

Caucasus-Balkan Express

Artists-in-residence

Cluj | Tbilisi | Yerevan

Caucasus-Balkan Express

Update <Culture>

Upgrade <Confidence>

Link <Communities>

The Caravan is a networking meeting aimed at building connections, stimulating reflection and facilitating cooperation among artists and cultural producers in the regions of South Caucasus and South-Eastern Europe.

The current global economic and political crisis has further deepened the social differences within societies and between countries. Both the Balkans and the South Caucasus are facing these challenges in their historically specific frame of an ever changing, discontinuous, disillusioned social context defined by transition from their respective versions of socialism to new „authentic“ democracies and market economies, ethnic conflicts and constant crises.

Culture - by its capacity to generate reflection, to construct and deconstruct meaning – has always acted as a facilitator of social processes, but cross-cultural translation can offer more: through comparison, emulation, osmosis, cross-fertilisation or contamination it can generate new, hybrid models of emancipatory practices, praxis in ephemeral or resilient solidarity networks.

Artists have always been good at this. Dealing with changing contexts and limited resources, the artistic sectors in these regions proved to have a great potential not only questioning existing models of social production but also in proposing and experimenting with new models of resilient and sustainable living. In order to add up into critical mass

and make a scalable social difference these experiments need to shift in time and space – hence the idea of the Caucasus-Balkan Express.

Using the metaphor of a train line connecting the Balkans and South Caucasus, the project aimed at building connections, stimulating reflection and facilitating cooperation among artists and cultural producers in the two regions.

The Caravan Meeting brought together 21 independent cultural operators from eleven countries for an intensive networking event in Tbilisi, in April 2015. The programme included meetings with local artists, urban exploration, public presentations, performances, and discussions on the topics of art and public space, socially engaged artistic practices, cultural policies, and international cooperation.

A nomad Artists-in-Residence programme followed in May-June 2015. Artists Vahe Budumyan, Armenia, Giorgi Khasaia, Georgia, Vilmos Koter, Romania and Tanja Radež, Slovenia explored the urban realities of Cluj, Tbilisi and Yerevan and produced a series of artistic interventions in public space, to reflect back to the local communities their insights.

Update <Culture> is our intention to connect and discover the each other's artistic universe. Our focus on socially engaged art is our commitment to **Upgrade <Confidence>**. Aiming to share knowledge and resources by working together is how we strive to **Link <Communities>**.

Caucasus-Balkan Express

ARTISTS -IN- RESIDENCE

Art actively engaging the social tissue - socially engaged art - encompasses a broad range of views and practices even if we focus on one single city. On a broader socio-geographical range multiplied by years or decades in time, we see a vast space of human experience where differences align or contrast, and a shifting landscape of communities of practice emerges.

The forces that shape or influence this process are everything between local and geopolitical. Structures of social organization (the government, civil society, art schools or the art market) are all actors that we can identify in this process - and still, we cannot and should not disregard the role of the individual, be him or her an artist or a "simple" citizen.

In fact, it's always persons who interact, even in the most intricate or overelaborated cases of institutional interactions. We keep underemphasizing the role of individuals in a world interwoven with threads of structural violence and still, in the end it is always flesh and bone persons responsible for both (social) stillness and motion - at all scales.

This is why art residences as immersive experiences are productive. In shaping the way artists interact with each other and ultimately, with community or society, we intend to apply the artists potential as a social actor to the wide and diverse space ranging from Cluj to Tbilisi, Yerevan and beyond, over the Caucasus area. The residence is designed

for artists to transaction and transcode cultural meaning, and produce mutual, cross-contextual learning. This cross-fertilization of methods, techniques, tactics, strategies and action has the potential to contribute - on both sides equally - to a deeper understanding of the context we are situated in and to trigger better informed and therefore enriched stillness or motion. Or both.



