

Wall Newspaper #1

ROMA_INDUSTRIE?

“The link will remain on it. File a lawsuit or help us!”



FEBRUARY 11, 2012 Activist and filmmaker Marika Schmiedt speaks out against the disrespectful and arrogant behavior of two producers who tried to capitalize on her work in order to publicize a highly problematic film:

from the daily life of a Roma woman ...

On February 7, I was contacted via email by **Wolfgang Gumpelmaier**, who asked for my support of the film **MANUSHA – The Little Gypsy Witch/ Die kleine Romahexe**. I told Gumpelmaier that I think the film is problematic, particularly the title “GYPSY WITCH,” as well as the many clichés in the film.

Shortly thereafter, I was contacted by producer **Knut Ogris**, with a renewed request for my opinion. I told him that I find the film questionable for children. This morning, I found a link to my film “ROMA MEMENTO. Uncertain future?” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zy0PwSWiLLs>) on the official site of his film, serving to raise funds and also market the film. After my request to remove my link from their site, Knut Ogris responded: “The link will remain on it. File a lawsuit or help us!”

see e-mail correspondences:

On 02/07/2012 at 11:57 Manusha wrote:

Dear Marika Schmiedt, I support the film producer Knut Ogris in terms of online communication for his children’s film MANUSHA – THE LITTLE GYPSY WITCH. Currently, the film is in post-production and requires the support of the fans. Therefore, we have launched a crowdfunding campaign. Since you have already written several times about ROMA issues, we would be delighted if you could post about our children’s film (blog, website, newsletter, Facebook, Twitter, etc.). Here the link to the trailer, the press release and Crowdfunding page.
Crowd Funding: <http://www.mysherpas.com/de/projekt/Manusha-die-kleine-Romahexe-moechte-ins-Kino/>
Trailer: <http://www.manusha-derfilm.at/film/trailer/>
Press: <http://www.manusha-derfilm.at/presse/>
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/romahexe>
Thank you,
Wolfgang Gumpelmaier

On 02/07/2012 at 11:53 Marika Schmiedt wrote:

dear mr. gumpelmaier, I think the film is questionable!
with best greetings
marika schmiedt

On 02/07/2012 Manusha wrote:

In what way?
Wolfgang

On 02/07/2012 Marika Schmiedt wrote:

a lot of stereotypes ..
even the title “GYPSY WITCH”

A Roma Model/ The Cosmopolitan Other?” (Berlin, Germany)

MARCH 20, 2013 Daniel Baker and Ethel Brooks’ performative conversation in the frame of the Former West project, entitled “A Roma Model / The Cosmopolitan Other” which takes place today, March 20th 2013 in Berlin, sparked a chain of criticism on the internet from the artistic and activist community for the problematic way in which it appears to gloss over Roma repression in Europe today, instead chosing to idealize and distort their experience. With the permission of the authors, here we reproduce the original statements and comments posted on Facebook, together with the abstract for Baker and Brooks’ conversation and a link to the livestream where it was broadcast .

Many thanks to Jasmina Tumbas and Mike Korsonewski for translation assistance.

via Former West

On 02/07/2012 Knut Ogris wrote:

Dear Mrs. Schmiedt, I have just received your comments on Manusha – die kleine RomaHexe – the engl. title: Manusha – the little Gypsy Witch! Can you explain, I do not understand you! Do you know the movie? If so where from? In what form?

What’s wrong with clichés – if there are not bad clichés!

We are not doing a documentary but a product made for children, which deals with FOREIGNERS in SCHOOLS, trying to keep children from bullying and ask them to deal with strangers! AND: we want the film to be successful in movie theatres and also to offer solutions. Please explain! See the links in yellow below for you to use if you like!

Thanks in advance!

On 02/07/2012 Marika Schmiedt wrote:

I have seen extracts from the film a while ago on tv, orf- heimat fremde heimat. As to the social and political situation of Roma in Europe, have you dealt with it in a serious way? and what do you mean by good clichés? As a Roma woman, I find such a product for children more than questionable.

best regards
marika schmiedt

On 02/07/2012 Knut Ogris wrote:

Well, I am glad that you are sooo expressive – but what is it that bothers you in particular? Which part? Did you know that Heli Maimann plotted against me once, because as a non-Jew I mixed a Jewish film? <http://www.defamation-thefilm.com> also a hornet’s nest – but it all went well, although some of it was unpleasant! Well then help us, if they know the movie so well.

