. No groups. No nothing you can hear about out of the walls of the city. Pinksummer has been compared to an ovoid (alien). Maybe the music scene and the contemporary dance thanks to the program of carlo felice and some theatre and to the activity of the summer festival of music is more alive. Without doubts there is space to do something different, because there is a audience (even if not large) interest in contemporary art, and events. Plus even the people that moved away are always connected to the city and looking for good possibility to do something in the town even if temporary.

Unfortunately the political is not pushing in this way. The contemporary art museum (Villa Croce) for years and years did a very local and not interesting program and now due to the pressure for a change (the director is always the same over 15 years!) they open a bit presenting group show with international stars such as bill viola, tony cunil and others but we are talking of a few bunch of works included in group show and coming from private collection in Italy and not of project run together with the artists. And at the end when the city has money enough to invest they prefer to call huge names as Celant to think a project and to supervise the activity instead of considering even the few locals that are doing a good national-international program. That's it.

2. The city itself is impressive. A chaotic mix of ancient aura (from 1500) a recent industry past now dismissed (from the 1960's/70's) and a new cheap try to be a tourist place (from the 1990's) with harbour transformed in a kind of luna park and a public support of a renovation in the historical centre, opening bars and restaurants and renovating the facades. It is enough to arrive with the car and take the highway that cuts the city to have a view and an idea of what Genova is. I love that highway!

3. As I told at point 1 unfortunately the art academy is run very very local. No international programs or workshop with artists even no national artists involved to teach. Only 1 professor is known in the national art world! Maybe (especially mid 80's mid 90's) university, architecture, was better...

4. You could visit Leonardi, and Guidi e Shoen, you can visit Villa Croce, you can talk with Cesare Viel (artist), with Massimiliano Marchica (architect part of a12), or with Rosetta Marzola (public part of the bureau of creativity and young people) and her colleagues, with Nicola Grendi (organizer of this Goa Boa huge summer music festival)...

**From:** Centro de Arte e Comunicação Visual Almada  
**Subject:** Almada  
**Date:** 4.03.2004, 16:01

I've shown your email to our Director, and here it is, his opinion about the city of Almada:

"Almada is across the river from Lisbon and has evolved from being basically a dorm/satellite city. Art scene and cultural life, given the absolute closeness of Lisbon

**From:** Hele Treier  
**Subject:** Re: Tallinn  
**Date:** 24.03 2005, 14:10

Thank you for being interested in Tallinn. How can I contribute to your project? It's a long story to tell about personal feelings about Tallinn or any other town. But I'll try to express some thoughts.

1. The new building of the Estonian Museum of Art - it will be opened in the beginning of 2006 in Tallinn. All our art life is currently expecting something new in connection with this. Changes. This will be the first building ever projected specially for art museum in the history of Estonia. Very exciting event. Just now big debates are going on behind the doors about how to present art history in the museum. Artists are kind of nervous. It's about re-writing art history, which is based on the collection of the museum. Many colleagues of mine feel they are "making history". Which is kind of unpleasant because the decisions are made by counted few art critics based on power position in the museum. Open discussions are not going on. But, just now I am optimistic and hope that the new building will improve the low prestige of art in our society in general. And will open new possibilities for international exchange. Just like the opening of Tate Modern did in London. Tallinn is trying to have here some future Manifesta, based on the institution of the museum.

2. Re-writing art history on academic level. Estonian Academy of Art will soon publish several volumes of art history, attempting to re-think our things after the Soviet period when we were forced to have several taboo topics and taboo artists. It's a collective work, includes all centuries. So, kind of attempt to write it "in a universal way", lets see what will come out.

3. In art life it's relatively calm period. Young artists come out in an introvert way, one-by-one, not in a group and not with radical manifests. Several young painters have turned to "realistic" painting, even to the hated "socialist realist" style (bringing Stalinism in mind). So, strange enough, totalitarian esthetics has come to the fore, in the creation of several young artists.

4. Performance art is incredibly strongly represented: Jaan Toomik and his students and the performance art festival organised by him. Performance art is also connected to video art, in our case. The two most-most big "international darlings" of our art scene, Jaan Toomik and Ene-Liis Semper both make videos that are actually based on performances and body. The alternative radical performance art school in Pärnu town has influenced some painters, too.

5. Curators and art critics are kind of dominating personalities here in the art scene. Maybe it's because of financial system and education - young artists usually do not read art theory and texts in English and so curators and art critics usually feel they are more sophisticated than artists. Also, the financial background is set up so that artists have only very few stipends - how do they make living, I wonder, especially those who do not even teach. Yet, some manage to be important, esp. Kaido Oles and Marko Mäetamm who created an artist named "John Smith" and showed his paintings in the last Venice biennial. They are both excellent painters and both teach at Art Academy.

Conclusion: sculpture is very weak, printmakers try strongly to be more important (historically we have Print Triennials that were considered "progressive" during Soviet time, but came into crisis in 1990s), painting is good level, radical conceptual jewellery on a very good level (school of Kadri Mälik), performance art on the facade of art scene, video art also, kind of. But I believe that in the moment there is something going to be prepared, in silence.

Here is an attachment with the interview I gave to Hildegund Amanshauser from Salzburg - a little about Tallinn, about our recent history, about art institutions, about Ene-Liis Semper (whose exhibition was in Salzburg).

*Interview with Hele Treier, October 2003 (1)*

Hildegund Amanshauser: Tallinn is the capital of Estonia, the most Nordic state of the Baltic States, still not well known in Europe although you will be a member of the EU very soon. How would you describe the art scene in Tallinn to somebody who has never heard about it?

Hele Treier: Before 1940 when the Soviets occupied Estonia, Tallinn held the position of the capital of finance and power — "merely". The capital of art scene used to be in Tartu, the internationally well known university town. Due to the centralization policy of the Soviets art institutions were brought to Tallinn in order to control critically minded "dangerous" intellectuals. The policy worked very successfully. Now Tallinn is the capital of finance, power and art scene and it seems as if it has always been so.

H. A.: Estonia was part of the Soviet Union until 1991, gradually breaking free since 1988, the singing revolution. Would you say that art played an important role in the process of becoming independent?

H. T.: Yes it did. On two levels mainly, direct and indirect. Some artists, writers and composers in their 50s and 60s participated directly in the liberation process. Everybody in Estonia knew the slogan of the well known cartoonist Heinz Valk: "We'll win anyway!" The painter and top politician Enn Põldroos took actively part in the political decision making. The career of the later cultural minister Signe Kivi, attractive textile artist, started right then. But for the art critic like me who was in the beginning of her career, it was much more exciting to analyse the radical processes taking place in art. I experienced all the crucial "on the edge" political events strongly through the interdisciplinary exhibitions and "on the edge" performances of Group T. Although these artists of my generation, Raoul Kurvitz, Urmas Muru and Peeter Pere (leaders of Group T) manifested being apolitical, they understood only years later that things they did were actually political on the micro level, reflecting the emotional tension, confusion, uncertainty prevailing in our souls at that time. The peak was in August 1991 when Russian tanks invaded Tallinn and Group T happened to have its most ambitious exhibition "A Guide to Introversionism" at Tallinn Art Hall. They planned a performance for each day at 4 p.m., and it continued for three whole weeks! I wondered where did they get all this tremendous energy from. The performances used to be violent, erotic, intellectual, religious, mix of everything. But, of course, state borders were not open at that time, the "family" of Estonian art world was the only witness of this exhibition, and so it never even became a big story worth even mentioning in some book, say Rose Lee Goldberg's "Performance Art". This is the way art history is constructed. It's not a very rewarding destiny to be the talented artist of a small nation.

H. A.: How did the art world change since the independence?

H. T.: The main change concerned the collapse of hierarchies and the institutional crises. The winners used to be young, emerging, active artists who grasped the new situation in art and society directly from the air without the need of relearning things. The winners were independently working curators who did not have to drag some big Soviet institution behind them. In that way the two internationally successful Saaremaa biennials were organized in 1995 and 1997 by Peeter Linnap and Eve Kiler (at that time Linnap). The winners were also those who started with the Soros Center. The losers used to be established artists of previous generations who expected to be honored and loved after years of working but now found themselves competing with the younger generation on equal bases. Actually, this situation created another serious gap. Regular visitors of art exhibitions and even some intellectuals whose taste was cultivated by the well known painters and graphic artists

is, of course, very modest. One exhibition centre deserves to be mentioned - Casa da Cerca -, belonging to the City Hall. Ar.Co has installations in Almada for reasons of space and because the opportunity that arose in the early 80's of making an interesting deal with the state. It's an old farm, transformed, and the school has relevant activities there (the rest is in Lisbon). Students do not really live in Almada or know the city well".

I hope that this can be of some help to your project.

**From:** Tatia Shirkladze  
**Subject:** Georgia  
**Date:** 5.03.2004, 15:34

1. WATO ZERETELI ist ein junger fotograf der media art form leitet. wie ich weiß ist diese schule die einzige die in neuen medien eine ausbildung bietet und existiert seit paar jahren, ausserdem hat er mit paar leuten zusammen letztes jahr ein internationales kunstsymposium veranstaltet. [www.farm.ge](http://www.farm.ge)  
2. TAMRIKO SARTSCHIMELIDZE ist Künstlerin und leitet das Kunstinstitut der Pädagogischen Hochschule. Dort habe ich studiert, finde dass diese Schule eine alternative Basis gegenüber der Akademischen Kunstausbildung ist und daher ziemlich interessant ist. Sie hat auch auf der Akademie der Künste unterrichtet, und kann euch etwas über die Ausbildungsstrukturen sagen.  
3. Ich denke über WATO oder TAMRIKO könnt ihr mit der Tifliser Kunstakademie leicht kontakt aufnehmen. sonst schreib mir und ich versuche einen Kontaktperson zu finden.  
4. GIA LORIA ist ein Künstler der jetzt über 40 Jahre ist und zu der Gruppe gehört hat die auch in kommunistischen zeit eine "nichtraditionelle" wege gegangen ist. er hat mich unterrichtet. er ist sehr interessante person.

representing the Kantian aesthetic tradition of the Soviet time suddenly started to hate contemporary art. (Of course the confrontation of "winners" and "losers" should be understood conditionally because the life of "winners" was usually full of financial uncertainty, while many "losers" turned their symbolic capital into real gains and lived happily ever after.)

H. A.: There are several important institutions for contemporary visual art in Tallinn: the Salt Storage of the Art Museum of Estonia, the Center for Contemporary Art, the Art Hall. The latter is still partly an institution of the Artists' Union, which played a key role in the Soviet time. What was and what is their position?

H. T.: The Artists' Union was created as one of the biggest control mechanisms during the Soviet time. Every artist wanted to become a member of the union because it offered social guarantees, access to information and honour. An artist was not taken seriously when he/she was not a member of the union. In order to become a member, the artist had to have the diploma of the higher school of art, plus approval from Moscow. That's what makes Raul Meel the most "underground" Estonian artist during the Soviet time. He had never any diploma, any studio, his paintings were usually not shown at exhibitions. He earned living raising bees at the countryside. He made geometric abstract art which was considered politically "dangerous" by the Soviet state. For example, the abstractionist Lola Liviat was suspected of being the American spy in the 1960s by the KGB. She found this document recently in the archives that had been opened.

In the 1990s the Artists' Union became a totally unimportant institution that was dealing with real estate problems and organising Christmas receptions to its members who turned out to be retired artists mainly. Recently the importance of the Artists' Union has grown a bit – it has taken over the role of a trade union or something, working on the level of legislation.

H. A.: The art market is still not developed, the artists earn their money with teaching jobs or stage design. I think this is one of the main differences between the so-called Eastern European scenes and the Western.

H. T.: That's definitely right. Our gallery system is relatively weak: not a single gallery takes the responsibility to work with artists the same way the best Western galleries do, enabling the artist some secure feeling to create. Not a single artist of ours is represented by a gallery. Their works are not protected legally. Only a couple of artists get a small stipend from the Cultural Endowment. They have to manage on their own — to be their own promoters, to be their own sponsors, secretaries, packers, carriers, designers, application writers and finally generators of new ideas and creators. So, you always have to motivate yourself to do something that is not needed by the society, as it often seems.

H. A.: Your discription is true for artists all over the world!

H. T.: Right, the fairy tales of lucky artists concern perhaps only some individuals in each country. But in our case it's still true that we do not have a single "gallery artist" who would have a more certain contract with some good prestigious gallery promoting him or her locally and internationally.

H. A.: As you know, we showed Ene-Liis Semper this spring in a monographic show, which was part of our annual focus on Eastern Europe. From your point of view, what do you think about an Eastern European focus? Is that a framing of Ene-Liis Semper which you would accept or do you rather see it as a marketing tool, which you would reject?

H. T.: Well, in this case I'd say that Ene-Liis herself has the right to identify herself. She definitely is not limited with the Eastern European context, perhaps her messages are as universal as possible. This is contrary to Kai Kaljo (2), whose videos contemplate ironically and very clearly about the Eastern European context, defining the shooting person as "the Eastern European female artist". I've been thinking that videos of Ene-Liis are so unbelievably eternal, showing once more that maybe "eternity" is the big thing, the "internationally most successful message" of Estonian culture. Culturally, Estonians identify themselves usually with Nordic countries, due to the introvert mentality, climatic similarities, relative Finnish people and taste for minimalism. Never with Eastern European countries. But concerning marketing tools, anything that is helpful to spread our art in different contexts, is welcome.

H. A.: How would you position the Estonian art scene within Europe?

H. T.: This is a difficult question. We ourselves like to feel sometimes mania grandiosa, taking for granted that Estonia is absolutely equal to America — of size, of importance and of distribution of the language. This comes when I read people comparing two countries as if they were equal. At other times, when letting the polar night influence our minds in winter, we feel that we are worth even less than nothing. Casting aside these two polarities, I see that what really works in real life is the inspired personal relationship between people from Estonia and people from various European countries. So, I prefer to see the relation on the personal level. For instance, Mark Soosara became a good friend of Edward Lucie-Smith who simply came and curated the exhibition Naked before God this summer in Pärnu, "the summer capital of Estonia". More than that, several artists including Judy Chicago presented their works to the New Museum of Art because Edward Lucie-Smith invited them as friends. Cultural process is a two-way traffic.

H. A.: How would you describe the unique position of Ene-Liis Semper in Estonia and also abroad?

H. T.: Ene-Liis is really unique because in Estonia everybody loves her — both radical young artists and critics and some oldfashioned writer, all theatre people, people who enjoy club culture, tabloids. The rising of Ene-Liis to international art scene began with Manifesta 3 in Ljubljana, when the curator Maria Hlavajova decided to choose FF/Rew. Until now, her works have been shown in many different countries from Japan to Canada, both at the main show and the Estonian exposition of Venice Biennale in 2001.

H. A.: Would you say that there are Estonian specificities which we can also describe in the work of Ene-Liis Semper, or would you rather reject to define national criteria? For example the strong body orientation?

H. T.: Again, because Ene-Liis herself rejects the national criteria in her idea world and works, there is no need to force such interpretation on her videos. Yet, there is no need to make this topic a taboo either. When I wrote the text for the Estonian catalogue of the Venice biennale I deliberately focused on the specific Estonian experience that has shaped such an artist as Ene-Liis Semper. For example, we may definitely speak about the short phase of "Soros art" because the debut of Ene-Liis took place in one of the yearly exhibitions of the Soros Center in 1994 in Tallinn. At that time video was a brand new art form and there were no previous examples to follow, no experiences of fantastic international video art, so she had to invent everything on her own from the zero. She made her videos out of the most personal experiences and since these experiences were connected with her concrete friends, feelings and perceptions, these videos also kind of reflect the specific geographical place called Estonia. Ene-Liis lives and works in Tallinn and many of her videos have been motivated by the changes of her life. But on the personal level only, not the wider social level.

Concerning body, I see the strong connection with the emergence of performance art. Coming back to the provocative performances of Group T and Raoul Kurvitz, one of the most important leaders of Group T, — all this concerns Ene-Liis Semper a lot.

(1)This text was originally published in: Salzburg Kunstverein's yearbook 2003 "Magazin 8"  
(2) The Video "Pathétique" (1999) by Kai Kaljo was exhibited on the occasion of the exhibition "Sound Systems" in Salzburg Kunstverein.

5. ARTSCHIL DARTSCHIA leidet die "old gallery" in der altstadt. er ist einer der ersten privatalgeristen in tiflis. er kennt sich gut aus mit der szene und kann euch sicher viele informationen geben.

**From:** Nagham Awada  
**Subject:** Re: Beyrouth  
**Date:** 09.03.2004, 19:06

About the cities that could be interesting for you, first I have to tell you that outside Beirut, there are almost no cultural initiatives or activities. There are some, of course, but very few. Some municipalities or associations organize summer festivals (like in Deir el Qamar, in the Chouf). But these initiatives are rather punctual. Cultural life outside Beirut is often led by foreign cultural centres (French mostly), which propose activities that have been shown in Beirut before. There are also some local cultural centres, but I don't know much about them. I think they are very "locally" oriented. Except in the summertime (with the big festivals of Baalbeck, Beiteddine, and also smaller festivals) cultural life outside Beirut is extremely limited, almost non-existent. I would say one interesting city, where some good cultural initiatives have been organised and succeeded, is the city of Saïda (30 minutes South of Beirut). It still keeps its old souls, and there's a very vivid atmosphere, people are very welcoming (I think much more than in Tripoli, in the North, or in Zahlé, in the Bekaa, which are more "closed" cities). And in Saïda there's a very beautiful and wide place called "Khan el Franj", an old caravansaray well preserved, where plays and exhibitions have been shown. The caravansaray is situated in front of the port, in the heart of the old city. Some initiatives have been organised in Saïda (by foreign cultural actors), which involved the local population. And the result was very interesting.

About Beirut  
I had been living in France for a long period and I decided to come back to Lebanon 7 years ago, in 1997. I regret that period, the few years that followed the war. I think Beirut was more interesting and attracting than now, on many levels. I have the feeling (but it's absolutely subjective) it was more dynamic, it was a city who's face changed from one day to the other, it was a permanent transformation, and it was fascinating because we couldn't tell exactly what would come out of this mutation. I loved Downtown Beirut when all the old buildings were covered with green canvas the wind would play with, and you could see the sky through the wide-open windows. It was magic, like a theatre door. Now they've finished rebuilding it, bars and restaurants run all along the pedestrian streets, and very chic and fancy stores display their windows that appeal for money, and this part of Beirut which was the popular heart of the city, with its old souls, has become the territory of the privileged. It turned into something rather artificial.

Some very "symbolic" places have disappeared. The Modka Café in Hamra district, some kind of "Café des Deux Magots" of Saint-Germain des Prés, where all the intellectuals used to meet in the 60's and 70's, and who new a certain "revival" after the war, was forced to close a year and a half ago, and today there's a fashion store instead.

The Big Theater of Beirut in Downtown, is being restored, but I heard they intend to transform it into a restaurant. Some years ago, some events brought back his old walls and scene to life: some plays, some concerts, some raves were organised inside, by some alternative initiatives.

On the Martyr's Place, where there used to be a square and a garden before the war (I never knew it, I was too young), surrounded with cinemas, theatres and bars, today there are almost only parkings, and instead of theatres they are building a huge mosque, close to a big Church, as if they weren't enough mosques and churches in Downtown Beirut.

Fortunately, some tiny "islands" remain, where there is still a spirit left: Gemmayzé, an old district of Beirut which has been relatively well preserved and restored, with some nice popular bars and restaurants, antique shops and galleries. It's becoming the place for artists.

Nice Bars: The Gemmayzé Café (Ahwé et Gemmayzé), an old typical café where old men used to come to play cards and smoke "arguileh", has been restored recently, and every night there are musicians who play lute and sing old popular songs. Bar Louie has opened some months ago, it's a jazz tavern under old vaults. There are another one or two nice bars, and popular restaurants (especially "Le Chef") More or less in the same district, there's a much more "futuristic" bar, very nice design: the "Centrale". A tube shape, sliding roof, a great view on the Martyr's place. Hamra also keeps its cosmopolitan spirit, especially around Bliss Street and the American University. Nice bars: Le Baromètre (also does good Lebanese Food). Many artists meet there. Chez André (but a year ago it's been reduced to what it used to be before the war: a very tiny space along a small bar). The "Regusto Café" belongs to the same proprietary. The clients of Chez André (Journalists, artists, intellectuals), now meet at Regusto. Lefty atmosphere, in the three of them.

The "Fennel": in Clemenceau district. Refined design, very nice view on the destroyed façade of the old Holiday Inn Hotel. "Fennel" also has a 2nd level for exhibitions. Nice space and nice exhibitions. Mannot Street is THE place where people go out. Some years ago when I came back from France there used to be 3 or 4 bars maximum. It was really nice. Today, every other day a new bar springs up like a mushroom. It's become unbearable. Most of the Discos are also concentrated there.

About the groups, artists, associations, places that could be interesting for you.  
- Beirut Theater and Shams association (it's an independent cultural association aiming to stimulate and produce artistic activities: theatre, audiovisual and multimedia). I think they're amongst the most active and interesting cultural actors in Lebanon nowadays, although they have reduced means. You can talk to Hanane Assaf or Roger Assaf (theatre director) and Abdo Nawar (Theatre administrator I think).  
- Espace SD: You will find all the information on the website: [www.espacesd.com](http://www.espacesd.com). The responsible is Sandra Dagher. This very beautiful and wide space, on three levels in a modern glass building with an unobstructed view on Beirut's port, is mostly an exhibition place for art & design, but it also organise conferences, courses, movie projections, ateliers, plays. Their aims is to show Lebanese creation under all its aspects, and they give the priority to Lebanese and Arab (mostly young) artists

trouble of budget since long times and only few individually resist (ie: Bretigny with Pierre Bal Blanc). I do appreciate a lot the program of Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers with co-curators François Piron and Guillaume Dessange. It's the same team with few other who create Trouble, the best analyse in art done in france, as otherwise press is terribly poor and only focus on market, effect and fashion in art. other point is for me the lack of young critic in important news papers (liberation and Le Monde have the same team since decenies and for me it gives a wrong way to access to actuality) Les Inrockuptibles used to be a good magazine and disappointed me since three years.

Another space i like very much is Public, with propositions coming from differents young curators with always interesting topics. Spaces run by artists are no more interesting but it didn't so well work in Paris as it's still a very individualistic scene.

School of art in Paris offer each year a 'carte blanche' to curators for propositions and this is the only institutional place who accept this. ARC is closed for two years for renovations and we miss it a lot in Paris, their temporary space 'Couvent des Cordeliers' is interesting but cannot offer the same visibility, the good thing is that as it's not a huge palce, the exhibitions are built on human scale which i do appreciate a lot. (I'm fed up with theater/cathedral of art). Beaubourg is slowly moving (at least) with some new spaces dedicated to young scene and run by two curators: C. macel and A. Gingeras. Programm for next months seems quite interesting and it will make me come back to Beaubourg. Jeu de Paume was an excellent place when created and run by C. David and A. Paqueton, then has been totally destroyed by D. Abadie with a programmation only conceive to make tickets to bourgeois, direction changing and will be done by Régis Durand from ex CNP but i'm afraid it will be a too big machine for his free mind and that he will be totally involved in administration stuff. I have always liked in Jeu de Paume the very good programmation of Cinema realised by D. Hibon since years. I look after students from Cergy or Grenoble, the two best ones in france for me, sometimes from ENSBA of Paris, but less obvious.

**From: JNM**  
**Subject: paris**  
**Date: 16.03.2004, 9:30**

there is no artistic initiative possible anymore in france: 140 000 workers in Theater, dance, performing arts have been fired by government.

last june more than 100 festivals were cancelled last summer. no money for culture anymore.

Our non profit association receive no grants.

Paris and suburbs: 15 million people. No description available.

What do you know about the art scene in that city?  
such a studyon 15 million people city costs time.

What would you like to mention about the city in general?  
What do you think about the art schools in that city?  
art school are old fashioned: sculpture and painting.

Could you describe the city according to how you experience it?  
just travel. I have been many times to all the countries in europe, by hitchhiking.

**From: smiljana ukovic**  
**Subject: Belgrade**  
**Date: 22.03.2004, 14:47**

The Faculty of Fine Arts (as I know it, in the end of the 90'ies) in Belgrade was very "traditionally" oriented, meaning that it was basically focused on a form and technology of the crafts, that it was important that students were working in their studios everyday on an ongoing basis, and the first three years of studies were actually "learning how to draw, paint, make paints, sculptures, icons, mosaics, get to know to present the anatomy of a human body etc.," and no other tendencies were encouraged. The entrance exam would take six days, with no interview part, only the demonstration of "artistic abilities", meaning how close to reality one could produce figurative images (precisely: a still life and a nude). Nevertheless, the entrance in the Academy was highly competitive.

The main program of the Academy was dry and did not accommodate the sensibility of very young and curious people (students). A few professors and assistant professors at the academy put effort into organizing lectures away from the main Academy program, trying to introduce the actual currents in contemporary art to the students. Also, the Academy was a place of political conflict among its employees, as well as among the students and some employees.

It was almost impossible for students to get free information, as the Academy (and the other University) libraries were not provided with any new magazines, catalogues etc. for the financial reasons of course, internet was not free and not easily available, the academy had no computers, neither most of the students. As well, I can't remember there were any significant grants, neither government nor private funded. However, and on the contrary to the lack of money and the politically dark times, the students led vivid and engaged lives inside as well as the outside of the Academy. Almost all studios were almost always completely full and crowded. Everyone lacked space for work, but people were very active, communicative and hard-working, despite the conditions.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the Academy became a centre of alternative streams (mostly in music and a nightlife), because of its famous nightclub in the basement (although it was changing the owner every couple of months). The club was a notorious and leading club within Europe.

I know about two private run galleries in Belgrade, its "Zvono" underneath the Studentski Park in Vojisvicka street and "Remont" in a shopping mole on Trg Republike (probably the second floor). Otherwise, there are ULUS Gallery, FLU Gallery (in the downtown Academy building), DKC Gallery, SANU Gallery, all in Knez Mihajlova street, then Galerija Grafickog Kolektiva (just around a corner of the downtown Academy building), Srećna Galerija (SKC), Muzej Savremene Umetnosti (Museum of the Contemporary Art), Cvijeta Zuzoric pavilion on Kalemegdan; I think that cultural centres of buildings(American, French etc.) have their exhibition spaces as well.

I recommend a visit and contact with "Zvono"(Lilija) and "Remont"(I don't know who is there now). Sometimes interesting activities in diverse media take a part in Cinema Rex in Jevrejska street. For getting informed and involved in Belgrade art life I suggest you should contact an assistant professor from the Academy, he is an artist who was often in Austria, and his name is Dejan Grba; However, I'll provide you all contacts if you decide to go there.

I have the feeling that the art scene in Belgrade/Serbia is currently "recovering" from the dark 90-ies.

There's a very good history of conceptual art and black wave film in Belgrade in former Yugoslavia.

**From: Sabrina Benjaballah**  
**Subject: Lille**  
**Date: 31.03.2004, 11:57**

ja es gefallt mir ganz gut in lille, die stadt hat eindeutig davon profitiert, dass mauroy (= der erste minister unter mitterrand) in den 80igern buergermeister war (erste u-bahn ohne fahrer ist das auffallendste beispiel), und jetzt ist martine aubry buergermeisterin (also die ministerin, die die 35std/woche eingefuehrt hat).

es ist eine lebendige stadt, mit vielen wirtshausern, bars, cafes, und aktivitaeten. die ankuendigungen sind nicht so gut, oft verpasst man was, weil man nicht davon gehend hat. ich glaube, zur zeit ist die gegend "wazemmes" besonders aktiv, die gegend war ursprueglich ausschliesslich nordafrikanisch, aber weil ein riesiger markt dort stattfindet, sind immer mehr touristen hingekommen. der gilt als sehenswertigkeit. es eroeffnen dort immer mehr cafes, wo sich die 'alternativen' treffen. was ist aus den ex-produktionsorten geworden? sie sind renoviert, also ziegelstein sichtbar, und dazu riesige glaserfenster. najja, die dienen jetzt meistens als hochschulen, gesundheitszentren, oeffentlich gebaueude, halt.

ein interessanter ort ist das schwimmbad in roubaix. ursprueglich fuer die arbeiter von der textilindustrie im art nouveau stilt gebaut, und daraus haben sie ein museum gemacht (la piscine, a roubaix), die kunst stammt eher aus dem 19. - anfang 20. jhdt., also rund um das becken statuen, und bilder in den kabinen.

du erwaaehnt die kinos: das angebot ist nicht so gut, finde ich, aber vielleicht bin ich zu kritisch, denn paris ist ja in der hinsicht besonders gut. 3 kinos in der innenstadt, 2 draue haben hin und wieder interessante retrospektiven aber sonst... theater ist gut, davon ich, bin aber selbst keine grosse theater besucherin.

sonst ist die gegend zur zeit ziemlich hart getroffen: 2 grosse fabriken haben letztns zugehoert. was die leute dann machen? najja, streiken, demonstrieren und in die arbeitslose gehen. das centrum von lille ist sehr schoen, altstadt also, und ziemlich reich. eine richtige innenstadt. aber ein biischen weiter weg kann man schon sehen, das die leute nicht so viel geld haben, in den letzten regionalwahlen hat die SP die absolute mehrheit gekriegt, als zweite partei ist aber zum ersten mal nicht die konservative partei aufgetreten, sondern die front national.

**From: Nils Claesson**  
**Subject: Stockholm**  
**Date: 01.04.2004, 14:02**

U will get brief answers on your questions.

What do you know about the art scene in that city?

Stockholm has the best art-scene in Scandinavia because it is messy, complicated, international and commercial and non-commercial and self organizing. The Helsinki and Oslo scene are missing intensely and Copenhagen always seems to be stuck in some Danish slime. (It is always to nice in Denmark.) But they do great dogma films.

Politically the city council in Stockholm are doing the best to kill the art-life. They sacked the boss of Tensta Konsthall and are cutting down art-funding quite heavy. U can see 2 reactions:  
a) Self organizing. Initiatives like www.soc.nu, idi, crac, site magazine etc  
b) Commercial but serious galleries are selling art again most paintings but also other things. Serious galleries are for example Magnus Karlsson, Andréen Schipchenko etc.

It is always happening things in Stockholm art-life.

Stockholm also has a small but interesting electronic art scene with places like Fyklingen, Splintermind non tv-tv station etc.

Also interesting is Filmform that is an archive for video-art and experimental films: www.filmform.com

What would you like to mention about the city in general?  
Stockholm is dead between 15 may and 20 august. The art life dies and tourists invade the city centre. Best time for art is autumn and spring. Worth mentioning is Moderna Museet and IASPIS studio programme.

Stockholm is a segregated city. The city centre is dominated by the white middle class and the suburb of emigrants and workers. Slowly the art scene is spreading to some suburbs following the metro-lines.

Stockholm lacks a strong venue for contemporary art. In Helsinki they have Kiasma but Stockholm has no central space to fill that gap. The art audieces( they are several ) is a hip bunch that drink until they fall.

What do you think about the art schools in that city?  
Stockholm has two strong Art Academies with master education: Royal Art Academy (Konsthögskolan) and Konstfack School of Arts and Design. Contact Peter Haghdaji at the Royal art acamy and Gunnell Pettersson at Konstfack.

Worth mentioning is the curator education that Konstfack started two years ago.

Now U meet a young curator everytime you go out.

**From: Boryana Dragoeva**  
**Subject: Sofia**  
**Date: 04.04.2004, 06:56**

-What do you know about the art scene?

To say who is interesting and who is not is a matter of a personal opinion. What I am able to contribute to your research could be of two different types - just giving an information or shortening the information to what i like. I am one of the small group of artists/technicians/students seduced by new technology and art.

