

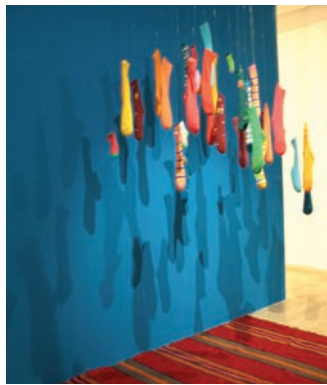
From Kosovo to Kaliningrad: Part 1

Aaron Moulton



THE BALKAN EXPRESS

East of Italy, on a night train heading from Milan towards Belgrade, I was en route to an early appointment with the Lost Highway Expedition (LHE), a month-long initiative organized by the School of Missing Studies and the Centrala Foundation for Future Cities. Artists Kyong Park and Marjetica Potrč put together an all-star itinerary to cover ground throughout the Balkans along the lost Highway of Brotherhood and Unity, a road referred to generically as "Autoput," an unfinished effort to urbanistically link the major cities of former Yugoslavia and enforce a geographic unity otherwise rejected by the parts of the whole. Championed by Tito as a way to tie the knot of a forsaken marriage, the highway is currently integrated into other official highway networks and now stands as a metaphor for the obvious disconnections that exist from the fragmented leftovers of South-eastern Europe, ex-Yugoslavia and the Balkans.



In between states of unity with an encroaching Europe of Schengen Agreements on one side and the recent defragmented past on the other, the LHE was aimed at mapping the trajectories of urbanistic and cultural development in cities from Ljubljana, Zagreb, Novi Sad and Belgrade to Skopje, Prishtina, Tirana, Podgorica and Sarajevo. The mission, open to all, sat on the fence between a crash course in East art tourism and an as yet unclear goal of analyzing the transformational nature of these individual hubs through a range of



meetings and lectures with different cultural protagonists. The LHE was preceded and would be followed with seminars and exhibitions held in the US and Europe. After Kosovo, I would separate from the highway and continue on to Sofia, Kiev and then up through the Baltic region of Tallinn, Riga and Kaliningrad before a departure from Warsaw. With LHE travelers hailing from backgrounds of art, urban studies, architecture and general enthusiasm, this come-as-you-please format of the expedition was an ideal opportunity for accessing these cities but also to feel out and establish networks. In the process of Lost Highway entrepreneurial tactics and DIY infrastructures for art and architecture were revealed which made the notion of Balkanization seem like a condition conducive for forming bricolage alternatives.

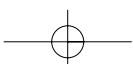
POST-SOROS CONDITION

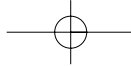
As a parallel and much larger network threaded throughout post-Soviet Europe, in 1991, at the moment of the Soviet Union's collapse and independence being secured, George Soros' Open Society Institutes stepped in to facilitate transition. In addition to implementing a wide variety of neoliberal educational and ideological initiatives that were contrary to latent and leftover systems of Communism, they also initiated programs of contemporary art of an unprecedented measure in the form of the Soros Centers for Contemporary

Art (SCCA). These centers set up a collaborative network within each major city providing money, facilities, research databases of local artists for foreign curators and also infrastructure to promote and cultivate offshooting branches, NGOs, events, education programs, etc. Their presence reinvented hierarchies of quality and schools of thought through the institutionalization of culture. Depending on the venue, they offered a model of infrastructure that presented everything from what was happening at the Venice Biennale or Documenta and how to write a grant application or develop a portfolio, to instruction on the use of new materials for producing different kinds of work. The development or acceleration of cultural phenomena in each city is subject to individual research. In the recently published "East Art Map" by Irwin, Lilia Dragneva, curator of the Center for Contemporary Art Chisinau [ksa:k], Moldova, marks the introduction of the SCCA and its support structure as the "emergence" of contemporary art production in Moldova as it is known today. Though that stands as a particular example of its impact, most cities such as Belgrade, Sofia or Skopje had their share of official and unofficial institutions to individuate them from or synchronize them with the SCCAs. Nonetheless, cities — twenty in total — were suddenly fortified with a wave of unparalleled support, making the pursuit of larger productions and international possibilities a reality. Though it is impossible yet tempting to generalize