And tell us what you want? We are in the final production and would also welcome and adopt your comments and suggestions for improvement, even consider them!

But please do not use platitudes but concrete suggestions – because: Yes, WE HAVE DEALT WITH THE CONDITIONS OF ROMA – ESPECIALLY IN THE BALKANS – AND SINCE MAC-EDONIA IS THE ONLY COUNTRY WHICH RECOGNIZES ROMA minorities, the film developed the way it did!

Mlg
Knut

On 02/10/2012 Marika Schmiedt wrote:

mr. ogris, on your website you have posted a link to my film Roma Memento under the rubric Roma in the arts and culture. why did you this? please remove it from your website.

I do not want to be brought in connection with this film.

best regards
marika schmiedt

On 02/10/2012 Knut Ogris wrote:

Dear Mrs. Schmiedt, despite my polite offers for you to help with the improvement, nothing concrete comes from you – the link will remain on it. File a lawsuit or help us!

Thanks
Mlg
Knut ogris

On 02/10/2012 Marika Schmiedt wrote:

alright, if you think so, I will publish our email correspondences about the film on my blog and make my rejection public!
besides, your attitude clearly shows how disrespectful, extortionate and dishonorable your actions in connection to this film are, especially towards a Roma woman who expresses her opinion.
please remove the link.

Originally posted on February 10, 2012 on Marika Schmiedt’s website.

A Roma Model / The Cosmopolitan Other

Abstract

It seems to be a commonplace assumption that the misery of Roma who live amidst our societies is a direct consequence of their self-chosen “freedom” that stands against the prevailing consensus in the so-called West. Now, as this very consensus gets uncovered as one of order, control, and disciplining aimed at breeding the fiction of western hegemony, the Roma model of life—arrested through social and aesthetic prejudice—might offer knowledge on how a new possibility might emerge from the current condition of emergency. Artist and researcher Daniel Baker and theorist Ethel Brooks examine what Roma thought has to offer today if it manages to migrate from the margins to central societal discourses on politics, economics, and aesthetics. The discussion on issues

such as nomadic sensitivity, extraterritoriality, camp, survival, and collectivity—underlined by the principles of the makeshift and of contingency—get punctuated by two instances of divinatory dialogue: a palm reading by Brooks and a Tarot card reading by Baker. These marginal “fortune-telling” acts are stereotyped as primitive practices of those who have been circumvented by modernity, yet they resonate in many established western structures ranging from commerce to politics to culture and art to religion. Whether taken seriously or not, these acts of divination signify particular modes of engagement and a potential performative departure to embrace “Othered” knowledges in imagining alternate kinds of prospects for being together.

Daniel Baker/Maria Hlavajova

Reactions

via Filiz Demirova

Hello Ethel, I found out that you and Daniel Baker are giving a talk titled “A Roma Model The Cosmopolitan Other”. I think the description of the talk and this event are very problematic. I think it is for many reasons problematic. For example rather than tackle the oppression of Roma in Europe, I feel it idealizes a distorted, whitewashed image of Romani existence. This whole discourse sidesteps the issues of lived oppression, racism, and exclusion, and instead idealizes “nomadic sensitivity, extraterritoriality, camp, survival, and collectivity”. To make matters worse, you are going to perform what they call “divinatory dialogue”: you will hold a “palm reading” session and Baker will do “Tarot card reading”. I am a Romni and a activist and just looking at it makes me feel sick. This is unbelievable.