As i think that the new comes only via the new tech, i am interested and appreciate artists who at least consider this as an important part of the problems they are involved in.

Unfortunately in the field of robotics i working in there are only two artists working - me and Oleg Mavromatti, who is currently apart of bg art scene, but is a Russian artist.

The futurist vision of the technology and its influence on the everyday life is what i really appreciate as a part of the artistic activity nowadays. Concerning that i can say there is only one organisation who approximately covers my requirements - it is Interspace, media art center. There are two artists who mainly work with it and make good works - these are Petko Durmana and Krasimir Terziev. I would mention also Pravidolub Ivanov, who is quite interesting conceptual artist, who works in the fields of photography, installation, sculpture and Rassim, who is popular with his long term performances Corrections 1 & 2.

From the video artists i would mention Daniela Kostova, who usually implements strong message in a strong compact form, for what her works are quite well accepted in bg and abroad, and also Marieta Gemisheva, who besides the fact she is a brilliant fashion designer, she makes photography and performances, marking the cross-field between fashion and contemporary art.

-What would you like to mention about the city in general?

I like big cities. Sofia is too small, I know almost everything about it. But i rely on the fact a new babies are born and they will possibly appear as a significant personalities in a time and space i can't predict. This is interesting.

-What do you think about the art schools in that city?  
I am against education (in general incl the art education) in the form it exists in Bulgaria. I am not able to mention any teacher or art school which could be interesting. I graduate the Academy of Arts, department of public art, and i have close impressions about it.

there are some contemporary artists and critics who are professors in the Academy of Art and New Bulgarian University. Most of them have not been my teachers, but i will list their names in case you need them. I am not exactly sure what kind of courses they have, or what is their title, for which i ask for excuse.

Svilen Stefanov - PhD Art History, National Academy of Fine Arts  
Pravidolub Ivanov - Assistant professor, department of painting, National Academy of Fine Arts  
Luchezar Boyadziev - New Bulgarian University.  
Iara Boubnova - New Bulgarian University.  
Mariela Gemisheva - department of fashion, National Academy of Arts  
Boris Kostadinov - Art history, department of fashion, National Academy of Arts

**Von: Andreas Fogarasi**  
**Datum: 7.04.2004, 11:47**  
**Betreff: Budapest**

Zum Thema: Ich hänge mal eine Review an, die ich vor inzwischen 2 Jahren über drei grosse Ausstellungen in Budapest geschrieben habe, immer noch recht aktuell. Ich fahre gerne hin und bin so halbwegs gut vernetzt dort, stelle immer wieder dort aus. Es gibt einige gute Orte da, ein paar Offspaces ganz unterschiedlicher Struktur und langsam ein paar richtige Galerien, die aber nicht wahnstnspannend sind.

Eine Übersicht über Ausstellungen u.ä. findet ihr unter:  
<http://www.exindex.hu/index.php?1=en>, die links dort sind auch ganz brauchbar.

<http://www.c3.hu/~limal/ManamanaFO.htm> ist ein alternatives Zeitschriftenprojekt, das Freunde von mir machen und das zwischen Politik, Kunst und Aktivismus berichtet, übersetzt usw.

**From: Erden Kosova**  
**Subject: stan polis**  
**Date: 3.01.2004, 3:30**

there are two sister exhibitions i co-curated on the urban scape of istanbul. u can find info in the websites:<http://www.digitalartlab.org.li/istanbul/> andhttp://istanbul.mur.at/

the other cities i d recommend are belgrade and tel aviv

an interview from one of our istanbul exhibitions:

*Interview — Stéphanie Benzaquen October/December 2003*

Stéphanie Benzaquen: To start this interview, I would stress a certain absence of 'communication' between our two countries, Turkey and Israel. If only (perhaps...) evoke some isolated — or better said sporadic — collaborations or contacts, we remain far away from continuous exchanges and reciprocal knowledges. This lack of information explains, somehow justifies, the general aspect of my first question: could you give an overview of the situation of the contemporary art scene in Turkey (involvement of the State, presence of private galleries and sponsorship, art spaces and events, situation in the art academies, access to international publications, specific situation of Istanbul, main changes in the last decade...)?

Erden Kosova: The lack of communication is caused mainly by the nationalistic discourses running through the twentieth century, I guess. And even after the traumatic conflicts were healed between the neighboring cultures, the addressed interlocutor of cultural interaction was chosen not from the closest geographies but from the powerful cultures that are perceived as models. I think that is a global symptom. The exemplary practices of contemporary art in Turkey were based on isolated and quixotic struggles of the artists who were isolated but active in the seventies and eighties. Their self-initiated exhibitions prepared a relatively extensive ground for the following generations. They were not supported by commercial galleries; no need to mention the absolute absence of public funding and the state is still non-present in the field, which gives the paradoxical advantage to the artists to maintain a politically autonomous enunciation. To a great extent, the artists with experimental tendencies and radical engagements with social phenomena haven't been allowed to have places in the academies advocating a formal bigotry. Yet, along the establishing of the Istanbul Biennial and the accession of younger artists to European art circuits, the picture seems now to be rapidly changing. The autonomy, the quality which has characterized and enriched the scene is being replaced by a tendency towards institutionalization. New institutions backed up by some corporate and financial companies opened up venues for exhibiting more daring works. We haven't seen clearly the results of this change yet.

Basak Senova: Basically the lack of communication has not been inhibited in the conflicts or hostilities between two countries. It is simply based on a lack of mutual acquaintance because of the suppressive policies of the countries and how these policies impose cultural domains and their representatives on the surface. This lack of communication has also appeared as an internal issue within the cultural landscape of Turkey. Stemming from its cycle in unitarian state policy, the representative scenery of the Turkish culture politics has always been cohesive, yet the tendency is to sustain stability by labeling a "contemporary" artistic act as "highly regulated and enlightening" concession with a confirmation of "modern" Western criteria. This consideration has widened increasing gaps not only between the public and the contemporary art sphere but it has also addressed a lack of information, interaction, and communication among the actors of this sphere. I must say that for some of the parts of this sphere both governmental support and strategies of commercial galleries have been existing and beneficial. Yet, as Erden has just stated that for the part of this sphere which we are interested in and in some ways feel familiar with has been ignored for a long time. Now this mentioned part of this sphere is the most acknowledged one by the cycle of international contemporary art scene. Eventually, this has been mostly the outcome of individual efforts and successes. Turkish contemporary art scene or may be I should rephrase it as "Istanbul contemporary art scene" has developed and enriched so rapidly for the last 10 years. In its most natural and classical way, institutions are taking place.

However, surprisingly the communication gap among the parts of the contemporary art sphere is insistently increasing. At this very moment, I am very excited and hopeful as alternative "independent" formations have started to come up and who knows they can challenge the agenda and may bridge this gap.

SB: Since a few years, we attend the strong focus from the international art scene on the Balkans and South Eastern Europe — with the danger of reducing local art scenes to fashionable products. The Turkish art scene appears as a part of this current tendency. Has this trend changed the situation in Turkey? How is it perceived from the Turkish side?

EK: Within a single year, three big exhibitions are held in the institutions of Central Europe, organized by three big curatorial names from the German-speaking terrain. You can explain this 'coincidence' either through historical links (the heritage of Habsburg), current macro-interests [extension of EU eastwards, internal politics in Germany in relation to the migrated populations from the SEE for the last four decades] or define it, more cynically, as the search for the new geographical hype. This special interest in the Balkans in its cultural specificity will be in the future replaced by the coming, economic and political hierarchy within the castle of Europe. These three exhibitions and the exhibition series of Balkan Konsulat by rotor gallery hasn't been discussed at all, in the Turkish national press. It was confined to the narrow circuit of participating artists. Yet, these shows were incredibly beneficial for Istanbul art scene (and perhaps also for the Diyarbakir scene) to consolidate its status within this region. The geographies of the Balkans inhabit an incredible intellectual capacity and the Turkish art scene succeeded to communicate its vivid, emphatic production to this highly developed discursive field. Similarities and differentia tones between the regions gave the way to a self-reflection. It was also a progressive opportunity to redraw the historical traces that lie-up these geographies. I hope, even after the passage of the hype about the Balkans, this recently attained transversality can generate further interaction.

BS: For me, there is no such thing as a unique Balkan reality at all. In a very ironic way, the polarization of idyllic "Balkan" identity is so visible. It is a fiction by itself. All of these large and/or small-scale Balkan shows present a highly schizoid picture for framing the South Eastern Europe in a homogeneous understanding. Yet, when we consider the social-political and

Tibor Varnagy, der Manamana mitherausgibt, betreibt die Liget Galeria (<http://www.c3.hu/~ligal>) einen ganz kleinen Offspace, der seit 20 Jahren existiert und sehr offen für ganz ganz unterschiedliche Sachen ist, von internationalen bis zu lokalen Geschichten wie zB. Roma-Malern

Unter den Kunstzeitschriften ist Balkon ganz ok: <http://www.balkon.hu>  
Ein wichtiger Ort/Zusammenschluss ist das Studio junger bildender Künstler auch mit einer Galerie: <http://studio.c3.hu>  
Die Akademie <http://www.mke.hu> ist eigentlich ziemlich konservativ, hat aber seit ca. 1990 eine gutes Intermedia Department <http://www.intermedia.c3.hu>, da kann Euch der Idz sicher genauer erzählen, er war ja gerade ein semester lang dort.

Jetzt langsam kommen in Budapest ein Interesse an Politik, öffentlichem Raum uä. auf, was erstmal auf jeden Fall positiv ist, aber auch ein wenig eigenartigen Hype Charakter hat.

Ich finde Budapest eine sehr tolle Stadt, hat noch eine angenehme Grösse, die gleichzeitig in der Kunsthalle in Budapest zu sehen waren und die in ihrem gemeinsamen Auftreten eine Möglichkeit bieten, spezifische Diskurse, Ausschlüsse und Zustände im Budapester Kunstgeschehen zu beschreiben.

Wenn man das altegediente Modell von Zentrum und Peripherie bemüht, fällt Ungarn zwischen diesen zwei Polen durch. Der Hype um immer neue Peripherien hat blinde Flecken hinterlassen, die zwar nicht mehr exotisch erscheinen, sich aber auch nicht als interessant genug erwiesen haben, um in einem gemeinsamen "Innen"

mitspielen. Was aber ist an verschiedenen Orten, zu verschiedenen Zeiten interessant? Die Ausstellung "Szerviz" (Service) trat mit einem Thema an, das im westlichen Kunstbetrieb bereits vor Jahren ein Höhepunkt angefangen war - Dienstleistungskunst. Dieser Begriff hat einen üblen Beigeschmack. In Verklärung

institutionskritischer Praktiken waren Mitte der neunziger Jahre immer neue Bars, Lounges und ähnliches installiert worden, die Kunstmarkt und Institutionen durch

**Out of service**  
*Drei Ausstellungen von Gegenwartskunst in Budapest*

Szerviz, Klima und Out of Time. So waren drei Ausstellungen beteiligt, die heuer gleichzeitig in der Kunsthalle in Budapest zu sehen waren und die in ihrem gemeinsamen Auftreten eine Möglichkeit bieten, spezifische Diskurse, Ausschlüsse und Zustände im Budapester Kunstgeschehen zu beschreiben.

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economic traces of the recent history of this region, it would not be surprising to detect searches for uniform identities, collective memories and even a desire to believe in meta-narratives. Yet, every time it is easy to decipher the same story and patterns for all region-based trends for the last decades such as shows on Baltic, Arabic Speaking Countries, Far East...etc. On the other hand, as Erden underlined, it is also interesting that they give the opportunity to reveal new energies and potentials at the 'hidden corners of the world. Nevertheless, it also works as an elimination system for the artists and curators so that you can detect who fulfills the gaps that these trends impose and on the contrary who can resist and/or open up alternative spaces within this system.

SB: The coup d'état in 1980 has been the knell of a certain type of society in Turkey. The militaristic apparatus and pressure, the new governmental line have destroyed the former social texture, followed in this by the disastrous consequences of the neo-liberal policy the State initiated, the escalation of fundamentalism, the increasing daily violence of the Turkish society, the migration. In some, too clear cut way, could one consider the Turkish art scene as torn between political (and critical) positions and the commitment to social issues or as managing to combine and articulate the different realms of analysis and translations through artistic forms?

EK: The contemporary art production in Turkey is heavily based on narrative interpretations on the social phenomena, like some of the neighboring geographies. Yet, the enhancing politisation of the content throughout the nineties was built up onto the formal efforts of eighties towards conceptualization. In addition, as I said before, the increased communication with the other art scenes produced a more experienced and confident enunciation among the young artists. Formal reflections on the separate visual disciplines and experimentation on the new media have not been the primal concern, but there is a considerable meticulousness in pursuing efficient strategies of presentation and an effort to benefit from the emerging technologies to be employed in artistic expression. In parallel to the relative political stabilization (or paralysis) in the country in the last couple years, the confrontational attitude towards the plethora of social conflicts gave way to an emphasis to subtler and multi-faceted issues on social texture. And perhaps more irony, more playfulness and more erotisation...

SB: If we aim at defining a certain relation to power, especially to the establishment and political power, are there alternative and experimental projects and places as well as activism beside artists, works, spaces and exhibits that one may know? Would you say there is some censorship, indeed self-censorship, in Turkey?

EK: The political power doesn't see the field of contemporary art as a threatening platform, which is understandable when considering its limited access to the public and the mainstream media. Therefore we saw only a few of conflictual instances in the recent past. I remember a work of Hale Tenger was brought to court with the accusation of offending the national flag after the third biennial in 1992. And in the year 2000, Hall Altindere was attacked by one of the conservative parties in the parliament since he used nudly on a work employing a Turkish identity card. There have been also some accusatory tone expressed in some of the conservative art press linked to academic orthodoxies about the extent of criticality in the works of Turkish artists that have been exhibited in the European institutions — I am not sure whether it is out of jealousy or nationalism. So, as for the contemporary and radical art scene, I don't see a self-censorship at all; just the opposite, there has been a quixotic courage to tackle the political issues.

BS: As the outcome OF "bad" general of state (with plentiful coalitions) for the last several decades, people have long previously lost their faith in politics in affairs. This deadness can also be perceived in the various art scenes in Turkey. Thereby, currently produced politically oriented works cannot really go further than imitating the 80's type of protest art models with dry and worn out concepts. Nevertheless, you may detect evident reactions in different cultural productions, which operate far away from the label of "contemporary art".

SB: You reject binaries, like East/West, Islam/Christian, Europe/Ottoman Empire and rather focus on current configurations resulting from the political situation, the internalized violence of the society, the disproportioned population, the imbalance of incomes, the machismo. How do you perceive the understanding from the abroad viewer, since you present a multilayered and complex image of Turkey and certainly not the "image of Epinal" ( cliché) which foreign people may want? How are you perceived in Turkey itself?

EK: I'm right now on a search trip in the Serbian capital Belgrade and I observe here a wide and rich range of artistic production that shy away both from the vertigo of traumatic events in the late-Yugoslavian past and the opposite complementary endeavor to depict the 'Other/Second Serbia' dis'obeying the regime of Milosevic. Last bombin bs in Istanbul have construed Turkey again as a culture suffering from ever stretching binarisms between the cultural continents. Yet, our exhibitions both in Graz and Holom aim to give glimpse of the hyper-dynamic, megalopolitan specificity of the city of Istanbul. The word 'Istanbul' comes from the Greek expression 'to the city'; people in Greece still call it the 'Polis'; Ottomans called it 'the city of cities'. We wanted to underline, in a humble scale, the urban richness that the City inhabits.

BS: In addition to what Erden stated, I would like to add the aspect of social schizophrenia as a way of surviving in this so-called 'city of cities'. It is an asset of adaptation, of any kind of situation, developed as a defense mechanism. So, you see that in many works this mechanism — mostly disguised as parody — operates in various layers.

SB: Istanbul appears as a focal matter in your curatorial process, with the idea "to stress cultural works (...) fed, challenged and shaped by the reality of Istanbul that [you] have all experienced" (I quote here Basak). How is this experience expressed through the exhibition? How do you conceive the representation, then the communication, of these personal and individual feelings, gathered into this exhibition?

BS: As you know, "Walking Istanbul, Notes from Quarantine", is a continuation of the exhibition: "Daydreaming in Quarantine", <rolo >Graz, 2003. This time the exhibition focuses on the visual notes, remarks and traces of the city as the reflection of the inner-world which is trapped in the mundane and untamed realities of the streets. The overall visual design of the Israeli exhibition is based on darkness and the uncanny encounters of the works with the audience; now the space inhabes another language through unexpected familiarities with the geography it locates. The interaction between the works and the selected artists operate exactly in the same way. I must say that the overloaded yet driving energy of the Digital Art Lab and the physical qualities of the gallery have transformed the setting of the exhibition. It was a nice crash.

Ästhetizismus und einen unscharfen Kommunikationsbegriff vor dem drohenden Hipnessverfall retteten. In Budapest sind die Voraussetzungen andere. Langsam scheint sich um zwei bis drei Galerien ein Kunstmarkt zu entwickeln, was zu einem Boom an neuen Malereipositionen geführt hat. Mit "Szerviz" hat die Kuratorin Judit Angel einerseits den Versuch unternommen, einen davon abweichenden Werkbegriff zu forcieren, andererseits ist die Aneignung eines ökonomischen (also alltäglichen) Produktionsbegriffs auch ein Hinweis auf mangelnde öffentliche Wahrnehmung aktueller Kunst.

Die Ausstellung wurde, ebenso wie "Klima" vom "Studio junger bildender KünstlerInnen" organisiert, einer Vereinigung, der ein grosser Teil der ungarischen KünstlerInnen unter 35 angehört. Anfang der neunziger Jahre ist das Studio dazu übergegangen die traditionellen Jahresausstellungen bei der alle Mitglieder teilgenommen hatten, durch kuratierte Ausstellungen zu ersetzen, für deren Teilnahme man sich bewerben muss. So wurden auch die Projekte von "Szerviz" als Reaktion auf das kuratorische Konzept eingereicht. Die meisten davon bezogen sich auf den Kunstbetrieb, viele überlagerten die anderen zwei Ausstellungen, um für sie Vermittlungsarbeit zu leisten. Gábor Bakos etwa hatte ein Medienbeobachtungsunternehmen beauftragt, im Zeitraum von zwei Monaten nach kunstbezogenen Stichworten zu suchen. Die gesammelten Zeitungsausschnitte waren in einem Dutzend schwergewichtigter Ringordner zugänglich, auf einem roten Ledersofa konnte man sich ein Bild vom öffentlichen Diskurs über Kunst machen. Feldforschung betrieb auch die Soziologin Éva Beatrix Bora, die einen PC aufstellte und die BesucherInnen aufforderte, Fragen zu ihrem Kunstverständnis und sozialem Umfeld zu beantworten, um mehr über die BesucherInnenstruktur der Kunsthalle zu erfahren. An der Ausstellung nahmen auch drei Kuratorinnen teil, die in verschiedener Weise ihr eigenes Berufsbild zu diskutieren stellten. Erzsébet Tatai veranstaltete eine Gesprächsrunde mit dem Titel "Kunstkritik als Dienstleistung", Livia Páldi lud - quasi als Subunternehmerin - ihrerseits zwei Künstlerinnen ein, Projekte vorzustellen und brachte damit die einzigen nicht ungarischen Positionen in die Ausstellung ein. Katalin Timár schliesslich stand für Konsultationen und Führungen zur Verfügung und gab Auskünfte über die ausstellenden KünstlerInnen. Auskünfte konnte man aber auch direkt von den Kuratorinnen der drei Ausstellungen bekommen, zu denen Sándor Bartha eine kostenlose Telefonleitung eingerichtet hatte. Den permanenten Kampf um Ökonomie der Aufmerksamkei visualisierte das Projekt "Attendometer" von Marcell Esterházy, Gábor Kerekes, Krisztián Kristóf und Csaba Szentesi. Über das Videüberwachungssystem der Kunsthalle und eine Software die normalerweise zur Erfassung von Konsumentenströmen dient, wurden die unterschiedlichen Aufmerksamkeitsspannen, die die BesucherInnen den Arbeiten in den Ausstellungen widmeten errechnet und - täglich aktualisiert - auf einem Display angezeigt. Für veränderte Formen künstlerischer Praxis steht das Projekt "Klimaserviz" von Tibor Várnagy und Miklós Erhardt, das in Kooperation mit der Ökologiegruppe "Rügyesckék"

und mir realisiert wurde (von mir stammte die Möblierung). Im einzigen Raum der Kunsthalle, der neben Oberlichten auch mit Fenstern ausgestattet ist, wurde ein Präsentations- und Diskussionsraum eingerichtet, in dem neben Vorträgen wöchentlich Gespräche zu Globalisierung, Klimawandel und sozialen Fragen stattfanden und der auch einen Rahmen bot um die Ereignisse von New York zu verhandeln. Videos aus Seattle und Genua und eine kontinuierlich erweiterte Wand mit Zeitungsausschnitten, Fotos und Flyern kontextualisierten jene Themen, die sonst im ungarischen Kunstbetrieb vollkommen fehlten. Verstärkt wurde dies durch die Herausgabe von zwei Nummern eines Zeitungsprojektes, das aktuelle Texte von Toni Negri, Slavoj Žižek oder der Volktheater Karawane auf ungarisch zugänglich machte, ausserdem Gesprächsprotokolle der HerausgeberInnen zu verschiedenen Anliegen zwischen Politik und Kunstbetrieb.

"Klima", kuratiert von Zsolt Petrányí wollte dem Titel entsprechend das geistige Klima junger ungarischer Kunstproduktion abbilden. Ein Unterfangen, das in seiner Konzentration auf Kategorien wie Nationalität oder Alter zumindest etwas resignativ anmutet, schliesslich sind es gerade die Kontakte zu Szenen anderer Länder, die im Budapester Kunstbetrieb selten genug sind, um ständiger Verstärkung zu bedürfen. Diese mangelnde Anbindung an internationale Diskurse wird von den KünstlerInnen auf unterschiedliche Weise problematisiert. Manchmal wird auch an ihrer (strategischen?) Verschleierung gearbeitet, zum Beispiel durch den exzessiven Einsatz englischer Textfragmente und Slogans, sowie in der Beschäftigung mit einem globalen Lifestyle, der dazu neigt, lokale Kontexte - in Folge auch politische Referenzen - zu negieren.

Für die dritte Ausstellung, "Out of Time" hatte Christoph Tannert sieben international bekanntere ungarische KünstlerInnen wie Róza El-Hassan oder Emese Benczúr ausgewählt. Dass damit ein westlicher Kurator lokale Künstler an einem Ort zeigte, an dem ihre Arbeiten ohnehin gut bekannt sind, wird ja vor allem dadurch zum Problem, dass somit in allen drei Ausstellungen ausländische KünstlerInnen komplett fehlten und auch sonst eine Schau nach der anderen ein beinahe militärisches Antreten einer Gruppe "zeitgenössischer ungarischer KünstlerInnen" zelebriert. Ein Begriff, der schwer zu überwinden scheint. Das trifft besonders auf Ausstellungen im Ausland zu, bei denen ungarische Positionen allzu häufig innerhalb nationaler Kategorien repräsentiert sind. Die Ausstellung "Zeit-Spiel - Junge Ungarische Kunst" etwa, die 1999 in der Berliner ifa-Galerie gezeigt wurde, hatte zwei historische Jubiläen zum Anlass: 1000 Jahre Ungarn und 10 Jahre Mauerfall. Die Kombination entbehrt nicht einer gewissen Schlüsseligkeit, schliesslich hatte Ungarn einst als erster sozialistischer Staat die Grenzen für osteudische Flüchtlinge geöffnet und damit doch eigentlich beträchtlich zur Aufweichung der Kategorien Ost und West beigetragen.

**From: Luca Cerizza**  
**Subject: Milano**  
**Date: 8.04.2004, 11:50**

Da circa i primi anni '90, Milano è stato il centro più attivo sull'arte contemporanea in Italia. Questo soprattutto per i seguenti fattori: Nascita di alcune nuove gallerie propositive e attente sulle ultime espressioni del contemporaneo (Marconi, De Carlo, Guenzani, Fontana, De Cardenas, ad esempio), e di un centro di promozione no-profit e di un archivio per artisti giovani (Vafarini). Presenza delle riviste d'arte contemporanea più aggiornate (Flash Art, Tama Celeste

**Galleries:**  
Raffaella Cortese, Massimo De Carlo, Monica De Cardenas, Emi Fontana, Studio Guenzani, Francesca Kaufmann, Giò Marconi, Zero (Paolo Zani)

**Artists:**  
Stefano Arienti (Guenzani), Simone Bertì (De Carlo), Massimiliano Buvoli (Sonia Rosso, Turin), Gianni Caravaggio (Francesca Kaufmann), Christian Frost (Zero), Giuseppe Gabellone (Guenzani), Massimo Grimaldi (Zero, ora dovrebbe essere a New York), Luisa Lambri (Guenzani, now in London), Marcello Maloberti (Raffaella Cortese) Luca Pancrazzi (Mazzoli, Modena), Roberta Silva, Patrick Tuttofoco (Guenzani, ora è per un pò a New York), Luca Vitone (Emi Fontana), Italo Zuffi (Galleria Continua, S. Gimignano)

**Curators/art critics:**  
Emanuela De Cecco, Laura Garbarino, Alessandro Rabottini, Daniele Perra

**Others:**  
Carlo Antonelli (co-director of Rolling Stone Italy, the man who knows best about night life, music, style, etc...A very good writer as well!)  
Paola Nicolin (about architecture and design)

**From: Gülsün Karamustafa**  
**Subject: Istanbul**  
**Date: 11.04.2004, 23:06**

Yes, the conference about next documenta was so exciting. Around 10 people from the book list was in Istanbul including Hans Ulrich, Martha Rosler and some which I do not remember the names right now. The sessions were very dynamic including the audience into the discussion in a very good way and lots of criticism was done as well as contributing new excellent ideas.

I would like to link this condition to your topic by saying that the dynamic atmosphere of the city of Istanbul contributed so much to the situation. This is something that I am witnessing lately about the conferences and workshops which are held in Istanbul as they seem to be more fruitful than the ones which are held in one traditional European cities. For example the conference on Balkans which also opened itself towards the problematic of the middle eastern countries, which was held in Istanbul was much more interesting than the one which was held in Kassel in a larger scale. Probably the attendants were feeling more free to express themselves in an intimate an far away atmosphere created in Istanbul with the different conditions of the city.

Another topic discussed in the conference 'next documenta' was that some cities in Europe, like Berlin being invaded by artists and being pushed into creating a new centre for arts which gave way to new questions. On the other hand As artists from Istanbul we think that the point we live in, is quiet reachable and many of us though we are thoroughly linked to the world and work internationally choose to live in this city.

Istanbul related to art and artists, should be considered a unique city. With its population of 15 million, never ending movement on its streets, with its being awake night and day serves a great creative surrounding for the artist. It does not have very many art institutions but one or two of them undoubtedly catches up and competes with the world scene. It has a rich local artists scene with around 100 private galleries and a local Art Fair but it still does not have a Modern Art Museum. Here artists never receive subsidies from the state or from any institution. They have to take care of themselves and they always find the courage and strength. Probably they receive their power from the chaotic, schizophrenic, poetic atmosphere of the city itself. This might be my small answer to your question and for the rest you both have to come and experience Istanbul.

**From: Michael Beutler**  
**Subject: Berlin/Frankfurt**  
**Date: 13.04.2004, 14:27**

Ich bin ja auch schon ein bisschen rumgekommen, aber je mehr ich rumgekommen bin, desto mehr hat sich der Begriff Kunstszene auf dem Weg zu jeglich möglichen Sinnfugungen aufgelöst. Eine Kunstszene, wahrscheinlich egal wo, täuscht den Begriff so extrem in dem Sinne das sowas eben nicht so leicht zu fassen ist wie eben eine Szene im Film oder ähnliches. In Berlin denke ich immer nur, das ich mich im Grunde in einer Variante der Kunstszene aus Frankfurt aufhalte, jemand aus Frankfurt denkt von der Kunstszene dort, das ich da vielleicht nie dabei war und in Berlin denkt jeder sowieso an was anderes, wie soll es hier auch eine Szene geben? Bin ich aber tatsächlich mitglied einer Gruppe, bin ich das schon wenn ich zu bestimmten Eröffnungen Regelmäßig gehe, wenn ich mit immer gleichen Leuten zu abend esse oder sind es nur die in der Bar?

- da gibt es einen Stammtisch jeden Donnerstag, da gehöre ich vielleicht auch dazu, der tut sich aus TZK und Ex oder noch Spex schreiben, ein paar musiker und Künstler gibt es eben auch, ich war nur seit einem halben Jahr nicht mehr da. Dann gibt es so kleine vereinigungen, die sich meist um Off räume ringeln, wie die Galerie Antik, aber da war ich auch schon lang nicht mehr. Mit Zeitschriften kenne ich mich nicht so, weil ich nicht so viel lese und zum anschauen, kuck ich eher in andere Bücher. Vielleicht ist es schon sinnvoller anstelle nach einer Szene, nach einer Organisation oder einem Verein zufragen, oder eben speziellen Galerien/Ausstellungsräumen. In berlin ist das sicher schwierig alles unter einen Hut zu kriegen, in Glasgow war das schon einfacher, oder in Schottland allgemein. Das ist nicht so groß, und sehr gut organisiert, dennoch bleibt scene wässrig, da es so im Wandel ist, wie kaum etwas anderes.

Ich habe glasgow ja auch über die Schule kennengelernt Glasgow School of Art und das ist sicher schon eines der Herzen dort. Da gibt es eine unglaublich umtriebige, die für den MFA Kurs verantwortlich ist, der wohl am ehesten für einen Besuch sinnmacht (weil zumindest ein bisschen freier);SAM AINSLEY, dann ein toller Schreiber: Francis MCKEE. Die vielen offräume sind super organisiert und um musik kommt man da natürlich auch nicht rum alles ist eng vergliedert und unglaublich Leidenschaftlich. Glasgow ist sehr toll, eine feine klinge, harte und total lebenswürdige statt. Niemand wird schäme, wenn da noch jemand daherkäme und mitmachen will. Die freuen sich über jeden der herkommt, weinen ein bisschen an deiner Schulter über die tiefen Misstände in der Stadt- und Kulturpolitik und über ihre tiefe verbundenheit auch noch dabei.

Also super und danngelt man in einen Snooker club und dann einen pint und so. Frankfurt ist aber auch nicht schlecht, schon ähnlich wie Glasgow, halt schon anders und es gibt diese tiefe Verbundenheit zur Stadt selbst nicht so. Im Nachhinein wird sie dann schon gut geredet, aber dennoch wird die Stadt von den meisten verstanden und so wandelt sich auch die Szene dort, wird von immermehr jungen Studenten an der Südeitschule gespeist und die alten kommen schon gerne mal wieder, zumal das institutionelle Treiben schon einiges zu bieten hat, und das bei einer wandbaren Laufdichte, also vielversprechendes, vielseitiges Kompaktprogramm. Im Deutschen Filmuseum gibt es gerade Stanley Kubrick und im Kunstverein Cerith WynEvans. Da fahre ich morgen auch gleich hin.

Insgesamt finde ich die Idee gut rumzureisen, doch vielleicht auch trotz vieler Beiträge löst sich eine gewisse Oberflächlichkeit bei doch einem Vorhaben doch nicht verhindern? Das persönliche bleibt doch vielleicht ein bisschen auf der strecke, und das macht doch so viel aus auch gerade in sowas wie einer Szene?

**From: Matteo Costanzo**  
**Subject: La mia città Roma 2004**  
**Date: 17.04.2004, 15:05**

Vivo a Roma da sempre, e da sempre mi piace l'arte, specialmente le sperimentazioni dell'arte contemporanea. Non sono un artista ma un architetto, e come tale vivo le esperienze artistiche.