since each Soros Center had its own specific approach of administrative strategies within each city, the influx of support for the arts was unprecedented. A well-noted example in Estonia, ex-SCCA director Sirje Helme noted the financial support in 1995 as being twice that of the ministry of culture budget for art, an amount capable of causing a paradigm shift.¹ Amongst rumors that he is said to have little interest in contemporary art, what are George Soros' interests or motives in supporting it at such a widespread and comprehensive level? The SCCAs introduced from the ether among other things, programs and heavy support for new media, Internet and electronic art timed with its Western success in the '90s, and then positioned, in some cases, where it hadn't been prior. Art historian Miško Šuvaković has outlined in detail the tempering homogenization that resulted from the impact of these centers on local cultural production in his concept of 'Soros Realism.'² The grooming process of deciding what projects or art to support and why is also a topic that Šuvaković discusses regarding the neutralization of otherwise natural artistic

Clockwise from below: Ana Nedeljković, *Evil Girl*, 2005/2006. Installation, dimensions variable. Photo: Eduard Freudmann. Predrag Miladinović, *Smelling Socks*, 2005. Installation, dimensions variable. Photo: Aleksandra Mirčić; Akram Zaatari, *In This House*, 2005. DVD, 30 mins. Courtesy Sfeir Semler Gallery, Beirut/Hamburg. Above: Snapshots of Skopje by Aaron Moulton.





reactions to the post-Soviet situation. On this note it seems relevant to consider the potential for monopolies and even instrumentalization of culture through these centers for the sake of 'civil society.'

What has been the effect and after-effect from the funding, which had a shelf-life of less than a decade? It is suggested that there was no sound exit strategy. The SCCAs and other Soros-supported NGOs were left to establish themselves alone by garnering support from other sources be they local, international, governmental or otherwise. Most SCCAs have either been renamed, closed or cut their program so drastically that they barely figure into the equation any longer.

In the wake of this advent, a research trip was in order to investigate the state of these cities in their post-Soros condition and in the run-up for Europeanization. The LHE and my own parallel itinerary of interviews seemed as good a starting point as any for understanding how today's NGOs and



Knežević, as a part of the Swiss funding body's "Small Actions" grant. They received the money before having done any actual shows. It is one of many new institutions that has popped up in order to meet the needs of contemporary culture but also help to reinvigorate the Cultural Center Stari Grad where the gallery is located. Since opening, it has been successfully juggling enough programming in that time to fill about two years worth of space on any normal schedule. On view were the finalists for the fifth edition of the Mangelos Award, a prize for young Serbian artists that results in a six-week residency in New York at the ISCP. Part of the Young Visual Artist Awards within Central Europe and the Balkans, each country created an award named after a prominent cultural figure, in this case the conceptual artist and art historian Dimitije Bašičević who is known under his pseudonym Mangelos. Mangelos, though known as a Croatian artist, is claimed as Serbian in this context due to his birth in the border town of Sid, Serbia. A jury chose the delicate wall drawings of Siniša Ilić as this year's winner from fellow finalists Jelena Radić, Ana Nedeljković, Ivana Smiljanić, Jamesdin and Dejan Kaluderović.

As the Belgrade Cultural Centre prepares for the region's most international contemporary art event, the annual October Salon now curated by René Block, the current exhibition "Postcards," curated by Aleksandra Mirčić and Una Popović, offered ways of rethinking the stereotyped notions of a city, specifically Belgrade. When mediated through the iconic vistas of postcards, Google

images or other distant windows, these frames sometimes become the only impression one has of a place. Aleksandar Mačašev tried to develop a new landscape through more everyday imagery by loading eerie snapshots of his hometown with the psychological reading of a horror film set in the series "Bečej — small town horror." The project by Predrag Miladinović cracked open archives of untouched associative memories that made a composite sketch of the street's many faces. In his installation *Smelling Socks*, he presented a hanging panorama of odors stored inside an array of stockings. Each moved a soon-to-be drunk nose through burnt rubber, coffee grinds and citrus. It was reminiscent of a similar project where Herzog & de Meuron successfully synthesized the *eau de quotidien* into a perfume with its olfactory sketch of Rotterdam.