via Ethel Brooks

Dear Filiz,

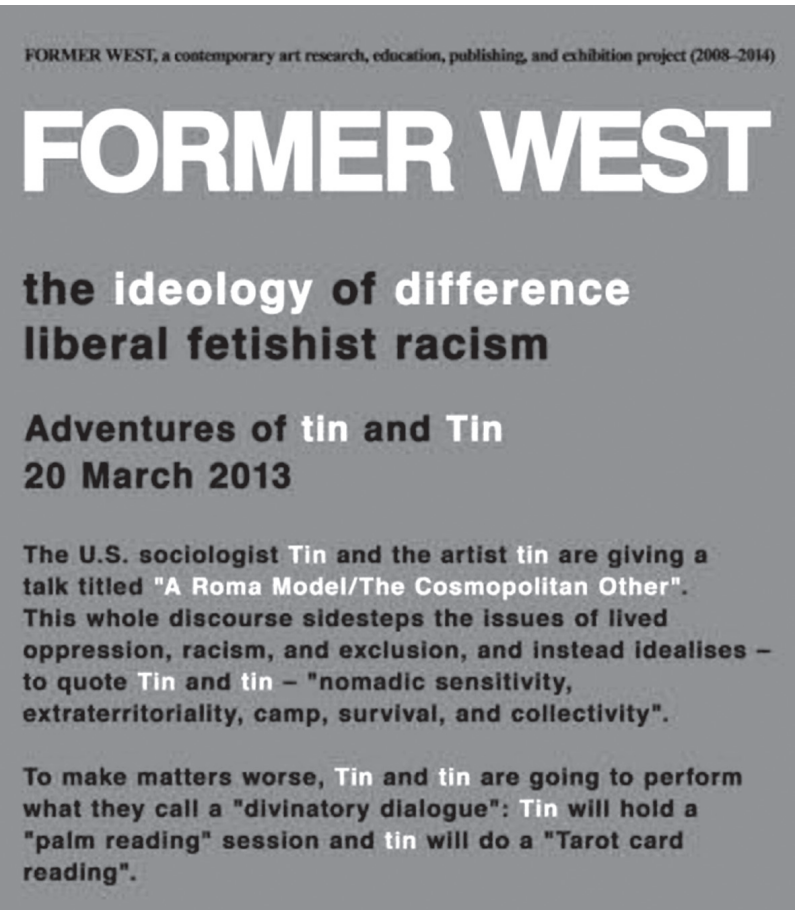
I am sorry that you are so upset by the title and the subject of the talk. I also am a Romni and an activist, and hope that the dialogue will actually address some of the very issues of racism, exclusion and lived oppression. I did not write the “nomadic sensitivity” part, but do think that the collectivity and survival are urgent questions that have to be addressed. I am hoping that what I will be doing will be useful to Romani activists; the palm reading that I am doing and what I will talk about I draw from my own family background –this was work that our women did to feed our families, not the gadze fantasy that people portray it as– and will talk about race and gender and class in that context. Are you in Berlin? If so, I would be happy to meet and to talk more about it, or to have you come. If not, then I will share the link with you as well. Again, I am sorry that I have offended and sickened you. I think that it is crucial to talk about our history in Europe, as part and parcel of the racism –death, violence, eviction, etc– that Roma face. I also think that we have to claim, as activists and as Roma, and not deny that these have been the labor market practices –the only alternatives– of our people. We brought palm reading to Europe from India, and it kept us fed and alive for centuries... there is not need to deny that in the name of some sort of push for belonging to the gadze-kane world.

I would like to talk more if you want. But baxt, Ethel

via Jasmina Tumbas

A very important intervention by Filiz Demirova – especially given the description of the event (!!!). However, I am curious how Ethel Brooks will approach the topic, and hope, given her immediate and thorough response to Filiz, that this panel will be a lot more “critical” than it appears in the description, meaning that it engages with the very stereotypes and racism that enforced and perpetuated these kinds of “labours” of survival, and how those forms of racism are systematically perpetuated by European “nostalgia” and “primitivizing” of Roma as “ideal cosmopolitan Others” (one must only remember Salman Rushdie’s talk at the Pavilion in Venice) or villainized as criminals and social parasites (the status quo in the European approach to Roma, politically and socially), all the while the brutal REALITIES of the living conditions (and their histories) are often conveniently ignored or brushed over... Thankfully there will be a live stream.

via Marika Schmiedt



via Ethel Brooks

Dear Marika,

I am sorry if you are offended by the presentation that I will make tomorrow. You have seen my response to Feliz Demirova. I am doing this as an anti-racist intervention. I think that we need to talk about labor practices and the ways in which Roma and Sinti kept body and soul together for a millennium. My presentation will be about gendered and racialized labor and the ways in which practices such as palm reading are work, pure and simple. but also how such divinatory practices have been taken up by non-Roma, not just through liberal fetishist racism, which you rightly say, but also through capitalist speculation, commodity production and other forms. I am making an intervention, one that I hope is useful to our community and will push back against gadjekane obsessions with our difference.

via Marika Schmiedt

dear ethel, well intentioned, but wrong thinking approach. we have no more time for experiments. for a change, it finally needs more discussions and other interventions!