#ElectricYerevan
Yerevan, 20 June 2015

from Georgia

Giorgi Khasaia

Born in 1985, Giorgi Khasaia is currently based in Kutaisi, Georgia. He is a member of the Cyber Theatre of Indirect Action, a Georgian collective focused on social theory, critique and action. He has experience as author and broadcaster for Radio Dzveli Kalaki and Radio Iverioni, as moderator for Innovation Zone (Izone), and columnist and blogger for Journal Tskheli Shokoladi.

from Slovenia

Tanja Radež

Tanja Radež lives and works in Ljubljana. Born in the city of steel Jesenice, she chose design as her profession when she was fifteen years old. She graduated from The Academy of Fine Arts and Design Ljubljana, Visual Communication program. Tanja and two of her fellow students founded the TANDAR studio in 1989, which is where her creative work took place for the next twelve years. She permanently supplemented the two dimensions of visual communication with a third one, arising on the basis of contents and concepts. They were particularly involved in design and space formation.

Her creative studio work has a strong focus on culture, education and science these days and is dedicated to co-creating contemporary spaces and events. She has been the author of authentic notebook planners for 18 successive years now, whereas her everyday life is embedded with a unique sort of creative exploration that was eventually given the name OSTALGIAS, which in Tanja's language embraces authorial research and the upgrade of whatever it is that we leave behind. She writes about this subject of her research

and is on the constant search for new attributes she could attach to the existing objects and thus reshape them on the basis of collective memory by creating imaginary spaces and thus not only tracking down the visual remains of the recent history, but also reinterpreting them.

from Romania

Vilmos Koter

Vilmos Koter is an artist from Miercurea Ciuc, he graduated in Cluj-Napoca, among others has been to India, participated in the internationally reputable South Korean Geumgang Biennale and he is a regular guest at Korkép International Artist Colony located in Lăzarea. He is the type of artist who is not defined by one genre; his forms of expression are determined by the message he wants to express.

That is the reason why one can barely find two or more works of his created in the same genre. The content of his work is delivered in a clean and lucid way. His works are dependent on the environment, may that be natural, rural or urban environment. An encounter with a given environment and culture has a creative effect on him. Every such encounter and contact, is elementary to him as an artistically lived process. He allows his environment to speak, to get involved in the process of creation fundamentally determining its nature. He leaves ephemeral prints on his environment in such way that he never wrecks with them. He has a very sensitive approach to his pieces, first of all he is the one who changes in the process of creation and makes this change available for us to live as well. / art historian Eszter Túros

from Armenia

Vahe Budumyan

Vahe Budumyan is a visual artist based in Yerevan, Armenia. He studied Fine Arts in Armenian Open University (2005-2010). He continued his studies in Contemporary Art History and Theory in Institute of Contemporary Art (2012-2014), Yerevan, Armenia. From 2011-2014 he was involved in Bridge of Hope NGO programs as a photo trainer. Throughout past years he participated in numbers of local and foreign exhibitions, workshops and art projects, including SPACES: a three year project for artistic and cultural actions in public spaces in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

Vahe is currently working with two local art initiatives: "Utopiana.am" and "Boon.am". He also writes short stories for local literary magazines, being honored with the "Inknagir jury award" in 2010. He translates texts on art and photography theory from English to Armenian, with the view to make this knowledge accessible for Armenian audience. His recent projects include an educational book for young photographers, written in collaboration with Armenian artist Karin Grigoryan, and a documentary on Soviet-Armenian architecture of 1920-30's.



Giorgi Khasaia

Exchange Labour

Performance | Cluj, 29 May 2015

Featuring: Alex Boguş

Photo: Roland Váci

One of the main characteristics of contemporary art is its aspiration of reducing labor, of working less and less. Some of the scholars argue that the artistic avant-garde can be described as a consistent refusal to labor. The practice of ready-made, in this context, should be considered as a ramification of this approach. The famous gesture of Marcel Duchamp is the best example how to create an art without labor, without manual work.

But commodities that were and still are used in the artistic practice of ready-made are done by the manual work of someone else. This means that the artists have succeeded in reducing their physical work to the expense of others'. Contemporary art took up a diversionary tactic and took attention away from its own work to the work of others. An old dichotomy between material and immaterial labor, between manual and intellectual labor does not reflect (describe) the contemporary nature of labor practices. We have to reject this capitalistic division of labor which presupposes the opposition between physical and intellectual work.

Describing the status of English proletariat, Engels writes that casualties in a workplace which cause death of workers are to be read as a murder, as a man-slaughter. It could be a home task for an artist to discover a murder, to unveil a murder when the capital tries to convince us that it was casualty that caused worker's decease; or to find oppression when it is hidden in the illusion of welfare; or to invent the

language that affords us to speak out about the oppression. All that is possible, if an artist recognizes himself as a worker – for example a worker which operates with a keyboard. (Typing on a keyboard while being on internet, you enrich the companies – the more you stay online, the more profit they generate.)

