

**Minna L. Henriksson**  
**'Construction'**

**26. – 28.11.2008**  
**Andrea Gropa No.49, Prishtina**



**Project Rizoma**

Minna L. Henriksson  
Ndërtimi (Construction)

*The exhibition is dedicated  
to the memory of  
Huseyin B. Alptekin*

Artistja ka qëndruar në Prishtinë gjatë muajve Tetor dhe Nëntor të vitit 2008, e ftuar nga Projekti Rizoma. Gjatë kësaj kohe ajo u interesua për shfaqjet e identifikimeve të ndryshme kolektive në hapësirat publike në Prishtinë dhe në qytetet e tjera të Kosovës.

Hulumtimi i saj artistik i këtyre shenjave të ndryshme e prodhoi këtë ekspozitë që përbëhet kryesisht nga fotografi. Artistja së fundi ka punuar me çështjen e nacionalizmit në Finlandë përmes shenjave popullore në hapësirën publike dhe në prodhimet bazë si ushqimet dhe pijet. Atje hapësira publike është e bashkuar dhe e rregulluar. Në Kosovën e sotme mund të gjenden mesazhe të ndryshme, nga manifestimet e nacionalizmit ndaj shtetit të ri të Kosovës deri te adhurimi i SHBA-ve dhe Evropës, apo te shpresat për bashkimin me Shqipërinë brenda një formulimi të ri shtetëror. Si mesazh më së paku të problematizuar dhe më së paku të ngarkuar politikisht ajo e gjeti përfaqësimin kryesisht seksist të femrave.

Artistja është e lumtur që mund të shfaq punimet e saja në një ndërtesë e cila mbetet e papërfunduar edhe gjatë kohës sa mbahet ekspozitës. Kjo korrespondon gjithashtu me mënyrën se si ajo e përjeton situatën e tanishme në Kosovë, jo vetëm për shkak të ndërtimeve të shumta që bëhen por edhe për shkak të shtetit të ri në ndërtim. Fundja, duke u bazuar në tezën e Benedikt Andersonit, mund të thuhet se çdo kolektiv më i madh se një fshat i vogël është i imagjinuar dhe i krijuar me vetëdije në një moment të caktuar historik.

The artist has stayed in Prishtina for October and November 2008, invited by Rizoma Space for Contemporary Communication. During this time she has been interested in the different manifestations of collective identification in the public space in Prishtina and other cities in Kosova. The outcome of her artistic research into these various kinds of signs is an exhibition consisting mainly of photographs.

Recently the artist has worked on nationalism in Finland through popular signs in the public space and in basic products, such as food and beverages. There the public space is united and regulated. In Kosova of today one can find many different kinds of messages, from manifestations of nationalism of the new Kosova state to celebration of USA and Europe, or to hopes of joining with Albania in a new state formulation. The least problematized and least politically charged she found the plentiful sexist representation of women.

The artist is very happy to exhibit her work in a building, which is unfinished and even during the exhibition under construction. It can also correspond to how she experiences the current situation in Kosova, not only with the many construction sites all around the city but also with the new nation state being built. After all, following to the thesis of Benedict Anderson, we can state that any collective larger than a small village is imagined and consciously constructed at a certain historical time.

## Conversation between Sezgin Boynik and Minna L. Henriksson

S.B.: As far as I know your artistic work is mainly based on the research, and these researches are many times conducted in different places and especially in the places in which you don't know the language and the circumstances very well. Considering the fact that your work is also very much based on the social and political problems, it is interesting to know what kind of methodologies or strategies you are using in order to 'understand' the situation of the place, or how do you conduct your research?

M.H.: And it is also a big restriction. I can only look at things from the surface, from my impression as an outsider, and I have to rely on what people tell me.

But at the same time it is even easier to concentrate on the visual messages when I don't know the language. They stand out more. In Finland for example, when walking in the street, there are so many verbal messages, which I register, that it is difficult to see the visual signs.

In my work, which I do abroad, where I don't know so much of the circumstances, as you say, I am very aware of that, and try not to make too many claims from the perspective, which I come from. Rather I ask people to explain me, and maybe use that somehow in my work.

But I am interested in the phenomena, which are local, but at the same time you can find everywhere. For example I made a work in Finland about nationalism in Finnish food and drink products. In other countries it is the same rhetoric, but with different names of heroes and mythological figures.