A livestream of the performative conversation between Daniel Baker and Ethel Brooks can be accessed on the Former West main site March 20th, 2013 from 10 PM (Berlin Time). <http://www.formerwest.org/DocumentsConstellationsProspects/Contributions/ARomaModelThe-CosmopolitanOther>

Marika Schmiedt’s reaction to Daniel Baker and Ethel Brooks’ performance

an impossible intervention!
the challenge of rigorous intellectual engagement was not present. i found the undifferentiated treatment and blending of roma “culture”, concentration camps and camps in general very problematic. for me, it also raised the question of whether brooks or baker lost relatives in the concentration camps? my spontaneous thought was no. because i think the outlook would be different. in general, i have the impression that there are big differences between those roma who live in the usa and the uk, and those who reside in various european states. the concern and hence the involvement is very different. at times, i also thought about the use of such events. who actually benefits from them? what remains is a lack of solidarity with roma among intellectuals and artists.

Ethel Brooks

I was travelling without access to email or facebook these past few days, but I want to respond to Marika’s reaction to Daniel Baker’s and my intervention, particularly around the question of whether UK/US Roma are different from European Roma: we are, certainly. However, I think that this production of difference, between an “us” and “them” among Romani people is disingenuous. As we know, there is a tremendous diversity amongst Romani communities –some of us speak Romanes, others don’t, or some speak poghadi chib or other dialects of Romanes –of those who don’t speak Romanes, there are many who do not do so (Spanish Roma) because the language was forcibly taken. Some of us have collective memories of genocide –and lost family in the Holocaust, in particular– others don’t have that direct connection, but feel the loss and pain deeply nevertheless. Some of us have collective histories of traveling, others were forcibly settled; some of us were enslaved, others we not. some of us have been forcibly evicted and moved from place to place, denied home, citizenship, school, others not. We have so many battles to fight –but to fight each other, rather than those who are killing us, is merely divisive and not productive. We are a diverse people –and just as I don’t believe in the nation-state, I also don’t believe in the necessity of a homogeneous notion of who we are. It makes us no less a people ==we are Romani people, and have ties to each other across nation-states, across history and across oceans, that has lasted a millennium. I celebrate those connections, and mourn our losses and our collective history of genocide, and I hope that our interactions begin a dialogue that will be based on our connections, and our common struggles. But baxt, Ethel

Tanja Ostojic

I agree with your statement Marika Schmiedt . In addition to that, I’d like to mention that at the same conference we witnessed a number of artists performing all kinds of stereotypes of their otherness. Such as Nastio Mosquito in “African? I Guess”. He brought to us ALL stereotypes of “nigger” sexist, “sexy nigger” in awfully entertaining show where audience was amused by being sexually excited and hearing over and over “nigger” “sex” “bitch” words + “I like the sound of word bitch!..” and similar.. I wonder how comes that the discourse has been brought so much backwards. Remembering Josephine Baker’s Banana-dance (in 1920’s and 1930’s) and the “Sweet Sweetback...” move (1971).. It’s hard to believe.. Why do the artists of color have to paint their skin with black?! Why do we need all the stereotypes over and over? Why artist of Turkish origin, a Phd candidate Köken Ergun is exposing Turkish community.. etc.. and claims that they say that they do isolate them selfs voluntarily within the German society?! He further more claims that with his work with “isolated communities” he kind of enlightens their “sterile lives”.. And why our beloved Russian collective Chto Delat teaches us within their learning play simply that “communism is bad and it brings dead people”.. i wonder ..

via Filiz Demirova

In my opinion, every criticism regarding the performance/event, Brook and Baker and the organizers should not mean that Roma fight against each other. More central is a self-criticism, which is, in my view, urgently necessary to learn from mistakes, grow with them and getting the current dramatic situation changed. The question Marika asked, “Who profits from such kinds of events?”, is adequate and legitimate in my opinion. I am not likely to speak of “we” because I think that there is no such thing as a “we” in reality. I want to have the right to criticize Non-Roma and Roma, as well, when they cooperate with the system and thus do more harm to Roma instead of standing up against the existing power structures.