Everybody is an artist only if they are workers.

What if the subaltern speaks while one who operates with language undertakes manual work?

/

Giorgi Khasaia is member of the Cyber Theatre of Indirect Action, Georgia.





Giorgi Khasaia

Fish size

Action | Yerevan, 20 June 2015

Featuring: Artur Petrosyan

Photo: Nvard Yerkanian

Driving pass Lake Sevan, one can't miss the sight of fishermen by the side of the road, inviting travelers to buy their latest catch by showing with their hands the size of the fish available. The gesture there, by the lake has a clear meaning. Out of that context, it changes significance. Two people on the street, citizens of different countries, enter in dialogue by showing each other this hand sign. The performance openly mocks a political discourse that is based on deceiving promises and false expectations.





Giorgi Khasaia

Lavash Nash!

Action | Yerevan, 20 June 2015

Featuring: Artur Petrosyan

Photo: Nvard Yerkanian

Lavash Nash! Our Bread! No, ours! It is around simple things that we build our identities, around which we tend to legitimize the heroic image of „ourselves” and the separation from „others”. The performance is a critical and ironic enactment of the disputes between countries in South Caucasus over the origins of traditional dishes.





Tanja Radež

Cross Story

Public intervention | Cluj, Tbilisi, Yerevan
May-June 2015

Since I was little, I was troubled by the image of Christ on the Cross. Almost naked, the body of the divine representative in the corner of the room nailed to the cross was an unacceptable image for me. I never developed a positive attitude towards religion or Church, because they seemed cold and inhospitable and the ceremonies were uninteresting, full of scolding and prohibitions.

In the time of transition the religion is becoming stronger in our countries any many of us feel intolerant and critical towards it. With the Cross Story project I wish to improve my personal relationship towards all the symbols and systems behind them. And I wish to help the Christian religion become warmer, more modern and kinder, less dark and not so untouchable.

The theme I am interested in is graffiti for the elderly. The older generations are bothered by street art, they might find it dirty and are not willing to read it and understand it. That is the reason for my bringing out to the streets something that might cheer up the elderly. I invented a kind of local street folk art enhanced by the question of the Cross. I would like to share my idea of hand making of symbols, in this case the crosses, as a therapy for tolerance. After all, the symbol of cross has a very strong position also within Slovene contemporary art. The question of personal attitudes to religion opens various new topics suitable for artistic reflection, for example the question of women and religion, and the question of whether faith in culture is equivalent to faith in God.

Domestic Beauty
Cross



Domestic Gambling
Cross





Gypsy (he)
Cross



Gypsy (she)
Cross



Greek Bruxelles
Cross



Antifascist
Cross



Clean
Cross



Super Clean
Cross



Eating
Cross



Two Meters
Cross



Vilmos Koter

Bless you

Public intervention | Cluj, May 2015

Photo: Kund Kopacz

Recently the orthodox church censored a wall painting in Bucharest. This was a simple interpretation of Saint George killing the dragon, the devil but they considered this satanic and evil and they made the drawing to be erased in an age when people are doing the most for their freedom of expression but we are still attached to religious dogmas, iconography and limited by taboos and if we try to observe we can see how organized religions are separating man from man, believers from nonbelievers.

In a response to the mentioned event I collected several religious objects from different religions and placed them on the streets gluing them on the wall beside or covering some graphites. It was a way of invading the public space with religion but it left the possibility for people to decide how to deal with them. After a few days most of the objects disappeared from the walls. These could have been taken by people who are believers or by nonbelievers who opposed or felt irritated because of them. Our approach to objects may differ but we do not attack the one problem which lies at the root of it. A simple object becomes a subject while simultaneously the subject becomes intangible.







Vilmos Koter

At the end ...

Public intervention | Cluj, Tbilisi, Yerevan
May-June 2015

Given the circumstances that we participated on this programme from the Balkan and Caucasus region, from countries like Armenia, Georgia, Slovenia and Romania I wanted to use there writing to encode a simple and generic message about a basic human need.