Roma è piena di gallerie d'arte ma non tutte riescono a generare situazioni interessanti, nella ricerca e nella sperimentazione. Molte gallerie sono veri e propri negozi dove poter acquistare un quadro da mettere nel salotto della propria casa. Alcune invece sono gallerie "storiche", spazzi dove lungo gli anni sessanta o settanta, si viveva un clima magico di cambiamento, prima tra tutte l'"Attico" di Fabio Sargentini, una vera e propria istituzione nella storia dell'arte a Roma.

Poi ci sono gallerie molto interessanti perche ti permettono di vedere artisti a livello internazionale come la "Ugo Ferrante" o la "Discetti" o il "Ponte Contemporanea".

Poche sono invece quegli spazzi che riescono a convogliare energie positive, dove si può ezialzare un lavoro legato ai concetti e non a soldi ai cm2.

Negli spazzi della "Fondazione Adriano Olivetti", slegati dalle esigenze di mercato della vendita, si possono trovare ormai da molti anni occasioni di collaborazione tra più artisti, una fusione tra discipline. Questo grazie al lavoro degli organizzatori primo tra tutti il direttore Bartolomeo Pietromarchi.

In questi ultimi anni stiamo assistendo allo sviluppo di progetti che riportno Roma ad essere una delle città più importanti nel mondo dell'arte. Diversi concorsi e a breve la costruzioni di nuovi centri d'arte e di architettura contemporanea. Il "MAXXI" (Museo di Arte XXI secolo) che verrà realizzato dall'architetto iracheno Zaha Hadid, il "MACRO" ( Museo di Arte Contemporanea Roma) su progetto della francese Odile Deque dello studio Deque e Cornette, il "Palazzo delle Esposizioni", in restauro su progetto dell'architetto italiano Michele De Lucchi.

Intorno alla nascita di queste nuove strutture stanno nascendo nuove entità come il "DARC" (Dipartimento di Arte e Architettura Contemporanea) diretto da Pio Baldi e legata al "Ministero dei beni culturali", che indice concorsi ed eventi per stimolare nuove risorse. Anche se non ha ancora assunto una posizione precisa per scardinare la situazione.

Roma città dell'informale, della Pop art italiana, della Transavanguardia di Bonoto Oliva, oggi vive una nuova energia. Una forte spinta informatica e tecnologica nei lavori di artisti come Cristiano Pintaldi, Matteo Basile o Alessandro Gianvetti, che nei primi anni del 2000 hanno saputo dirottare la pittura classica in una espressione nuova. Attraverso il lavoro di giovane critici come Gianluca Marziani, gallerie d'arte coraggiose come "Il Mascherino" e nuove case editrici coma "Castelvecchi Arte".

Gruppi come Stalker (Laboratorio di Arte Urbana) che già dal 1995 con il "giro di Roma" hanno rinnovato l'approccio di analisi nei confronti della città. Una fusione tra arte e architettura. Nel loro spazio "ON" (Osservatorio Nomade), gestito con il gruppo di architettura ellelab, passano personaggi come Peter Lang, fotografi come Armin Linke, gruppi di architetti come ma0, laN+, 2A+P/Innicole\_fvr.

Roma sicuramente oggi più che un panorama preciso è un luogo che in una grande confusione attira e cultura energie e curiosità. Partecipa ad una rete di contatti molto vasta, che spesso riesce a far uscire diverse ed emergere all'estero i più interessanti fermenti.

**From: Krassimir Terziev**  
**Subject: Re: On The BG Track**  
**Date: 18.04.2004, 22:24**

The art scene in Sofia. It is small but dynamic, full of contradictions, peaks and falls. As an institutional player, I could mention several key organisations. The Union of Bulgarian Artists is the heritage of the communist era, it is the biggest institution (as a space - 4 floors exhibition halls in its own building, and a separate gallery - may be the most beautiful exhibition space in the city). As an institution UBA follows the model of an association, where artists have to apply and become members of. In the past it was the only gate through professional career development, nowadays it means nothing, but curiously the young artists finishing academy still keep the inertia applying for a members of the union. As a programme UBA develops events which could fit the members interests, following the majority principle. This creates the risk being very static, conservative and old fashioned programme. Then comes may be the most powerful institution for Contemporary art - Institute for Contempo-rary Art - a group of artists and curators with a very established contacts in the international art scene, one could see the people connected to it are easy as nut at big international art events, than seeing them in Sofia. This is also the most professionally working circle of people.

interSpace Media Art Center is a small organisation devoted to Media Art. It exists from 1998 and maintains as a resources a production lab for media art, an independent media channel on the web - www.cult.bg, and a programme on the field. XXL gallery was before 2003 (when it was closed form the local state) an important independent space for contemporary art which started with a very radical and focused programme, but didn't sustain in time this ideology. Irida Gallery is a semi-commercial but also very active and very flexible platform devoted a large percentage of its programming to Contemporary Arts. The red House - Centre for Culture and Debate is also one of the most established, and powerful initiative, focused in this heterogeneous space between culture and political debates. They cover a large scale field of culture and debates on certain "hot" political; issues, relevant to the social transformation of the state and the country. The municipal Art Gallery plays also an important role and is very active collaborative with other smaller cultural organisations. They are funded by the municipal state institution and as such balance between established events and important alternative initiatives.

I will contribute to your survey my last project description part of my residency at the Visual Seminar Project, which is shaped as a show at ATA Gallery, managed by the Institute for Contemporary Art, as well as intervention on the screens of Metro Media Company at all Subway Stations in Sofia:

**"Excuse me, Which is This City?"**  
is a visual investigation on urban everyday life world of a city in crisis (Sofia, capital of Bulgaria).

After 1989 and the collapse of the former communist system a new period of transition to new market oriented social system began. This transition was accompanied with a series of economic, cultural and political crisis, followed by corruption and chaos in all levels of society.

Sofia, as a capital of the country witnessed a rapid growth of population. This demographic boom, on the background of the total decline by the institutions resulted in urban environment left entirely in the hands of private and individual initiative. The project studies the processes of atomization of the urban geography, architecture and logic of production of social space. As a result the city falls apart in a fragmented sequences of spatial organizations, each with its own logic, rhythm and rules.

**Sofia does not exist!**  
It is a pale abstraction projected by the institutions, which does not stand the challenges of "real life" flux. There are only fragmented places where traumatic memory (or lack of it - amnesia), imagination, dreams and pressures of everyday needs create a permanent mutations of spatial reinvention and redefinition. What is interesting is the human use, interactions, appropriations of space. The output of my visual observations of the city is shaped in a multitude of artworks in photography and video, case studies discussing different aspects of the world of everyday life:

1. Series of photo-montages, representing mutated creatures (stray dogs) in the city, as the only element identified with all the areas of the city.
2. Series of video installations with a docu-fictional scenarios.
3. A video installation "A MOVIE" - 2 channels video installation, shot in the "BOYANA FILM" center.

**"Excuse Me Which is This City?"**  
*Exhibition at ATA Gallery/Institute for Contemporary Art – 09.04 – 09.05.2004*

- Structure of the show// list of works:
1. "A MOVIE" - 2 channels video installation, DVD Pal, silent, colour, equipment: 2 DVD players; 2 video beamers, 2 projections ~ 3/2 m. each.
  2. "A MARKET" - 2 channels video installation, DVD Pal, mono, colour, equipment: 2 DVD/VHS players; 2 TV monitors, wooden shelf hung on the wall for the monitors.
  3. "A PLACE" - single channel video installation, DVD Pal, stereo, colour, equipment: 1 DVD/VHS player; 1 TV monitor, headphones, wooden shelf hung on the wall for the monitor.
  4. "POST-URBAN LAND" - 4 colour photographic prints on paper, 87/ 16 cm. Each 5. "100 arguments for public art" - 100 images of abandoned cars on the streets of Sofia. - options for presenting them are: 1) photographic prints 2) slide show 3) digital slide show projected by PCI/ or combined with the web site display.
  6. Web site of the project.

During the presentation of my show in ATA Gallery – 09.04 – 09.05.2004, there will be series of interventions in public space, showing the visual materials accommodated for the different context of the interventions.

So far the idea is to have a projection in the stations of the Subway line on the screens of Metro Media. And also a screenings of short video spots on TV Programs on BBT, and Channel 1, as well as publication of images from my project on life-style magazines "1", AZ.

INTERFACE of the web site:  
The web platform uses a map of Sofia as a navigational structure, divided into 16

**DIFFERENT REGISTERS OF ENGAGEMENTS WITH REALITY**  
*Suzana Milevska and Erden Kosova discussing*

This text is conceived and conducted as a dialogue between Suzana Milevska, curator and writer from Skopje, Macedonia, and Erden Kosova, critic from Istanbul, Turkey. It is an attempt to discuss the subtle differences among two peripheries and the various modes that the artists deploy when dealing with different registers of reality.

The socially and politically engaged art practices from different corners of the world are usually put under the same roof as part of the same art discourse and cultural background, often interpreted in opposition to the formally and aesthetically determined art. However, the completely different political contexts determine the fact that the social and political issues in art are not compelling the different art communities in similar way.

What sounds as attractive issues to research and question for the artists working in more liberal democratic environment, dealing with the limits of democracy itself and the reflection of those limits on the social quality of everyday life, is for various reasons not of the same relevance for the artists concerned with the contemporary global political strategies and their impact to the governmental policies of the new emerged and established countries in Europe, or of the other peripheral cultural environments.

Some cultural contexts seem to show resistance towards such social engagement, due to more complex political climate marked by serious threats to political stability, or as a result of the differently structured art institutions and policies. The usual East/West cultural metaphors and dichotomies become too narrow to extrapolate the differences in the approach of the artists towards the political and social engagement. Zizek's critique of what he calls liberal fundamentalism is based on similar perspective. In his view the perverse game of making a big problem when the rights of a serial killer or suspected war criminal are violated, while being ignorant towards massive violations of 'ordinary people's rights' (Slavoj Zizek, Repeating Lenin, (Zagreb: Arkinz. d.o.o.) 2001, p. 10) is actually due to the silent consensus of liberal-democratic hegemony not to change anything.

It is important to locate the actual reasons for the different stands that artists have towards what they consider as socially and politically engaged art but their art can also result with constructively overcoming of the contextual framework itself.

E. K. Suzana, in one of the few occasions that we found in the corridors of the myopic British academia we discussed the fact that the pre-conceived conventions of the European political philosophy do not easily translate into the cultures of the geographies that we are more familiar with. And in that conversation I remember you mentioning a conference organised in Skopje in which the guest presenter, who was invited from a Western scene, had a serious difficulty in communicating his paper based on the principle of 'political correctness' to the young local audience who had a completely different view on the concept. Can you recall the details of that instant?

S. M. The event in question (a lecture given by David Eliot at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje in the mid of nineties) unexpectedly clarified some historical and contemporary debates about the engagement in arts in Macedonia. Some of the points made by Eliot, or the questions posed from the more informed members of the public (e.g. 'whether there is 'left' and 'right' in art theory') were provocative because it was the first time since social realism's debates that art and society were put within the same context. That was a taboo theme after some very strict discussions and conflicts among the communist leaders in the fifties, and therefore it came as a surprise that art, society, economy and politics could be discussed outside of the inevitable traps of ideology.

The academic art education in the local Faculty of Fine Arts is still determined by a strong modernist and anti-ethical principles, embraced by the artists and art critics as expression of their revolt and desire to take a critical distance from the social realism of 50's and 60's. The paradox is that what was once a revolutionary art in the age of state controlled art already in the liberal seventies and eighties of the 20th century inevitably became conservative. The aesthetics was equalised with the abstract content-less art and for a long time there was no room for any kind of engagement with any 'otter' elements. Many artists of the pre-transitional generations still take the easy and safety position towards the social and political problems in the society with only one excuse: that it enables them to keep the independence of art concepts from the societal and political power structures. If ever interested in any kind of interaction and engagement with reality the artists of the younger generation are more concerned with the issues of global economy and politics than with the social problems of the underrepresented local communities and groups of people. The projects of Aleksandar Stankovski, Zaneta Vangelj or Igor Tosevski, for example, are mainly concerned with the problems of national identity, the role of the international politics for the local transitional traumas, and the integration phantasm that are the new grand narratives of the transitional societies. I cannot speculate whether such interest in the global political problems is what Zizek would prefer instead of the mild politically correct projects, and I don't agree completely with him that there is no potentiality for radical impact in the projects without political agenda.

Nevertheless some social issues were present in few projects in the last several years — Oliver Musovik's projects Neighbors II is probably one of the rare and therefore important examples for an art projects that derived from the social environment of the artist emphasising the mundane problems of the neighbourhood. For that reason it was often selected as a representative of the so called 'socially engaged art' in the international art context.

I can hardly imagine that all these projects are due to some clear cut individual artistic programs only. I presume that other important roles in such differentiation among the artists of different generations are enacted on one side by the inherited historic experience with social realism and the resistance towards it, and on the other side by the contemporary attention and expectation of the international art community, distributed through the policy of the art foundations that while supporting the art simultaneously design its concepts. Of course here comes to mind the liberal fundamentalism and its support for projects that are not too threatening for the system that is being criticised.

Do you think that there are some comparisons that can be made in regard to these different registers of engagements with reality in contemporary art scene in Turkey? Would you draw some lines of connection between the historic social realism and the contemporary socially engaged art in Turkey? E. K. There are similarities between the histories of Macedonia and Turkey in terms of their distinctly modernist ideologies, yet, I

quadrants, entering each of the quadrants activates different visual spatial narratives. This creates a kind of on line cinematic experience with a docu-fictional character. The observations are personal and do not represent any complete, finite or evaluational attitude. The web site uses HTML 4.0, Java and Flash. You need Flash Player 6 in order to play some of the movies.

The project is realised during Krassimir Terziev's fellowship in the frameworks of The Visual Seminar Project. Visual Seminar is a joint project by Institute of Advanced Studies - Sofia & Institute of Contemporary Art – Sofia. The address of the project is: <http://www.cityscales.net>

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-What do you think about the art schools in that city? Ugh, you are touching another difficult question about the local situation here, hm...

OK, the only serious educational institution in the city is the so called National Academy of Fine Arts. I finished it in 1997 and as been part of the story can not be an external observer, so my attitude is not an objective one:))

The academy is a very conservative place still defending a very old fashioned ideas and practices, the faculties are the 19 century concept of painting graphics sculpture etc. The academic authorities legitimize this state as the unique position of the academy to be one of the few left in the world teaching the students grow practically to draw as the painters did in the past centuries - a very problematic for approval claim.

Unfortunately there is no serious alternative to this in the educational system in the country. One of the most negative effects of this is may that the artists are graduating with a very conformistic political attitudes and they can't be an active social players and conscious intellectual capacity for social change.

At the end I ask for this text to stay a private information source between me and you, not because it is not my absolutely public position, but because i prepared it in a total improvisation due to a lack of time. If, at certain point you would like to make it, or parts of it public, please inform me a reasonable period ahead to work on its refinement.

I am sorry that you ask me only about the art scene here, it is maybe one of the sectors with minimal reforms so it is maybe not representative of the "real life" situation.

about other people - maybe you can address Jelko. I know he prepares a new project concerning the local art community development so it might be interesting to you.

**From: Vit Havranek**  
**Subject: Prague**  
**Date: 19.04.2004, 11:55**

contemporary art life in cr / prague

prague is no more the only center of contemporary art – there are some small but more risky and contemporary activities going on in the regions like the galleries eskort in brno, galery flovka in ussti nad labem and dum umeni in ceske budejovice in prague there quite strong scene of museums but they are practically not dealing with the contemporary art or exceptionally organising kind of surveys of contemporary artists like 'actual painting' or czech biennial - city gallery prague, one kusthalle galeries roduffinum www.roduffinum.cz is running a professional program without risky experimental approach, the national gallery (narodni galerie) the biggest art institution became with a new director – a na artist (milan knizak) really conservative and nationally oriented, there is any hope that contemporary art could be presented with this director, despite the fact that for example the prague biennale was launched there and that once a year they try to make some contemporary exhibition.

there is one strong galery we are collaborating and trying to help which is galery display ([www.display.cz](http://www.display.cz)) they have been existing since 2000 aprox. and are mostly focused on the presentation of the non czex artists (some of them based in prague) their past program is on the web otherwise two new spaces were founded in the last years like galeries futura and galeries home – some of their activities are interesting our plan for the future is to conceive a new platform together with display galery and „kruh“ society for a contemporary architecture where will be a base for the exhibition as well as for the lecture and reflective backound needed for contemporary arts

there are 2 main scholl universities „academy of fine arts“ - avu [www.avu.cz](http://www.avu.cz) and academy of art, design and architecture [www.vsup.cz](http://www.vsup.cz) (i am teachin there contemporary art)

avu was really dynamic in the first half on ninties but now becoming more and more academic, only a few teachers are interesting there (vladimir skerep – painting and michael bielicky new media and also the theoretical center leaded by jiri sevcik)

vsup is not really conservative but kind of classical school focused also on design the scholls are not really running an externally influential program they are focused on their study programs and their presentations vsup ahs a galery with a program based on the school presentation, avu closed their galery

there is one internet galery runned by one enthous iastic art organiser [www.galerieholec.cz](http://www.galerieholec.cz)

guess, a full engagement in social issues have been officially side-stepped in Turkey, first in favour of a future-oriented yet classless, conflict-free construction of the society, and then, from the fifties on, in favour of the myth of the artistic individual untainted by political urgency. Yet, the contemporary art production in Turkey seems to have a pronounced investment in a confrontational politicality. It is the constitutive factor of this production. A series of deprivations have produced a state, or an illusion of political autonomy among the artists who have pursued radical and experimental paths. In general, there is a certain sense of rejection from the social sphere: the previous generation was traumatised by the brutal coup d'état of 1980 and my generation experienced the shock of the Sivas massacre in 1993 in which fundamentalists burned 37 communist intellectuals to death. In the mid-nineties, the explosion of nationalism, civil war, terrorism of the Kurdish guerrillas, the army and the anti-terror squads and violence in the everyday life reinforced the need for an enunciative response to the urgencies of social issues.

In addition to this, the state and the local governments have absolutely been absent in the artistic field: no space to those artists in the public galleries; no support to the quixotic artist-initiated exhibitions; no jobs in the academies. The commercial market is obsessed with dead paintings and the field of interest allotted to culture in the reckless media, which prospered disproportionately in the last decade, remains somewhere between football and the Turkish Pop. This isolation, in turn, offered a free zone for attacking the most daring social taboos, ranging from the national(is) symbols to the omnipotent icon of Atatürk, from xenophobia to the male hegemony on the public space. Yet, this platform of critically, putatively external to its topic, has been challenged by some critics and artists. A number of privileges – education, class, geography etc. – had opened up a sphere of dissent for the artists who were coming from the 'good family machines', as Vasif Kortun once put it. – They were unhesitant to operate critically on the political sphere, but some indirect routes of transgression remained intact — as visualisation of violence on the body, its nakedness, formal interruption in the presentation of art works, the retreat from the public space etc. The recent expansion of the artistic production onto other segments of the society brought in a sort of productive self-criticism. For instance, the emphasis on the embeddedness of the artists within the value system of the majority of the society, as in Aydan Murtezaoğlu's and Bülent Cangar's works, could elaborate on the spatial subtleties of the Turkish or Istanbulian specificity. And on the other hand, the recent emergence of young artists from the Kurdish part of the country problematised the reproduction of hierarchies within the country and the art scene in Istanbul.

E. K.: Have the recent ethnical tensions had any impact on the approach to the political in the art scenes in Macedonia?

S. M.: I have to admit that for me personally it is very difficult to answer this question. Taking into account that I belong to the Macedonian ethnic majority and I am employed in a governmental cultural institution (the low budget Open Graphic Art Studio, attached to the Museum of the City of Skopje) it is inevitable to emphasise the fact that I cannot take the position of the subaltern subjects (see the often misread text by Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak Can the Subaltern Speak, 1982) without sounding as a ventriloquist who uses the manipulative hand and gives voice to the ones who supposedly cannot speak. Not that I want to assert that it is impossible to talk about these issues only because we should enable the subaltern speak for themselves, but I need to position myself first, before entering this dangerous field of interpretation of the problems of representation, inclusion, and exclusion.

In fact the question itself is two fold. The problem of hierarchies in representation, obviously a result of the long-term blind national institutional and governmental politics that resulted with the ethnic conflicts (to be more precise, it was a proper war with fronts, conquered territories, and several hundreds victims and disappeared persons) we all expect should be solved gradually with an appropriate implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (2001) signed between the Macedonian and Albanian legal representatives. There are several clauses there that are directly concerned with the just and righteous representation.

The other problem is how these tensions are reflected in the art projects themselves. I have to mention Zaneta Vangelj's project Integralism, 2003, presented at this year 50th Venice Biennial in the national pavilion. There is a very strong ambiguity in that project that underlines many of the usual paradoxes when it comes to employment of actual documentary materials within art framework. The project itself consists of three spaces (Design Room, War Room, and Show Room) and each of them is related to the NATO controlled operation called Essential Harvest that took place in Macedonia in 2002 (imagined in order to collect and destroy the weapons from the Albanian rebels after the Agreement was signed). In the War Room there are six glass boxes full with cut in two weapons and the video documentary called Real Kunst – Essential Harvest, 2003, edited by the artist is being shown continuously. The integration and the disintegration, the territorialisation and the deterritorialisation are put side by side and it is emphasised that such processes are usually completed through wars. The map of the world put in a reverse perspective (as perceived from inside – a principle used by the fresco and icon painters in the Byzantine art as 'God's point of view') is installed on a table in the Show Room, as seen in the war movies and TV documentaries when the war strategists/ 'cartographers' discuss their next moves.

One of the paradoxes of the installation is that besides all the horrors of the war the installation view is extremely aesthetical. The perfectly arranged weapons, symmetrically cut in two pieces, and thus turned into dysfunctional art objects create an obvious tension between horror and beauty, attracts and abjects simultaneously. The slow motion video material, accompanied by a compelling soundtrack, seductively influences the audience in a Wagnerian way so that to accept the war as a justifiable integration process does not seem so implausible. The complex and ironical captions in the war, on the other hand, marked the utterance of the intimate anxiety and strongly transposed personal experience of the war shared by all of us. All this ambivalence is emphasised by the fact that the project was officially presented as part of the national selection at the Venice Biennial which gave way to many conflicting comments e.g. of the budget of 50.000 € to produce and transport the work during the extremely difficult situation of the exhausted state economy. This is the only more complex art project that I know that directly addresses the latest political situation.

S. M.: My last question is related to similar phenomena and differences between the social and political art in the Turkish art scene: whether it is possible to distinguish different motifs for each of the streams and is there any radical activist project?

E.K.: The oppositional voice in Turkey, or more specifically leftism of the last two decades, has operated less through the terms of economy politics than resistances responding to cultural conflicts, such as rights of ethnical and religious minorities, rifts

**From: Basim Magdy**  
**Subject: Re: cairo**  
**Date: 23.04.2004, 11:04**

Thanks for your interest in my opinion. I read your email and in the end found myself having too many questions in my head about your project. I have strong opinions about the 'interest in Cairo', so I hope you can answer my questions to help me find out in which way i can help you and maybe if I can't get you in touch with other artists or galleries that can help you.

My questions are as follows:  
Are you talking about both of you starting new art spaces in cities for one year and then moving to another city and so on or are you talking about already existing art spaces?  
What other Arab cities do you have texts on?  
What exactly is this project for? who is sponsoring it? and how will it be presented in the end and where?  
You didn't make clear what you are going to do with a text that I might write. I mean if I decide to write the text, in which context will it be presented and how will it fit in your project? Will the text be available for the public or is this just information gathering for you?

It would also be nice if you can send me a sample of maybe previously written texts or what you have done already concerning this project to help me get a clearer idea about the whole thing.

**From: Muratbek Djumaliev**  
**Subject: Re: Kyrgyzstan**  
**Date: 29.04.2004, 11:16**

Thank you for your interest to the situation in contemporary art in Kyrgyzstan. It really develops very fast during last several years. What I can do for you is to send my speech in a panel discussion in the frame of Istanbul Biennial last autumn. It is short description about how contemporary art developed in Kyrgyzstan. Also I can send some photos of our art works that we made with my wife Gulnara Kasmaileva.

This year start with two events in Bishkek:  
1) International Exhibition of Contemporary Printmakers (February-March). Curators: Gulnara Kasmaileva and Muratbek Djumaliev. Organizer ArtEast Art Laboratory. Participants from: Japan, Belgium, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, China.  
2) International Exhibition of Contemporary Art " and Others". Curator: Ulan Djaparov. Organizer: Kurama Art Gallery. Participants from: Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Ukraina, Moldova, Slovenia.

Part of the exhibition was a panel discussion with Victor Misiano, Ecaterina Deogot and Sergey Popov, IRWIN group from Ljubljana. Exhibition started April 25.  
3) International festival of theater. Organizer: City Drama Theater. In the frame of this festival a video art project was shown: "Contemporary". Curator and educator: Laezz Altmady (New York). April 26-28.  
4) There will also be a festival of video art "Videoidentity" on November 2004. This project includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. I am coordinator of this project in Kyrgyzstan.

**Contemporary art of Kyrgyzstan**  
*Muratbek Djumaliev*

Despite the fact that the development of contemporary art in the post-Soviet space occurred in identical conditions of institution's deficiency, absence of dialogue with authorities, misunderstanding at local level and as result - producing of artwork to export. - nevertheless the contemporary art of Kyrgyzstan has its own features.

Speaking about the genesis of Kyrgyzstan contemporary art, it is impossible to ignore the art situation developed at the end of 80-es, tremendous activity of artists and architects of this period. This activity included the movement "New Wave", and the participation of our artists in a seminar of Underground Art in Estonia, and festival "Architectural Alternatives".

On the one hand, young artists of «New Wave» supported the high temperature of this boiling pot. The brightest of them did not limit themselves in post modernism style and created sharply social artworks.

On the other hand there were representatives of so-called "Paper Architecture". One of the centers alongside with Novosibirsk, Moscow and Kazan was Frunze (now Bishkek), "Paper Architecture" as the phenomenon

In 1999, at the studio "Museum", there were conducted a number of photo-exhibitions of Alexander U. He, together with Roman Moskalev and Ira Dekker, formed a group "Armour Train", and made numerous video films, such as "Tea Ceremony" and "Artist Z". Distinctive feature of group - irony and remarkable sense of humor. At the exhibition in Berlin Ulan Japarov has presented a series of photos from the action "Unheard Song". Now Ulan Japarov is known not only as the architect, editor of literary and art almanac and curator of projects, but also with his actions as "I am", shown on festival of arts in Almaty, "Hot Head - Cold Heart". Last one had been submitted within the frameworks of the international exhibition "Inner Asia" 2002, and at the Geneva exhibition the same year. Under the exhibition of Ulan, hot head and cold heart became a symbol and source of problems of our time.

In 1998 Gulnara Kasmalieva and Muratbek Djomaliev became initiators of creation of a group "Zamana", which has carried out three projects: interactive installation "The Wall of Talking Clay" on Soros festival of arts in Bishkek, the video project "Paradise" first at the annual exhibition of the Soros Center of Contemporary Art -Almaty in 2000 and then in the exhibition "No Mad's Land" and the photo project "Encounter with the Shadow" also in Berlin.

In 2001, at the exhibition "Hand Made" in Saint Petersburg, Gulnara Kasmalieva for the first time showed performance "Farewell Song". Subsequently it will be shown in 2002 at the exhibition "Inner Asia" (Curator Vladimir Nazansky from Novosibirsk) and at the exhibition "Transforma" in Geneva.

**From: Power Ekroth**  
**Subject: Stockholm**  
**Date: 03.05.2004, 22:53**

I have been abroad for some months now and just came back to Stockholm. I will send you some articles on the Stockholm art scene that have been publicized in Contemporary magazine (UK) that describes some of the issues you are interested in. It seems to me that if I were about to try to answer your questions fairly well I would write you a book. I know a lot, and if you are interested in the Stockholm art scene which is very vibrant, but a bit narrow minded, I suggest you come here and we could have a coffee just to start an outline of the scene.

Lets just start with my articles attached and we will take it from there.

*Contemporary July 2003*

During summertime Stockholm traditionally have a long break from all art events. This spring there has been a concentration of events like this at particularly two places: After Shopping/SAM at the Kulturhuset and Modern Talking with four different "sets" at Gallery EkrothJensen.

The producer Jelena Rundqvist have during several years been working with art events and exhibitions, and her projects After Shopping and the "spin-off" SAM at Kulturhuset have engaged lots of talented people working with design, art, media, music and performance. The title After Shopping stems from the idea that visitors could come to the event just after shopping/ Saturdays as Kulturhuset is located in the shopping district of downtown Stockholm. SAM is a continued and concentrated form of After Shopping, where the invited artists/curators/magazines/musicians inhabit a small galleriespace in the large building for several weeks instead of only one night. It becomes a semi-opened space, where people either exhibit or just sit and works in their "office" or "studio".

As most artist-run galleries, Enkhuset have in the past had financial troubles. The solution has been to have people doing stuff with low/no-budget, and the springtime programme Modern Talking is no exception. The three artists Hans Iaksson, Rodrigo Mallea Lira and Yiva Oglund have been working as curators as well as directors for the spring program of 2003. The programme is allegedly for "contemporary art between art/architecture/design and popular culture" and have included designers making fashion design during the gallery's opening hours, graphic designers and webdesigners, DJ's, writers proclaiming texts that they produce in the gallery as a kind of performative installation (?), a record label and so on. The space is redesigned by the ultra trendy designgroup Uglycute (a part of the Venice biennale, Utopia Station this year) is always stuffed with activity, and the openings are always super-crowded and continues through all night.

Both cross-fertilizing initiatives have a very laissez-faire attitude — it is flexible and opened up to everything remotely connected to art, and it tries to widen the concept of art. That is, it is opening up to everything and everyone included in a tight group of people already within a small circuit of friends working in areas connecting to art. This is the strength of both projects but also one of their problems. But it is surely interesting to see the projects as a strong reaction to the unflexible and rather stiff Stockholm institutions and exhibitions where few younger names get to be included. The projects work very well as a social platform where one could meet and mingle with a good "arty" excuse. It's always fun meeting a lot of friends and to have a drink in a relaxed environment, but of course, one has to be included in the group of friends already to feel welcomed. And after attending five, six of these interactive, performative events where anything goes, one can't help but to wonder how these at times watered down Tiravanija-wanna-be-projects can continue without everyone becoming exhausted off with it. Everything is so "work in progress", and sooner or later it becomes a bit exasperating not being able to talk about the exhibition, the art or the art works. Of course a good excuse for not coming through all the way is a lack of a large budget, but even with a budget — everyone cannot make interesting art.

*Contemporary January 2004*

Generally, the galleries have been the only place for younger artists to show their work in Stockholm, and there have been quite a large number of galleries existing considering Stockholm is not a metropolis. However, there has been too little rejuvenation amongst the galleries during the last couple of years, and therefore younger artists have not been signed as the pre-existing galleries have been "full". This has lead to a situation where artists have either been moving to other cities, such as Berlin, or trying to start their own artist run spaces. For a while there has been a tremendous vibrating scene with different temporary "galleries" or show-cases with no budget, desperately trying to show art with a varied result, and a stagnant scene within the larger institutions.