Marika Schmiedt

In reaction to the Roma Pavilion, Venice (2011), and Former West’s “A Roma Model/ The Cosmopolitan Other?” panel (Berlin, Germany, 2013):

LOST IN THE PAVILION - Call The Witness Venice 2011



<https://youtu.be/d7seoCGIK5Q>

Marika Schmiedt’s Exhibition at Construction Site in Linz, Austria – Posters Ripped Down, the Artist Threatened and Attacked at Opening by Outraged Hungarian Nationalist and her Austrian Husband

via Jasmina Tumbas

APRIL 19, 2013 Marika Schmiedt, one of the most politically engaged Roma activist artists in Austria (and Europe), has been censored, threatened, and attacked for her politically controversial artworks, which expose and critique various forms of racism, nationalism and fascism in Europe. By linking the history of the persecution and killings of Roma and Sinti to the current forms of systematic and violent discrimination and murder of Roma and Sinti in Europe and worldwide, Schmiedt’s work has hit a nerve in the neo-fascist atmosphere of European politics, enraging nationalists from various countries, as well as politicians, intellectuals, and activists who find her work too confrontational.

On Sunday, April 14, 2013, at the opening of Marika Schmiedt’s exhibition, “Thoughts are free”, a Hungarian nationalist and her Austrian husband attacked Schmiedt, tore her cell phone out of her hands, and began to tear down her posters on the construction site fence. One of the organizers of the exhibition and Schmiedt stopped the attack. The Hungarian woman called Schmiedt a racist and threatened to sue the artist for her purported defamation of the Hungarian nation.

Those of us, who read daily about Hungary’s outrageous violations of human rights, censorship of the media and the cultural sector, welcome Schmiedt’s poignant and loud critique of these political developments. Since the EU continually fails to address the rampant hatred of Roma, anti-Semitism and homophobia in Hungary, Schmiedt’s work bears witness to these developments and offers resistance against complicity and capitulation of civil courage.

Such artistic interventions raise many enemies. The 30 posters were all torn down within two days, leaving only traces of her exhibition. It remains to be seen who was responsible for tearing down all the posters. But one thing is certain: Schmiedt does not shy away from – and does not fear – confrontation; she incites it. As she has said:

“My work attempts to break this silence and expose the visual culture of racism – and its many languages – and simultaneously counteract the continuing discrimination.”

Jasmina Tumbas

Hungarian Ambassador intervenes Against “anti-Hungarian” Art Exhibition in Linz

OCTOBER 3, 2013 Political art with the predicate particularly valuable: The Hungarian Ambassador to Austria intervenes against the “racist, anti-Hungarian” exhibition opening in Linz. The Salzburg Hungarian Club, closely allied with the Hungarian Jobbik, provides the necessary e-mail terror against the organizers. The artist Marika Schmiedt shows, among other things, parallels between the national socialist and present-day hatred towards Roma – among other places, also in Hungary, along with a sharp criticism of Fidesz and Jobbik. The ambassador tried to undermine the Roma artist and activist in his in semi-official communication, accusing Schmiedt of “hostility against Roma,” because her work thematizes the word “Gypsy Cutlet,” and insinuating that, after all, the “socialists” must be behind this.... (SPÖ)

Event Tip: “Thoughts are Free” Exhibition by Marika Schmiedt
Opening: Monday, 7. October 2013, 4:30pm, Altes Rathaus Linz, Hauptplatz 1, 4020 Linz. Tee exhibition will remain open until October 20, 2013 (ORF)
<http://marikaschmiedt.wordpress.com/>

Der Standard: Ungarnnationaler Proteststurm gegen Roma-Plakatschau in Linz, 2. October 2013, 18:43
President Heinz Fischer to intervene against Roma artist and activist Marika Schmiedt, whose exhibition is opening this coming Monday in the City Hall Foyer in Linz, Austria.

Linz City Hall is currently facing a flood of protest emails from nationalist Hungarian circles. Hundreds of senders – according to a spokesman for Mayor Franz Dobuschs (SPO) – are fighting against the Viennese artist Marika Schmiedt’s exhibition “Thoughts are free. Anxiety is Reality for Roma in EU-rope.”