For the content of this message I formulated a sentence that is a fact and true to us all but using a language different from the major community will make it more difficult and harder to decode and this can have an unexpected effect and it may cause also division.

Knowing more languages it gives us the possibility to understand, to learn and to find out more about the cultural differences and similarities, however because of ignorance and lack of knowledge we may separate ourselves from others and therefore there is a risk to become violent.

Can we or can we not separate ourself from others due to the differences based on religion, traditions, culture, language, principles without being violent?



City | Cluj-Napoca, Romania



City | Cluj-Napoca, Romania



City | Cluj-Napoca, Romania



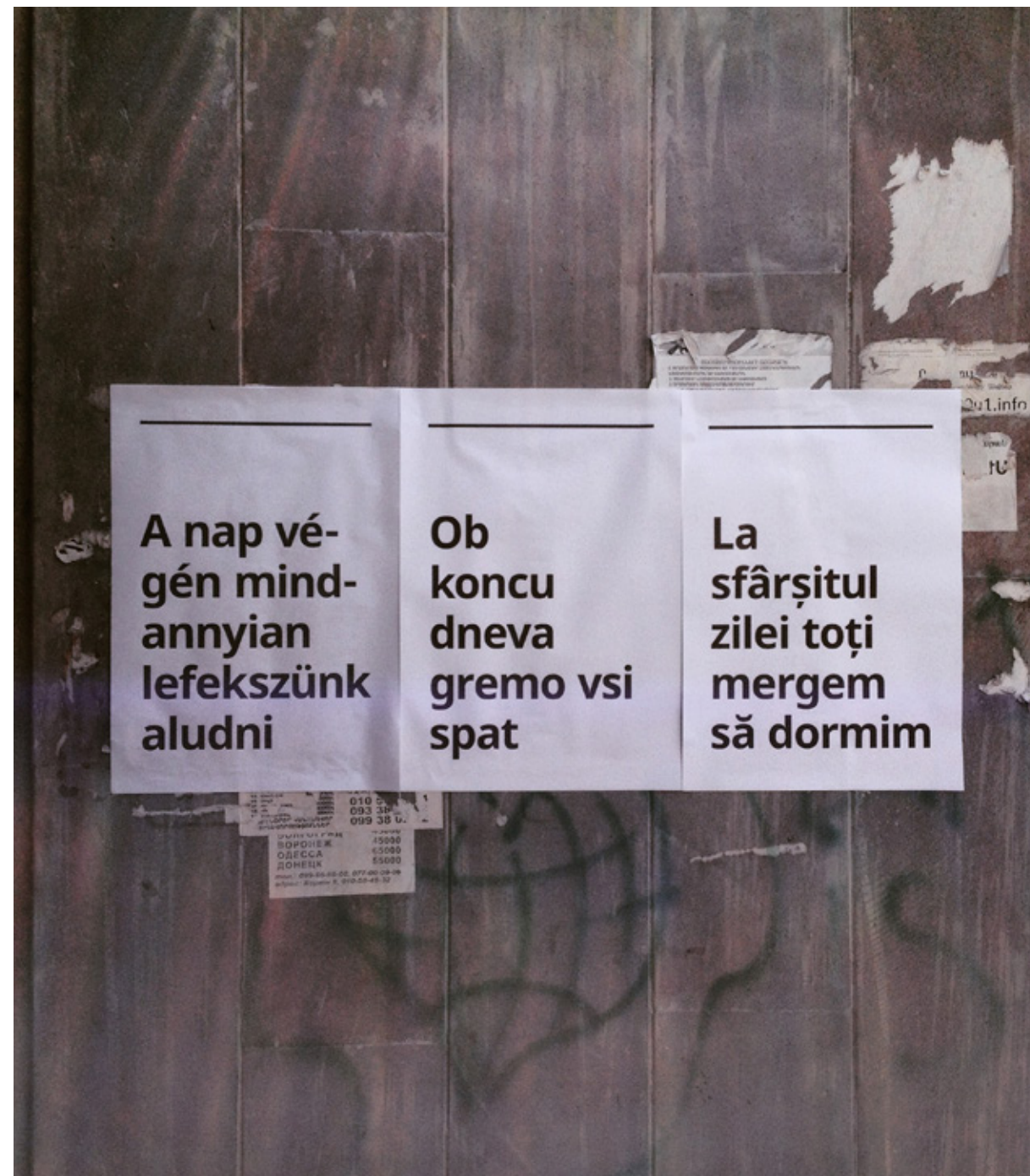
City | Tbilisi, Georgia



City | Tbilisi, Georgia



City | Yerevan, Armenia



City | Yerevan, Armenia



City | Yerevan, Armenia

**At
the end
of the day
we all go
to sleep**

Vahe Budumyan

Missing Places

7 Postcards, 10,4x14,8 cm
Cluj, Tbilisi, Yerevan, May-June 2015

Although digital technologies and images have almost entirely conquered our day-to-day life, there are still people who prefer non-digital communication, and there are still postcard stands near touristic attractions in every corner of the world. The postcard gives you a feeling of possession, evidence that you have actually been on the trip, and returning without pictures is considered abnormal, as if you had not left a place. If you own a postcard, you own a place, and you own a landmark. But what if the subject of the image on your postcard were missing?

Missing Places is a set of subversive postcards that depict famous places in Cluj, Tbilisi and Yerevan, with their landmarks missing: Avram Iancu Square with the Dormition of the Theotokos Cathedral missing and Unirii Square with the St. Michael's Church missing, Cluj, Avlabari neighborhood with the Holy Trinity Cathedral missing, Tbilisi, Freedom Square with the Opera Theater missing, Yerevan. These postcards can be found around the city in places where they belong - in different cafes, bars and cultural sites. Although most of the photoshopped buildings are churches, the Missing places project is not simply against religious institutions, but is also about the notion of a public space, e.g. a square, as a free physical space and its importance and necessity for city life. And the actual subjects of the images are not the buildings but rather the free spaces they create when they are gone. The aim of the project is to give the possibility to reflect on the notion of public spaces, our perceptions mediated by images, and to underline the physicality of a public space - that it is not simply an empty space but a free space.