Despite the current "baisse" in economy, all of a sudden several new galleries have established in Stockholm, and most of them are actually taking in younger artists. ALP gallery, Peter Bergman, was the first young gallerist opening, and two of the most prominent Stockholm galleries have unexpectedly re-opened their galleries during 2003. Both galleries had been closed for several years in Stockholm, first Nordenhake (who moved to Berlin and opened up a large gallery there); and secondly Andreas Brändström, who now have teamed up with Jan Stene. The Stockholm branch of Nordenhake is not only showing artists already included in their Berlin-stable" but has surprisingly also opened up to younger talents like Jan Christensen. Brändström & Stene have also picked up on new talents, but is also showing some heavy-duty young names like for instance Jappe Hein. Brändström & Stene will also be presenting at this year's "Statements" in Basel with Juan Pedro Fabra Guemberena. An ambulating curator-run gallery named Simon Says, who has been showing at the Enkhuset gallery during last year's autumn, are showing a mixture of just recently graduated artists and some alternative shows expanding the curatorial field, like having a cat exhibition instead of showing only art. Their fresh initiative perhaps takes the edge off the image of the curator as the stuck up dictator with no self-irony. Two more galleries should be mentioned with special emphasis, the Natalia Goldin

Gallery and Aidy Milliken Gallery. Aidy Milliken was one of the two guys running the Zinc gallery, and is opening up again after little more than a year without a space. He will be working with most of the same artists from Zinc, like for instance Lars Sillberg, Natalia Goldin however, is the completely new kid on the block, and she is picking up hard core unsigned and fresh artists. This is quite unusual and will be worth to follow with a special interest.

When the Moderna Museet re-opens in February, the art scenario will look quite different from when the Moderna closed. Perhaps will the large museum let itself get inspired by the young and vibrant art scene suddenly existing and perhaps show some of the less commercial young artists that will also need a showcase?

*Contemporary February 2004*

The art scene in Sweden, the larger country in the "middle" of the Nordic region, is largely concentrated to the capital of Stockholm. There are a tremendous amount of commercial galleries here, several kunsthalls and a Modern Museum, which is quite much for a quite small population. However, there has been some stagnation in the larger institutions in Stockholm lately. The recent shift in the kunsthalls of the southern cities of Lund and Malmö to rather young and interesting directors Lars Grambye and Asa Nacking, combined with the energy of Roseum in Malmö with the director of Charles Esche residing, there will certainly be a compelling nexus to Stockholm in the future.

When trying to try to keep up with what Hans Ulrich Obrist and Laurence Bossé called the "Nordic Miracle" in the catalogue for the exhibition Nuit Blanche in 1998, referring to a boom of Nordic artists making an international career, Swedish artists have done quite well. Nevertheless it has been somewhat of a struggle for the generation just a few years younger than Henrik Håkansson, Ann Sofie Sidén or Annika von Hausswoff —just recently has there been opening up a space just big enough for them to build international careers. The artists entering the scene are still quite young, good-looking and very ambitious, a perfect formula to make it in an ever toughening art world. Perhaps the perfect example of this is of course Annika Larsson, who just this summer of 2003 had a large solo show at Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel, Switzerland. It seems as if everyone wants to see and exhibit the videos of Larsson, and who can blame them? Her films are fresh and have mult faceted interpretation possibilities and triggers many thoughts that are fascinating stuff for anyone interested in Freudian or Lacanian theories. Her camera lingers on details, and is almost always about men and the interplay between them. Larsson are perhaps the largest star from the "New Kids on the Block", but there are several artists that are closing in behind her.

In the Italian Pavilion of the Venice Biennial 2003, curated by Francesco Bonami and Daniel Birnbaum, several young Swedes were twinkling. Among them was Jonas Dahlberg, also working with video and previously shown for instance at Manifesta 2002, Frankfurt. Dahlberg has in several videos filmed inside intricate paper models representing architecture. When the videos are later projected, displacements of the scale and the reality makes your perception wonder around and your brain to work overtime. Johanna Billing's video Project for a Revolution was also shown in the pavilion, in the café actually, perhaps just the right place for revolutions? However, the most interesting "young gun" from Sweden showing in the Italian Pavilion, originating from Uruguay, was probably Juan Pedro Fabra Guemberena. Fabra Guemberena's approach is that of a painter no matter what expression or medium he uses as his tools, be it video, film, photography or even music. The form by which the content is conveyed is as important as the content itself in his work. Images and videos of Swedish military in the environment of the Swedish landscape was the object in Venice. The images/videos presents somewhat of a paradox, since Sweden is supposed to be "neutral," and because of the fact that Sweden has not been involved in any wars for several hundred years. At the same time Sweden is manufacturing guns and selling them to other countries. Fabra Guemberena will be exhibiting at Statements in Basel 2004.

Chaper rents and a larger art scene are attracting many Swedish artists to go to Berlin, and Johan Zetterquist is one of them. Zetterquist works in pretty much any kind of medium one could imagine, and his installations cover many different mediums. Lately he has shown some interesting sculptures and drawings actually made as suggestions for public art pieces as for instance the Make-Out Tower: Towed Solution For Flat Cities. 2003, an architectural model of a skyscraper, each floor accessible by car, with a parking lot on top. Katarina Löfström, also Berlin based, have earlier on, and are still, working with mainly video with abstract content, be it computer animated or abstracted images from the real world. The images are closely connected with the soundtrack of the films. Meditative or almost hallucinogenic at times, her videos and projects are very attractive, and are also exploring some boundaries of art: between art and music; video; art and kitsch; and art and design.

Two artists often working together who showed in the section of IASPIS, International Studio Programme in Sweden, of Venice 2003 as well are Gunilla Klingberg & Peter Geschwind. Klingberg has for several years been working with logos and branding, and Geschwind has been working with sculptures made by different well-known packages. The large sculpture made by the plastic bags from different supermarkets shown in Venice was an ingenious mix of the two artists' work into one. Some interesting artists are of course still living in Stockholm and some are perhaps not yet known to a wider audience, but surely will be soon. Johan Thurfjell is preoccupied in narratives and how they are conveyed, be it in texts, manuscripts, films or images. Narratives are very important in everyone's lives throughout history. How the narrative is being told, or retold, affect how we comprehend the message and the reality. His latest exhibition at one of the most fresh galleries in Stockholm showed a complex architectural structure/sculpture seemed to be built from a writing desk of the artist, with the title Reach Out and Touch Faith — very poetic indeed. A different kind of poetry or narratives seems to be luring in the fragile drawings of Roger Andersson's. Very tender water colour drawings portray beautiful landscapes, flowers and miniature people in this environment, which can have horns like the devil or be engaged in activity not generally considered ideal or exemplary. Kids inhaling glue, shooting drugs, or having sex are portrayed with tender strokes, in almost High Renaissance style. Of course there are other names worthy of special interest, such as Tobias Bernstrup, Lars Sillberg or Jacob Dahlberg, with an increasing number of international exhibitions in the past and in the future to come. The new interest have natural connections to the effect in the export of Swedish curators to an international market, much similar to the effect Björn Borg had for Swedish tennis. After Björn Borg there was Mats Wilander, Stefan Edberg and several other tennis players who made international success, and after Pontus Hultén we have Sune Nordgren, Lars Nitvte, Maria Lind and Daniel Birnbaum. The work of IASPIS has also been tremendously important for the artists in Sweden, but contact and exchange in-between the scan-countries are surprisingly few. Hopefully this will change soon. In Oslo, the new large museum has a Swedish director, Sune Nordgren, previously director for Baltic Floor Mills, so inter-contacts can perhaps start to rise. The new curatorial players will probably continue to promote Swedish artists so there will hopefully be a place for all these artists, and more, in the future. The new international platforms will hopefully also allow the Swedes to continue to make impressing works with high quality. We will just have to wait and see.

*Contemporary May 2004*

With the change from David Elliott, currently running the Mori Art Center in Tokyo, to Lars Nitvte, former director of Tate Modern, London, as the director of Moderna Museet/The Modern Museum of Art in Stockholm, the local art scene had high expectations for the new programme of exhibitions. His first demanding task was however to organise the move from the recently raised building designed by Rafael Moneo (completed 1998) because of severe mould problems. Now the collection is out on loan to several institutions around the country, and "Moderna" is currently lodged in a small temporary space in downtown Stockholm. Here, a project with smaller solo exhibitions with an ambitious change every other week is currently running throughout 2003. The new space has been welcomed by most. It is flexible and fresh compared to the "old" buildings' parquet-laid floors and weak light within the spaces. The character of the exhibition programme has however not been accelerating anyone's pulse. The choices of artists are considered to be too safe and a bit dull. Just recently, Nitvte made a statement in an interview that it has become "mainstream to show young, contemporary art," and that "Sweden is discriminating against elderly artists." His

wishes for the Moderna are that it be avant-garde, and in Sweden this would, according to Nitvte, imply showing older and not-so-trendy artists, for instance Max Ernst. A quick poll amongst younger artists would tell quite a different story though. Traditionally the commercial galleries have shown a younger generation of artists, but there has been little rejuvenation amongst the galleries in Stockholm lately. Tragically, one of the best galleries in town, Zinc Gallery, closed down in January 2003. Fortunately there is one new gallery on the block - ALP. The owner, Peter Bergman, is showing mainly painting, but also artists not connected with any particular medium, like the talented Peter Geschwind.

Without proper platforms for exhibiting, the younger generation of Swedish artists have for the last couple of years been migrating like lemmings to Berlin, where the rents are lower and there exists an established network of contacts within the large population of artists from the other Nordic countries already residing there. The signals sent from a large institution like Moderna are perhaps not a perfect formula for enticing the artists to return. Perhaps it is time for the Modern Museum to concentrate solely on Modern art, and to constitute a new, contemporary institution that can take care of the emerging artists that are important for the generation slightly younger than Nitvte himself?

On the positive side, the privately run Magasin 3 has for a long time shown contemporary exhibitions. Earlier this year they have shown, among others, Doug Aitken, Ceal Floyer, Dan Graham and Carsten Höller. The pedantic finish of the space will surely be a perfect surrounding for a solo show with artist Aernout Mik from the Netherlands this springtime - something to look forward to indeed.

**Yves Mettler über Genf und Lausanne**  
**Interview am 4.Mai 2004 in Café Drechsler, Wien**

YM: Najá, also, ich kenn grundsätzlich nur Wien, Lausanne und Genf, einfach weil ich da studiert habe. Genf – is halt – in der Schweiz – in beiden Städten werden die Strukturen von sehr wenigen Leuten getragen, das merkt man ziemlich schnell, die Kreise sind eigentlich sehr eng, und, wahrscheinlich in der Genf eine der wichtigsten Bewegungen war, war diese John Armleder Gruppe. Also der hatte damals – das ist jetzt vor 20 oder 30 Jahren – der hat irgendwie richtig die Kunstszene ins internationale Gegenwartssystem eingebracht. Der hat auch die Knete dafür. CB: Was hat der gemacht? YM: Der war mit dieser Gruppe – äh – eine sehr bekannte Gruppe und hat so ziemlich absurde Sachen gemacht – also sowohl Aktionen, als auch Malerei wie auch

between the urban population and the newcomers to the big cities, debates on corruption, 'deep state' etc. One strand of the Left seem to have misinterpreted the concept of anti-imperialism and recently approached, dangerously, to an ultra-nationalist rhetoric. Another strand of it has always been critical to that kind of introverted perspective which perceive the world events reductively through the national concerns, yet the whole force of this latter strand is being spend to elaborate a correct stance in the face of a serious of traumas, the violence of everyday life and numerous social conflicts. The contemporary art scene is much embedded in this second strand, and the issues that are addressed remain limited to those local frictions, facing the danger of collapsing the artworks into national allegories and expressions of narcissistic drama. Just as the radical socialists in Turkey (with the exception of anarchists) are passive and hesitant in approaching anti-capitalist and global democracy movements, the contemporary art production stumbles in transcending its local agenda. Links made to other geographies are rather of a cultural nature, such as sharing the Ottoman past, the tensions between Islam and secularism, Mediterranean machismo etc.

I tried earlier to point at the paradox around the illusive autonomy of the artist, in which s/he is free to offer a harsh critique of the political situation and moral value system, but in expense of a direct communication with a larger audience. This lack of direct confrontation (with institutions and the public) harms also the potentialities for activism. Not much artistic intervention is practised on the social space and more than this, the exhibitional space is too easily surrendered to the luxury of the audience. A recent show in Projé4L, Istanbul brought together young artists from different cities in the country, Hall Altinder who curated the show used the suggestive title 'I'm Too Sad To Kill You (referring to a project of Marc Bejj) in framing the provocative character common to the contributing artists. There were a number of creative speculations on some delicate social issues, and in addition to this, the whole concept was hijacked by the perceivable presence of the artists from the Kurdish part of Turkey and the show was perceived by the event-thirsty media as the herald of a post-traumatic era for that region.

Yet, despite the controversial content of the artworks and the promise of change in the show, the heavy majority of the works didn't possess any marking on the exhibitional territory they were installed in. Nearly all of them were based on two dimensional presentations: paintings, photographs and videos. None of them referred to the conflictual social surrounding of the exhibition space and none of them performed any spatial change to the audience within the museum. Their spatial docility harmed the edgy dimension in content. But along the current tendency towards institutionalisation, things might change in the future. A denser touch with the audience and art institution might produce a more situated criticality.

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**Erdem Kosova: Istanbul Miracle**

Was it truly a miracle? When everything else has been collapsing in the country, (the buildings after the earthquake, the economy after two decades of rampant monetarism, common sense after the rentable programmes of monopolistic media) efforts to expand the space for contemporary arts have been bearing visible and serious fruits in recent years. Rival magazines, increasing contributors, the maturation of a dynamic generation and the arrival of a younger one, the opening of new venues, the establishment of a Biennial and a general feeling of things-can-only-get-better... Well, if we haven't experienced a miracle in Istanbul then why not invent one?

To be frank, one of the big benefits of neo-liberal politics on the cultural terrain was an opening of minds to the outer world and a liberation from the constraints of third-worldism in the seventies. There were more books and magazines on the shelves; there was an enhanced curiosity about the speculative products of global culture. In contrast to general tendency towards de-politicisation, this interest in other geographies brought with it an urge to contextualisation, conceptualisation and hence politicisation. Exceptionally sensitive to the social traumas of the mid-nineties, the scene of contemporary art has offered the leading example of liveliness in the country. Yet until recently, the spatial ground for production has not been equally strong. Perhaps fortunately, there is an absolute lack of state support and the struggles to keep progressive galleries alive remained rather chaotic. Incredibly conservative art academies and commercial galleries have executed a de facto embargo on works of 'doubtful' character. It's a paradox, but many emerging Turkish artworks were first exhibited in the venues of European capitals or global biennials. This meant that there was a serious problem for visual production to encounter the audience.

Today, the strength of the existing energy has forced certain things to happen and we can talk now about the presence of a traceable trajectory of places dedicated to contemporary art within the urban environment. Our route would start from the Istiklal Street, the avenue that has always been full of cultural kinetics and the cohabitation of establishment and subcultures, then proceed to the Niflantafi, the bourgeois quarter of the city, and finally end in the Leventi/Gütepe where the recently emerging finance district borders traditionally working class dwellings. Let's stop at a few specific locations.

1. Platform The institution is supported by Garanti Bank. It has a large exhibition space opening onto the constantly busy Istiklal Street and the large window on the basement level attracts the strolling crowd to have a look inside. Platform has an office upstairs, a library of 3500 books and an archive of approximately 140 contemporary Turkish artists. The collection also includes local and foreign art magazines, slides, videotapes and CD's. It serves students and researchers in Istanbul, as well as professionals working internationally. The pre-selections for contributions to global exhibitions and biennials from Turkish artists and critics are mainly a result of studies at this office. The presence of the financial foundation backing the project doesn't cast a shadow on the policies of Platform but perhaps this seemingly liberal attitude derives from the fact that some exhibition projects remain unrealised.

2. Istanbul Foundation for culture and Arts The curator of the eighth Istanbul Biennial is Dan Cameron. The exhibition, for which venues are scattered around the various districts of the city, vitalises the scene for a full month as a second circle of independent projects and shows support the core event. Unfortunately this animation has not spread to the whole of the year till now, since it is mainly motivated by the search to attract foreign guests, who, in turn, perform the role of older women of the family sent away to find a prospective bride for their beloved son, preparing the ground for future weddings.

3. Borusan: In a building of classic Beyoglu architecture, the institution, supported by a prominent company, organises events for various disciplines and hosts music performances, exhibitions, and conferences. It also includes the first private Music Library in the country. The exhibition hall is separate from the other facilities and dedicated to contemporary art, yet the shows rarely attain a satisfactory level of artistic vision.

4. Karsi Art Gallery This independent gallery is run by people coming from the humanist generation of the seventies and aims to

Installationen. Und der hat dann Silvi Fleury – also es gibt Anekdoten, die sagen dass Silvi Fleury eigentlich ein Produkt von dieser Gruppe ist. Also dass quasi die Gruppe Ernt. A quick poll amongst younger artists would tell quite a different story though. Traditionally the commercial galleries have shown a younger generation of artists, but there has been little rejuvenation amongst the galleries in Stockholm lately. Tragically, one of the best galleries in town, Zinc Gallery, closed down in January 2003. Fortunately there is one new gallery on the block - ALP. The owner, Peter Bergman, is showing mainly painting, but also artists not connected with any particular medium, like the talented Peter Geschwind.

FA: Waren die auch mit einem Raum irgendwie verbunden, gab es da irgendwas? YM: Also es läuft dann parallel, eben John Armleder und ein paar andere Leute, wie Lionel Bouvier, auch sehr wichtig in Genf. Lionel Bouvier ist Kunstkritiker, Kunsthistoriker und auch der hat eine Edition, also einen Verlag, heisst JRP, und der ist in Genf auch sehr wichtig, der ist in der ganzen Schweiz tätig als Kunstkritiker, also der schreibt extrem viel. Und der hat mit Armleder zusammen, und ein paar anderen Leuten noch, haben sie Forde geöffnet. Und das ist, sagen wir mal, der einzige unabhängige Kunstraum in ganz Genf (ich hab auch damals die Dings geschickt) Und damals hatten Ks das übernehmen können. Also das Prinzip ist, du kriegst den Raum mit einem Budget und 18 Monate, und du machst was du willst draus. Wirklich was du willst. Das geht über Bewerbung, das Geld wird hauptsächlich von der Stadt und dieser Association Forde gegeben und die lassen dich eigentlich machen was du willst. Und eben Klat waren dann sehr stark verbunden mit diesem Forde und haben dann richtig so eine Ebene geschaffen von Aktionen, Performance, Ausstellungen, die richtig so Pop und High-Art verbunden haben. Sehr sehr fein. Das ist sagen wir mal jung-kunstmäßig eine wichtige Bewegung gewesen. Man weiss nicht mehr so richtig ob sie noch existieren oder so. Die haben auch den eigenössischen Wettbewerb einmal gemacht und gewonnen und das zweite mal haben sie einfach eine Manka-Hand hingestellt auf ein Podium die so machte (zeigt Mittelfinger) und einfach voll mit Juwelen drüber, Ketten, mit Goldketten und damit war auch klar dass sie den Preis nicht gewinnen aber sie waren richtig – also die schaffen das dann, so auf diese Ebene irgendwie.

Das jetzt mal so eine von den wichtigen Strömungen. Eine andere – Kunstszene sonst in Genf: wichtige Orte sind Luise Asier – ne, nicht, von weitaus nicht so wichtig. Sagen wir mal die wichtigste Institution ist Le Mamco, das von Christian Bernard

geführt wird, schon seit jetzt zehn Jahren. Und das ist so - sehr Spitzenprogramm, also wirklich sehr High-Art angelegt. Die Räume werden immer vom Künstler dann auch bespielt und vorbemaht für eine Ausstellung. Also er kollaboriert wirklich auf mehreren Ebenen mit den Künstlern für jede neue Ausstellung. Also die haben eine ständigste Sammlung und eine nicht-permanente Sammlung und das ist so mal der höchste Punkt. Jetzt ist halt gerade der Streit weil der halb privat finanziert ist, die andere Hälfte von der Stadt und jetzt wollen die Sozialisten das kürzen weil die verstehen nicht warum High Art so gesponsert wird wenn das Volk das nicht versteht, und so Sachen halt. Aber Mamco ist sehr wichtig. Und dann ist – neben dem genb's Luise Asier, das ist so ein komisches Querprogramm – centre d'art contemporaine – das ist Programm ist nicht so gut. Weil so unentschieden – da geht's dann um Wissenschaft, Ausstellungen, die thematisch – also so wie in einem schlechten Kunstverein. Die stellen auch die - Genf hat so ein paar Stadtwerbwerke – Kantonswerbwerke, die jedes Jahr so kleine Ausstellungen funktionieren, so mini-eigenössische Wettbewerbe wenn man so will. Das ist sehr wichtig dass alle immer hingehen und schauen was gerade so gemacht wird. Dann gibt es eine ganz kleine Institution, die sehr wichtig ist, das Centre d'édition contemporaine. Die Frau, die das führt, ist sehr international angelegt und hat im letzten Jahr einen Preis gewonnen vom eigenössischen Wettbewerb, sie hat ein spitzen Programm und ist sehr brutal, sie hat aus einer ganz kleinen Institution, etwa 60 km, wirklich einen Standpunkt geschafft, der wirklich gut ist. Galeriemäßig ist Genf nicht so interessant, die wichtigste ist Pierre Hubert, der ist jetzt schon älter und zieht sich vom Galerieleben, wo immer Ausstellungen gezeigt werden, langsam zurück. Es wird erzählt, dass er irgendwo im Zolbereich, wo in der Freizeile soziale Gebäude stehen, so er eine ganze Etage voll mit Kunst haben. Das ist ein richtiger hardcore Sammler, Warhol und alles ist darunter, der hat sowieso ausgesorgt und muss das nicht mehr genießen. Er hat zum Beispiel Emanuelle Antille als erstes gezeigt. Es gibt noch die Galerie analien, die der Frau eines Laserdoktors gehört, der ästhetische Chirurgie macht, sie sammelt zum Beispiel Fotos von Cindy Sherman, die Bilder hängen dann in Arztkabinetten. Das ist mit so einer Hochbürgerlichkeit verbunden.

CB: Was ist das für ein Raum? YM: Es gibt die Galerie und es gibt die Klinik, in der Klinik sind auch Bildet. Aber die Galerie versucht eher jüngere zu zeigen, die in diese Spitze extrem ästhetisch reinpassen. So etwas gibt es merkwürdig weise in Wien nicht wirklich. Genf hat ein hohes Bürgertum, so ganz komisch sophisticated, nicht so wie hier, da muss man einfach mal zu einer Eröffnung gehen. Da gibt es auch eine kleine Strasse, in der alle Galerien sind, Galerie Mitterand, und andere. Es gab einmal ein Industrie Gelände, in dem ein paar Galerien und Ateliers waren, das ist abgebrannt.

promote contemporary art and invites scholars from the other disciplines to give series of talks.

5. Gallery Nev The gallery has been one of the most consistent institutions at the older centre of arts in Niflantafi. It promotes Turkish art from the 50s ]] onwards, but occasionally hosts contemporary artists as well. It played a considerable role in art publishing and still leads efforts to organise international fairs.

6. Galerist: Settled in the same eilte district, this young gallery exhibits contemporary Turkish art and occasionally hosts shows from the younger generation.

7. Projé4L Istanbul Museum of Contemporary Arts: In director Vasif Kortun's, words "the museum is located on the borderline of two dissimilar neighbourhoods: between Istanbul's pre-eminent new business centre — the Levent-Maslak corridor — and a much older working class neighbourhood, Gütepe. The working class neighbourhood is a reminder of the factories that were supplanted by the business tower, such as the high rise in which museum is located...." The museum doesn't deal with marketing works and doesn't keep a collection, yet it's open to collection exhibitions. It operates as a ground for young, dynamic and progressive art production. The lack of large scale shows in the city is to some extent compensated for by the recent activities of Projé4L.

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One of the few occasions that brought the history of the Turkish Republic with the dramatic verges of zeitgeist in May 1968, when the politically engaged university students translated their dissent into militant interruptions on the political system, in demand to extend the gained liberties of the constitution law of 1961. This upheaval didn't fully cancel out the bonds of the Left with the military apparatus, the state and nationalism; yet, a certain strand of that generation pursued a different path in formulating radicality: not the male fantasies of heroism, not the humanist naïveté about the unproblematised harmony between the national and the universal; not the messianic belief in a party-line, but an interest in the epistemological changes on the global scale, structural readings and the concept of difference in general. True, that the romanticist belief in expressionist individualism and bohemian exteriority from the society dominated the arts in the seventies, anarchistically; however certain isolated efforts gave the first glimpses of a shift towards conceptualisation, sober individualism, disenfranchisement in the body, and a new sort of radicality — both, in artistic and political terms. Altan Gürman's teachings in the Fine Art Academy, Füsün Onur's self-initiated exhibitions and Sarkis as a spiritual model operating in Paris encouraged a new generation of artists to redefine the artistic conventions in Turkey.

After a period of paralysis following the brutal coup d'état of 1980 and the monetarist policies implemented in the same year (another convergence of Turkish history with the global changes), two series of artist-initiated exhibitions (A Glimpse from the Avant-garde Turkish Art and Ten Artists Ten Works) settled to generate a collective voice against the conservatism of the academia. In the frame of these autonomous events, Ayse Erkmen, Serhat Kiraz and Yusuf Taktik forced the limits of the artistic disciplines of their formation, mostly through formalist analyses; Canan Beykal combined these conceptualist studies with a political agenda; and Gülsün Karamustafa and Cengiz Çekil employed the iconography and the everyday objects of the exploding suburbia.

The first years of the nineties were marked by a disillusioned reconsideration of the previous decade and bitter comments on the nightmarish state of the country held in the twin grips of state suppression and the cultural erosion of neo-liberalism. This criticality is enounced in a formal language that expanded the experimentality of the eighties — first in the installations of Hale Tenger and Selim Birsal and later in the photographs of Aydan Murtezaoglu and Bülent Canfar. The issues like asymmetries in gender relations, militarism and violence in the public and private spaces were more confidently formulated by these artists.

One advantage of the neo-liberal economics was that it reinforced artists' access to other geographies and art publications. In parallel to this, the biennial of Istanbul, matured in the nineties, took up the mission of exhibiting the contemporary tendencies in visual culture from the artist initiated exhibitions of the previous decade and connected the local scene successfully with international art circuits.

In the mid-nineties the political climate deteriorated further: the climax of the war between the Turkish army and the Kurdish institutions; the explosion of nationalism, private broadcast channels and the Turkish Pop; the spreading of terrorism to the big cities; the reckless operations of anti-terror squads; unaccounted murders; the tension between the army and the Islamic movement; the massacre of Sivas, in which 37 intellectuals were burned to death, and related assassinations on the leftist intelligentsia by fundamentalist terror supported by the CIA.

Having encouraged by the political stance of their forerunners and encountered with the recent productions from other cultures, a new generation of artists succeeded to give a strong response to this stiffling atmosphere. The aggressive and provocative tone in their initial productions, displayed in the self-initiated exhibition series of Youth Action and Performance Days, were slowly shifted towards other forms of transgression, such as self-eroticisation, use of subcultural parodies, ridiculing national(ist) icons, reflections on their own status as artists. Benefiting from the scholarship and residence programmes initiated by the multi-culturalist politics of the European social democracy that came into power in many countries in those years, some figures of that generation such as Esra Ersen, Serkan Özkaya, Vahit Tuna and Halli Altinder referred to the love and hate relationship between Turkey and EU, or more generally the problematic of centre versus periphery.

The economic expansion between the years 1994-97 had a belated effect on the cultural scene and despite the persistent economic crises since then, the art scene in Istanbul has recently attracted investment from some big companies and financial institutions. New places as Borusan, Platform and Projé4L set out to expand the field allotted to artists with experimental and radical approaches whose works do intensively circulate in Europe and global biennials but cannot find an exhibit space at home. The slim support of commercial galleries seems to have slightly taken up recently whereas the total absence of state academies are still closed to any sense of reform and recognition of what is going on in the contemporary field. Yet, the energies deriving from other disciplines still feed the art production and Istanbul attracts more and more energies from its surrounding. Just as the family and class formations of the artists have recently expanded to a considerably wider range (as Vasif Kortun put it, it was before a domain of 'good family machine') the force of Istanbul seems to stimulate effect on various nodes: on one hand it empowers the neighbouring ex-socialist terrain as it was exemplified in the 3rd Istanbul Biennial; on the other hand, it converts an experienced film director as Kutlug Ataman to the premiership of contemporary art; and lastly, it angers the young artists from Diyarbakir for its position as a neo-imperial centre. There might be more to see.

FA: Heißt das dass die Kunstszene eine Art Parkett für das Geldbürgertum ist? YM: Ja schon, es kreuzt sich komisch, weil es eine ganze Szene gibt, in der man immer wieder Namen bekommt, Armleder ist immer dabei, weil Armleder kommt von einer Familie, die die größten Hotels in Genf besitzt. Es gibt da eine Techno Szene, kennt ihr Miss Kittin? Die kommt zwar aus Grenoble, aus einer Haus Szene. Sie hat mit dieser Musik mit den Rhythmen angefangen, mit einer lausigen Frauentimme, aber halt white - kein schwarzer House, sondern weiss, in diesem Stil eben. Das verbindet sich auch mit Techno, Drum n Bass, Jungle, das ist auch eine wichtige Sparte. Es gibt eine ganze Underground Szene, das Escobar, das ein wichtiger Ort für Musik ist, wo die auch ganze Szene von Zürich und Lausanne nach Genf kommt, obwohl das nur ein Keller von 80qm ist.

CB: Das ist also die Techno und House Szene, die stark ist in Genf? YM: Ja, aber das ist nicht die große Szene, das ist die kleine. Es gibt auch eine ganze alternativ Szene mit Techno Labels, die von den Hausbesetzern kommt, das ist eine ältere Sache, die es schon seit 15 oder 20 Jahren gibt. Die ist natürlich auch größer und älter geworden, sie produzieren jetzt auch, es gab ein Zentrum, das heißt Artemis, das es immer noch gibt, jetzt ist es nicht mehr so wichtig. Das war der Anfang, es haben ein paar Leute zusammengelegt und dieses Techno Label für die Musikszene aufgemacht, das wieder sehr international funktioniert. Das ist klassische Techno Ebene, die legen echte House Abende auf, in einem Industriebetrieb Genfs.

FA: Hat sich die Hausbesetzer Szene also mit Techno identifiziert? YM: Ja, auch, es gibt die Alternativ Szene, die richtig auf Punkt sind, dann gibt es die ganze Reggae-Peace Szene und die Elektronik Szene, die es immer noch an der Cave 12 gibt. Die haben fast jede 2 Wochen ein neues Konzert mit immer sehr spritzigen Leuten, ä la Hecker, Zbigniew hat da aufgelegt, kommen Leute von Spanien, Portugal, Amerika, London, von Japan, aus dem Osten, von Überall. Das ist La Cave 12, die in einem besetzten Haus sind und die sich zur Kooperative gemacht haben. Man merkt halt, wenn man irgendwo an einem Platz zieht, fädelt sich irgendwo alles ein. Es gibt eine ganze Clique von Deutsch-Schweizern, die zusammen in Genf studiert haben und in einem besetzten Haus wohnen, das nicht mehr besetzt ist. Zu zweit haben die eine Vitrine gemacht und als Galerie erklärt. Alle drei oder vier Wochen haben die Leute ausgestellt, der heisst Peter Stoffel, wie die andere Frau heißt weiß ich nicht mehr. Peter ist in der Schweiz ziemlich erfolgreich mit Ausstellungen und so. Der ist mit der Deutsch-Schweizerischen Szene sehr verbunden.

FA: Mich würde interessieren, ob es viel Austausch zwischen den Deutsch-Schweizern und der französischen Schweiz gibt.