The protestors argue that Schmiedt’s works are “hostile to Hungary” and even “racist.” Among them is the Hungarian Ambassador to Austria, Vince Szalay-Bobrovniczky. In addition to contacting the mayor of Linz, the ambassador also sent a letter to Federal President Heinz Fischer, asking both of them to prevent Schmiedt’s exhibition of the posters.

Schmiedt’s work exposes parallels between national socialist and contemporary hatred and discrimination of Roma. Her works were already shown on a construction site fence last November in Linz. But the Austrian police removed the posters and tore them apart following complaints by Hungarian nationals.

“Art should be provocative”

Following the destruction of her artwork, Green party politicians posed a parliamentary question to, and demanded an answer from, the Ministry of Interior. The Linz police informally apologized to Schmiedt. “In terms of freedom of political art, which has to be provocative, we want to show the exhibition again,” said a spokesman on behalf of the main initiator, Joseph Weidenholzer, a Social Democratic MEP.

The Mayor of Linz office affirms that the exhibition will be opened as planned. They had already sent the Hungarian ambassador a reply last week, stating: “Criticism and escalation” is “a legitimate method in a democracy. We therefore stand by the artist who will receive a public forum at City Hall”. (Irene Brickner, THE STAND-ARD, 10/02/2013)

Images from the exhibition (taken from: <http://www.hofkabinett.at/cms/index.php?mact=News%2Ccntnt01%2Cdetail%2C0&cntnt01articleid=3&cntnt01origid=15&cntnt01returnid=70>):

At the opening:



After 2 Days:



After 2 Days and 3 Hours:



Hungarian Government Site: Exhibition is “hostile against Roma”

From today’s report by the Hungarian Press Agency MTI, on the Site of the Hungarian Government (and Magyar Nemzet On-line):

(...) Vince Szalay Bobrovniczky regards the exhibition as “a cheap provocation, openly racist and hostile against Hungary, and in violation of European values and the dignity of minorities, primarily the Roma.” His protest is directed mainly against the “openly discriminating” exhibition. He also considers the choice of the venue (note: City Hall Linz) – in view of the good relations between Hungary and Linz, where a few months ago a Hungarian Tourism Festival was held – incomprehensible and sees it as a direct insult.

(In response to a statement to MTI by the major cultural director of Linz, Dr. Julius Stieber, who defended the exhibition) Szalay-Bobrovniczky said, according to MTI, “the hostile thrust of the exhibition against Hungarian and Roma(!) is clear;” He was particularly offended (on behalf of Roma!) by those posters that make a mockery of Roma by evoking the “Gypsy cutlet.”

(Note PR: The concept of this exhibition was too “high” for the ambassador, or, for the purpose of his conversation with MTI, he chose the most “nonpolitical” posters, or, rather, he ignored the posters with Fidesz and Jobbik references (see below).)

He added that Rudolf Sarkozi, director of the Austrian Roma organizations (sic), shares his opinion, and that he had spoken on the phone with him in this regard.

(He meant Prof. Rudolf Sarközi, Chairman of the Cultural Association of Austrian Roma and Chairman of the Advisory Board of the Roma ethnic group, who has been instrumentalized by the Hungarian government to support their stands in this discussion.)

For Szalay-Bobrovniczky, it is clear that the “Socialist Linz city tours” (sic) support of this “project full of heavy distortion and discrimination” is “due to the political and ideological orientation of the artist” (read: all “socialists”), noting that “it is not Hungary that is shamed by these works, but instead those who exhibit them.”

In the following, reference is made to the invitation text, according to which the opening of the exhibition, following the initiative of the city of Linz and the MEP Joseph Weidenholzer (SPO), is repeated after the first open-air exhibition had been damaged by + Hungarian nationalists + (+ sic) in April this year.



A SALZBURGI MAGYAROK VENDÉGE LESZ
SNEIDER TAMÁS
a Jobbik alelnöke és országgyűlési képviselője
Az előadás témái:
A tömeges külföldi munkavállalás hatása és
Jobbik megoldási javaslatai
Hogyan segíthetik a külföldön élő magyarok a
Jobbik tevékenységét?
MINDEN ÉRDEKLŐDŐT SZERETETTEL VÁRUNK!
CSAK JÓBBIK TAGOK RÉSZÉRE

Salzburg, Schallmooser Hauptstraße 50.