Passing through a cloud at O3ONE Gallery, pronounced "ozone," artists Lukas Mettler and Cris Faria inaugurated a ruse similar to the tongue-in-cheeky Gagosian Gallery, Berlin by the Wrong Gallery by creating *Art Basel Geneva Belgrade*. With pirated font, publicity campaigns, a smoke machine and the champagne on ice, it obviously wasn't really an art fair but did demonstrate how out of place the hyperbolic sales event or the credibility of its price tags would be if it crossed the Danube. In Serbia they have an expression that translates to "selling the fog" similar to the English version of "blowing smoke" up one's art fair. This playful hijacking coincides with the gallery's education program organized by curator Marko

Stamenković, which explores various angles on art and economy — issues on the tip of the tongue in how spaces like O3ONE position themselves with private or corporate funders and the making of a profit. In this capital of former Yugoslavia, with the many foundations and young non-profits, it might not be long before an art fair makes perfect sense.

SKOPJE, MACEDONIA

Skopje was a hidden treasure in the heart of the Balkans. Nestled in the foothills of a nearby mountain range, the city seems to sprawl infinitely. After the earthquake of 1963, which destroyed most of the original plan, the city was flooded with the solidarity of international support for rebuilding. It became the architectural drawing board of people such as Japanese architect Kenzo Tange, whose master plan was the sketch for the present city. It is currently a trove of concrete baroque, a museum of modernism's brutalist dreams with the prevalent *béton brut* style that, similar to certain pavilions in Venice's Giardini, feels like entering into yesterday's concept of tomorrow.

Walking around with artist Oliver Musovik was comparable only to having a kind of x-ray vision, seeing a healthy wood-for-the-trees-eye view of everyday urban drama. The

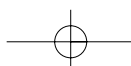


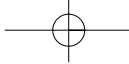
Jovan Shumkovski, *Paraolimpic-Skopje 2052* (detail), 2005. Architectural model. Courtesy Press to Exit, Skopje; Above: Aleksandar Mačašev, *Bečej — Small Town Horror* (detail), 2006. Installation and website, dimensions variable. Left: Cris Faria & Lukas Mettler, *Art Basel Geneva Belgrade*, installation view at O3ONE, Belgrade. Photo: Milan Radovanović. Below: Snapshots of Skopje and Belgrade by Aaron Moulton.

members of the contemporary art industries are approaching issues ranging from alternative forms of support for education and cultivation to self-sustaining commercial enterprises and strategies for capitalizing on a career.

BELGRADE, SERBIA

Kontekst Galerija is a nonprofit gallery funded by ProHelvetia — who in the last decade, along with organizations such as the European Cultural Foundation, Kulturstiftung des Bundes and Erste Bank have been heavily involved in the sponsorship of NGOs and artists throughout the region. The space was started earlier this year by two young curators, Ivana Marjanović and Vida





city itself is already visually overwhelming but Musovik peels back layers from otherwise invisible components such as paving stones, beaten paths, the odd monument or the common and yet suddenly noticeable doorway. He offers an anecdotal breakdown of social trauma, governmental tension or the harmony of the sublime banal. It became the tour of a city that I

on the prime real estate, transforming the MoCA into the new palace. Outraged and inspired with constructive humor, Musovik envisaged the idea with the cooperation of the museum by using official guards, red carpet and other decorative regalia to make it so. Musovik's leveraging trade-off in the project momentarily turned Parliament building into the new Museum of Contemporary Art. Recently the museum and the city received a second wave of support, this time from the Italian government in the form of 3 million euros, money that will go towards a new roof and drainage system for the otherwise leaky building.

PRISHTINA, KOSOVO

In the run up to independence Kosovo is buzzing with a flurry of construction ventures and an unparalleled optimism for the future. In Prishtina, the national hero Bill Clinton's name is used for good business branding, greeting you upon arrival with the Bill Clinton marble dealership seen next to the bus station. Clinton even has a street named after him that ironically crosses with his '96 campaign opponent Bob Dole Ave. Marjetica Portč's *Prishtina House*, shown at Portikus in Frankfurt earlier this year, very pointedly analyzed the liberated approaches of construction for turning a house into a home. There is a definite do-it-yourself aspect to the design, be it incorpo-

rating beautifully kitsch shale mosaics into the side or leaving the top floor under construction for the possibility of adding another story. Gas stations seem to be the business of choice and on the road from Prishtina to Peja they dotted the highway abundantly. Often in setting up a station there is eventually a hotel and restaurant added to the equation that leads to a microcosm for economy making, as Potrč put it, "the citizen into the smallest state." These shades of formal and informal economy, or "parallelism" as artist and curator Erzen Shkolöllli said, run deep in the recent history here. Contemporary art seems to have understandably little relevance in the current environment. Yet the EXIT Contemporary Art Institute in Peja — for which Shkolöllli is the co-founder — and its educational counterpart Laboratory for Visual Arts and the Center for Humanistic Studies Gani Bobi in Prishtina, have in three years formalized an otherwise informal economy of advanced cultural production that, at the most difficult times, was manifesting as a parallel school system squatting in locations around the city or as spontaneous exhibitions in local non-art establishments. It's possible to be a pioneer here if you know what you're doing.

At EXIT in Peja Akram Zaatari had two films on view. The feature length *This Day* (2003) leafed through a history of the Bedouin based on its mediation through early publications, photographs and

stereotypes. The film dissected the current state of the nomadic people in the face of modernization in an ever-shrinking land. The visually rich and poignant photos used in the film were from the Armenian/Egyptian photographer Van Leo and likely to have been culled from the potent archive of the Arab Image Foundation co-founded by Zaatari in Beirut. In the film, the camera's scanning of images was devious as the pan motion analyzed subject/object relations that turned relatively candid snapshots from the turn of the century into a semiotic theater. The telling of this Bedouin tale of old was always meshed in parallel with current interpretations while also revisiting and interviewing the actual photographic subjects appearing in the archival images. Across the streaming footage of the desert, the occasional camel or colonist appears as split second, black-and-white flashes of faded memory. The sound of the desert wind is eventually replaced by the afterburn of F16



fighter jets as the story leads into the '82 invasions of Beirut by Israel. "This day" was how Zaatari began every diary entry during that period, reporting on everything from military developments to the weather. Though moving directly into the personal aspects of Zaatari's own history and a direct analysis of the war, the film maintains a consistent angle of distance while discussing the imposed limits upon differing civilizations. Strangely the exhibition was prognostically timed with the recent Israeli invasion of Beirut which is currently in remission. ■

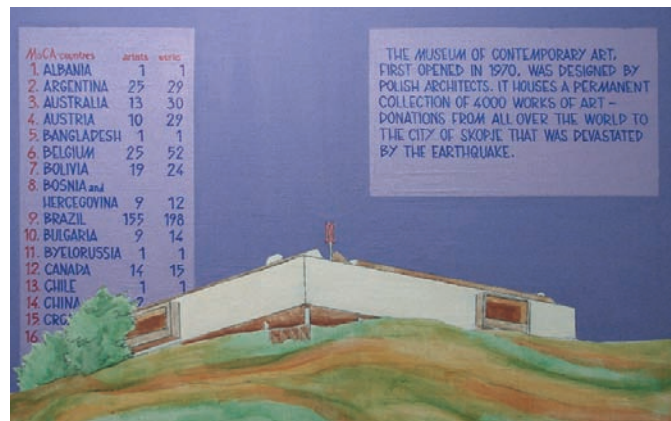
In the next issue, this report continues with the new Pinchuk Foundation in Kiev, what's on in Shargorad, Ukraine, asking the Kaliningrad question, a trip to the Willa Warsaw, and more...

Notes:
1. Helme, Sirje. www.cca.ee/et/meie/artikkel/
2. Suvaković, Miško. www.ljudmila.org/scca/platforma3/suvakoviceng.htm

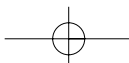


had always wanted, one that was even-handed with the good and bad, and heavy on information infused with poetic ironies like being inside a work by Sean Snyder — who incidentally made a piece about Kenzo Tange's work in Skopje.