S.B.: Year 2005 while you were doing your residency in CAC Platform in Istanbul you exhibited first of your series of "Contemporary Art Networks and Gossip Maps". This mapping continued with the Zagreb in 2006 and Ljubljana in 2008. Looking carefully to these maps one can easily see that all of them are pointing to different local art 'practices'. In your Istanbul map (Weekend Istanbul) we see that almost all the Istanbul contemporary art scene is about personal relations, subjective reasonings and power games, almost like Istanbul art scene is about 'gossips'. Second, in Zagreb (commissioned by GMK with title 'Zagreb Notes') your map is showing more of relation between the institutions and especially between the NGO's versus the State structures. Last experiment of this mappings you did in Ljubljana (commissioned by Gallery Kapelica and Moderna Galerija with the title 'Ljubljana Notes') and there the theme is more about the "political" meaning of contemporary art in Slovenia, and also you tried to deal with the connection of the Civil Society members which were active during the alternative movement in eighties and their current power positions. Can you comment more about your mapping project, for example do you think that by mapping the contemporary art it is possible to understand some 'fundamental' social truths? And another question is why you didn't make a map of contemporary art of Prishtina? (is it because it would be so simple and that one would need only few days to do it?)

M.H.: Yes I think that my maps of the contemporary art scenes do reveal some characteristics in them, which are usually kept hidden. Contemporary art scenes in different cities usually aim at showing themselves as very professional and open, friendly. But when you look more carefully, there are a lot of hierarchies and power games. For example in my map of the contemporary art scene of Zagreb I wrote (as I was told) about the director of the Contemporary Art Museum that she is secretly listening to the telephone calls of her curators and even called the police to give a parking ticket to a curator in the museum, whom she had a professional disagreement with.

And especially visible in my map of the Istanbul art scene were the gossips. The whole scene is based on them, perhaps in the lack of real professional activities. But this is the case with every contemporary art scene into some extent. The scenes usually are quite small and everyone knows each other, and has had some professional, or personal contact with many members of the scene. Some fall out and become enemies. Some others are collaborating professionally, but there are obvious personal reasons behind the collaboration. But then to the general audience all this looks only professional. Maybe when looking at my maps many explanations can be found to why certain people are collaborating and others are not.

And of course this phenomenon can be applied to any other small inter-connected communities, from music fans to academicians. I didn't make a map of the Prishtina art scene because I was more interested in other things here, not so much the art scene. And these maps, which I have made so far, can work as a gesture and a model for someone else to use. But who knows, maybe one day I will make a map of the Prishtina art scene also. It is true that it is a very small scene, and with the lack of institutions it also doesn't have the hierarchy, which is what I am interested in bringing visible in my maps.

S.B.: Since you didn't make a map of Kosovo art scene and since it is not your first visit to Kosovo it would be interesting to know how do you see the changes in the contemporary art scene of Kosovo from your first visit in 2004 for the Second Video Art Festival (Homemade Marmalade) until this last longer (residency) stay hosted by Projekt Rizoma?

M.H.: The first time I came here I was very impressed with the amount of young artists making very good art works, individually and collaboratively, especially around the Exit-space.

There are still good artists producing works, but the energy which I thought there was when I came here for the first time seems to have disappeared.

I wonder why that is. Maybe it was also because of the many curators coming from abroad to invite artists for exhibitions. Now there are not so many curators visiting anymore.

I think that the scene has matured. It was then still in its beginnings. The first video work in Kosova was only made in 2001, wasn't it? 'Milka' by Sokol Beqiri. And there was also the push from outside, both through the foreign interest from the curators and researchers but also economically. Some of the artists, whom I met then, and was impressed by their works, have since then

stopped producing. But also the 'Missing Identities' project of Exit has stopped. I am sure that it was something, which was bringing people together and got them interested in art.

S.B.: Seeing how you produce and display your artworks one can get this idea that making art can be very cheap, and easy. Your installations are direct, simple, cheap, and not over aestheticized and at the same time they are informative, provocative and composed with careful research. Sometimes I have this idea that your installations are more about using the gallery as the communicative or discursive tool?