YM: Ja, schon, in Genf ist es eine sehr Genfer Szene. Es gibt eine andere Institution, Saint-Gervais, die von Simon Lamuniere geführt wird. Es ist aufgeteilt in Theater und Neue Medien, Simon Lamuniere macht die Neuen Medien. Es gibt jährlich ein Festival, abwechselnd Video und Neue Medien, ComputerKunst, das war ein ziemlich wichtiges Festival in den letzten zehn Jahren. Ein Freund von mir war in der Jury für die Vorauswahl und er meinte, das ganze sei total lasch geworden. Er konnte die Entscheidungen nicht verstehen, da waren viele persönliche Interessen mit im Spiel. In Genf gibt es 4 oder 5 Orte, wo man hingehen kann, wir waren immer in den zwei gleichen Orten, ausser wenn es einmal etwas anderes gibt. Abendkultur ist also ziemlich langweilig, ich finde es sehr langweilig dort zu leben. Sicher gibt es viele Ausstellungen dort, aber wenn man einmal im Monat dorthin geht, kriegt man eh alles mit. Dann gibt es die Schule, das ist die einzige Kunstuniversität in der Schweiz, alle anderen sind angewandte Hochschulen mit einer Sektion für bildenden Kunst.

Genf hat in den letzten zehn Jahren einen sehr liebens Direktor, der aber ziemlich lasch ist und es nicht richtig ausgenutzt hat. Genf ist von der Schule her unidentifizierbar geworden. Auch wenn es nicht schlecht ist, jedes Jahr beim eigenössischen Wettbewerb kommen immer noch 40 Prozent aus der Schule, aber dafür dass es die einzige Univer-sität ist, ist nicht viel los. Ich hatte eine Professorin dort, die hat das Sokrates Netzwerk komplett ausgebaut, sie ist selbst in jede Universität gegangen und hat Werbung bei den Studenten gemacht: hat doch ab und geht wo anders hinschauen. Jetzt ist das eher üblich für Studenten für 3 oder 6 Monate wegzugehen, sie hat das in den letzten 6 Jahren alleine aufgebaut. Sonst hat die Uni sehr wenig Identität, die Professoren sind dort seit Jahren, es sind sehr wenige in den letzten Jahren neu dazugekommen. Es waren immer Professoren, die dann selbst in der Kommission die vom eigenössischen Wettbewerb drin waren. Ausser der Bewegung von Klatt, gab es in Genf in den letzten Jahren lange keinen richtigen Generations-Push mehr, also dass eine ganze Generation von jungen Studenten sich zusammen tut und es schaffen eine Bewegung zu bilden. Jetzt machen immer ein paar deutsch-schweizer Studenten etwas, die vor 2 Jahren fertig gemacht haben. Aber da fehlt es ein Radikalität und richtiger Durchsetzung, alles so lieb und gemeinschaftlich, ich finde es fehlt total an Positionierung, überhaupt in der ganzen Stadt. Es fehlt an Positionierung, dass man richtig sagen kann, da richtet sich etwas aus, oder so. Man weiss schon, was die einzelnen Ex-Studenten machen, aber man kriegt es nicht richtig mit und wenn sie rauskommen, dann nicht wenn sie in Genf bleiben. Forde war im letzten Jahr von ehemaligen Mitstudenten von mir gemacht worden, das war ein sehr ambittöses Programm aber letztlich haben sie es nicht geschafft eine Identität zu schaffen. Auf der formalen und inhaltlichen Ebene ist dass immer irgendwo zwischen High Pop und Super Aktionismus. In der Schule selbst gab es eine Professorin, die sehr 60er und Feminismus angelegt war, die hat einen Raum organisiert, in dem seit ungefähr 20 Jahren öffentliche Ausstellungen organisiert werden. Das hatte vor 15 Jahren ziemlich Erfolg und einen Namen, als wir Diplom gemacht haben, habe wir auch eine Ausstellung organisiert, da fehlte es auch an Positionierung. Das ist überhaupt in der Schweiz ein Problem,

**From:** Orkhan Huseynov  
**Subject:** about Baku art world  
**Date:** 24.05.2004, 12:49

The main image of Baku and Azerbaijan abroad is natural resources, like oil and caviar. This is not really what I'd like to have as an image of my city and my country. The most surprising thing foreigners notice in Baku, that the city is not that 'oriental' as they expected to see. Though there are some Islamic architecture samples, particularly in the old part of the city, Icheri Shahar (Inner town), located inside of old city walls. The outer city, the centre, mostly built in the end of 19th century and the beginning of 20th century, has many beautiful European buildings owned by oil millionaires of that period.

Baku was the first place, where oil industry became a serious business for such firms like Nobel brothers, Siemens, Standard oil etc. During the Soviet period the city was like an oil Academy for students from Middle East, Africa and South and Central America. The Soviet state also used Azerbaijan specialists for promoting soviet art and culture in the Orient.

Nowadays, Baku is getting bigger and noisier. As many foreign guests say, it's overcrowded with cars. The new high buildings are emerging almost in every free space in the city. The situation in the art world and art funding is closer to what happens in Istanbul. There are not so much foreign foundations in Baku, like, for example in Tbilisi, the big financial streams pass the modern art world and go to other areas. So, we always rely on ourselves.

Such organization for contemporary art, like ours, which organizes contemporary art exhibitions (not painting and other 'traditional' stuff), always face similar funding problems and need to look for different ways of financing. Some help comes from local Soros foundation, and foreign Embassies.

Baku has its small souvenir and painting/graphics/sculpture art market. A few galleries and art dealers run that business quite successfully. That's why there are many artists still preferring to work with these materials instead of using new media. The 'Azerbaijan International' is a very helpful magazine for promoting such kind of artists.

There are three main organizations in Baku, that work in the field of contemporary art: Zamanin Qanadlari (director. Leyla Akhundzadeh), ARTS etc. (director Chingiz Babayev), LABIRINTH group (director. Sabina Shikhinskaya) ZAMANNIN QANADLARI (est. 2000) organization organizes art festivals, international exhibitions

ARTS etc. running the information centre in the State Fine Art Academy LABIRINTH group makes ecological and social art projects

Fine Art Academy is a new institution in Azerbaijan, but now it has become the one big organization with large amount of art students. The rector of the Academy is a famous soviet-time sculptor. Though the Academy authorities are quite conservative, they don't bother students to use contemporary art forms and allow conducting workshops, seminars on new media art in the building. Academy includes 2 institutions: Art College (in the very centre of the city), and main Academy building (ateliers, info-centre, sport hall, small hotel).

There is also Azerbaijan Artists Union- the heritage of soviet art system. The director of this organization 'Farkhad Khalilov', abstractionist painter, who became a leader of the organization in late 80. The union owns a few spaces in the city, and has relation to the government (as during the soviet time, some government authorities consider the Union the best artistic organization). The Union deals with old-fashioned, conservative artists.

**From:** Caroline Ferreira  
**Subject:** Paris  
**Date:** 07.06.2004, 9:33:

My impression on Paris is rather positive and unless I used to think that concerning contemporary art Paris was less interesting than, say London or New York, or Berlin, and that I think that to a certain extent it is still true. I think the best quality about Paris is the cultural diversity. I like very much cinema and contemporary dance and I must say that in that field, Paris offers a wide range of possibilities, much better than London for example where I use to leave for one year and where I was really unhappy concerning these 2 fields.

I think that since the opening in 2002 of Le Palais de Tokyo and Le Plateau, we have really interesting exhibitions (even if Palais has been much criticized) with international artists for le Palais and more French or European artists with le Plateau.

One of the problems for Paris is that there is a lot of interesting things happening in the suburbs: la Galerie de Noisy le sec, la Ferme du Buisson à Noisiel, Le centre d'art de Brétigny etc. All these centres are doing a great job but are difficult to go to and it's a bit of a problem. If you take these places in account, the contemporary art scene in Paris is very strong and lively.

The galleries are quite good too, except still that the art market is not so strong: among my favorite Chantal Croslet, Marian Goodman, Yvon Lambert and GB agency are doing a great job.

Jennifer Flay as you may know, has taken up the artistic direction of the FIAC, to try to renew it. So, we will see in October but I am sure she will manage to change things. Concerning the private side, we are still waiting for the opening of Fondation Pinaudt till this week-end, opened near Bastille, the Maison Rouge, a private foundation by Antoine de Gaebert, which seems to have a very good programmation. The Jeu de Paume which was doing quite a classical programmation with middle-age, or old artists (like George Mathieu I) is going to change. Regis Durand, former director of Centre national de la Photo (which had an amazing programmation) is taken the direction of this art center, which will be from now on, dedicated to image in a wide sens (from patrimonial photography to video). It should be interesting.

Centre Pompidou (National Museum of Modern Art) which programmation was disappointing in contemporary art, has opened a new place (Espace 315) within the museum completely dedicated to contemporary art: it opened with Urs Fisher and Koo Jeong A and is curated by Christine Macel and Alison Gingeras which will commission production of new works to these artists. I must say the size of this place has been a bit criticized regarding its size: espace 315 as it is 315 m2 !!! within such a big museum I totally understand these critics. Last thing the programming of event and lecture at Centre Pompidou is really diverse and interesting.

There are also a lot of different artists run spaces as Grassbox, or Public, small places but which also are doing interesting things with a small budget.

Last thing, I think that French artists are doing a great job and are taking more and more importance on the international art scene such as Dominique Gonzales Forner, Pierre Huyghe, Anri Sala, Melik Ohanian, Xavier Veilhan or Mathieu Mercier. A new generation of younger artists is also coming such as Laurent Montaron, Guillaume Lebou, Kristina Solomouka, Bruno Peinado, etc which is also very promising.

**From:** Agata Dutkowska  
**Subject:** Krakow  
**Date:** 13.06.2004, 18:13

Kraków is said to be the "true" capital of Poland, or at least the cultural capital – it has a strong aura and tradition of being the place where art (be it visual arts, theatre or literature) is being done. It is in fact a very beautiful city (old, you can walk by foot everywhere, very slow/relaxed tempo of life), so these two factors have made me want to live here from Gdansk – which lies in the north of Poland. Living, studying and working here for five years, I had the possibility of getting to know the city and creating my own opinion about it.

Kraków is not a real art-centre, nor is it a cultural hype. There are indeed a lot of events, but very few are fresh and inspiring. But the bohemian flair which is in the air,

makes up for it, so one doesn't normally feel it (I mean that there are almost no good events). This is the great paradox of this city! It is also very traditional and conservative, what is strongly connected to Catholicism. I read somewhere, that it is the second city after Rome in Europe with the biggest number of churches – and even if it is not true, one gets the feeling that the church as an institution has a big influence upon the city. By traditional I mean e.g. what is being shown in theatres. The most influential & creative Polish directors have studied here, but then moved to Warsaw, to work there...

(you should know that the general atmosphere about modern art in Poland is the one of scandal and blasphemy, because of some artists having used religious symbols in their work, which caused a hot, country-wide discussion, demonstrations of conservative catholic groups followed, some artists were sued to court, one even got a sentence to pay a fine for insulting the religious feelings of "the majority"). Poland is a crazy country, all those contradictions, tensions, being on the verge, on the periphery, on the border between – Western Europe and the former eastern block, a new member of the EU, not fully democratic yet, very homogenous ethnically, not prepared for diversity, not a Ueberflusgesellschaft, but trying to consume/act like one. For me it is extremely interesting and annoying at the same time. I don't know about your exact ideas/preferences about where to make your project, but I guess eastern europe is the place where common space is endangered with becoming a space of official (state etc) & commercial signs only, with little consciousness of the people, that it could be their space and they have the right to use it, reclaim it, change it. The trend is to hide in the privateness. It is a topic, that I am seriously concerned with, so forgive me this longish interruption). What is unique about the city is that it has an unbelievable number of clubs, bars and the nightlife is flourishing, and the music scene as a consequence too.

Institutions – in fact there is only one gallery worth mentioning – Bunkier Sztuki (google it up by typing bunkier sztuki krakow, i don't remember the webpage), which is the place where new art is being exhibited, it is also a platform for discussion series about art, literature, new media, social issues etc – they organize meetings, film presentations, concerts. Also the Goethe Institut is striving to become engaged in bringing art to Krakow and supporting it. The biggest longest event they supported is called "what is architecture?" and lasts since 2 years – it is a series of prelections & meetings about architecture, a process of re-thinking architecture involving the most interesting architects, philosophers of culture, journalists etc.

At the moment the Goethe Institute is trying to pursue a project "freiehandelszone-kunst", which aim is to bring art into cityspace, (but so far they show video art in closed rooms), the co-ordinator is definitely a good person to talk to, especially because she seems to know virtually everybody in the local art-scene and has professional reasons for researching the subject you are interested in. She is young and easy to approach. Her name is Beata Seweryn.

The other person you should contact is Roman Dziadkiewicz, the founder of an art group, which later developed into a foundation "fundacja 36,6". www.36i6.org (a good webpage in english aswell) They strongly focus on social issues in their art work, they have attended the social forum in Bombay, but act also locally – bringing very good art, new music, and creative spirit into small, backward cities. Check out the webpage of the big polish-german border-art\_project www.dialogoci.org and have a look at their part in it. Roman as well as Beata are people to ask about the Krakow art-school, as I could only tell you that it is rather conservative and closed but maybe my contacts with it were superficial.

And last – there is another similar group – Biogrupa www.biogrupa.org, which was doing for the whole last year an art-project in Nowa Huta, a very interesting, often neglected part of Krakow – formerly an utopian socialist steelwork settlement, built out of nowhere, now a problematic, post-industrial district (sozialer Brennpunkt, how do you say it in english?), so this project consisted of doing video art, theatre, working with young people, breakdancers etc. It was a big project supported by the european culture foundation from netherlands. For details contact: Kuba Szreder.

And there are rumours that in October 2004 there is going to start a big, independent cultural centre in one of the empty factories in another district of Krakow, the focus is going to be visual arts and electronic music, it could be a good place for you, if you decided to do part of your project here. The person in charge: Monika.

artgroup pipal, the one I am working at, is a group of 4 people, we concentrate on the digital and communicative aspects of art and are interested in interrupting the Alltag (I was looking again for an english term, but couldn't find an exact one), placing artwork in unusual sceneries, focusing on interaction with people and developing urbangame-scenarios. We want to co-operate with similar groups, especially in Eastern Europe, therefore we came up with the idea & organized polish-ukrainian workshops of streetart. Some of our work includes:

- lawki (benches) – designing and sticking official stickers on a number of benches in a ring-park in the centre of Krakow, saying that the bench belongs to some groups: "catholics only", or other distinct or completely neglected groups in our society – unemployed, single fathers etc. The other part was making photos during the next days of people sitting on the banks & talking to them, May 2003.

- po co to (do you need it?) – a stencil which we sprayed on ca. 50 large dimensional commercial billboards in Krakow, which advertised different products with lifestyle slogans, mainly in November 2002.

- polnische traumfrauen suchen deutsche männer – performance in Galerie Zero, Berlin, April 2004. Well, it was a performance dealing with the above mentioned topic.

- tu i teraz (here and now)- placing large-scale photos of some (apparently uninteresting) sites in the city in the same site, unofficially – like ad posters as well as officially – 2 were placed in the main hall of the railway station or in some milkbars (do you know what a milkbar is?), or completely illegally covering some large-scale billboards with the here&now photo

- cartoons– sticking cartoon bubbles to faces on billboards, with text that is poetic or in any way disturbing the message of the ad.

(by now you must think we are obsessed with billboards..in fact we love them because they provide "free" space for communication in the city and hundreds of people see them everyday)

- polska (poland), zycie ma smak (life has taste), robicie kontrkulture (make counterculture) – video plus performance during "Reminisjencje teatralne", an international festival for socialcritical theaters in March 2004, Krakow.

- samba-parades, urbangames – e.g. eurobusiness-konstczyn – we come up with a large number of ideas for rituals, feasts and interactive games to be performed in cityspace – sambaparade (May 2003/May 2004) is an unofficial carnival event out of nowhere, which takes control over the main square for half an hour and vanishes, ca. 100 people are involved in being dressed-up playing, dancing, preparing it.

- We also designed some games based on scouting games of looking for messages in the wood and going a route, our idea is to have adults exploring the city space, getting further by interacting with clerks, workers in institutions and shopkeepers, whom we first convince to take part in the game. Eurobusiness is a project, which we will do next week being invited by the foundation 36,6 to join their programme during "dialogoci". It will be an open-air version of the monopoly game, where you buy land to put there hotels &stuff. We will reconstruct it with different principles and rules on the area of old Kóstrin, which used to be a German Festung (english?), now lies on the Polish side and is devastated park with ruins and only a net of the former architectonic body. It was destroyed during the war, more on the webpage of dialogoci, which as a whole will take place there.

- e-utopia it is our new, very beloved baby, a project we just started. We want to use & explore the possibilities of internet as a medium for horizontal, independent communication and ask people (in Poland) involved in a very wide range of social movements, autonomous groups, organizations, groups, even NGO's to send texts about their utopias, visions of "good (s)/[l]aces", (u)-topos – non-existing place, eu-topos – a good place) not really social order, not the old utopias, but the state of

affairs they fight for. Or to be honest, we'll accept every comment on utopia, critical, superficial, naive, radical, conservative, all these texts will be a base for a theatre performance, which will be shown during the celebration of the 10th birthday of Rozbrat in Poznan (August 2004), the biggest & oldest & most interesting independent cultural centre in Poland, functioning as an besetztes Haus, (ich frage mich warum ich mich bemühe das alles auf englisch zu schreiben, wobei ihr beide deutschsprachig seit und mir immer Wörter fehlen, Let's switch to Deutsch). Die Geburtstagsfeier wird eine Woche dauern und in dieser Zeit haben wir vor Elemente von e-utopia in den öffentlichen Raum der Stadt zu bringen z.B. mit Audio-installationen.

Ich hoffe, dass ihr euch bis zu diesem Punkt durchgelesen habt, weil jetzt kommt das wichtige, d. h. eine Berleikerklärung von unserer Seite euch zu helfen, z. B. wenn ihr nach Kraków für eine Vorbesichtigung kommt, können wir vorort weitere Kontakte vermitteln, euch mit Leuten verabreden, Unterkunft besorgen, Dolmetschen, Poland is Ahnung was ihr noch alles braucht. Natürlich wenn wir in der Zeit da sind

**From:** fran illich  
**Subject:** mexico  
**Date:** 14.06.2004, 12:44

sorry for not being able to reply to your mail as i would like to, but my present activities have taken my time.... at the moment i'm shooting a film which is plotted by a poll on the web... i will be leaving mexico city for a few weeks to work in la habana & sao paulo...

i believe, just as you said, that mexico city is a very complex city to try and define in the context of one mail... there are 23 million inhabitants here, and i believe just the main university in the city has something around a million people there.... the art scene is just as complex, and at times, many of the artistic things happen completely outside of the art scene -there is a severe division here between art and streets, art and society...

i would love to be able to answer your questions, but i believe it would take more than an essay, and then it would only be my point of view....

**From:** Melki Amihai  
**Subject:** Re: Tel Aviv  
**Date:** 21.06.2004, 12:52

Let me present myself. I am 30 years old and I was born in Israel. But I spent the biggest part of my life in France (20 years). I studied Art and Art History in Paris (Art institute of the Sorbonne and Ecole du Louvre) and also Museology (Ecole du Louvre). I came back to Israel 5 years ago and continued to study Art History (Tel Aviv University) and I also took a one year artist class at the Avni Art Institute.

I am a painter and a photographer. I showed my work in different exhibitions in Paris and in Israel. Also, to make a living, I am working for 4 years as the assistant of the curator of the Israeli Phoenix Art Collection. This collection is the most important private (and corporate) collection of Israeli art in Israel.

As someone who studied and worked in Paris, I was in contact with different people and institutions. By investing myself in my integration in the Israeli art scene, I was able to notice a multiple range of resemblances and unlikeness between Paris and Tel Aviv.

Concerning the Tel Aviv art scene I feel the crude absence of invested money in cultural activities. The exhibitions are very commercial oriented or (maybe worse) politically correct oriented.

**From:** Eugen Radescu  
**Subject:** Bucharest  
**Date:** 13.08.2004, 14:13

I attached the text about the Romanian art scene, the text was write by Vladimir Bulat which is the most important art critic in Romania, you can use this text for your project.

*About the National Museum of Contemporary Art and mostly about its non-existence*

At the middle of the last decade, the Slovenian theorist Renata Salecl wrote a substantial text about the building in the center of the capital of Ceausescu's huge palace, scary and empty at that time. Its massiveness - impressive through proportions and eclectic forms - reminded of that period when the "mastodon" gave off fright and mystery at the same time among the tourists and local people. For many this was a contemporary embodiment of Draculaeland. However, after a short time the Romanian Parliament moved here and soon after the political power from that moment posing as "Mecena" of the contemporary arts opened the Constantin Brancusi art gallery. Adrian Nastase, then the speaker of the Parliament, declared that he pays special attention to the local artistic scene, stating that he is a careful collector (in fact an owner ) of Romanian art as well.

Nobody could realize then that this political figure will create the future museum of contemporary art, its establishment being discussed for a long time. The discussions were superficial and rather sterile. Now, being Prime Minister, Nastase manipulates with ease this idea which naturally has already started to materialize. His dream begins to shape and a space for this museum is allocated in the back wing of the Parliament. Why here? Not with the very intention to control thoroughly the situation? The fitting out and the turning of the huge rooms into exhibition spaces have started, while the debates about its necessity and function did not cease, but on the contrary have intensified. Could the Museum of Contemporary Art really maintain its autonomy, being a subsidized structure of the state, and moreover sharing the same building as that of the Parliament as well as having an "appointed" director? How will our politicians feel close to its proximity, considering that most of them are narrow minded and old fashioned, more prone to looking back rather than ahead?

After this introduction I would like to make a quick case study of the Romanian contemporary art scene. For me, the intrusion of the political power in the contemporary art field seems cynical to say the least. The state does not have any plan or coherent cultural policy for the promotion of Romanian art at home or abroad. Romanian art is lacking dialogue with the international cultural system: our artists are always almost absent from the international art scene and the foreign curators do not visit us.

If however it happens that some of them wander in the Carpathians' areas they will look for a projection of some legends and fantasies, therefore a more ethnological material, not an authentic contact with the reality of this place. This does not seem to bother anyone; the government avoids any kind of lobby for the artistic community. It is more important for them to launch the Contemporary Art Museum, to create a collection to show the world that here everything is normal although this normality is very illusory.

Recently, the Ministry of Culture has started a contest for the artistic projects that will represent Romania at the Venice Biennial. Until 1998 there was a single coordinator -Dan Haulica- probably appointed for life. Things took another direction and Haulica accepted that a new generation of artists and curators have to be allowed to manifest themselves. Internally the dinosaurs of the communist era continue to dominate the entire artistic spectrum and the young have reserved for them only a caricatural and marginal role. Here it is more shameful and embarrassing to be a contemporary artist than a prostitute! Almost every youth project is perceived as a joke or an incident game. Therefore it is not surprising that the works of a group like "Subreal", known in Europe, remain almost unknown locally. The recent exhibition of the group shown in Bucharest was presented to an almost empty gallery and the reviews were noticeable by their absence.

Since December 2000 till February 2001, at the National Art Museum it was organized the "Transitionland" exhibition, where there was discussed the role of contemporary art in a country in permanent transition, in the confusion of things never brought to completion. "Transitionland" has become a comprehensive image of Romanian art, recognized artists such as Geta Bratescu and Horia Bernea were presented close to artists such as Teodor Graur, Marielena Preda-Sanc, Iosif Kiraly,Gheorghe Rasovsky, Lia and Dan Perjovschi concentrated in the '80ies. Alongside were invited younger creators, Mircea Cantor as well as the eccentric group "Rostopasca". The exhibition had a big press coverage. Personally I thought that the curator Ruxandra Balaci minimized with too much ease the differences between generations, concepts and discourses. The curator overlooked on purpose many of the artistic expressions of that particular period, while including a series of large black and white photographs representing the hideous reality of the '80ies captured by Mihai Crozeanu before the communist collapse. What is the point to insert in the actual esthetical and critical discourse an element of a frozen and now obsolete documentary as a disturbing factor? What purpose does it serve? There is no secret that few of our exhibitions have a sole artistic point. Moreover our

Through my (not so many) contacts with Israeli artists, I found it difficult (but not impossible) to engage a dialogue on art. I believe that this difficulty finds its roots in the complete different situation from a quiet and rich European environment and the sunburned and desperate atmosphere of a country in construction that is still engaged in conflicts.

There is no doubt that the political problem of Israel concerning the conflict with the Palestinian people is the central debate here. It is something very difficult to deal with in an artistic dimension without being "propagandist", "politically correct" or "sinfully indifferent".

But even if for an European eye it is difficult to distinguish the quality of the Israeli art, I learned to appreciate it through my work in the Israel Phoenix Art Collection. This collection of more than 1500 works of art is an historical collection, presenting Israeli art from the beginning of the 20th century to today. The intimacy with the works, that I have the privilege to experience for 4 years, brought me the possibility to evaluate the connections of the Israeli art with the European and the American art. I can therefore distinguish the local originality if the Israeli art, and appreciate it.

As a culture in construction, the Israeli culture is building itself from the mix of different cultural backgrounds (European, oriental, Jewish...). The tension between the influence of international artistic standards and local ambitions of cultural identity definition, is present in the art practice as well as in the art institutions and in the art market

Here are web sites that might give you an indication about the different dynamics of the Tel Aviv art scene:

- The Tel Aviv Museum: The most influential museum in Israel with the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Its director and chief curator is Prof. Mordechai Omer, Art historian, who wrote books and catalogues about the main Israeli artists. He is also teaching Art History at the Tel Aviv University and is the director of the Art Gallery of the University. http://www.tamuseum.com/  
 - The Herzliya museum is more a space for temporary exhibitions of Israeli contemporary art (Herzliya is a residential city/suburb in the north of Tel Aviv). The curator of the museum is Daliah Leviv. http://www.herzliyamuseum.co.il/  
 - The digitalartlab is a new space for contemporary art exhibitions and events situated in the city/suburb of Holon, in the south of Tel Aviv (where Stephanie organised exhibitions). http://www.digitalartlab.org.il/index\_en.htm

Different art galleries

http://www.dvrgallery.com/  
 http://www.alonsegevalgallery.com/  
 http://www.nogagallery.co.il/  
 http://www.rg.co.il/  
 http://www.sommergallery.com/  
 http://www.talesthegallery.com/  
 http://www.ofelcintealavgallery.com/  
 http://www.chelouchnegallery.com/

Site of the Bezalel art academy (MFA studies are in Tel Aviv)  
 http://www.bezalel-mfa.net/

The main Art magazine

Studio Art Magazine (they do not have a web site yet but they already have an address www.studiomagazine.co.il

Tel Aviv is a dynamic and sunny city. The Mediterranean sea and the hot climate are determining the way of life of the city. My great love in this city is its architecture. In the 1930' and 1940', the International Style of modern architecture gave to this new city its modern character. The city was the first Israeli city (non-biblical), created from sand in 1909, growing out from a neighborhood of Jaffa. Even if the historical

tendency to look back is an inherent reflex of a profound and troubling anxiety from a not very distant past.

The intended goal of the curator was to demonstrate that the origins of new media art are to be found in the amateur and "primitive" films of Geta Bratescu or in the domestic photo sessions of Ion Grigorescu from the end of the '70ies (in fact he was absent from this exhibition). But even this intention is deeply mystified. Therefore, new media was present in a single work, the installation of Alexandru Patatic. He offered to the public the documentation and the "internal structure" of the mechanism that animate the activity of the communication channel "nettime.ro", the Romanian version of the international network "nettime.org" (a group of internet debate). Transitionland, in several aspects was rather pretending than showing a credible face of things. This caused a series of negative reviews. We can add that the idea itself of this show was born as a testy reaction to the statement of Giancarlo Piretti - the owner of Flash Art - who had said that "Romanian art is even less interesting than the Albanian one". Probably Piretti really believed in this judgement of his, since he financed the organizing of Tirana Biennial, not even putting the step in Bucharest. Here, it's true, has arrived M-me Catherine Millet who, when back in Paris, published a short presentation in her hypocritical monthly artreview. To conclude, the international echo of this proceeding seemed too weak and vague to the owners of big national illusions... Of course!

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At the present edition of Manifesta 4 Biennial, the Romanian presence has resumed (apothecially) to only one participant - Ioan Godeanu, the promoter of the group "The Institute of Construction and Deconstruction". Despite the fact that this team, who promotes post-conceptualism, had existed since 1998 and had already edited lately 10 issues of its bulletin, attention upon it is almost inexistent. The project presented at Manifesta by Godeanu, called One way ticket, is consuming within a metallic box, catapulted with the help of a parachute on the rib of the ancient cathedral in Frankfurt on Main: it was a parody of the inhuman conditions in which some people accept living, in search of the Western "heaven", living in a total unawareness in such suffocating containers. On the container's floor there was a projection of a detailed map of the city, with many marks of the places which are "vital for the immigrant's survival". More than this, our young artist seriously involved himself in the functioning process of the Biennial: he sold Red Bull in the Manifesta café and guided through its several venues the journalists came from all the corners to visit it.

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One must clearly state that in the present art situation it is better to impose yourself, as an artist, under the umbrella of a group than as an individual. You have more chances. You are more real. The public perceives you easier. The Artists' Union magazine "Arta" dedicated a special dossier to this phenomenon. The youth is constituting its own communities, in order to bring on the art scene their own "techniques" and "tactics" of action. Some of these groups are crystallizing themselves in the University. Now there are relatively many groups - Cutter, Rostopasca, Eccou, Crimul, Palnia, Super Us, 2D, The Construction &Deconstruction Institute etc. Some of them develop their projects (or just gravitate) around a few exhibition spaces and galleries (S.P.A.C.E., Galeria NOUA, Atelier 35, De Interece, Galeria etc.), and this means that each one "is inhabiting" its own territory and administrates it after distinct rules. The contacts between groups have an accidental character and the collaborations (dialogues) are happening only due to personal relationships of individuals with similar views.

I find it adequate to evoke also the fact that there is a major discrepancy between the province and the capital. Probably, after the French model. In other cities than the capital there have been developed local structures, some of them worthy of real interest. There appeared magazines and spaces for exhibitions. For example, in Cluj one can find the galleries Protokoll, Atas, Sinden, and the magazines - Version, BALKON, Philosophy & Stuff. The city of Iasi will soon be proud with an international biennial, after there have already taken place here - under the umbrella of Vector association - four editions of "performance art" festival. While the periphery is seriously tending to undermine the capital's authority, this last one is wasting itself in "fine details" and "delicate ornaments", instead of building a mature, coherent and logic critical discourse. The desire and the aspiration to give birth to the Contemporary Art Museum undermines and eclipses the mere existence of art. It makes it enter the shadow corner - becoming too insignificant to place itself in the center. It seems that the whole local art scene has stepped back in a secondary position, right behind the mastodon.

The evolution of this institution deserves a special attention and the most lucid problematizing. As, let's be clear, the baby is now coming to life suffocated. It breathes in vain - it's already useless, even before making its most-wished for and long expected appearance.

*vladimir bulat, August-October, 2002*

*This text was originally written in Russian, and published in Moscow ART Magazine, no. 47, December 2002 (Romanian version - the author, English translation - Simona Nastac).*

architecture is neglected and only few buildings are restored, the city seems to me fresh and open to the future, colorful and dynamic. The easy going way of life is appealing, what makes people less interested in deep thoughts (the raw actuality is enough). They are more attracted by entertainment and decoration. Everything is good to avoid dealing with the burning reality of our area (but here I might speak about myself more than about others).

Art schools and Institutions are prominent in the progress of an artist. The main institutes are the Bezalel Academy and the Midrasra Institute. Teachers are pushing their favorites (in this role, the "historical" figure of Raffi Lavie at the Midrasra Institute was very influential – now retired).