At Press to Exit, the ProHelvetia-sponsored space for contemporary art, a presentation of Jovan Shumkovski's hypothetical models for a future Skopje were on view. His stadium for the Paralympics of 2052 seemed comfortably feasible against the actual architectural risk-taking within the environment outside. At the gallery's project space across town, the young Velimir Zernovski's paintings were buzzing with the same irony as Musovik's tour, depicting cultural monuments with a certain refreshingly raw edge. One image showed the Museum of Contemporary Art perched on its hill, an institution that was born shortly after the earthquake when some 6,000 donations of art from the world over created its present collection. An interesting time capsule of artistic production, the huge white cube watches over the city along with its neighbor, the extant and crumbling Turkish fortress, perched there as an unmistakable bastion for cultures old and new. Musovik explained that at one point in 2003, the local members of government were discussing the then president's lack of a presidential palace and had pondered, based



Velimir Zernovski, from the series "Welcome to Skopje," 2005. Acrylic on canvas, 92 x 73 cm. Courtesy Press to Exit, Skopje. Above left: Oliver Musovik, Presidential Palace, 2003. Above right: Akram Zaatari, *This Day*, 2003. DVD, 86 mins. Courtesy Sfeir Semler Gallery, Beirut/Hamburg. Above: Snapshots of Prishtina by Aaron Moulton.





SOFIA, BULGARIA

After much anticipation, Sofia, Bulgaria, the furthest East I traveled, looked and felt a lot more like a Western European city such as Brussels than a city within the so-called 'black sheep of the Balkans.' Architecturally speaking, it is less baroque when compared to the unmistakable 'architecture' of Skopje or Pristhina, having instead a rather anonymous urban identity. However, in place of the city's tempered topography this urban peacock is noticed for its abundance of visual information: advertising is used architectonically to fortify and yet at the same time eliminate the presence of certain buildings within the visual field. Artist Luchezar Boyadjiev has made several projects that explore the manner in which advertising competes directly with and occasionally replaces monuments. In other cases he fabricated



Photoshopped situations where one is not sure where advertising and the consumer's reality begin and end, a cross-pollination resulting in a neo-Captialist nightmare of dedifferentiation. Sofia Art Gallery curator Maria Vassileva has done much to turn the gallery's program into a cutting edge one, making it one of the only public institutions to turn to for contemporary art. Vassileva and in-house curator Daniela Radeva recently opened "Important Announcement," a substantial survey of the last twenty years of Bulgarian artists using text as an instrument in art-making. The curators accomplished quite a coup, importing and displaying numerous works that are famous internationally but having never been seen locally. The selection of



over 30 Bulgarian artists included Boyadjiev, Nedko Solakov and Veronika Tzekova, each using the medium of script filtered through other media such as photography, installation and drawing. Boyadjiev took the opportunity to revisit Croatian artist Mladen Stilinovic's famous reality check of the times *An artist who cannot speak English is not an artist*, a harshly straightforward work from '93, with his own sardonically comical millennium edition of *English for Artists*.

One notices a lack of public institutions available to provide adequate platforms for contemporary art practices. However, Moscow Biennale curator and diehard local Iara Boubnova recently initiated a creative protest against the lack of a contemporary art museum, enlisting the help of local artists and anticipating the museum subversively: by creating its gift shop. "The Store of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sofia" (MUSIZ), sells stationeried miniatures of iconic works of Bulgarian contemporary art — a clever tactic that infiltrates the public, giving the possibility of owning a 'small' collection of works that should already be in the public trust but as yet are not. In addition to the museum store, Boubnova recently began operating a clandestine exhibition program in one of the many hide-away kiosks that are particular to Sofia. Positioning the clerk below sidewalk level these shops from Communist times have instant

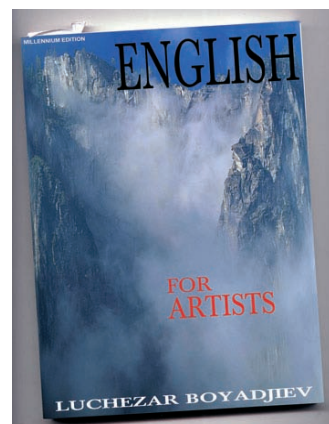
fold out vitrines asking the customer to peruse the products and then kneel over to make the transaction. Using the displays for presenting artists' projects, this Wrong Gallery-esque intervention has been roughly dubbed "Bend-to-art."