A View of Unirii Square with
the St. Michael's Church
City | Cluj-Napoca, Romania



A View of Unirii Square with
the St. Michael's Church Missing
City | Cluj-Napoca, Romania



A View of Avram Iancu Square with
the Dormition of the Theotokos Cathedral
City | Cluj-Napoca, Romania



A View of Avram Iancu Square with
the Dormition of the Theotokos Cathedral Missing
City | Cluj-Napoca, Romania



A Bird's-eye View of the Old Town with the St. Michael's Church and the Dormition of the Theotokos Cathedral Missing
City | Cluj-Napoca, Romania



A Bird's-eye View of the City Center with the Opera Theater Missing
City | Yerevan, Armenia



A View of Freedom Square
with the Opera Theater
City | Yerevan, Armenia



A View of Freedom Square
with the Opera Theater Missing
City | Yerevan, Armenia



A View of Freedom Square
with the Opera Theater
City | Yerevan, Armenia



A View of Freedom Square
with the Opera Theater Missing
City | Yerevan, Armenia



A View of Avlabari Neighborhood with
the Holy Trinity Cathedral
City | Tbilisi, Georgia



A View of Avlabari Neighborhood with
the Holy Trinity Cathedral Missing
City | Tbilisi, Georgia

Acknowledgements:

Vahe Budumyan, Giorgi Khasaia, Tanja Radež, Koter Vilmos
Harut Alpetyan, Tamara Bračić Vidmar, Nevenka Koprivšek,
Lali Pertenava, Taguhi Torosyan, István Szakáts, Natuka
Vatsadze, Nvard Yerkanian, Rarița Zbranca
Alex Boguş, Lavinia Jaba, Artur Petrosyan, Emilia Zbranca
Anca Hrab, Dinu Toderaşcu

AltArt Foundation
<http://www.altart.org>

Photo credits: Kopacz Kund, Tatjana Rajic, Nvard Yerkanian,
Roland Váczi, Koter Vilmos, Vahe Budumyan

Design: Koter Vilmos

Published: July 2015

Caucasus-Balkan Express project is initiated by the AltArt Foundation, Cluj and Balkan Express Network, Ljubljana, in partnership with Public Art Platform and Bouillon Group, Tbilisi, and ICA, Yerevan. With the financial support of the Black Sea Trust - A Project of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, The European Union - Culture Programme and the Romanian Cultural Institute.

A project of:



Partners:



Supported by:

