

КУЛЬТУРА

Култура - Брой 23 (2550), 19 юни 2009

Начална страница

SOFIA UNDERGROUND 09 CRISIS EDITION

The following excerpt of this Culture News Article translated from Bulgarian.

Another person who has become almost a co-author of the Sofia Underground 09 is Ted Efremoff – an American artist of Russian descent who is a Fulbright Fellow here in Bulgaria. He authored two memorable performances and led a virtual performance bridge between Sofia and New York City. During the Night of Museums from 12 noon on the 16th of May until 12 noon on the 17th of May on the terrace of the Union of Bulgarian Artists he conducted with fellow artist Rebecca Parker a 24-hour conversation. The conversation was a free discourse on the theme of art with artists, bystanders, professors of the academy, local chalga club attendees in the small hours of the night, and online participants from around the world.

This colorful conversation has in it's own right sociological value in connection to the climate of the Bulgarian Art world, the full recording of which can be viewed on the internet site. The seemingly work like droll and stoic character of this action is in sharp contrast with most other Night of Museum performances, which tended to be on the theatrical side.

From 9 pm until 11 pm on the 23rd of May in the very centre of the capital on Vitosha boulevard, Rakovski street, Tsar the Liberator boulevard, National Assembly square and Alexander Battenberg square Ted Efremoff realized the action Gypsy Wagon Prophet Theater. A real Roma horse and wagon outfitted with a screen and projector and manned by two Roma pilots traveled around the center of Sofia projecting video animation of a slot machine, which showed words and numbers reminiscent of a bingo hall or casino. The dangerous and surreal journey wound it's way through Saturday night traffic among luxury automobiles and heavy black jeeps. I observed viewers responses on my bicycle. People on Vitosha Boulevard were asking what is the advertising for? On Racovsky Street, theater going public gave the wagon a spontaneous ovation. Foreign tourists were asking to take photographs with the horse wagon. In the end the Roma horsemen asked for a raise in honorarium because of the heightened difficulty of the nights journey. Everyone will see the result of the action upon the completion of the video of the event, but it is obvious that this was one of the most radical performances by an artist in the Bulgarian public sphere.

Also of great interest was the third project by Efremoff: "Electric kids performance exchange" a 7 day exchange (16-22nd of May) of instructions/documentation between Sofia and New York City, between students of New Bulgarian University, National Art Gallery and Atelie Plastelin from one side and young artists from (Kindness and Imagination Development Society in NYC). This simple, unpretentious and friendly game of imagination gave birth to 14 performances created through instructions given in the virtual space by these young artists sharing visual ideas without actually making each others acquaintance. I am not aware of any other performance in Bulgaria of this type of multi personage, multi-location action through different time zones.

Ruen Ruenov.

You Are What You Beat

By: Emily Morrison

01/23/2007

A detail from Ted Efremoff's i2i installation, on view through February 3.

In an era of political upheaval and global violence, the numbing effects of casualty counts and war propaganda can confound even the most patriotic American. Our split political personality screams out for consistency and searches for a sturdy definition of American identity. Yet, ironically, there's nothing like war to leave a permanent mark.

Connecticut-based Ted Efremoff explores the personal and social implications of warfare in his installation at i2i gallery, employing hand-drawn maps of the world, stickers, photography, and video to reflect upon the personal travel diary of one United States soldier. Laden with images of tattoos and scars from the soldier's body, the maps explore the subject's conflict-ridden personality. These ghastly, painful, and often eerily playful forms permeate the borders of tumultuous nations such as Columbia, Iraq, and Indonesia. The images redefine boundaries; country borders are no longer simple lines, but a reflection of this soldier and his army.

The southern wall of the gallery features a continental world map marked at various locations with tattooed red stars. The northern wall, covered in a menagerie of fanciful winged devils, skulls, fish, and images of the soldier, reveals an enlarged version of each starred site. Images of the soldier in various poses are portrayed in bird's-eye perspective. The figure often sits in a closed position with arms tightly wrapped around drawn knees, ducking his head toward the earth. These photographs fail to offer a full view of the soldier's face and his expressionless presence successfully amplifies the emotional charge of the installation.

The many portraits of the soldier are surrounded by images from his tattooed body. A trio of razors, bullets, and nails (a tattoo from his left arm) marks the border of Panama and Columbia, while dancing devils and ominous skulls dot the landscape of the Middle East. Perhaps the most poignant image is the repeated undulating form of two Koi, beautifully rendered in turquoise and cobalt; closer inspection, however, reveals a flaw. A large pink oval gashes the abdomen of one fish, mirroring the scars that cover the soldier's body — each shiny pink blemish is a reminder of the repercussions of war. The juxtaposition of tattooed icons and war wounds not only reflects the pain of the soldier, but the political turmoil surrounding each country. Suddenly the tattooed figures reveal greater meaning. Dancing devils now represent the conflict in Iraq as well as the conflicting elements of the human psyche. Efremoff grafts the skin of this man onto each country, creating a travel diary outlined in physical pain and emotional dichotomy.

Behind the Lines: Mapping Identity Through Conflict

Through Feb 3

i2i gallery

2110 McCullough

San Antonio Current, February 2007

Queens Chronicle

New L.I.C. Gallery Pushes Envelope
by Ric Jenny, arts@qchron.com
06/29/2006

(Ted Efremoff) A typewriter serves as the centerpiece in “Correspondence,” an installation that recreates a Stalin era Soviet apartment, now on view at P.S.11, a new gallery in Long Island City.