KIEV, UKRAINE

Amid the dust and sweat of an endless squad of construction workers, Olafur Eliasson's *Inverted Shadow Tower* was veiled in a sheet of plastic, a backstage beauty from its last appearance in Venice in 2005. Victor Pinchuk, the richest man in the Ukraine and the oligarch who has bought and sold some of the country's main industries, opened his private collection, the PinchukArtCentre, on September 15th. Seeing everything weeks before curtain call carried, as with any exhibition, the tense impossibility of finishing the museum in time. Yet the foundation has proved unstoppable in the face of municipal difficulties, as the initial location in the historic and infinitely vast Arsenal building of Kiev was roadblocked by differences with the local government. The new location is in the Cedric Prican fun palace called "Arena," a megacenter for consumption with restaurants, bars, casinos, discotheques, luxury clothing shops, automobile showrooms and now completing the highend spectrum with a contemporary art museum.

Nicolas Bourriaud, a man needing little introduction after his recent contributions to contemporary art 'isms,' was selected in 2003 to head up the cultivation of an international collection of contemporary art — an effort presented in Venice during the last Biennale melee. His sketch for taking on what could be considered a daunting task of making from scratch something that represents even the last year of contemporary art history, was focused by looking at overlaps of art and technology — areas already present in Pinchuk's extensive collection of new media work from the Ukraine and semi-biographical given Pinchuk's background in industry. Victor Pinchuk has been collecting since 1993 and with the astute advice of Olexandr Solovyov, he managed to acquire such a strong array of Ukrainian contemporary art that if Ukrainian institutions ever tried to put together a collection, let alone a survey show, they would be looking to Pinchuk as London's Tate would Saatchi to adlib their glaring oversights of recent local accomplishments. This collection officially sets the bar for an art scene which is dominated by what could be considered a weak commercial market. Beyond Berezniysky Gallery, the local spaces don't differentiate themselves between being vendors of

Luchezar Boyadjiev, *English for Artists*, 2000. Digital print, 29 x 21 cm.
From left: Luchezar Boyadjiev, work from the series "Billboard Heaven", 2005. Ink-jet print, 60 x 80 cm; Oleg Kulik, From the series "Lolita vs Alice," 2000. Above snapshots of Kaliningrad by Aaron Moulton.





Russians was delayed due to the increased threats to the statue's wellbeing through vandalism, acts resulting in its being painted portions of the Estonian flag's blue and white and one man was even arrested earlier this year for threatening to blow it up.

As a part of the three-part exhibition "Flowers of Evil" at Hobusepea, Draakon and HOP galleries — three of Tallinn's main commercial venues — curator Elin Kard organized a survey of political crimes of passion and poisonous obsessions found in a group of young Estonian artists. Kristin Kalamees' prescient video installation from 2002 *Eternal Flame* touches the raw nerves of the bronze anti-hero's existence in society. By mapping the spiraling infatuation of a young girl's hidden crush for this fatherland figure, from her youth as a pioneer to her adulthood of unsatisfied relationships, she always envisions a future in his arms. Interviews with oblivious family and friends describe her as normal and harmless. Noticing her first gray hair she realizes youth has slipped away and she is unable to ever be with her true love, a fairly legible subtext of a forbidden USSR.

When discovering the budding interest in the bronze man from another younger girl, her attraction turns fatal and she obtains the means to obliterate the statue with heavy explosives — a tough-loving reminder of how recent colonial break-ups are and of the untenable yet passing 'Ostalgic.' The happy ending to the tale

art or artisan craft, selling works that have little redeeming value for visual culture. The art scene seems to have had its hayday during the Soros years when the Soros Center was under the curatorial guidance of Marta Kuzma. Currently the Soros Center has little more than community-based art workshops, hosting rather disengaged exhibitions that place the programming deeply in the throes of an endgame.

more appropriately translates to "Global Village." It was a festival aimed between the eyes of positioning art where you'd least expect it.

About as out of place as a UFO landing, the event was inaugurated by a 'Greetings Earthlings' speech from the REP group, a collective of young artists whose name means "Revolutionary Experimental Space." The group has made quite a name for itself locally and abroad after being born out of protest during the 2004 Orange Revolution. Thanks to a bus organized by Berezniysky Gallery — who just opened a spacious new branch in Berlin's Mitte district — it was possible to drop in on an otherwise unlikely destination. Financed and curated by Moscow's Metafuturism Society for Alternative Art Development, Illya Chichkan, Boris Mikhailov, Blue Noses and around 20 other artists were invited to come to the town, work and put forward projects specifically for this event, using the city — not so coincidentally the hometown of the organizer's co-founder — as a frame representing the rural environ to the locals and accidental tourists alike.

TALLINN, ESTONIA

The Kumu Art Museum, Tallinn's new and permanent home for the former Art Museum of Estonia, opened last winter marking a stabilizing shift in how and where people will come to experience Estonian art and culture. Housed in the futuristic, semi-circular, limestone castle designed Pekka Vapaavuori, the museum's collection and programming, under the direction of Tallinn's former Soros Center director Sirje

Helme, maps an insoluble path of artmaking from the country, moving from the 18th century to the present. The direction is refreshingly acute, logically compartmentalized and specific to Estonia without seeming provincial. It presents an artistic chronology that consistently posits a dialogue between art to society, reflecting times of political trauma or cultural changes, rather than art merely referring to itself.

In the center of town at Tonismagi square, a monument is guarded twenty-four hours a day by police. As a visitor this tension is not immediately evident but represents an ongoing struggle for authoring and editing history. The Russian Soldier-Liberator monument is a staunch stone shrine encasing the socialist bronze sculpture of a Russian soldier — a statue commemorating the liberation of the country from Nazi occupation and mourning the death of the soldiers who died trying. According to local myth, the figure is actually an Estonian man in Russian fatigues since he was made by famous local sculptor Enn Roos, and also bears a closer physical resemblance to Estonians than the ethnic Russians who still make up a strong minority. Created in 1947, it is one of the few monuments still remaining from the period of Soviet occupation and its existence is salt in the wound by representing the "liberation" of Estonia into another form of occupation within the Soviet Empire. There are numerous plans to move the statue in spite of protests from Russia, but already the unknown soldier's eternal flame has been extinguished. Use of the site for the late September anniversary celebrations organized by ethnic



Kiev is a city bursting with wealth that needs to be culturally directionalized since, at a glance, the saturation of luxury goods makes it seem a bit like a Mercedes and SUV dealership. So far Victor Pinchuk seems to be the only one constructively channeling his money towards the development of contemporary art. With the new PinchukArtCentre and all the international attention it guarantees, every venue in the city and country will have no choice but to pay attention and adjust themselves accordingly.

Seven hours south of Kiev is Shargorad, a sleepy and inconspicuous town with a population of about 2,000 people. In late August it was rushed by the Ukrainian and Russian art scenes for the opening of "Globe City" — a name derived from the literal meaning of the name "Shargorad" — but

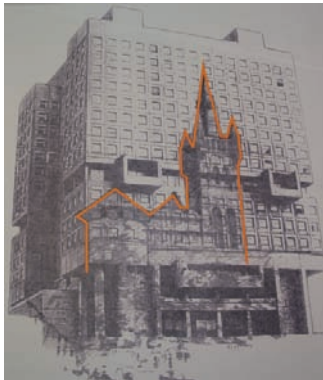


Performance by REP Group. Photo: Aaron Moulton. Kristin Kalamees, *Eternal Flame*, 2002. Video. Mayor of Shargorad in front of his portrait. Photo: Aaron Moulton. Below snapshots of Sofia by Aaron Moulton.





occurs when our protagonist falls in love anew with an older and more socially acceptable monument of Anton Hansen Tamm-saare — a local literary icon whose work has come to



symbolize not only Estonian literature but in many respects Estonian identity.