2013. május 4. (szombat) 18:00 óra

JOBBIK
HUNGARIAN NATIONALIST PARTY

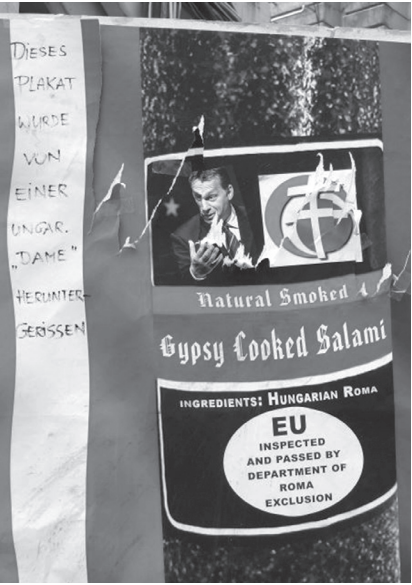
Image: stopptdierechten.at

Protest-Emails to the Mayor of Linz

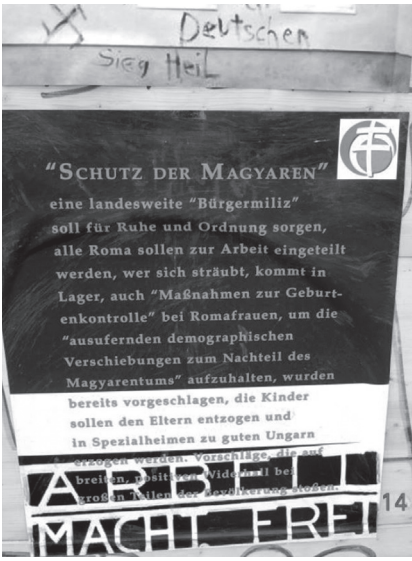
The protest action, addressed to the Mayor of Linz, was initiated by the Salzburg Hungarian Club (www.salzburgi-magyar-koer.org, here the Call with a German sample-letter: https://pusztaranger.files.wordpress.com/2013/10/salzburgi_kc3b6r.jpg) – the same club, which had invited the Jobbik-politician Tamás Sneider to Salzburg in May; (see: Der Standard: Jobbik-Politiker als Gast in Salzburg und Stoppt die Rechten: Die ungarische Rechte in Österreich, 13. Mai 2013, <http://www.stopptdierechten.at/2013/05/13/die-ungarische-rechte-in-osterreich>).

The club chairman and self-proclaimed “revolutionary” Péter Karsay is a member of the extreme-right group Lelkiismeret88, see more info at Stoppt die Rechten: Die ungarische Rechte in Österreich, 13. Mai 2013, <http://www.stopptdierechten.at/2013/05/13/die-ungarische-rechte-in-osterreich>.

How did the ambassador find out about the scandalous exhibition? Perhaps through the Salzburg Hungarian Club? A number of posters from Schmiedt’s exhibition are documented as ‘corpus delicti’ on the club’s site (Filename: “Gypsy culture”), with the following comments:



Commentary from the club’s site: “The Hungarian Prime Minister is equated with the Jobbik, and she creates the impression that the Prime Minister and Jobbik make salami from gypsies (sic). And this despite the fact that the Hungarian state, at the direction and permission of the Prime Minister, provides more than 100 million forints for the Roma (pejorative formulation) every day.”



Commentary from the club’s site: “For the “protection of the Magyars” the suggestions by Jobbik regarding the Gypsy question (sic), but shown with the swastika and logo of the concentration camp from the Third Reich, “Arbeit macht frei” (“work makes (you) free”). This suggests that Jobbik seek to use the model of the Third Reich in the solution of the Gypsy

question. In Austria, there is no greater crime and it is punished harshly.” (The club suggests that this exhibition in Austria could lead to concrete charges against Hungary.)

Regarding Marika Schmiedt’s request for permission of showing her art installation in Kirchstetten (Austria)

AUGUST 7, 2015

Buffalo, August 6, 2015

Dear Mayor Paul Horsack,

I was just informed that you have denied artist Marika Schmiedt the permission to exhibit her temporary art installation, “Futschikato – Die verschwundenen Roma und Sinti aus Kirchstetten und der ‘Fall Weinheber” in your city. It is with great dismay that I read your letter to Schmiedt, especially your reasoning:

“Erinnerung ja, aber es muss auch einmal Schluss sein mit Aufarbeitung und Auseinandersetzung.”

