

SEZGIN BOYNIK & MINNA HENRIKSSON

Critical Reflections on Contemporary Art from the Point of View of Nationalism

Drawing a connection from contemporary art to nationalism is in many ways complicated and problematic. One of the main reasons lies in understandings of contemporary art as a practice that is subversive and critical, which questions mainstream ideas and conservative thoughts. In its fundamental definition, contemporary art of the 20th century (ranging from the avant-garde to conceptual art and up to the present) is assumed as an obvious negation of pre-described and fixed ideological formulations, of which nationalism becomes among the most visible examples. The practice of contemporary art, which in its character is international and cosmopolitan, supports this idea of anti-nationalist contemporary art mythology. Because of this, the union of contemporary art and nationalism remains as an oxymoron within critical discourse. Yet, observing very obvious tendencies in contemporary art – of the support for contemporary art by national foundations and institutions, representation of contemporary artists in national pavilions in biennials, the existence of contemporary art manifestations labeled as 'Balkan,' 'Young British Artists,' 'Nordic Miracle,' 'Kurdish Video Art,' 'Moscow Conceptualism,' and so forth – made us think that connecting contemporary art and nationalism is not an exaggeration of a social problem of a minor scale, but in the contrary it is an acute and important topic of discussion.

We will speak about the connection of contemporary art to nationalism through examples and comparisons from different geographies, in which we are living and being confronted with this problem.

CHARLES ESCHE

Imagine Resistance

The presentation *Imagine Resistance* will deal with the imagination of life without structural, instrumental and political fear. Between pre- and post-1989 timescales it moves from Lenin arguments that have a strong political sense, towards the presumptive possibility of art, artworks and it's practitioners in general and imagination and acting in particular.

ANNIE FLETCHER

Be[com]ing Dutch – Past, Present and Future

In an era of globalisation when normative national values seem displaced by increased mobility and world-integrated capitalism how do we look at the legacy of national identity and incumbent social cohesion and the normative values they produce? What would we understand as a legacy to a world that no longer places these values in the top position? Would our Europeanism turn introverted and nostalgic or militant and fundamentalist? What would we, in these circumstances, want to become?

The project *Be[com]ing Dutch* serves, in part, to put a spotlight on existing phenomena and to suggest how we might react to or engage with them as artists and viewers of art. It also uses the infrastructures of art, it's much vaunted 'freedom', its finance, its avant-garde inheritance of saying the otherwise unsayable, to act in the everyday of this place and these current conditions.

FLO KASEARU
Keep in Touch

Flo Kasearu will present three of her recent projects that talk about national identity and traditional values: a performance she made in 2005 titled *Estonian Sculpture* where she was wearing Estonian folk clothes, standing on a podest with a sign calling herself dead; the photo series *Keep in Touch* (2008) where she visited Estonian National Museum, putting herself into the situation of being a tourist in one's own history; and a video called *Mulgi Travels* she filmed last year during her residency in Berlin as exchange student. The video tells the story of a lady who is voluntarily and quite fanatically promoting her country and nation. Dressed up like a souvenir doll and acting like a missionary, the main character of the story seems to be obsessed with her country.

KAROLIS KLIMKA
Irresistible Sentiment? Money-Making in the Name of the Nation

The presentation will concentrate on several examples of how (cultural) nationalism can be put in the service of private interests or exploited commercially, taken from the arena of public life in Lithuania. In particular, the presentation will draw on the case of informal activist movement, nicknamed *Lithuania without Quotation Marks* that evolved from the *Pro-test Lab* project initiated by the artist duo Nomeda & Gediminas Urbonas. The *Pro-test Lab* was established in response to the plans by Maxima, the biggest supermarket chain in Lithuania, to demolish the last cinema in the city centre of Vilnius, called cinema Lietuva. The same supermarket chain was recently granted with the status of National Investor in the sector of energy supply. On this occasion Maxima have attempted to revamp themselves as national heroes in the service of the Nation that is supposedly in need of 'liberation' from 'Russian energetic (along with political) influence'. On the other hand, the campaigning cinema-goers attempted to turn the cinema Lietuva into a symbol of Lithuanian society as a whole suffering onslaught of greedy money-makers. The presentation will be illustrated with examples of a number of actions by the informal movement of cinema-goers, particularly the ones expressing an ironic attitude towards nationalist 'mobilisation'.

OLIVER KOCHTA-KALLEINEN & PETRI SAARIKKO
Summit of Micronations

The presentation will give an introduction into the recent activities of YKON – a non-profit advocacy group for micronations, experimental countries and utopian thinkers. Curiosity about utopian fantasy productions and interest in the emergence and drying-up of alternative architectures of society unite members Sasha Huber, Tellervo Kalleinen, Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen, Petri Saarikko, and Tomas Ivan Träskman, who became friends in the aftermaths of the First *Summit of Micronations*. All of the members played an instrumental role in the organisation of this Summit. YKON was formed in order to organise the next *Summit of Micronations* on the Brioni islands in Croatia.

ÉLÉONORE DE MONTESQUIOU
The Travellers

Éléonore de Montesquiou will present two of her recent works. *Atom Cities* (2006) is a project she conducted in Paldiski and Sillamäe, former military cities in Estonia which had a restricted access during the Soviet era. This ongoing project consists of a series of videos, two publications, posters, a radio piece and a blog, featuring a number of interviews with the inhabitants of both cities. Secondly, she will present her latest project *The Travellers* (2007) exploring the commuting practices of women on Polish-German border.

JOANNA RAJKOWSKA
Under the Palm Tree

Joanna Rajkowska will present three of her recent and current projects – the public project *Greetings from Jerusalem Avenue* (2002–2007), an artificial palm tree situated at the intersection of Aleje Jerozolimskie (Jerusalem Avenue) and Nowy Swiat streets in the city of Warsaw; *Flight Over Budapest* (spring 2008), a social experiment that will consist of a short air flight over the city of Budapest aboard a small tourist airplane, inviting members of Hungary's ethnic minorities, both the historical and contemporary ones, to participate in the project; and *1000 Israeli Looking at 1000 Palestinians for One Hour / 1000 Palestinians Looking at 1000 Israelis for One Hour* (2008), a public project in Israel/Palestine which aims to provoke the situation of 2000 people looking at each other for one hour in an area in Israel where the military rule would allow such situation.

MARIA-KRISTIINA SOOMRE
Lost in Integration? Estonian Contemporary Art and Missing Attitudes towards (Sneaking) Nationalism

The presentation is an attempt to map the Estonian contemporary art field in search for approaches relating to the 'issue of nationalism', considering both the role of institutions and single artists. No case studies will be offered but rather a psychoanalytical analysis looking back into the past of the young nation-state and its previous lives. Contemporary art in Estonia today seems to be quite happy with the mainstream concept of 'Estonianness' – the national identity served on the plate. Is the mythological Estonian super-hero Kalevipoeg to blame for the fact that nationalism in artistic context seems so safe, even if so 1930s, to us here today? Do we feel comfortable in this small quite xenophobic society where 'openness' has to be branded? Is critical approach possible or is it, really, not impossible at all? Are we just blind, are we lost in integration or are we nationalist indeed?

MARKO STAMENKOVIĆ
Private Dancers

The presentation revolves around the exhibition entitled *Private Dancers* (Belgrade, February 2007, curated by M. Stamenkovic). The exhibition opens up the issue of Labour, while the current problematic revolving around the new work-conditions, as well as the impact of transformed work-concepts on a general value-system and social psychology, are being observed from and within the perspective of an omnipresent neoliberal order. Immaterial labour, flexibility, temporariness and insecurity pertaining to all forms of job-engagement today, (un)employment, work-ethics, new forms of organisation, social security, alternative models, economic

migration, global movements etc., figure among all sorts of issues put into question (at the level of this displaying 'sample', in various visual and discursive formats: video, music, photography, drawing, installation, computer-game, publications, public discussion...) in the projects of contemporary artists/groups coming from Belgrade, Berlin, Budapest, Paris, Vienna, Dresden, Brussels, Zagreb, Geneva, Dublin, Milan, Moscow. The exhibition aims at pointing out the necessity of rethinking the socio-economic effects of transition in the conditions determined by the privatisation process of a formerly state-owned property, and consequently, by the transformation of work-practices, as well as of the value-parameters in everyday life.

TOMAS TOMILINAS

Nationalism in the Baltic States and Societies

The 'democracy' of elites and its challenges while transforming into the majority rule in the post-soviet region provides outstanding cases for transitional analysis. The analysis of relations between citizenship and nation building in Baltic States is usually based on Latvian and Estonian cases. However Lithuanian case adds to the general picture new dimensions. There are important questions to be asked about democratic quality. Do the current Baltic elites represent the societies? Does the policy making satisfy the popular needs?

Anti-Russian national state building and post-communist capitalism in the Baltic States result in a narrow political spectrum and formal democracy. The limits of transitional approach hide structural problems of Baltic democracy: weak parties, domination of 'neo-liberal conservatism', etc. Is there a real political left?

Some foresee the end of 'political correctness' among the Lithuanian (Baltic?) politicians – it is getting to be popular to withstand basic values of tolerant (Western?) political culture. Will society manage to tolerate the tolerance? Pessimistic observers note, that the Lithuanian majority representatives are acting and identifying themselves as if they were still a defending minority under occupation.

New challenges of migration will definitely shake Baltic nationalism. But is a way to 'European nationalism' really long?