Of course, all what I wrote is a real small part of what is happening here. I will be happy to give you more information in the future. I am also suggesting you to come to visit Tel Aviv and see by yourself the reality of a city that I can handle just a little part of it. I hope this e-mail will give you a satisfactory early point of view

**From:** Ani Riaboshenko  
**Subject:** Georgia  
**Date:** 13.07.2004, 18:37

If I understand everything well, you want my description of our town or any other Georgian town and Georgia as well. I don't think it's necessary to explain nature and views of the Georgia and Tbilisi, these you can find on some websites in Internet

And what about description the city: Ok last year we made Project "Foreigner" with group off Dutch artists. It was quite interesting, it was in the old wine factory in the center of town. The idea of the project was Georgian mentality and hospitality; in Georgia there are lots off old traditions, especially in connection with foreigners. But we get some problems, at the end appeared that factory and nice people is not enough. So as I thing the most interesting here is to work specifically with people, you can't imagine how different they are, how different are their mentality, in one town, in one district, and how different are their houses and life stile, these all are most important details of our town. You can't see it if you're not living like these people. If you are coming and making art project or whatever you will leave Georgia without know it, off course the same can say about any other country or town. But refer to my experience any other art projects here won't be so interesting. Of course architecture is also interesting, all stiles European and Asian, many historical monuments, churches, beautiful surroundings, and so on.

Best place to make art projects in Georgia is Tbilisi. It's quite easy to make some art projects, we can help you to find space and living apartments, food and travel in Georgia is very cheap compare to Europe.

And what about art situation in Georgia, I can't tell that it is perfect but its not because we don't have good contemporary artists, it depends more on the economical and political situation in our country.

But maybe you heard about last changes in Georgia, and I can tell that situation is chaining immediately.

So we have good artists as well as all other countries, and off course there are some really good. Our organization is nongovernmental noncommercial organization which is promoting contemporary young artists in Georgia we are creating different art projects in Georgia and abroad.

More information about us and Georgian art you can find on our website www.tram.ge

**From:** Laura Garbarino  
**Subject:** Re: finally few thoughts about milan  
**Date:** 19.07.2004, 10:28

Cosa sa dello scenario artistico a milano? Milano è una delle città principale per l'arte contemporanea, non tanto per la presenza di musei o di attività pubbliche (concerti, premi, festivali mancano quasi del tutto!!!!!!), ma per la presenza delle persone (artisti, critici, curatori, collezionisti). Quasi tuto quello che accade a Milano accade o per iniziativa privata o nelle gallerie.

Quasi tutte le gallerie più importanti italiane sono a Milano:  
 Gio Marconi  
 Massimo De Carlo  
 Minini (a Brescia, 40 min. da milano)  
 Studio Guenzani  
 Raffaella Cortese  
 Monica De Cadenas  
 Lia Rumma  
 Emi Fontana

Tra gli spazi deidcati ai giovani interessanti:  
 - Galleria FrancescaKaufmann  
 - Galleria Zero (Paolo Zani è il proprietario). Nuova sede prima era a Piacenza, cittadina piccola a mezzora da milano. Il suo programma è tra i più interessanti per i più giovani: Massimo Grialdi, Francesco Gennari, Micol Assael, Christian Frosi...)  
 -lo spazio no profit (l'unico di un certo rilievo) VIAFARINI (www.viafarini.org) diretto da Patrizia Brusaroso che ha un archivio di giovani artisti italiani molto fornito.  
 -Care Off, parte di Viafarini, archivio di video!  
 -Cantiere Isola: è un edificio autogestito che questa associazione occupa per fare mostre ecc. e per scontrarsi con il votere del piano regolatore che vuole buttare

But I am living in a small town in the south Lithuania - Alytus. In fact it is not far away from Vilnius - about 100 kilometers and will try shortly to describe what kind of the art it is. There is no any cultural life in it almost - first. There is even no art space for showing the art in fact. o. k. there is some very provincial theater and couple of dancing collectives who are always fighting between each other. Sometimes there are coming some musicians to give a concerts and usually are using the State money devoted for cultural life in the periphery... Usually their appearance holds the character of rehearsal before some important events in Vilnius or abroad... But I am using to make some very decisive artistic gestures in that city and it works pretty well - it usually takes over the national press, but unfortunately not the cultural pages of the dailies but the front pages usually. To compare Vilnius events - usually they are overwiewed in cultural pages - kind of ghetto of 'wooden' and boring articles which are out of interest even from the side of professionals...

About urban conditions. Alytus is the city of absolutely crazy urbanistics. Till the end of 19th century it was just a village. In the end of 19th century there started to appear first brick houses - so called Jewish architecture (houses build by Jewish community for their shops, bakeries, pubs and so on). Afterwards Russians build numerous military fortifications in the city (the city was on the frontier of Russian Empire with Prussia). A lot of fires burned almost all the wooden houses which were gradually replaced with brick houses, but the city all the time remained militant. After the WW2 almost all the city was destroyed. All the new houses were very typical to that period when they were build: in 50-ies - typical houses ground floor+attic, in 60-ies - 4-floors communal houses. Then it was decided by Communist Party leaders to convert Alytus into the economic center of south Lithuania. There were build about 10 factories. In 20 years the number of inhabitants increased from 15 000 to 80 000. The city became totally proletarian. In the 90-ies after the collapse of the SU in few years almost all the factories bankrupted and there was the biggest unemployment in the state. about 20 000 inhabitants left for USA and Western European countries to seek for easier life.

What is very interesting about the city - till the 90-ies the map of the city was not available, because of the military status of city. The city was planned by the architects from Kaunas who never experienced the life in the city and there were a lot of strange solutions. Architects were trying to make some strange paths between the parts of the town, but the people in the town were using the longer paths - only in the 90-ies a lot of people realized that the main street in the city is not the straight one, but round... After the 90-ies Alytus became the polygon for the experiments of the top architects of Lithuania (actually from Vilnius) - they started to build absolutely stupid buildings without any responsibility and just with the task probably to enjoy the freedom of expression as to express own ego... so now Alytus is absolutely mixed up city in all senses of the city life and if you would like to go for the challenge I would like to do my best.

From: Stephanie Benzaquen  
Subject: Tel Aviv  
Date: 19.04.2004, 13:49

Here is the draft. And I add the following texts:  
-one about the Holocaust and its ideological function (written in 2002, for a project that didn't happen...);  
-Young Israeli Art (article for PH magazine, Kaliningrad art centre, written in February 2003);  
-the statement of my last project (for the exhibit in Riga, written in March 2004).

You will have then about two years of comments about Israeli art. As I wrote you in my last e-mail, I think there are some changes. The subject of censorship for instance. Actually, it's such a complex matter that it should be much more developed (but maybe does it come from my own doubts as being also supported by or requesting support from Israeli authorities for some projects - always the same question: how far can go compromise?...)

I tried to go beyond the impact of Intifada and to give a wider background since I deeply believe that each issue / problem in contemporary art in Israel is firmly linked to the others as well as related to the global social and political context. I tried to bring you the nuances and complexities of the political art making, as it is perceived in Israel (unfortunately, would I say, since "making political art" never appeared to me as the right solution, contrarily to "making art politically").

Well, all this is rather theoretical. Please let me think if these drafts fit you. If you need practical information (names of contacts, descriptions of places or works, etc...), don't hesitate.

Israel art scene  
The art scene in Israel appears active and dynamic. Though Tel Aviv gathers most of the art spaces and structures (private galleries, museums, digital artlab in the suburb, art schools...), it's true that every city possesses its own art space / structure. It may be the municipal gallery, the gallery of the kibboutz for instance, and even more options in biggest cities like Haifa and Jerusalem, like museums, art schools or fine arts academies. Nonetheless, a quick overview makes visible some dysfunctioning.

Schools  
The first art school, Bezalel Academy, has been founded in 1902 by Boris Schatz. It grew up and had to be displaced toward the facilities of the Jerusalem University. Recently, in the 90-ies, Bezalel opened a post-graduate branch in Tel Aviv, entering then a certain competition with Camera Obscura Art School, which had the monopoly in the city for about twenty years. The teaching provided in both schools presents similar symptoms: post-modernism-based teaching (where Virilio, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze and Lacan are still the heroes) without critical apparatus, lack of knowledge regarding trans-and multi-disciplinarily, reduced knowledge regarding 'traditional' art history and contemporary art. Luckily, some design schools (like Shenkar) aim now at developing their teaching and opening art departments with art teachers wishing to change the system of education. It will probably contribute toward the change in the balance of influence.

New media recently appeared in the programs -eventually- but strong efforts to promote them are more than ever requested. It is a pity that the central function of Tel Aviv (as artistic capital) makes forget that new media / technologies projects have been developed since years at the University of Haifa / Technion and that some of the most interesting collaborative projects (of new media combined with architecture, often) between artists and students, between Arab and Jewish participants, have been initiated there.

Museums  
Museums generally privilege Israeli artists. Regarding the Tel Aviv Modern Art Museum, exhibits often present the masters of Israeli art (painters from the 60-ies until now). Its contemporary art department (the Pavilion Helena Rubinstein) hardly corrects the effects of this nostalgia. With a better policy, but with dramatic structural and financial problems, the Israel Museum (Jerusalem) setups less and less exhibits and withdraws too toward more traditional projects. The Herzliah Museum remains then the only one dealing with contemporary artworks, with a strong orientation toward video art.

Private galleries  
The system of private galleries is rather recent, although the first private galleries opened in Tel Aviv in the 60-ies and 70-ies with pioneers like Gordon. The phenomenon of contemporary art galleries, seeking collaborations with international art structures and market, is more recent. They mainly appeared in the late 90-ies. Though their action to promote Israeli contemporary artists can not be denied, their

policy remains far from high quality criteria: no experiment, no 'adventurous' taste and no deep knowledge regarding the global art scene. This explains, for example, why Eastern European or Asian artists have been, until now, hardly presented in Israel and why these galleries present their artists in conventional biennales, projects and art fairs.

Duplicating Western structures has been somewhat the leitmotiv these past years. Most of the galleries concentrated in the same area of Tel Aviv, accordingly to the idea of a fashionable contemporary art district. The only inconvenience is that it let aside many new art spaces and attempts (rather based on non-commercial principles), in other districts, without any audience since people hardly give long time to gallery visits and opt for the easy solution of remaining in the same area.

Press  
The domain of art magazine and art critic is probably one of the most problematic. The art critic in newspapers is provided by a reduced group of four / five journalists who hardly update their information on international events, festivals or artists and who generally get some commissions from several galleries to write mainly -if not only- about the exhibits presented in these spaces. In addition, there is no plurality of art magazines in Israel. The monolithic Studio (about thirty years of existence) remains the only monthly art publication. In the same way, its articles on abroad exhibitions concern the MOMA, the Tate Gallery or Beaubourg, but never focus on more contemporary structures or projects.

In short, the main dysfunctions are  
- Lack of clear definition and distribution of the roles ending in the disruption of the art texture. Too often, museums delegate contemporary art to private galleries, which are not able to setup big group exhibitions. One absence has to be strongly emphasized: the contemporary art centre. There is no structure as such in Israel. One organization has taken this name (Israel Contemporary Art Centre) but remains a virtual structure without physical space, organizing performance and video biennales. Its main action has been to setup a video library. The other institution, the Israeli Centre for Digital Art, is clearly dedicated to new media and didn't develop yet the multi-disciplinarity that would allow wider openness to various media and conceptions of projects. In addition, mainly depending from the municipality of Holon (the suburb where it is situated), it functions with a modest financial basis and hardly gets funds from other sources.

I should mention Time for Art, a recently opened huge art space. It doesn't deny the above considerations. A rich couple (art speculators) has decided to install an art centre in the facilities of a renovated building and to subsidize it partially with a restaurant. This centre is dedicated only to Israeli artists. Contrarily to what has been stated when it opened (that it was a non commercial space), one could see, after two exhibits, very discreet boards on the wall, saying that 'if somebody wants to purchase a work, please contact the office at...'

This institutional absence of art centre shows the perception regarding artistic careers. The artist is caught between the private gallery and the museum. The necessary -living- mediation (the art centre) lacking, the artist must find paths enabling the entrance within these two structures. In some way, the artist is stuck in between speculation and conservatism.

- Lack of analysis pertaining to this situation. It should be the function of schools and press to make these issues clearer and to fight for improvement. Schools, nevertheless less depending from structural funds, are not really active and can't be considered as counter-weight to an artistic milieu functioning accordingly to speculation, financial matters and fashion. Press, which should present alternatives and comparisons with different contexts and experiences, fails in this task.

-Enclosure. The system develops in some biased and fictitious ways. Some reputations are over or under evaluated without any criteria taking into account the situation of the artists in question on a wider stage or context.

- Lack of innovation. It is always striking to notice that, whatever is the organizer, most of the projects dramatically lack innovation and experiment. Is it a consequence of the enclosure? What is sure is that Israeli organizers (galleries, museums...) rarely show emerging artists. The most updated works that one can see in Israel generally come from previous abroad festivals or biennales.

-Lack of experiment and work on the notion of art space. Other striking fact: nobody works on the function or status of the art space. Nobody experiments other ways to insert the art space within the social texture. Nobody tries to deconstruct it. It is still the domination of the white cube combined with hierarchy of art genres.

- A certain provincialism, thus, with its procession of frustrations and inner rivalries and fights. Though it is far from being a singular situation, the effects of provincialism, all connected to the conflict's implications, are unfortunate. The Israeli art scene would require a minimum of solidarity to function and to operate the necessary structural changes requested, but all what can be noticed is the utterly opposite situation.

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It is obvious that Israeli contemporary art copes with specific/local issues strongly impacting on its contents, forms, perception and distribution. Israel is a country torn by conflict, since its establishment. Many wars: 1948 (date of the establishment of the State), 1956, 1967 (Six days), 1973 (Kippour), 1982 (Lebanon), 1991 (Gulf war)... To understand art in Israel, we have to take into account that, every decade, the whole infrastructure went through disruption, that artists faced issues as political commitment and the status of art and that the whole value system of the society has been totally overwhelmed. The background of these wars is a continuous tension provoked by the territorial and border conflicts.

The Intifada (the second one) has started in September 2000. Since more than three years now, Israelis and Palestinians fight and, as we can see in the last news, things are far from improvement. This conflict damages the Israeli contemporary creation at moral, civilian, social and political levels. From the mental / psychological as well as moral perspectives, this impact is very strong; besides the general feeling of depression (as no end can be seen in this conflict), artists or curators look for meaning - or better said: they try to protect the meaning of their work, of their action in spite of the context, as well as they try to make sense through their work and practice, within this context.

The practical consequences, mainly budget cuts because of the war effort and the economic collapse, can not be neglected. This is particularly important because private funds are rare in Israel: there are very few collectors, very few foundations and sponsorship is not developed at all. Of course, in war context and economy, art is never favoured. In the past two years, we could attend the closing of a few art spaces

as well as the withdrawal of the still existing art places to more traditional practices, mainly painting and sculpture easier to sell them than video works or installation. Thus, the main part of young artists who chose for video art, new media or performance, find themselves in some problematic situation: no way to exhibit. Even the places that tried to offer some resistance facing this withdrawal and to keep doors open are now affected too by the current situation.

The conflict calls into question the notion of political exhibitions. Since the beginning of the Intifada, this kind of show multiplied. Though it has been, for the first months, a healthy reaction from the cultural milieu making clear its opposition to the government policy, its systematization (making of it a dogma) became problematic. Shows of coexistence (Arab and Jewish artists), shows against Sharon, etc... invaded the art territory. Have been then neglected a few facts: that collaboration (for instance between Arab and Jewish cultural actors) is a modality of work, certainly not the ultimate objective of a project; that art never asserts and never acts as the window of political positions (art is a questioning - forgetting this point corresponds to its instrumentalisation). Obviously, reactions came after a moment: artists, curators and gallerists started claiming for their rights to do or to show non political art. Too extreme reaction as the remoteness from the context took too light shapes. But it contributed toward re-balancing the situation for a while. The continuity of the conflict, and its worsening, put on the stage again the political matters. Years pass and the problem remains the same: the (leftist) political art functions exactly accordingly to the rules of the dominant policy and government. It just takes the opposite positions. In this sense, the political art is certainly not a critical approach toward the situation. It doesn't propose any alternative. Respecting the traditional Israeli binarities (Israel/Palestine; Arab/Jew; victim/aggressor; oppressed/oppressor...), it doesn't try to make visible and to investigate the complexities and the mechanisms of the situation in order to deconstruct the ideologies basing it.

There's a kind of double bind for the Israeli artists which is relates to the conflict and to the way their work can be perceived abroad. In a certain sense, Israeli artists are convinced that they must deal with the Intifada to be presented out of Israel. Several shows, in Netherlands or in Germany for instance, seemed to confirm this tendency. No doubt that several Israeli artists used (and still use) the conflict to push their career

abroad. But this fact is rarely commented in Israel and abroad. The danger of 'turning-to-trend' has been perceived by artists and curators: they tried to develop works and projects with some distance or through critical perspectives. But this tendency remains weak. One of the themes that should be evoked too, in relation to this matter, is censorship. There is a tendency in Israeli contemporary art to refer to the governmental pressure and censorship. This point can not be totally denied, but, actually, censorship in Israel is not so different from any censorship all over the world. The aggressivity of TV programs or press articles regarding Sharon proves a certain degree of freedom expression. (Actually, the censorship in Israel acts at a level that people may hardly be aware of: the retention of information can not be so easily traced for instance). Things, as usual, are neither black nor white. Most of the Israeli artists presenting shows abroad often travel with subsidies coming from the Art section of the Israeli Foreign Ministry. It is true that the Ministry asks about the contents of the work of the travelling artist, but, in fact, once abroad any procedure of control, from Israeli authorities, becomes difficult. Mechanisms of self-censorship are much stronger and effective (as deeply inscribed within education for instance) than the official censorship.

One of the most important question the conflict arises, pertaining to Israeli contemporary creation, concerns the national identity as construction and as reference. When Palestinian contemporary artists seem able to present themselves without resort to the Israeli presence (and able to deal with social issues not necessarily related to the Intifada), Israeli contemporary artists tend to present themselves within a dialectical relation to the Arabic, especially Palestinian, world - as if their identity was incomplete, always necessitating the supplement of the Other (Palestine) to get achieved. Existential problem of the Israeli identity (if such a clumsy term may be used), finding its origin in 1948, constantly reactivated by the daily worsening of the conflict? Yes, surely. As well, it indicates that the conflict is deeply inscribed in the Israeli life, and that wars became the modality of life. By circumscribing their discourse within opposition to government and continuous accusation, and because of their incapacity in delivering alternatives (to analysis, reconciliation and normalization), the Israeli artists and cultural actors, basing their action on the conflict, partake to processes delaying the moment when Israel and Palestine will arrive to compromise and agreement. It reflects the fear of facing, at last, new conditions of life and new issues, and the fear regarding transitional process.

These fears were born in the feeling of instability impregnating the Israeli society. Israel is built by waves of migrations often corresponding to tragic events of Jewish communities all over the world. Leaving home, building a new home, coping with the consequences of rupture and exile: these are matters present in each Israeli family. Things are temporary... The notion of 'temporary' is a key-function when trying to understand Israeli art. Its relation to the notion of 'exile' is multilayered. Israeli artists often use the word 'periphery' while describing their position within the international context. Nevertheless, the term 'periphery' is not exact. Not only because the binary center / periphery appears irrelevant... Because this term does not fit any actual geographical location: it rather pertains to the translation - indeed the fictionalizing - of the specific physical perception by Israeli artists regarding their situation... Obviously, the feelings connected to 'exile' are different from the ones linked to 'periphery'. Being the representative of a specific culture in another geographical area - in our case, representing the Western culture in the Middle East - will evoke the punishment (being sent far away) as well as the mission (being on the front of the fight). Complicated self-consideration arises from this representation: the debt, the compensation, the claim for recognition, the artificial feeling of having privileged relations with the Western world and the nostalgia. In short, we could say that the Israeli art scene has grown up within gap, loneliness and expectation. This may explain why and how Israeli artists are so eager to communicate with the outside. Inside, it explains how the art scene has been structured. The influence of Western models is so strong that their duplication appeared as the obvious solution to construct the foundations of the art scene (kind of spaces hosting works, relation between artists and institutions, artistic models and references...). The disconnection from realistic parameters (the fact that Middle East is not NYC, contrarily to what seem to think lots of cultural actors) has amplified this phenomenon of reproduction, and, of course, the absence of adjustment and contextualization. Even the models proposed to think locally the situation always look a bit aside. When you're exiled, you expect to be called back... So, why to make too many efforts for what you build in the meantime? Somehow, everybody copes with the current structures without trying to improve them. The absence of alternative art spaces and proposals is amazing. Finding new art spaces to realize projects, opening new commercial spaces, squatting, etc... Alternative is far from being a current practice. As mentioned, there are some attempts in outside districts of Tel Aviv (mainly south of the

city and in Jaffa) but they hardly resist more than two or three months: no audience, no reaction from the press. Even artists, instead of enjoying the multiplication of art spaces and options, are not so interested in the experience. The lack of referential models (as the way to legitimate these attempts) is obvious and combines to the lack of analysis, evoked at the beginning of this text. Let's mention the last failure (because of recuperation): a couple of Bezalel students in Jerusalem organized an alternative monthly event (with video screenings, performances...) during the years 2001/2003. The most successful event took place on the compound of the Underground Prisoners Jail. In Fall 2003, when came the moment to organize Art Focus, the Israeli contemporary art biennale (delayed 2 years, as its last issue was 1999), the two chief curators (who are also the chief curators of the Israel Museum) decided to seize the area and to realize the biennale at the same place. From then, no new event by this couple of students has been organized. One may even say that this couple won't organize any event anymore, as being now entering more fashionable and recuperating structures. Multicultural society, migration society, young State (State under construction) are terms to be dealt with, as last issues concerning Israeli contemporary art. Building a system of traditions, building a national art history... In short: how to root and to promote a national identity that will both erase the cultural differences of the multiple communities and respect the multiple influences? Besides building the "national culture" (and a common art and culture memory) as frame of references valuable for each one (Israeli born, coming from Russia, France or Ethiopia), the problem consists too in bringing altogether, in a harmonious way, the ideal of young State (that will be able to create the New Jewish Man), and the inheritance. How to mix the national and traditional cultures and to find the balance since the Young State simply contradicts the notion of (old, ancient) Jewish culture with the images that relate to it. I consider that this issue pertains to the tension between two options: rebirth and ex-nihilo creation. This questioning goes far beyond the cultural realm (actually, it is the central issue of the Israeli national identity). But to remain in the art field, it is sure that it bases most of the problems faced by Israeli artists and cultural actors: the influence of the outside, the instability, the lack of confidence, the quest for legitimacy, the duplication and the lack of experiment, among the numerous problems evoked along the draft. April 2004, Stephanie Benzaquen

## THE HOLOCAUST IN THE ISRAELI REALITY:

*The contemporary art scene through a process of victimization?*

The State of Israel was founded as an answer to the Holocaust. If it appears clearly

that the existence of the State finds its justification in the sheltering of the Holocaust survivors and in the possibility of proposing an organized refuge as well as in the assertion of a security authority for all the Jews living in "exile", the Holocaust as base of a political, military, economical and social State remains problematical. The genocide is the founding event and the absolute reason of each action initiated by the State. In other words, the question could be: how is it possible to estimate the impact of a construction based on the destruction? What are the daily consequences regarding the existence of the State of such a perception, dictated by the suffering, the mourning, the fear, the isolation, the radicalized protection? As a trans-generational phenomenon, the Holocaust remains the Event – an absolute memory's singularity – and undergoes mutations of its function and its translation. We will call into question the Holocaust as the absolute paradigm of the identity creation in conflicts' areas, as the Middle East.

The Holocaust as a generalized reading grid – the example of the "political exhibitions" Since the beginning of the New Infatada, two years ago, we are at the multiplication of the "political" exhibitions aiming at asserting the coexistence. At the beginning, those exhibitions could be considered as a spontaneous attempt to maintain the communication between two communities going through a major crisis. Afterwards, they became the expression of the problems' blurring. In June 2002, for the 35 years of occupation by the Israeli army in the territories, an important part of the Left wing artistic and intellectual milieu decide to organize an exhibition of Arab and Jewish artists. Good intentions: raising funds, through the sale of the works, for medical organizations and for the refugees of Djenin. But the problem arises from many facts.

The first fact: the artistic requisition. The responsible of the project implied that the persons that would not participate would therefore reveal their absence of opposition to the government policy. Shortly: "The one that is not with us is against us".

The second fact: the lack of curatorship. The artistic practice is reduced to the expression of a political position. In the context of catastrophic decreasing regarding cultural budget and of the perception of art as a luxury, this lack of "professionalism" transforms art into a servant for ideology and not into a practice fitted to translate the reality and its problems. Art doesn't question anymore, it asserts. The third fact: this exhibition reflects the supposed requests of the Western world. The international authorities look for the (re)conciliation, therefore the Israeli artists understand that the correct image of the art scene is the representation of co-existence. It is a matter for interpretation. The art scene doesn't develop any local answer to the local issue. It uses outside instruments in order to create the adjusted image, intended for the Western world.

The last fact: the place of the Arab world in the project of coexistence. We notice that a very little part of the Arab art scene is present: just a family of artists managing a gallery in Um-El-Fahem. We have to precise right away that in this kind of projects we are in a totally Israeli universe whatever it is, Arabic or Jewish. The Palestinian artists, and there is no information about them, don't take part in these exhibitions. The Arab artistic scene, obviously, can't be amounted to one family. Like every other scene, it has its conflicts of interests, its more or less hermetic groups and its inner artistic battles: each city owns its artists and its structures of presentation and of education. Working with only one representative denotes either lack of imagination or the impossibility of a developed contact with the Arab side (about which kind of coexistence are we talking actually in this case?). Or couldn't we suppose that there is an instrumentalism – an unconscious one, as it seems – regarding the Arabic world for an inner debate belonging to the Jewish world: the guilt. This guilt is not specifically the guilt of silence and passivity facing to the policy of Ariel Sharon, but also the guilt strongly linked to the perception that the Holocaust won't "clear the on-going thinking about political and ethical position through the customs". The Holocaust is the place where everybody is able to understand that the status of victim is not eternal – at least, it is, but in another dimension – and is ambiguous.

That is why these projects contribute to the confusion of the situation. As we already mentioned, the artistic practice ends in being an instrument. What is called "the biggest political exhibition since the establishment of the Israeli State" reveals a frightening tendency to the assertion of connections precisely when those connections should be called into question and to the repression of the essential issues. The fact that an exhibition is the window of political opinions and not the space of visibility of the interactions between the political system and the various contemporary systems, social, economical and cultural ones strengthens the ambient ideology. When there is a war (and we will ask: is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict a war?), art must add to its simple stating the adjective "political" if it wants to justify its necessity, indeed its existence: therefore it is submitted to a hierarchy of values that never has been favourable to freedom of expression.

### Territorialities

One should investigate the Israeli art in terms of "territoriality". The issue of the territory may be deciphered through three levels: history, identity and structure.

The territory itself is a fundamental issue in Israel. In spite of all the justifications being of help to explain the establishment of the Israeli State (return to the Land of the ancestors, genocide), the Israeli presence doesn't arise from obviousness, even for the Israeli population itself. We talk in vain, we act in vain, erasing the traces of the expulsion – the deportation – of the Arabs in 1948 remains difficult. Variations on the bad conscious persist: are we "legal citizens" in our country? The house is the illustration of this question without answer. Especially in Jerusalem. Some of the beautiful districts of West-Jerusalem are the districts of Arabic villas, inhabited by "Jews". In East-Jerusalem, it is still possible to see a menorah or the trace of a mezzahon torn out on the lintel of some houses, inhabited by "Arabs". The excellent movie / documentary by Amos Gitai describes perfectly this spatial intermixture: a house in Jerusalem is first inhabited by an Arabic family, then given after 1948 to a couple of Jewish emigrants coming from North Africa, before being sold to a University professor, Israeli Ashkenazi, that employs Arabic workers to restore and transform it. Thus, the recurrence of issues linked to the territory (house, landscape, architecture, home, frontier...) in the works by Israeli artists is not surprising.

The second fact of the territoriality is the position of the Israeli art scene, as it is defined by the institutions and most of the artists. The persistence in circumscribing the scene in the scheme center / periphery is the most worrying matter of the present situation. Israel obviously being a periphery (thinking about itself as being obviously a periphery) that has to make sure the validation of the Western scenes – first of all: New York and London – to be convinced of following the right artistic way, the opening to non Western scenes is very limited. It even doesn't interest people. The Israeli artists try to assimilate the international esthetical and artistic language without going to the trouble of adjusting it to the local parameters. In addition, the theoretical support of the Establishment and of the Art Schools just strengthens this tendency. When the country tries to start a self analysis of its own artistic identity, it caricatures itself in the Orientalism, indeed Exotism: an image easy to export but that totally neglects the complicated layers of the Israeli society. Concretely, Israel, fascinated by the American dream, is incapable of viewing itself as a part of other geographical areas: the Mediterranean area (there is no relationship with Turkey, Greece or Cyprus for instance) and the Middle-East (there is no exchange with Egyptian, Lebanese or Jordan artists). More than a frustration born in the feeling of being a periphery, we should talk about a lack of self confidence. We could call it provincialism, in the first meaning of the word "province", a "space deprived of the radiant King presence, the Hall of the disgrace, haunted by the fear of forgetfulness". Declining the construction of an autonomous scene requests the absolute conviction that the King is an illusion. The

artists looking for an identity that is valuable outside place themselves in a tension between two figures arising from an imaginary space as well as a phantasm of hierarchy.

At last, the Israeli art unfolds itself through the failure to recognize the field it occupies. There is no attempt to bring the social, political, economical questioning in the art field and thinking them through the artistic language. Consequently, there is no thought regarding the medium, the practice, the function of the artist, the status of the art spaces. Art is just the recording of the daily reality, exciting enough in order that the artists save up a developed formal work. The art spaces are content with organizing exhibitions: the mission is fulfilled. Actually, in the present economical conditions, the fact that those spaces survive is almost an exploit. But this survival is far from being a battlefield or the subject of claims: it is not the stake of analysis. In spring 2002, as an answer to the bankrupt of contemporary art, a gallery from Tel Aviv organized an auction of young Israeli artists' works. This fussy financial reaction allowed the neglecting of necessary debates. Without thought regarding the possibilities of a real management of the art sphere – in a utopian way, a system where the private wouldn't have to take the place of the State, but would be the counterpoint – the construction of a long-term cultural policy and the partition of functions and actors will remain unreachable.

As a young State, what it is on the whole, Israel is building itself on specific bases corresponding to its needs: that is logical. But the country tries to make up for its lateness by copying foreign models without replacing them in the proper context. Thinking about the museum function through the rupture with its long tradition and its evolution, therefore through the rupture with an essential part of its meaning, is an example. The lack of coordination between the local thinking and the analysis regarding outside solutions is doubled by unconscious (non avowable?) feelings of envy, frustration and of what we will call "inferiority complex". Without a dynamic of opening, the Israeli scene remains cut up from everything. Thus, it withdraws within an export element that is perfectly controlled and monopolised: the Holocaust.

### Social and cultural dichotomies

The Holocaust points out a fundamental issue of the Israeli society: the hierarchy based on the dichotomy, an unbearable situation. The political exhibitions translate it through the specific relationship between Arabic and Jewish populations, deciphered with the code of the Holocaust. There is a connexion between the cause and the result – and again, one should understand the stages of construction – read as the connexion between the establishment of the Israeli State and the rights of the Arabic citizens in Israel. Here do we see the influence of the Holocaust on the constitution of citizenship: the disjunction between the contents and the container. But this disjunction is beyond the case of the Arabic citizens. What happens with the foreign workers – their increasing is linked to the decreasing of Arabic workers – coming from Romania, Philippines or Africa? The Middle-East conflict is a facet of the deep structural problems in the Israeli State.