What do you exactly mean when you write: “remembering yes, but there has to be an end to processing and confronting the past”? What kind of memory making of the murder and deportation of Roma and Sinti do you think is adequate? And why do you presume we should put a stop to processing and confronting this history? Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, why do you feel entitled to make such a decision on behalf of your community, and in extension, on behalf of Kirchstetten’s history?

It worries me greatly that as a leader of this Kirchstetten community, you are not supporting an artist’s engagement with the history of National Socialism in the region, especially the discrimination and murder of Roma and Sinti. While it is reasonable to fear that such critical engagement is uncomfortable and conceivably difficult to face, the erasure of that past has catastrophic consequences. As is well known, Roma and Sinti are still the most persecuted and discriminated minority in Europe. Your city has the extraordinary opportunity, if not responsibility, to confront its own past, and to do so in a way that faces even the most humiliating truths, such as the Nazi past of a celebrated poet in town, Josef Weinheber.

I would also like to note that Marika Schmiedt is one of the most important artists in Europe who deals with the history of the Roma holocaust, and whose work has been exhibited widely, including being featured in the prestigious Venice Biennial in 2011. Her work was also included in “Roma Protokoll,” an exhibition in 2011 curated by Suzana Milevska, the recipient of the 2012 Igor Zabel Award for Culture and Theory. In response to Schmiedt’s work, distinguished literary critic and theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak noted that:

“Marika [Schmiedt] has made the subaltern speak, in a certain way for sure, through representation, but much more forcefully. If the subaltern is the group that cannot achieve the state – Antonio Gramsci’s classic definition – the Roma Holocaust didn’t even make it into Hannah Arendt’s insistence that the banality of evil springs from the premises of the state. The Roma Holocaust is not allowed into this widely accepted generalization. That is subalternity, not



Commentary from the club’s site: “We have attacked the Gypsies and are proud of it.” She puts this in the mouths of the people on the photo. This shows the relationship of the Gypsy to reality. The Hungarian folk costume (sic) and the red number 88 in the right-hand corner suggest that they are Hungarian fascists.” (This quote is cited by Contrarian Hungarian, and in regard to the “folk costume,” it is an outfit of the extreme-right Betyársereg.)



Copy Paste



The original: Jobbik-Demo 2010. Source: https://www.document.no/2010/04/jobbik_-_de_bedre

Commentary from the club’s site: “Using the Hungarian colors, the work Copy-Paste suggests that the Hungarians are copying Hitler. In today’s times in Austria, this functions as an indictment, which can lead to many years in jail for the accused.” (s.o.)

All of this did not seem to interest the ambassador; instead, he accused the following poster of being extremely hostile towards Roma. If that were the official position (government page!), then we know, how much the Roma strategy of the Hungarian government is worth.



An installation by Marika Schmiedt from 2004: Artbrut, <http://marikaschmiedt.wordpress.com/2013/08/16/lustig-ist-das-rassenleben-faria-faria-ho/>

just not achieving the state, but not even achieving the record of the banality of the evil state.”

Spivak’s words speak volumes here, but most significantly, they comment on Schmiedt’s resistance to accepting the erasure of this history of violence, which has marked many families in your own community. Trauma theorist and historian Dominick LaCapra has suggested that art is a cultural form that “may even be a means of bearing witness to, enacting, and, to some extend, working over and through trauma whether personally experienced, transmitted from inmates or sensed in a larger social and cultural setting.” Even though you speak of the young generation, which you note is not responsible for the atrocities that happened more than seven decades ago, I must disagree with the implication that these generations do not need to learn about this past in a way that is confrontational and that directly involves the urgent problems of our contemporary moment. Europe as a whole still has to confront much of its violent history, especially in regard to Roma and Sinti, and the devastating conditions under which many Roma and Sinti live today. Marika Schmiedt’s installation has the potential of bearing witness to these atrocities and bringing some form of healing to your community and beyond, even if it involves facing painful truths.

I hope that you will reconsider your decision and grant Marika Schmiedt the permission to exhibit this installation in Kirchstetten.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jasmina Tumbas
Assistant Professor
Department of Art
University at Buffalo

PS: For more information on Spivak’s discussion of the exhibition “Roma Protokoll,” please consult <http://igkultur.at/projekte/roman-istan/making-visible>.

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