M.H.: My installations are cheap and easy because I don't have the means to make more complicated works. Probably if I had a video camera I would start making video works, but as I don't have, I don't even think through that medium. I don't know how else to understand gallery space than as a tool, it is like an empty page, which you fill instead of words with images, sound, installations... Of course this time with my exhibition it is not empty. But at the same time it is not a gallery. And I think that is more interesting and challenging.

S.B.: You work a lot on connection between contemporary art and nationalism, for example in Prishtina you co-organized one workshop (Altered identities, in Stacion CAC, 2006) and co-edited a critical reader on this topic published by MM publishing house in 2007. This your last work in Prishtina which is installation titled 'Construction' is also dealing a lot with the national imagery and symbolism. Also in your statement you are referring to the main theoretician of nationalism Benedict Anderson?

M.H.: You can understand the word 'construction' in my exhibition not only referring to the building, which is under construction, but also to the situation in Kosovo being a site of construction of a national identity. For me this is very interesting. In Finland for example the same process happened 90 years ago. Of course there it is also very much happening still today and will go on as long as the state exists, but kind of secretly. It is as if Finland was constructed 90 years ago, or evenlong before that, and then also finished. That is of course not true. Nationalism is something, which keeps changing and updating itself very fast, keeping up to the trends. And contemporary art plays an important role in its contemporariness. It is a rare moment to be able to witness this construction of a nation state. Of course there is a very strong Kosovar identity. But for example the flag of Kosova is something, which people still didn't get used to. For example in the demonstration of Vetevendosje I hardly saw any Kosova-flags, only Albanian. My aim by showing all these national symbols is to bring them visible for people to be more aware of them, and also to show the amount of them, how dominant they are in the public space, and through that by no means to elevate but to ridicule them.

**Minna Henriksson** (b. 1976) është artiste vizuale konceptuale e cila punën e saj e bazon në hulumtim. Ajo është e interesuar që ti kap dhe analizojë polet dhe strukturat e fuqisë në shoqëritë bashkëkohore, qofshin ato të dukshme apo të padukshme. Bashkë me sociologun Sezgin Boynik ajo e redaktoi në vitin 2007 librin "Arti Bashkëkohor dhe Nacionalizmi - Lexim Kritik", e botuar nga Instituti i Prishtinës për Art Bashkëkohor "Exit" dhe Botimet MM - Qendra për Studime Humanistike "Gani Bobi" në Prishtinë.

Ajo jeton në Helsinki dhe Stamboll. Gjatë viteve të fundit ajo ka ekspozuar dhe ka marrë pjesë në programe të artistëve në rezidencë në Evropën juglindore.

**Laboratori për arte vizuale - LAB** është një OJQ që merret me artin dhe kulturën bashkëkohore. Gjatë viteve të fundit, si pjesë e projektit Missing Identity, fokus kryesor i organizatës kanë qenë projektet arsimore dhe promovimi i artistëve të rinj. LAB bashkë me Qendrën për Studime Humanistike "Gani Bobi" tani e kanë nisur projektin Rizoma. Ky projekt erdhi si rezultat i ristrukturimit të projektit Missing Identity ndërsa synimi kryesor i tij është krijimi i një platforme të re për art bashkëkohor dhe kulturë ku artistët, teoricienët dhe aktivistët kulturor mund të punojnë pa strukturë apo organizim të caktuar.

**Minna Henriksson (b. 1976)** is a visual conceptual artist whose work is based on research. She is interested in recording and analyzing the hidden and obvious ideological sets and power structures in contemporary societies. Together with sociologist Sezgin Boynik she co-edited book 'Contemporary Art and Nationalism - Critical Reader', published by Prishtina Institute for Contemporary Art "Exit" and MM-Publications - Center for Humanistic Studies "Gani Bobi", Prishtina, 2007. She is based in Helsinki and Istanbul. In recent years she has been exhibiting and participating in artist-in-residency programs in southeastern Europe.

**Laboratory for visual arts - LAB** is an NGO dealing with contemporary arts and culture. During the past years, as a part of Missing Identity project, its main focus was in the educational projects and in promotion of young artists.

Now together with "Gani Bobi" Center for Humanistic Studies LAB has initiated the Project Rizoma. Project Rizoma has come as a result of restructuring of the Missing Identity project, with the main goal of creation of a new platform for contemporary art and culture where artists, theoreticians and cultural activists work without specific structure and organization.



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