KALININGRAD, RUSSIA

Kaliningrad is a hybrid, notoriously dubbed the 'European Hong Kong,' a situation that has inevitable challenges for cultural identity. A subculture of graffiti tags and local death metal bands lament the halcyon days of the land's previous self as Königsburg, a firsthand experience they know nothing of in their own lifetime. This year Kaliningrad celebrated its 60th birthday and the advertising was lush with a subtle and self-conscious embrace of culturally Janus-faced existence. Last year the team at the National Center for Contemporary Art published *Königsburg / Kaliningrad Art Guide* for the 750th anniversary of Königsburg that currently, while not being widely distributed beyond its website, serves as the first and only guide to help decipher the current state of affairs. The book is rife with architectural proposals from superimposing original histories onto the current plan to the designs for the NCCA's upcoming relocation to the Kronprinz towers. There are many artists projects by people such as Joachim Koester, SKART and Alexey Chebykin offering medi-

tations on the city and oblast's condition, discussing specific issues such as the late embrace of Königsberger Immanuel Kant's importance as a local cultural icon to a general anthropological tallying of specter hunting and resurrected lore.

The NCCA is the primary institution working actively with contemporary art and culture within the oblast. They produce a stylish biannual magazine called *pH* since 2002 which is bilingual in Russian and English and their program, without a permanent space, frequently consists of offsite and parasitic exhibitions in the local non-art institutions. Once the new premises are ready, they will stabilize their programming to include a broad range of education programs, a studio residency and the space for temporary exhibitions.

WARSAW, POLAND

The position of Warsaw — similar to that of Ljubljana, Prague or Budapest — makes it a hub of betweenness for Eastern and Western Europe, especially in terms of the success nascent art markets and self-sustainable commercial galleries are having within the broader framework of the global market. Considering the lack of art fairs in Poland, the members of Raster Gallery,

Lukasz Gorczyca and Michal Kaczynski, staged a vanguardish expose of today's hottest young galleries from near and far in the seat of Warsaw's own historical avantgardist temple, a derelict villa buried in overgrowth between a shopping mart and an anonymous office building. Created by lawyer, mathematician, philosopher, artist and factory owner Antoni Moniuszko, who designed and realized the villa in 1949 as a made-to-measure and fairly eccentric architectural archetype of exactly what he wanted as a home complete with personally designed furniture and artwork. It became a generational crossroads for the cognoscenti up until the late '80s, hosting meetings, parties, exhibitions and the like. Moniuszko passed away in 2001 leaving the villa virtually untouched.

In a brilliant reassumption of this role, Raster invited their own milieu of international caliber. The democratizing layer of dirt, age and use provided a readymade platform and works were installed throughout this Miss Havisham-esque manse. Galleries that participated were as A-list as any one could hope for with gb agency and Jocelyn Wolff from Paris, Zero... from Milan, Hotel in London, Daniel Hug from Los Angeles, plan b from Cluj, Jan Mot from

Brussels, Ibid Projects from London and Vilnius and of course Warsaw's own Raster and the Foksal Gallery Foundation. Keeping in mind the pertinence of a good events program, there were tours, screenings and performances throughout the week. Overall the atmosphere was relaxed and the art good. It was hard to tell the success of sales but the importance of such a collaboration and its positioning in Warsaw seemed to be the most significant aspect to the event.



OUTRODUCTION

This article is clearly not an exhaustive survey of any of these places, representing nothing more than a several snippets. Certainly this type of feature should appear as a regular column rather than a one-off. The globalization of culture through biennials attempts to level the playing field while also lessening the difference between new markets. But at the same time 'other' geographies are kept at arm's length due to unsustainable coverage of what happens after the biennial has closed. Contemporary art's cultural institutions have added segments to their anatomy that act as a culture compass for looking at non-Western locations and are ultimately informative. However, they too pose the same problem of sustainability due to the fact that they also do not invest in a continuous or non-spotlit presentation of what's happening on a monthly or even annual basis, in effect keeping scenes foreign and unknown.



Installation view at Villa Warsaw. Upper left: Vladimir Scherbakov, *Illumination of sarcophagi by neon lamps or reconstruction of the silhouette of the Royal Castle on the facade of the House of Soviets*, 2003. Pencil on wall with duct tape. Above right: Will Hunt, *Live*, 2006. Performance. Courtesy Raster Gallery, Warsaw.