The basic dichotomy is the disjunction of the Israeli and the Jewish identities. The statement is very clear: one may be Jew without being Israeli; one may be Israeli without being Jew. Among the numerous Israeli non Jewish communities, there are variations: religious minorities, Israeli Arabs – Muslims and Christians – and the persons that may claim their right of being there with the Law of the Return. Most of them come from Russia (Russia appoints here a geographic symbol gathering the remnants of the Jewish communities destroyed by the War and by the Soviet Power). The Law of the Return, that is the maximal expression of the Israeli State, is built as a reflection of the Nuremberg Laws: a person with a Jewish grandparent may get the Israeli citizenship. Unfortunately, the Law of the Return collides with the Rabbinic Law: the Jewish identity is transmissible just by the mother (therefore, the conflict is trans-generational) or through the orthodox conversion. The clash of the two Laws ends in situations that one could summarize in this way: there is a political visibility and no social visibility. Because the marriage, the circumcision, the burial belong to the religious authorities, the non Jewish Israeli citizens confront dramatic obstacles. We will simply evoke the impossibility, for a mixed couple, Jewish and Arab one for instance, of marrying in Israel, since the civil wedding doesn't exist. The problem is continuously more acute. Israel is an imploding society that maintains its cohesion through the conflict with the Palestinians. The presence – through the revenge – of the Holocaust in the State establishment ended in forms of segregation, based on Judaism and comparable to forms of Apartheid. Thinking about the finality of the reasons that lead Israel to adopt this social scheme comes to undermine the principles themselves of the State.

Seculars and religious, Ashkenazi and Sefarads are two other models of bipolarity. The religious community, for a part, considers itself as the heir of a disappeared world, the pre-Jar Jewish world. Clearly: the Nazis tried to destroy physically all the Jews and to eliminate the Jewish spirit / identity / culture. The memory of those vanished communities has to be protected. The duty of memory concerns the dead populations as well as each vector of the religious identity (Torah books, cult objects etc.). The secular milieu insists on the genocide aspect of the Holocaust; the religious milieu insists on the ethnocide aspect. It draws two different ways regarding the State function regarding dates, places of commemoration and ceremonies. The opposition is much stronger when one has to envisage: 1) the existence of the Israeli State, 2) the Israeli State as a Jewish State. A part of the religious world refuses the legitimacy of the State. The "Kingdom" of Israel will arise from the Messiah. Thus the State is a fictitious and untrue sovereignty. Facing Israel / Jewish State – and its meaningful opposite view: Israel / State of the Jews – the religious communities develop two strategies: the violent critic and the political involvement. Religious and nationalists parties, like the Shass, build and destroy the majorities at the Parliament and therefore at the government. In a few years, they became the indispensable partners of political coalitions, whatever they are, Left wing or Right wing. Their social presence has increased, especially in the poor cities. They build schools, they help the old populations. And they play on the frustrations of some citizens.

The integration of the Sefarad community, after the decolonization was difficult: Israel put them in transit camps and tried to erase the traces of their former identity. The cleavage between Ashkenazi and Sefarads is also firmly fixed in the Holocaust. The argument is clear: the Sefarad world was not sacrificed during the Holocaust, or at least a little bit in comparison with the Ashkenazi. This point weakened the participation of the Sefarads in the political life of the country for years. Shortly, one could say that the Sefarads didn't suffer enough to understand the interests of Israel: they didn't "deserve" the access to political decisions for the "common weal". It is interesting to note that the Sefarad community has recovered these so-called arguments especially in connection with the present conflict. Indeed, the Sefarads have not suffered from the Shoah and from the Nazis, but they have the experience and the familiarity with the Arabs, therefore they know how to behave now and how to manage. This is obviously not the case of the Ashkenazi that grew in the "democratic Europe", a priori. Thus they ignore the language – more exactly the absence of language and the recourse to the force – that has to be used in the relationship with the Arabic community, barbaric world that never plays the game according to the rules and in which option, because of their contempt regarding Western values and human life, every trick is possible. The outline is exaggerated but corresponds to an average discourse in which we may decipher the "competition of the victims". Suffering and mourning give the governing of the country. The awareness of the Sefarads regarding the events they endured becomes an issue and a source of claiming. There is probably to wait a few years before noting a similar phenomenon in the Ethiopian population.

### Holocaust-based national image

In a symbolic way, the Holocaust reflects the image construction. It consecrates the vanishing of a world – the Jewish world of Eastern Europe – and the birth of a new society, Israel. Let's remind the question that was asked to the Holocaust survivors when they arrived in the young State: "Why did you go to the camps like lambs to

slaughterhouse?" With a strong ambivalence: the suspicion – actually, how did they survive? – has followed the shame – they didn't resist against the Nazis. The process has been fulfilled through the heaviest silence. Thus, the Israeli identity didn't rest until it presented a new image of the Jew: the "victorious warrior". The identification with the poor bent Jew of the shtetl or with the compromised and assimilated Jew has been totally erased, because those former images didn't work in the Zionist iconography: the brave Israeli triumphing over the obstacles of the Nature or the countless enemies. One may see here that the fact of having been the victim justifies the fact of being the aggressor, though these definitions are not so clear in the Israeli minds. Asserting in Israel that the Holocaust has been, even just a bit, the ideological lever for the establishment of the State still remains badly perceived.

One should call into question the Holocaust as determined as an "historical crisis": an historical crisis occurs "when events create such a deep impact on the way of thinking of people regarding themselves and the world that the apparent continuity of their history seems to be drastically and for ever changed". We may decipher two levels of crisis through the acts of structuring in the Israeli society. The first level is the events' history and the factual reality: establishment of the State, ultra militarized State in on-going war, specific offensive and defensive landscape and architecture, army as crucible for identity building, various commemorations, radicalized patriotism... The second level is the representation. The artistic scene may be a good example of the general representation. The transmission of the Holocaust - that should be exerted in the direction of the depth and through a continuous questioning regarding assimilation of History in its individual and collective consequences - finds its representation on the surface. When the Holocaust becomes the issue of the artistic work, the artist is tempted to use the iconography of the Third Reich. For sure, a work with a swastika or the portrait of Hitler, when it is signed by an Israeli artist, provokes reactions: that is an effective artistic act! But far from being the expression of the control that the artist exerts on his personal / national history, resorting to this iconography reveals the assimilation of outside and general normative conventions – everybody may use them – close to the imitation of a model and to the adjusting to a dominant scheme. Irony and provocation won't change the facts: the artist denies a part of his identity in hope being accepted more easily in a larger community and simultaneously claims more strongly at his ownership of this history because he belongs to the massacred group.

We are not facing the "warrior", but a victim waiting for some recognition. The status of the "victim" is ambivalent: it is simultaneously an uncontrolled feeling – lack of self confidence and suffering – and the unconscious instrument in order to get the attention of the international art scene (attention that – perhaps – the works wouldn't deserve out of this context). To be identified, the value has to be presented through precise forms or to possess a specific apparatus: one may already see the appearance of the myths, because the confusion between the victim and the executioner may occur just in the myth – opening the door to the ideology – and ends in the inter-changeability of aggression and auto-aggression.

### Traumatic states

The Holocaust as matrix for a political creation has complicated consequences. The integration of the Holocaust as an effective national instrument just strengthens the confusion between the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the situation in Europe during the Second World War. The Holocaust is claimed also by the Arabic side as an inevitable stage for the constitution of the People: the expulsion in 1948 (the Nakba), the wars and the Infatada are steps in the long history of the Massacre. The Holocaust becomes a crucible for identity: the nuances are not important. From the Arabic side, the confrontation with the Israeli State is called "Shoah" and the terrorism "Résistance". The ideological set is already provided. From the Jewish side, the present threaten, outside and inside, is the way to a new genocide. Israel has to defend its population, it means to aggress. Each matter contributing to the increasing of the confusion takes part in the neglecting and the repression of the real issue: the State, built on such a base, on the way to democratic working? In other words: does the trauma, as base of national construction, lead to the creation of a political system that won't be compromised in the irrational?

In the national mythology, Herzl would have expressed the idea of a Jewish State after the Dreyfus affair. Nevertheless, Jacques Le Rider, in his essay about private diaries, proposes the loss of army rights of Dreyfus as the reactivation of a former and deeper wound: Herzl was rejected by a Club of Viennese students because of his "Jewish origin". The politics – the Zionism as the way for a national establishment – could reflect an individual reaction to an event / a rupture, a repair, a compensation. In its theory itself, the Israeli State (the future State) finds its roots in the complicated function of the traumatism. Through the Holocaust, we may observe a similar system. Wars and terrorist attacks reactivate the system. Each aggression makes the edifice more and more fragile and the neglecting more and more effective. Noticing that the Palestinian world already presents the same structures of identity building is frightening: the Nakba is the propitious ground to the destruction of camps and villages, the dismantling of the family nucleus, the daily humiliations.

We have to inscribe the Holocaust in this context: a "fiction" – as an agreement and a transformation of the reality by the victims – or a "souvenir-screen" that, on the national level, hides the other traumas. Thus, the Israeli art scene has to dig deeper and deeper the layers in order to enlighten the mechanisms of repression.

*Stéphanie Benzaquen, September-October 2002*

## ISRAELI YOUNG ART: BETWEEN TRANSGENERATIONAL AND STRUCTURAL ISSUES

"Sometimes I think that all I want to do is sitting in a bar and thinking about our future. It's almost an entire generation of people that don't care about anything..."

A few words of an Israeli pop song that we heard quite often those last months. Obviously, we can't neglect the context: the paralyzed and unconcerned population exhausted by the conflict, the fear and the economical collapse. Obviously, we can't neglect the word "generation", connected to the notion of "future". Talking about the Israeli young art requests its interpretation and its inscription within the specific issues of a State built on the multiple ambivalences of the concept "generation".

The fact that Israel is a country whose territorial appearance is one of the most recent of this century (55 years) – and one of the most problematic – is firmly linked to the model of social construction of the State, based on numerous migrations flux. It explains the recourse to the notion of "generation" in order to determine degrees of belonging to the national identity, to the community and to the territory. Hence, the reading grid regarding Israeli contemporary art will have to deal with this term. Each decisive moment in the building process of the local scene (abstraction, minimalism, political art...) is connected to one generation that is, whatever it is, based on the relation to war: Independence (1948), conflict of 1956, Six Days (1967), Kippur (1973), Lebanon (1982). Each artistic generation is marked by phenomena of destruction / reconstruction, opening/closure and renewing. Consequently, the "young art" could be considered through two main views.

The first interpretation would be: the art of the young generation. A generation that, in the older Israeli people's eyes, has lost the Zionist ideals and only dreams about leaving the country. Hasty statement especially when one thinks that this generation, born in the late 60-ies and 70-ies, which didn't experience the battles on and for the Israeli territory and has built its relation to the surrounding world through two determining elements – Oslo Peace agreements and the assassination of Itzhak Rabin – goes presently through one of the most complicated eras of the Hebrew State. This young generation, that got so close to the "Peace" and saw it fading away, experiences now the deepest call into question of the inner structures of the country, a

crisis reactivated by the Intifada.

The second interpretation would exceed this definition and would refer to "young art" as a category of contemporaneity and commitment: a truth of symbolic rupture, a category of representative gathering, a violent assertion of horizontal identity, prevailing over and transcending any other form of vertical solidarity" (Pierre Nora). The horizontal identity, in the Israeli case, displays on two levels. Firstly, it is connected to the political commitment: the young art is necessary a leftist one, necessarily against the present government, necessarily against the occupied territories. The political opposition, expressed by the artistic practice (in other words: the artists having expressed their political (opposition through their works), has always been strong in Israel. The difference here resides in the fact that this young generation has been able to experience certain "normally" in its daily life, at least during a few years. Hence, its relation to commitment would be "purer". Then, it represents, somehow, the international contemporary art scene, as being more mobile, fitting in development of abroad projects, more updated regarding new media and trends: it constitutes a bridge to abroad. For instance, one may notice that the young contemporary art galleries (between one to three years of existence) have contributed to this development, by promoting young Israeli artists and taking part in international art fairs. Thus, the "young art" is the magnified dream, the phantasm, of the actors, not always so young, of an art scene that projects itself, that incarnates itself into the young generation and, more cynically sometimes, manipulates it in the hope of hanging up again some dynamics: an empty signifier.

The young Israeli artists, trapped between their status of political – indeed politically correct – emblem and definitions which, a priori, don't correspond to their personal issues and aspirations, represent a generation torn between two extremes: on the one hand, they look for normality and insertion into a more global and expanded context; on the other hand, they carry the collective / national weight and the particularism that are perceptible through the historical inheritance and the education. Let's call it: between escape and responsibility. A relevant example, in its ambivalence, is the relation of the young artists to the Holocaust. Neglecting this historical crisis is impossible. In the contemporary configuration of the local art scene, presently oriented to "protestation" exhibitions – against the occupied territories – and to the assertion of coexistence with the Arabic world, the Holocaust remains the central element of the articulation regarding the events' deciphering. Interchangeable roles: now, the Israeli become like collaborators, indeed Nazis. Hence the numerous projects in which the Holocaust functions as the main curatorial principle. This inheritance is heavy on the personal level, as being inscribed as structural data of the Jewish and Israeli world. Thus, there is to find a way to express it. The time of the elders has passed. The tragic mode gives way to the subtle humour, the irony, even the fun. One can see works dealing with the sexual life of Hitler (in the "comics" way with Eva Braun as hero) or animations of Hitler's speeches (his moustache starts growing beyond measure). The thinking about formal adjustments that will make the Holocaust easier to "handle", to manipulate even to "export" is much more important than the investigation regarding the content and its transformation and contextualization.

The status of the Israeli / Palestinian conflict in the Israeli art context reveals the same hesitations: giving certain effectiveness to the artistic practice in the present social and political situation (we would call it "function of witness"), giving to the conflict a formal expression that will show the generational rupture and turning it into an artistic object / issue that will be exhibited within an international context and therefore will make possible to break the frontiers in a time that isolation is more and more accurate. For the young Israeli artists, the stake is important. The conflict is on the point of becoming the absolute "trend" – with all the dangers resulting from this trend – and the choice is deported towards the ethical realm. Between the formulation of good intentions, often proved, and the instrumentalization of tragic events, sometimes unconscious, the scale of attitudes is not so extended. The Holocaust raised this problem; the Intifada, especially after two years, amplifies it.

It seems that the most relevant answers brought to those questions are connected to practices developed within the daily life. The works don't deal with big issues but reflect, through elements of the intimacy and of the day by day, the influence of these issues on the work and the function of the artist. Content and form act through a firm interaction, as if the control regarding different processes linked to the artistic creation (narrative systems, fictionalizing, aesthetics) was contributing in the recomposing – on various levels – of the meanings concerning events that nobody has time anymore to understand: a delayed questioning. One will refer, for instance, to some young artists. Rotem Balva displays bodies and objects towards artificial environments: she creates leaks – whose form is the one of leaks seen in Jerusalem streets – with a complicated technique based on asphalt use. She re-works too the museum / art space by importing there gestures and movements that don't belong to the artistic world (through video installations and performances). More than the displacement, the works by Ariel Yarnay deal rather with the disconnection. His photographs stage objects belonging to his private life as well as, in some symbolic way, to the Israeli reality: the uniform and the weapon are decontextualized and juxtaposed with other elements (African little sculptures or masks, stones).

This closeness creates illogical, absurd esthetical effects blocking the way towards an easy narrative interpretation. Effie Weiss and Amir Borenstein especially focus on editing, animation and fiction process in their perception of the daily reality. For instance, their work "Chek it up" deals with the systematic control of bags at the entrance of each public building. The camera is placed inside the bag. The repetitive sound of the zipper is integrated into the soundtrack, a kind of scratch-rap. Let's mention too Elyasaf Kowner, archivist of behaviours, surveying Tel Aviv streets, filming and interviewing the passers-by, or Nira Pereg, rediscovering the possible strangeness of her Tel Aviv daily locations (her house, her yard, her studio, main streets). Other practice: Jan Tichy that integrates the most ordinary images within a work pertaining to the experimental cinema (in the medium) as well as to photographic work (framed installation).

On the contrary of their elders, the young Israeli artists confront now structural and financial problems easily explained by the political and economical crisis. In a totally private system (the State doesn't support the artistic sector – and when it does, the funds partition calls into question the existence of the official discourse... of the ideology), without public structure, with impoverished museums, the production and the presentation are a fight. The contemporary art galleries stopped taking over because the collapsing of the local art market and the lack of opening to the international art market (mostly based on the absence of networks) force to a strategic withdrawal. Video, installation and new media works (not for sale enough) have to give way to the painting and the sculpture – more and more decorative – that still have collectors. The return to traditional media may be explained by the national bankrupt. But there is to presume that it corresponds too to a very strong ideology in Israel which is not in favour of contemporary art, considered as a luxury, therefore as useless ("who cares about art when we are in war?..."). Or would it be the possible subversive charge of some practices that would disturb the national discourse?

The artists which want to exhibit have a few solutions: changing their practice (their medium), discovering new ways for producing their works or re-thinking forms and places of exhibition. It was the case for the video art. In 1999-2000, Effie Weiss, Amir Borenstein, Irit Garty and Itzik Laisha initiated a video program screened on a community channel. Each program presented the video works in their entire length and focused on a different artist each month. If the beginning has been difficult (the four initiators lending their own equipment, editing the works of the other artists), the solution has been profitable, ART ATTACK is now considered as a TV program, regularly screened at the Cinematheque of Tel Aviv. Built also as an exhibition possibility (an installation with a salon, a monitor and shelves of video tapes), ART ATTACK is exhibited in Israel and abroad. The four initiators gave way to a new staff, renewing the inputs of the program and its function as a video venue.

Other examples: 951 and Hearat Shulayim. 951, anonymous and informal group of video artists, designers, musicians and Dj's / VJ's obtained its "celebrity" thanks to an invitation, among others with graffiti on the sculpture by Igal Tumarkin (an old and established artist) near the National Theatre of Tel Aviv. Eager to remain clandestine, the group looked for non artistic spaces to act. Mainly claiming its belonging to extreme left wing, 951 composed its image – a very ambiguous one since it mixes guerrilla strategies and the literal – naïve? – adjustment to some "so-called Andy Warhol" principles. More recent, as initiated in 2002, and less alternative, Hearat Shulayim ("Margins"): this group of artists and art students based in Jerusalem organizes a monthly happening in specific places of the city. This attempt of awaking Jerusalem (a cultural desert because of the religious majority and the presence of the institutions in Tel Aviv) works in parallel with a trimestrial magazine, dealing each time with new issues (video, sound, poetry).

The young Israeli art scene holds out for the moment thanks to the willingness of particular actors, without real synergy: in spite of its – neurotic – activity, the scene remains dispersed. It doesn't succeed in developing a scheme of coherency, as being lacking a crystallization nucleus. Good sign? Worrying sign? It is presently difficult to say, in such a slant context. Actually, the answer resides in the ability of the Israeli art milieu to start the analysis of its needs, its structures and its necessary changes.

*Januar 2003, Stéphanie Benzaquen*

## WATER, IS TAUGHT BY THIRST

*Proposal for Noass Gallery, Riga*

Water, is taught by thirst  
Land – by the Oceans passed  
Transport – by three  
Peace – by its battles told  
Love, by Memorial Mould  
Birds, by the snow  
(Emily Dickinson)

Maybe, this quotation as introduction to a text concerning Israeli contemporary art can appear irrelevant. Actually, there is no deep explanation to this choice. Just the first sentence of a poem, read by chance a few months ago, which came back to my mind as I was thinking about this project: presenting Israeli artists in Riga. At first sight, it could be – a superficial- question of contrast: between Latvia and Israel. Sitting in front of my computer, in Tel Aviv, I tried to imagine Riga, with maps and pictures: a harbour city, grey and cold... water.

Of course, at this vague stage of reflection, I could refer to the importance of water in Israel: natural resources management or symbol of leisure while the conflict keeps on raging. Actually, I have to confess that only personal feelings are the cause of such a beginning: my intimate perception –and this is for me a leitmotif– that Israel is an "island", lined with the sea, surrounded by countries with which neighbourhood is declined through conflicts, locked up within hermetic borders. Difficult to leave Israel when you want... And difficult to go where you want.

This islander position strongly impacted and still impacts on the Israeli society and mentality. People project themselves to something else, towards the outside - as an imperious need to overcome limits and to reach what is situated on the other side. It seems, finally, that I'm talking here about communication.

Obviously, communication is the most fundamental human issue. Indeed, it happens that the combination of geographical, historical and political elements turn it to an acute issue, something that needs an urgent and necessary focus. That is the case in Middle East. That is the case in Israel.

There has been no Iron Curtain in Israel. But years of wars have been the most successful in enclosing the country in loneliness. No doubt historical events, especially the Holocaust, contributed towards feelings of distrust and fear, then towards need for protection. Later on, protection has been claimed as the basis itself of the Israeli State and radicalized through political, military and social systems. This process aimed at creating a nucleus that nobody or nothing would penetrate and endanger. Inasmuch as these feelings have determined ways to deal with the surroundings, they have been erected as rampart each time that systems and policies of enclosure have been called into question and criticism. The fact they are perceived as fatality ("there is no choice... because history has shown that..., because we have to protect ourselves...") shows the ideological distortions they went through all along the years. Survival at any price became the postulate of the Israeli policy, to the prejudice of, simply, the daily life.

No Iron Curtain, did I write. But the building of the Wall separating Israeli and Palestinian territories incites us to reconsider such a statement. What is this wall? Many answers have been given: apartheid measure, security fence, problematic border or economical and political strategy... Maybe does it hide too what people refuse to see – the best way to reject reality and to build a fictive version? And maybe does it actualize the utopian idea of the untouchable nucleus? It is impossible to avoid this parallel question: who will be really enclosed in the ghetto drawn by this wall? Silence threatens to impose itself. Facing this worrying –frightening- prospective, knowing how people, from both sides, will cope with this impediment gets inevitable. Eventually, how will they create zones of mediation?

War damages anything (social relationship, family, economy, safety feeling, civil and political behaviour). Its destructive nature goes with a wide range of reactions, from remoteness (not to say estrangement) to extreme commitment or attempt to deal with the given reality and to inscribe it within some "normality" of daily life. Whatever is the choice of reaction, the experience of the conflict leads anyone to confront its formulation. Putting into words, and into images, for oneself, for others, for foreigners, the influence of war on personal feelings, the individual and collective crisis, the doubts, the uncertainties, the despair, the changes...; making clear or, at least, reflecting the impossibility of clearness; translating...; communication...; in this case, has to do with the willingness of generating something that can be shared.

Talking loud or not talking, hearing in the streets so many different languages: this approximate description conceals a complex social reality where paths between generations and communities still need to be found.

Israel has been built by fluxes and migrations, from all over the world, for different reasons. Zionism, worsening of regimes which caused waves of flight, bad economical situation, quest for religious surrounding, and sometimes desire for a new life... The multicultural structure of the Israeli society continuously clashes the national identity construction. Defining common references, making various identities co-exist, thinking policies that would take into account integration difficulties, softening social cleavages are among the problems that the Israeli State had to handle as soon as established.

Each person carries, individually or through the family, stories of rupture, exile and separation, adjustment and survival. Parents unable to transmit to their children their traumatic story, parents pushing their children to occupy a place of which they felt deprived because of the slowness and harshness of integration, parents who recently migrated to Israel and who see now the gap growing between them and their children speaking Hebrew rather than the mother tongue... I could mention many examples of this kind. But I only intend to show that dysfunctions and disruptions of communication in Israel displays through various forms.

There is a one thing that may be considered as transversal and trans-generational: the feeling of instability. It has crossed any border of age, gender, community. It impregnates the Israeli society so much that temporary and transitory, paradoxically, became steady components of life. Belonging and roots, position and location, continuously questioned and analysed, became fundamental and common topics.

While writing about Israeli art, these elements have to be reminded. They represent the background and the conditions of the contemporary creation in Israel. Most of the Israeli contemporary artists deal with problems of visibility. Finding an optimal visual language and the means to produce and to show works despite worsened conditions is a part of this visibility. But the 'how' of the artistic practice has been, since a few years, overcome by the 'why'. The current context, with the political and civilian questioning it arises, has altered the status of artist and art, making complicated to avoid debates opposing futility and usefulness and to preserve the significance of the art work (and more over, its function) when the surrounding society collapses. Right now, artists fight within a complex situation: reinforcing their opposition to the national policy, asserting their specific place in Israeli art history and settling recognition and affirmation facing abroad interlocutors. In its way, video art challenged these issues and brought solutions.

Practically, video art bridged the gap. Organising video festivals or exhibits is not only the cheapest way to set-up projects but represents too the opportunity to obtain works when their creators hesitate or refuse to come to Israel (inferring from safety parameters or political positions for instance). This tactical characteristic is of much importance concerning the Middle East area: it bases strategies of collaborative projects and exchanges beyond borders and limitations imposed by the conflict. In this sense, video can be considered as one of the most effective vectors for transmission and knowledge.

From the educational point of view, video art allows students to be updated with current trends as well as it enables them familiarity with international art scenes. Import/export: those past years, video art helped to gain mobility and to reach international events, without too high expenses of transport and travel. Then, it provided the Israeli artists with openness to various art scenes and partook in their insertion within the international awareness.

In the current context, which could be characterized by the reduction of culture budgets and the withdrawal of private investment in art, video art supplies creation and presentation with continuity. For many Israeli artists, it strengthens visibility since it makes possible low costs and flexibility of production as well as alternative solutions for shows and projects. These concrete remarks explain the quickness of its success and the fact that more and more young artists turn to it as their favourite way of expression.

The bridging function of video, for the Israeli art scene, should be related as well to the nature of the medium itself. Video, as mobile and workable recording and editing tool, fits notions of temporary/transitory and movement. It enables to keep traces and changes of the unstable daily life.

Israel, as any "young" country (55 years old) copes with problematic referential frames. With this specificity, there was no former tradition to refer to when expressing the national identity. Let's say that cultural actors had to borrow here and there in Western culture and to combine these elements with Jewish inheritance. The resulting model was the most contradictory. The lack of artistic tradition was perceived, in national culture, both as space of freedom making possible any experiment and scaring vacuum that should be urgently filled. Thus, the Israeli artistic Pantheon –mainly painting and sculpture– has been quickly built to palliate this handicap. The rapidity of this establishment as well as its obliged connection to Zionist related concepts explain why the imposed references may be felt as far-fetched and heavy. Thanks to its outsider position, video plays a double role: on the one hand, it permits of rejecting frames; on the other hand, it permits of using these same frames without "guilt".

In fact, it creates the necessary distance in which can be re-thought the relation to the national identity, be it in the cultural, social, political, educational fields.

Video art changed the configuration of the Israeli contemporary art scene. The practical solutions it offered, more than relevant in the local context, don't explain entirely its extent. As I mentioned, it carried also opportunities to settle proper questioning and to translate in a renewed way critical points of view. Thus, video art strongly influenced communication on many levels of the art realm.

By multiplying and amplifying opportunities and means to relate to the outside, to overcome the assigned limits, video art radically changes the cultural landscape. But there is a corollary: it makes artists more aware about their needs and about the lacks damaging the Israeli artistic structures. Ambiguous function: it "repairs" as it simultaneously generates frustrations...

Water and thirst: this unbreakable relation - what you have and what you want. Communication is the indispensable link between them. Without it, no possible comparison, no way to envisage both possession and desire. Without it, no possibility to change the situation so that it can be lived in more harmonious ways and to realize, at last, that the act of communicating is, in itself, the most essential.

Selected artists, Proposal for Noass Gallery: Ariel &

**From:** Levan Chogoshvili  
**Subject:** Tbilisi  
**Date:** 1.07.2004, 9:06

To ease my task I will not exactly follow your questionnaire. To begin with I would like just to say that Tbilisi as the designator (I' am not sure it's a correct word or not, but sure you'll understand) of urban culture has its dramatic present resulting from its cruel nearest past, the remarkable and interesting history and the vague and uncertain future.

I will try to depict all these aspects and I think my story will not be subjective as the reality is very plain to see, it is too explicit and provides less variants for interpretation.

Let's start from your first question. I will answer it just in the context of your project – your proposal that Tbilisi could be selected as one of the possible cities for implementation of the project due to the current art situation here seems to be very important for us as for some years already the city experiences something like a Great Depression from the point of the artistic life.

Your project, on the one side, can be of the psychotherapy meaning and on the other, could become a motivation for the re-initiation of a counterprocess and a facility for bringing some dynamism in artistic situation. Moreover, Tbilisi may become the start point for the dialogue and exchange (here in our environment and not outside what can create locally the new art context) and, finally, it can be interesting for you from the point of working in quite specific milieu with its very diverse sides of life and art.

Externally the above mentioned depression maybe is not so much manifested – the exhibitions are held as usual, the art life as though goes on, the art galleries try to keep the common pace of work, but in fact, the potentiality and the possibility slowly remove from each other and it may be noticed in the artistic mood, in passive attitude resulted from the total pessimism (sometimes unconscious). I speak about contemporary artists who less and less participate in art process. They are much more oriented to the West and this is quite logic in the current situation as implementation of any project is possible only with the help of the West or in the West. You can consider it as a result of when the country even does not try to find its own place in the contemporary cultural geography, as if it has preferred the cultural isolation strategy, locks itself inside its borders and thus, forces the contemporary artists to seek their place in the different surrounding.

I'll list the reasons and after the groups of artists, the exhibition places and institutions which are doing their best to break the vicious circle in spite of many obstacles and difficulties:

#### Reasons and Results

The most serious reason of such situation, which entails other ones, is of course our nearest past. Georgia was one of the republics of the Soviet Union and it seems it still abides in the so called post-Soviet condition and does not even try to overcome it. By the living standard, for 13 years already we are on the 11th place among the fifteen former Soviet republics, that is we are the poorest in the poor space. By the level of corruption we are the leaders within the same space keeping the 5th place for the same 13 years. So, you can imagine how low is the demand for the culture and for the art support and what is the level of implementation of the right cultural policy from the side of authorities.

Was not even made any attempt to analyse the Soviet cultural condition, neither they have tried to carry out its typological analysis and, accordingly, to replace the existing closed mono-culture model with something new – more open, more interactive one. On the official level they have neither declared such intention nor commenced the process. Everything that has had place in Tbilisi in this line is the result of the personal, private initiative, tenacious efforts, that on the one hand, slows down the entire process, sometimes results in failures, thus producing weariness and apathy, and on the other hand, causes the estrangement of the artist from the local context and arises in him the demand for introduction in the foreign contexts (because of its illogicality such decision, naturally falls). The absence of any demand for changes from the side of officials has resulted in the lack of legislation in the culture, when neither the law of social protection of artists nor the charity law and other relevant laws are available. Thus, today the artists belong to the social group which stay on the verge of poverty but are not considered as such.

Most of all it concerns the contemporary artists as the contemporary art is not regarded here as the art at all. I remember last year, in 2003 the culture experts from the Council of Europe when assessing the situation in Tbilisi marked out as one of the top points the particularly negative attitude of the authorities towards the contemporary visual culture and art.

Therefore, no funding policy exists in this sphere (the only fund which used to allocate small sums for the contemporary art projects is Tbilisi Office of the Soros Foundation, but it seems that this program will be canceled). The only way to seek the funds for the project on the local level is the personal contacts, when some businessman in person or some organization allocates some sum not because the project falls in the priorities of their programs or they think it is interesting or important, but just they know the applicant personally. So, everything depends on the personal contacts and on what extent the applicant manages to awake the philanthropic feelings in the businessman or organization. In such case money is transferred from one pocket to another and is not reckoned in the taxes. Consequently, the sums are small and do not promote the serious projects.

What about the audience - the fact is that the audience open towards the contemporary art is not too large and is represented by the young and middle generations (but not only); those are the people who are aware of the contemporary culture, who are adequate to the time from the intellectual viewpoint. However, it should be also noted that this audience is a little bit disappointed, as for a long period already no contemporary art projects have been presented, no exhibitions have been carried out. The only events that still have place here are those rare to say some kind of "chamber" exhibitions, which are carried out once or twice a year strangely presented as the regional or international ones. However, they don't prove to be conceptually active and actual. Besides, it looks that some newly emerging art institutions and persons try to instill the concept of the modest art and art life, which is really inadequate taking into the consideration the current quite extreme political, social, cultural situation.

On the Caucasian so regional level Tbilisi contacts with other cities somehow are available, while the contacts between the cities inside the country are broken. Thus, you can easily imagine what is the situation in these cities. Such policy of severe differentiation of center and periphery, permanently keeping periphery in unequal position, very typical for the Soviet times (whole USSR and Moscow, the capitals and their republics), is still successfully continued in contemporary Georgia and is practiced by contemporary art as well. However, as for contemporary art, such tiny contacts of course are the result of the lately defined conditions as in the 1980-ies and early 1990-ies the horizontal spread and penetration into other cities countryside was quite strong especially of those groups of artists who now obviously hold the passive position.

The post-soviet cultural policy and its tendencies in the post-"Rose Revolution" period after November 2003 (in spite of many hopes related to it) do not intend to start serious art import-export programs. The international events and forums are closed for us (I can say that my participation in the Venice biennale was turned into some adventurous act). There is available no museum or national gallery program which would purposefully commence the culture or art dialogue in any line be it the contemporary art, the modernism of XX century, the old art or export of Georgian art etc. Noteworthy is that we have neither contemporary art museum, nor interesting art magazines. Any step towards establishment of any art magazine always fails because it does not find the financial support.

Unfortunately, we are facing the evident promotion on the official level of the modernized social realistic art with its soviet touch that produces the basics for existence of the official art of the stratum of the privileged official artist-ideologist. This by all means constructs the real environment for existence of the similar to the soviet times oppositions such as official/unofficial art, official/unofficial, nonconformist artist. However, of course this opposition nowadays carries the different from the Soviet times qualities.

#### Art scene – interesting artists, groups, spaces, projects etc.:

Despite the foregoing, we have very interesting artists' groups, art institutions, free exhibition spaces.

While I name the artists, I would say that the real radical conceptual changes in art, which further resulted in the introduction of the contemporary visual art, were initiated by the students of the Tbilisi Art Academy in 1973-4. Beginning from 1975, or after graduation from the Academy, these students continued their work with the status of unofficial artists. They were prohibited to work at any state art institution (in the conditions of non-availability of private or semi-private one in the Soviet period) and to exhibit their works in any official spaces. These artists opposed as the official art language – the socialistic realism so the current politico-social regime of that time. They arranged exhibitions in the private apartments of their friends for the narrow circle of viewers.

The names of these artists: Irakli Parjiani, Iliko Zautashvili, Gia Edzgeradze (lives in Germany), Temur Tskhovrebashvili, me myself, Soso Tsereteli, Dato mikaberidze who were shot for the attempted hijacking the airplane in 1983.

In the early 1980-ies with the moral and practical support of the these artists, the younger generation of unofficials started to work. By that time they also were the academy students and used to gather and work in one of the rooms of the 10th floor of the Academy. So they called themselves "The 10th Floor group," afterwards "Archivarius" and "Marjanishvili group" as in 1986-1988 they worked on the mansard of Marjanishvili Theater.

In 1985 as the so-called "perestroika" period begins the unofficial art leaves the underground and transits to a semi-legal position.

These years are the most active in art processes, very intensive and aggressive (in a positive sense); we have permanent exhibitions, actions, performances, declarations in the exhibition spaces, in open public spaces as we were hopeful that our efforts (not only in the art but in the cultural and public spheres) will bring the results in changing the art language, attitude, orientation, will bring openness, promote transformation of the Soviet thinking and so will become socially active. This process involved not only our generation of unofficial artists of 1970-ies and the generation of young artists belonging to "The 10th Floor" group, but those who came in the second half of 1980-ies - young artists, photographers, and those who created the theoretical and practical background for the processes, the theorists, art historians, philosophers, literati. There were also poets, writers (for example, the poets group "Reactive Poetry" and others). In this connection I would like to mention art historian, the dissident in fact Giorgi Marjanishvili (who now lives in Paris under the political asylum) and Karlo Kacharava, who was the ideologist of "The 10th Floor" group of artists.

There were the close contacts with Moscow, Leningrad, Berlin (the big action of the Georgian artists during the takedown of the Berlin Wall), Bristol, Montenegro and other places. The contacts with Bristol still survive.

All this needed the right culture policy with its sound strategy for the further development promoting the opportunity of the Georgian art to carry on the dialogue and contacts with the Western and Eastern Europe. Unfortunately, all previous attempts were in vain. These events which took place in 1980-ies and early 1990-ies were based on the pure enthusiasm without any funding or were financed by the foreign partners.

The horrible economic collapse of 1993-4, the political wars, permanent energy crisis, the purposeful terror nationwide and all over Tbilisi arisen by the armed bands provoked by the authorities, tore all possibilities for not only to continue the contacts but to carry out the artistic activity locally inside Tbilisi. We may date the beginning of the depression period back to 1997-8, though during that period were opened private galleries and were permanently held the exhibitions. However, it was already the beginning of the period of the modernized Soviet aesthetics expressed in the whole range of exhibitions oriented to the official style, supported by officials, propagated by media. These process is very notable in the public space art – too much sculptures and wall paintings, something like neo-socialistic realism.

Here are the names of those artists who belonged to "The 10th Floor" and their associates: Karlo Kacharava, Mamuka Tsetskhladze, Niko Tsetskhladze, Mamuka Japaridze, Oleg Timchenko, Koka Ramishvili, Niko Lomashvili, Keti Kapanadze, Manana Dvali, Guram Tsbakhashvili, Temo Javakhishvili, Ushangi Khumarashvili, Gia Rigvava, (who had lived in Russia since the beginning of 1990-ies and after moved to Germany), Luka Lazareishvili and others.

From 1995 we have a very interesting group, which was named "GosLab" only two years ago after many years of their joint work. This is a kind of interdisciplinary art group of a photographer, video artist, computer music composer working on the communal principle. They are somehow hermetically closed and isolated with quite a flexible policy choosing the partners carefully and skillfully. The group is rather productive. It mainly works over the urban projects. The group includes: Gio Sumbadze, Maya Sumbadze, Nika Machaidze, Nino Chubinishvili, Salome Machaidze, Tamuna Karumidze.

And finally I'll name one young artists group consisted of the postgraduates and students of the Tbilisi Art Academy. This year they practically willfully occupied the old factory building, which belongs to the Academy and now is decided to sell. Occupation of this building was a kind of protest. They transformed the factory space into the joint art studio, where they organize the exhibitions and actions. They work over the alternative program of the Academy reform, establishing contacts with the lawyers, representatives of the Ministry of Education. Today they actively oppose the Academy administration and the reactor, demand from them the conceptual substantiation of the reforms and transparency, rejection of the Soviet-wise management methods.

As to the institutions, the following ones may be named in the first turn:

1. Arts Interdisciplinary Research Laboratory (AIRL) established as recently as 3 years ago (Director – Nana Kipiani, art historian, members – Tea Tabatadze, Samson Lejava, art historians; Mzia Chikhradze, project manager; Vato Lejava, urbanist; nestan Tatarashvili, architects; Tamuna Gochiashvili, restorator).

a) This institution is of interdisciplinary kind where the art historians, architects, urbanists, restorers are engaged. The main line of this institution is the scientific work, however, as far as in 1999 AIRL and me started the artists exchange program with Basel Christoph Merian Stiftung IAAB program. In our reality it is the only exchange program and it came out so that today Switzerland is the only country, which has the stable art relations with Georgia. Now AIRL tries to establish the same program with Quebec, Canada.

b) AIRL is the founder of the free art/cultural newspaper "Iliadz". The first (and meanwhile, the only) issue of this newspaper is devoted to the Tbilisi urban/architecture problems. It is radically critical interdisciplinary issue which has studied the current architectural and urban situation from the aspects of various disciplines. Since the Basel University finances the edition of future issues, the newspaper will be renewed with the three-month periodicity. Each issue will be devoted to one concept. In the framework of the newspaper they work over the project "Architecture & Ethics" which integrates the exhibition -round table - publication.

c) AIRL founded the Institute of Arts Interdisciplinary Studies (IAIS) for postgraduate students. It will be the first institute, which will train curators and contemporary art theorists and will cooperate with ACE, Edinburgh Curatorship Institute headed by artist Marianne Eigenheer. now it begins to collaborate with Bohum University (Germany)

d) Together with Marianne Eigenheer they are in process of preparation of the exhibition project "OutLaw" with German and Georgian artists; IFA Gallery, Stuttgart.

e) The projects of international exhibitions-symposiums "Caucasian Circle", "Map & Territory" and "Global in Local," "Flying Craze" are also in process of preparation. Those projects are prepared within the framework of the cycle of international exhibition-symposiums "DifferAnce" arranged by AIRL under recommendation of Peter Pakesch and with participation of Georgian, Swiss and German artists, curator Bart De Baere, Scottish artist Alan Johnston, Swiss artist Marianne Eigenheer in 2000 and 2002.

f) AIRL prepared the exhibition "Beyond Bans" for the 50th Venice Biennale. AIRL strategy - to promote creation of the entire context, to bring closer the past (that period of our history which was banned and forgotten in the Soviet times) and the present. To achieve this purposes they try to implement the urban conservation-restoration projects in the city both in the architecture (restoration of the typical "Tbilissian" houses of XIX century) and in the painting (restoration of Zdanovich's wall painting in the modernists' café "The Argonauts Boat" of 1920-s, which had been whitewashed for years as the Soviet army warehouse was placed there).

Today it works out a rather ambitious project on creation of the contemporary art museum.

II. MAF (Media\_Art Firm), founded as CCCD (Caucasian Center for Cultural Development): The head of MAF is Vato Tsereteli. Irakli Paniashvili, Head of maf\_Institute; Khatuna Khabuliani, art critic; Nino Chogoshvili, art critic; Daniel Brefin, artist; Tamrko Janashia, project manager.

a) CCCD established the Caucasian Institute of Photography and New Media in Tbilisi. The Institute takes 10-14 students on board every year. The Institute has both analogue and digital equipment to its disposal. For the first year the Institute was hosted by the Academy of Fine Art in Tbilisi, and from November 2002 it is located in the Carvasa.

b) maf is building up a library consisting of publications on photography, contemporary art, design, new media and architecture. maf has already received more than 4500 important publications from different museums, foundations and editors. Today the library is unique in the Caucasus

c) Maf organized the lectures on photography and post-modernism by photo-historian Ian Jeffrey in Tbilisi.

d) appendix1 – Some Reflections on Contemporary Photography in the Caucasus: first biannual international exhibition with focus on South-Caucasian artists (Supported by Pro Helvetia and Council of Europe) and appendix2 – Diffusion and its Topology biannual international exhibition project focusing on crucial questions of contemporary life in the Caucasus. 30 artists from 10 different countries participated. (Supported by 27 international organizations

e) they organized arteria 1 - exhibition of contemporary Georgian artists with coaching program for young local curators f) Annual Festival of Dutch, Flemish and Georgian culture in collaboration with the Tbilisi Chair of Dutch Studies (Supported by Royal Dutch Embassy).

#### Art Galleries and Spaces:

There are many private art galleries which are mainly commercial ones. Some of them are interesting. Those are the galleries which in spite of lack of funds try to carry out their own policy. (There is not the contemporary art museum, moreover, as the official circles do not recognize the contemporary art at all).

The exhibition space of the Contemporary Art Department of Tbilisi State Historical Museum ("Karvasia"). The chief of this department is Ms. Lika Mamatsashvili who has provided the space to the unofficial artists and promoted many interesting projects since as far as 1980-ies.

N-Gallery which develops contemporary art projects. Director – Mrs. Nino Metreveli. The main principle of this gallery is to allocate the space for international projects (if such ones are available). Recently they promoted implementation of two parts of international art project "Apollonia" under the aegis of the Council of Europe.

International Art Center which mainly promotes the applied arts, but its space is still admissible (sometimes even free of charge) for various projects. Director – Mrs. Maka Dvalishvili.

#### The City:

What can be told about Tbilisi? This is a very interesting city by its location, history and culture but for the last 80 years it has dragged out a miserable existence.

Caucasus is the end southeastern boundary of Europe where it directly borders Asia, and the southwestern edge of Asia where it directly faces Europe. This boundary, Caucasus, where Asia and Europe meet and part each other, where the attraction and repulsion energy concentrates -that is the principle of boundary in general - embraces this energy. And Tbilisi which has always been and pretended to be the center of Caucasus showed this quality best of all, having reflected those conciliations or contradictions and paradoxes.

With its essence, culture, world outlook this oldest European Christian country, which inherited the antique culture and, concurrently, the Schumer/Hittite cultures, proved to have the median status, boundary function conductorship and its responsibility for balancing and synthesizing of those contradictions, for harmonization of the East abstract the West concrete, form and space in the Orthodoxy. I see a certain logic of this from the philosophic-cultural viewpoint, because for such its uniqueness it has been performing the interposition function...

It is noteworthy also that on the one hand you can see in Tbilisi historical museum the remains (scalps) of first ancient so called Europeans, the traces of Hellenic culture discovered by the archeologists near Tbilisi, and on the other hand, the ancient Masdean worship sites...

Just for such location Tbilisi suffered a lot: in XVIII century it was burnt down by Aga Makhmad Khan, then, in XIX century the current historic area of Tbilisi, which we call the medieval downtown, was restored in compliance with all those planning principles, structure and configuration which were typical for the city over its history. This took place in the first half of XIX century when parallel with restoration of the old city there were built the new districts - now also historic areas. They were built in compliance with the European town-planning tradition of the new, so called capitalist period. Based on the burgh principle the administration and government of the city pursued the European standards and had the relevant norms of the urban regulation.

The most interesting in Tbilisi is the so called Tbilisi-type dwelling. If you are interested in Georgian mentality, this house will be the best example of the urban culture where the entire philosophy of life is expressed. We may say that in some way it is the exponent and key to the context, which enables understanding of even the artistic mentality of the contemporary art and its certain specificity. The integrity of openness and insularity – an open wooden balcony on the facade, verandas open for communication, a yard often opened streetwards and at the same time well insulated interior apartments; the verge/border between the openness and insularity merge in their simultaneousness, the space and form bear the equal load (by its material, physical concept unlike the Western space definition where the space defines the form and unlike the Oriental concept where the form overrides and defines space), the open spaces and configurations unite and delimit, and consequently are united and delimited.

The Georgians used to say: I am neither earthy nor heavenly! That is I am both earthy and heavenly. So again the verge and border. That is why for the Georgian mentality and by the way, for the contemporary art as well the social, well-expressed material problems are not typical or are less typical. It is more vigorous, more vital. You will be able to see this yourself, if you decide to implement the project here too.

Imagine a small scale of a medieval town with its one short street with Orthodox, Gregorian, Catholic, Protestant churches, synagogue and mosque built along it in Middle Ages or later and still functioning. The downtown had (and still preserves) on the one hand the aura of the Oriental caravanserais, camel stands and on the other all attributes of European culture – the opera-house, european stores, ateliers etc.

This multicultural quality principally was not of traffic circle nature with its permanent temporality, but was the kind of stable cultural space. In XX century the so called national policy of the Soviet period somehow nationalized Tbilisi, made it more Georgian, thus diminished its significance as the general Caucasian culture and brought it down to the ethical meaning. And what is the main point, this policy deprived ethnic non-Georgians of the public and civil partnership, drove them out and turned into the groups of ethnic minorities. Consequently, the city has lost its unique vigor.

In general, the significance of Tbilisi, the interest in this city as well as in the whole Caucasus, now is of the geopolitical nature only and fully goes in the strategic interests of globalization that basically does not change the current home situation. On the contrary, now it is more likely of traffic circle nature zone, something like a public thoroughfare. The same can be told about the city.

Tbilisi is quite intimate city, where everybody knows everybody, especially those who reside in five central areas and who are considered to be the indigene and educated so called intellectual part of Tbilisi inhabitants. The city is quite snobbish. The real number of Tbilisi population is million and a half plus about 200000 Georgians forcibly displaced from Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia (the historic Samachablo), i.e. from those territories of Georgia which directly border Russia. The political indeed wars against the formation of Georgia as an independent state and factually provoked in those autonomous republics which are densely populated with Ossetians and Abkhazians, were named as ethnic wars. As a result the Georgian population of these autonomous republics were forced to leave their homes. Many of those internally displaced people came to Tbilisi and main part of them were accommodated in the fashionable hotels of the Soviet period - so called tourists, in the buildings of various administrative, scientific and research institutions (sic!), where they still live. Indeed, it is a very tragic story, but on the other hand, it obviously has absurd, comic look, of course the urban, social, demographic, visual balance of the city is breached. Once "fashionable" hotels now are turned into the place of residence of the most vulnerable population – the refugees. The facades of those buildings located in the downtown have metamorphosed and now look like many-storied hovels. The only way to survive for the refugees is the huge outdoor markets appeared in the city last years, where they sell and where you can buy the legal and contraband goods, imported from Turkey, Russia, Iran, China.

The main urban transport facility is the ancient trolleybuses manufactured as far as in 1970-ies, buses operated on gas cisterns and thousands so called "marshrutkas" – the old minibuses bought at a low price in Germany and Eastern Europe (the business very popular in Georgia), which cause total disorder in the city and total breach of all rules of the road as together with old and sometimes new models of Mercedes and BMW, many Jeeps, usually move at a very high speed. The foot-passengers as a rule cross the street at any place, as the traffic lights are out of order and pedestrian subways are in dark (the energy crisis in our country for already 10 years) while in the daytime they are occupied with the barrow-boys.

For 13 years already we have to store the gas and kerosene to heat and light in winters. We have no heating facilities (the district heating is destroyed, the individual heating systems imported by various firms are too expensive, as to the electricity we are lacking it in winter too). Homes and in streets are in total darkness sometimes.

For some dozens years already the historic areas have not been restored. The downtown is on the verge of demolition, the residents of the downtown feel themselves as if in the ghetto. Next to their ruined dwellings and instead of the demolished old ones are built the high-rise buildings of a very strange shape. These buildings for Georgian nouveau riches.

Suburbs are very specific. They are estranged from the downtown from all aspects (territorially, mentally, culturally), thus they are neglected in time and history. Built up as so called proletarian blocks, these are high-rise buildings of Soviet period with variegated facades (every resident has painted the balconies looking on the facades of 8-16-storied lengthwise houses by their taste, hung the sunshield curtains of various color, some balconies are just glazed). Under the background of such diversity of colors the medium is factually futile, everything is dull and sluggish. Such stagnation, disregard of any progress is typical for those suburbs. The only property of the current time is a newly built supermarket which in such grey totally static space manifests, or more exactly, reminds the current time.

The city is full of billboards and stray dogs, respectable/snobbish mood and beggars, high technologies and household gas heaters, lamps and generators.

This is the urban, visually expressed very harshly, in some way aggressive confusion, which reveals, on the one side, that the culture is really in trouble, and, on the other side, that the city and its residents are brought to the verge of social catastrophe. According to the statistical data, 100 000-150 000 city-dwellers are feeding from refuse bins. This is 10 % of total city population.

The city is the medium where closely are mixed together and integrate intellectuals, artists, bohemians, politicians, members of parliament, dirty money makers and washers, criminals, corrupted officials, ministers, fair businessmen, singers, poets - all those who satisfy some Soviet-snobbish demands of each other. From this point this city is really phantasmagoric.

May be it is the negative reflection of our cultural mentality, as the time itself with its extremely vitally problems and, thus, philosophic attitude to life, the same supersocial senses tradition, is now expressed in the social nature and conformism. But may be this is the nature of the modern intellectual society, which serves immorality for the sake of morality, as Peter Sloterdijk says. Who knows?

However, at the same time this is a rather interesting environment from the point of visual art research - history, current situation, urban condition; moreover, from the artistic point of view it is rather attractive and provoking to understand how impressive on the visual level is the organism of the whole city with its binary oppositions, how strained, extreme and discrepant it is.

The city is beautiful, it is built on the both embankments of the river Mtkvari; the urban landscape is mountainous and raised, that is why there are so many slopes in the city. Even in the downtown there are many hills which divide the city into various levels.

The city has six historic areas – four of them are located on the right bank of the river Mtkvari (one area named "Kala" is a medieval part, and three – Vera, Sololaki and Matsminda are of the European capitalist-modern type), and two – on the left bank (the comparatively traditional Avlabar and the same European modern king David the Great side). The main avenues, central streets stretch parallel the river Mtkvari thus showing that the city developed along the river. Such planning of the city was caused by its location - not only the city site is raised but it is encircled with mountains, which stay so close to the city that you can see them from any point inside and can easily reach them. Tbilisi was built in the canyon of the river Mtkvari and has inherited the ancient Mtkvari-Arax culture.

This small city (we imply its old downtown) accommodates on its small territory the full variety of architecture – we can see the wonderful Style Modern architecture, classicist buildings, the so called Moresque houses, pseudo-gothic architecture and other ones. In XIX century and at the beginning of XX century the Georgian, German, Russian, Austrian, Armenian, Sweden, Pole architects built the houses here.

The city had the German districts built and compactly resided by Germans and Swiss, who at one night in 1941 were exiled by Stalin to the Central Asia and some of them were killed here. Here is the so called Jewish area where the Georgian Jews live, the streets tightly settled by Armenians.

The European architecture has merged and mixed with the traditional one and has produced the above mentioned so called Tbilissian type dwelling with wooden balconies, which carry the signs of the European architecture.

By architecture and urban planning the city is on the one hand the European and Oriental one, and on another hand neither European nor Oriental. what about its today image, it can hardly be identified; it is more a post-Soviet city where all Soviet deformations are extremely expressed.

Of course my attitude towards the city is not nostalgic, I neither suffer from piety towards the past. However, the current situation provides a small hope that in future the city may be brought to the normal urban, cultural, social condition, to the situation what characterized Tbilisi in for example early 1910-20-s. In art it was the period of early modernism (we call it "bilisi modernism"), the most free and independent and with its destiny most tragic in the so called history of XX century Georgian art. It was really a true multinational event what by 1930-s was strictly forbidden as "bourgeois and formalist art" and artists were repressed. Its multinational character outcomes from the nature of the city, from the existing there intercultural communication. Tbilisi becomes the modern culture center for whole russian empire and must be noted that it is really significant that such an artistic environment arises not in a country of imperial ambition or conviction of it being the cultural center of the world, but rather a small country which in 1801 conquered by Russia and during one – XIX century – being the south periphery of Russian Empire, was fighting for its statehood and political freedom, and what was reached for short-term period, for only 4 years, in 1918.

Tbilisi was the artistic environment for Georgian, Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, Jewish, French, Armenian, German modernists; Besides, there were tight contacts with Russian Modernists: Mayakovsky (who was born and grown up in Georgia), Pasternak, Andrei Behli, Malevich, brothers Burluk, Kruchonich...

Till now it still is practically uninvestigated sphere (maybe in some way the exceptions are Ilya Zdanevich (Iliadz), well known in the West because of his emigration to France after the intervention of Georgia by Red Russia and its sovietisation and by different reasons considered as Russian or French artist; Archile Gorki, who started in Tbilisi but as Iliadz was in soviet times and till now fully razed from the memory in Georgia never mentioning even his name...

From: Sandor Antik  
Subject: questionnaire  
Date: 7. Mai 2004, 13:09

First, I send you some informations and pictures referring to the topic of Cluj:  
1) Cluj topical: attach Cluj panorama and some Cluj souvenirs marks by tricolor:



attach-s Cluj-old-center\_UnionPlace.jpg (0.13 MB)



banksmarks-by-tricolor.jpg (0.06 MB)



garage-marks by tricolor.jpg(0.13 MB)



Michael-the-Brave-place.jpg (0.17 MB)



new-center\_Avram-lancu Place.jpg (0.07 MB)



street-and-cars-marked.jpg (0.11 MB)



Transit-House.jpg (0.17 MB)



young-art-in-Cluj.jpg (0.08 MB)

2) I'll name some new space of art contemporary appeared in '90-s Cluj, which functional on, where I worked or I have a contribution in foundation of these new alternative places, communities and alternative art opinions (see you my Curriculum) + some realised artistic projects, referring to the recuperation of the functioned old places or public spaces, and to the symbolic construction of new places.  
Transit House: an old synagogue space recuperated and transformed in a multicultural center, unconventional space, meeting space for art contemporary artists  
(a) First exhibition/manifestation:  
"No isi ei/Mi es Ok/Wir und Sie/Amen thai Len?", 11. - 13.10.1997  
(b) First video installation exhibition and performance manifestation in Transit House in Cluj: "Trans(it)formation", 1-2, 1998 curators: Timotei Nadasan & Sandor Antik  
(c) "Arbitrary censorship and exquisite/hidden persuasion through manipulation" exhibition and workshop (curated by Sandor Antik) in frame of the project "Regional workshop in media theory, critics, and creation", realised in Transit House, 20. - 21. June 2001.

Balkon- art contemporary magazine (where I worked as editor) - after 2003 has been transformed to Idea- arts + society magazine (see <http://www.idea.ro>) + my contribution as editor signed the articles in Balkon art contemporary magazine

International Art Camp Salina '98 curated by me, it is a characteristic example, for the period (1998) and for my confrontation as organizer with a traditional level of official and conservative art-institutes, but a finally I realise a very successful artistic manifestation. The physic place of mentioned art camp was a very interesting salt mine, near to Cluj, 60 km, preserved in his past middle era aspects. (from the catalogue my curatorial text on Salina '98 took place, under the titre "Art as resource", in a closed salt mine. With its huge galleries and wells, dug in this subterranean mineral, this site is deeply dilated into the past (with or without a specific time or place) which can induce an attraction for utopia of artistic fantasy. This site with therapeutical effects over breath and soul may also conduce to a few moments of self reflection over the measure, purpose and responsibility of using and renewing the worn out energies of our artistic habits. A new kind of alliance with nature (natur-natus) requires a reconsideration of the habit of an always thirsting artistic taste, for which nature is just an exploitable objective (wild nature recorded with artistic means). On the other hand our inner nature can be more and more determined by the "resources" of the civilizing artificial, as are art and culture.

Next to the practical prerogatives included in the program of the camp, these were the reasons why Salina Turda (locality) was chosen for this creation symposium. The 12 artists from Poland, Hungary, Republic of Moldova and Romania, created a number of specific site works, favouring the forms of the installation and of the sculptural environment. This eased in a way their placement in this subterranean surrounding without harming its status of technical and artistic patrimony. We hope that the next edition will maintain this balance between environment and "resource" which the organisers of the first edition managed to find.?

Really, my artistic project was a booster of a big project, which proposed to establish a medical-balneotherapy centre and environment in mentioned salt mine. Unfortunately, the salt mine had an uncertain propriety status and as consequence the absence of capital investment finally effected the end of our proposal project, the first edition remained the last, and the realised artistic "utopia" didn't open for the public visitors, it is closed in a underground hole.

3) I can't mention some more unrealised projects referring to urban problem

My project "The blind man" topographical view about the centre town of Cluj, 1994, this action proposed a performance of a blind man, on his body attached a video camera. My intention was to realise a video-recording film, as well as the blind pauper ferry over across a religious community group (then happened more vindicating meeting in the historic center town), and second a recording film with the same blind about the getting around the hole-foundation of the big greek-catholic church planned and in start construction in new administrative-cultural town centre. (see: Hole foundation of greek catholic church....)

The "ReUrbanity" project proposed by, as a response to a very good French exhibition "Urbanites" (of collection FRAC Languedoc Roussillon) itinerant in Macedonia-Romania (in Cluj, October 2000). My educational project proposed a continuation course after the first contact with French artists' works, an exercise for young artists, to toggle a preferred work and realise an interpretation in manner of everybody, or realise a intercommunication with the preferred French artist, for to initiate a communication, which result a work.

In (IDEA arts + society, 14, 2003, scene) you can contact, between other, a series of exhibitions/articles, and you can to form an opinion about the scene of contemporary art in Cluj and other Romanian towns, or about the participations of local artists in the partner exhibitions  
- Style exercises - The Balkans  
- History in progress  
- Dislocated Art  
- Duet  
- Periferic 6, Prophetic Corners, Contemporary Art Biennial, Iasi  
- Re: Location 4 Cluj-Luxemburg  
- Urban Act

5) Sandor Antik english CV- attach file

how you see the art scene in comparison with other cities?  
The Romanian art opinion generally can't accept the avant-garde or modern art-poetry from 20.siecle, nor theoretically, still less practically. The alternative art opinion oscillate between the poles: the imitation / gesticulation after the trendy and ready made art models or in other hand have a bash at personalise or a few number people themselves create the models.

what you like or dislike about it / if there are a lot of changes and why in your opinion?  
Up to now, myself it were the changing model considered. From here, I don't know, because I have a feel, that many times when we change the technical mediums, these remain a stranger mediums in our art

is there something that's "in" / did you notice that the art scene or funding policy is focussing on certain things?  
In the '90-s I participated in many alternative festivals and exhibitions. This was a good experience, until that this change in some culture-tourist meetings or the festivals in familial enterprise around with the civil servant artists and managers. This and other motives, which affect my opinion for to change and "focussing on certain things" as you write, that is a big project entitled "Active archive of technical mediums and media arts", a project with more segments: educational (a series of lectures on media archaeology and media arts, edited by me as lecturer from 2003 in PKE University Oradea) and the development of a virtual archive of the last archaeological optical apparatus and their optical illusions, descriptions, sketches, moving images and animation presentations, I hope that can to research and archive some elements of local media history: (for example the un-research history of silent cinema studio in Cluj, between 1903-1930, which was in a universal cinematographic network then in virtual CD presentation and I hope in finally in real space exhibit in Cluj). Parallel with this archival activity, I want to form the workshop groups and research team and to found an art foundation, which not only administrate this active archive, but it procreate a living space for the public and produce media art events and exhibitions. I have some models about, in direct relation with Intermedia Department of Hungarian Art University (<http://www.intermedia.c3.hu>) and C3: Center for Culture & Communication (<http://www.c3.hu>), and other centres.



hole-foundation of greek-catholic church+vindicating meeting in old center.jpg (0.11 MB)



You find an assessment-dossier in english (IDEA, 15-16,2003);  
a dossier about the actual stage and aspects in Cluj town, about the dysfunctionality of the public space, about the absence of public functions in the big agglomeration of peripheral quarters around of old town, and about some opinions, reactions, proposals of people (IDEA, 15-16,2003);  
dossier: "The right to live in town" by Ciprian Mihail, "Cluj 2003, Metastasis of ostentation" / black & white illustrations of tricolor Cluj by Marius Lazar, "Urban,social an symbolic construction of Manastur neighborhood" by Dominique Belkis, Gabriela Coman, Corina Sirbu, Gabriel Tronc;

+ a planwerk Cluj-Napoca: City development project (Planwerk is a group of Romanian and German architects and city planners, active in Cluj since 1998 with some projects presented in the Tautelec-Bihor Architecture Summer School, planwerk group has elaborated (February 2002 - May 2003) a durable urban development study for Cluj. Planwerk is currently working on a preliminary study for the general urban plan of Sibiu. "Ready made in Cluj center town" by Sandor Antik, in political opinion magazine Provincia, nr.12, 2001. Cluj (bilingue publication: romanian and hungarian) and just now appeared in another magazine AHet, 22.04.2004 / <http://www.ahet.ro>