PSII gallery is located in a space so tiny you’ll be proud to have found it. Mary Martin and Aziz Chittae are the partners of this precious display case of a gallery, now just four months old. At four months, any gallery is barely embryonic, and it usually takes five years before collectors detect a sense of potential permanence. When a gallery has been selling art for five years, it becomes possible for it to start selling art. This conundrum is all too familiar to artists and writers who know they can get a show or be published as soon as they have gotten a show or been published. However, this frustrating barrier can also be the impetus for new ideas, as it is at PSII, located in the shadow of its namesake, an institution of modern art.

PSII fits into the low cost, often artist supported cooperative gallery niche that stands in contrast to high cost multi branch galleries concerned with historical and monetary excellence. The latter might include Larry Gagosian, a prime innovator who maintains galleries with impressive addresses in Manhattan, London and Beverly Hills, while the former includes the artists’ groups and artist run galleries that have been multiplying in the greater Long Island City area in recent years. Nonprofit art spaces like Flux Factory and Local Project, to name just a few, are rebelling against critical and financial pressures that might limit an artist’s freedom of expression. One mechanism eventually feeds the other—perhaps these galleries will bring forth the future art Romeos and Painterinas who will someday line the pockets of those bold enough to take a chance and pay attention.

The current installation at PSII, “Correspondence,” by Russian born Ted Efremoff, is first of all quite elegant in its implementation. Efremoff has transformed the gallery space into a small, darkened apartment during the Soviet regime. In a tiny stark room entered through black curtains, visitors hear the sounds of and see the projected image of a woman’s hands typing on an old typewriter.

This image appears on the wall and on fresh white paper in the actual typewriter, which sits on a simple desk. On the desk with the typewriter, we see what appears to be a writer’s work papers and a book with no cover in the warm light of a desk lamp. To the left of the typewriter lies a letter that begs to be read.

The letter is written by a woman named Peg to a woman named Joyce and explains the plight of a writer practicing “samizdat,” the self publishing that started in post Stalin USSR when strict censorship kept writers from being published. Writers would secretly copy manuscripts in longhand or on typewriters for distribution one by one.

To the left of this desk is a table onto which a video is projected of a woman’s hands making up a table as a bed. The claustrophobia is clear and present.

This is the territory of Mikhail Bulgakov, a Russian writer who suffered the same fate as the people described in the letter to Joyce. Bulgakov’s book, “The Master and Margarita,” tells the fantastic story of the devil’s revenge exacted upon Stalin’s cultural bureaucrats who insured he would never be published during his lifetime. The novel—published after his death—now stands as a beacon of justice for artists.

The installation at PSII is quite elegant and clear in its aesthetic astringency. It also represents political art that

champions the repressed artists. For a moment, the woman who wrote the letter is free and published in this tiny gallery in Queens. It does not matter that she is no longer alive. This installation of political text driven art has a soul. How often do you see that?

“Correspondence” will be on view through July 9. Gallery hours are noon 6 p.m. Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, at PSII Gallery, 13 03a Jackson Ave., Long Island City. www.psiigallery.com.

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Activism in the Form of Art: artist Ted Efremoff walks us through

by Clare Rowland

Though Ted Efremoff's installation, "Apartment 34 Parallel Construction," is a few weeks away from being complete, the essence of the piece enveloped me as I walked through it. Efremoff, a graduate art student at the University of Connecticut, has constructed a simple two room apartment with a few symbolic objects placed throughout it to demonstrate what it was like to live in Soviet Russia, or any other control oriented society. The only tangible objects in the reproduction are two large rectangular tables, a small telephone stand, a wooden chair, and a desk upon which sits a metal lamp and ancient type-writer. From the ceiling, a twenty-four minute loop of a film is projected onto the objects below, portraying people performing tasks influenced by their fear of the violent soviet dictatorship. Standing in Efremoff's stark memories, it is easy to feel as if you are surrounded by ghosts whispering reasons to appreciate our own waning freedom. Beginning March 31st, "Apartment 34" will be on display at the Benton Museum on the UConn campus.

What was your inspiration for creating "Apartment 34 Parallel Construction"?

This is basically a replica from an apartment where I grew up, in Moscow. I was in my graduate art theory class, and I remembered how this woman, who was a friend of my family, used to pack a suitcase in case she got arrested during the Stalin years. So I had that picture in my mind, and then I remembered that when my mother's friends would come over, she would take a pillow and put it over the phone, because she felt that if we were talking about politics, we could potentially be overheard. This kind of stuff was continually happening in our apartment. Then I talked to my mom and she said that in our apartment at one point, four people moved into one of the rooms. The father had been executed and the mother, the grandmother and two children lived in one room. They had to use their tables for beds, because they didn't have enough space. Then another part of the story I heard was that when we had friends over and were eating dinner, they would write something down that they didn't feel comfortable saying out loud, and pass it around, and people would read it and then they would burn it in a plate so there would be no evidence, no sound. Also, relatives of mine participated in self-publishing. People were not aloud to read certain books because a lot of books were censored and illegal. So my aunt worked with a guy who was a dissident. He was a writer, but wrote books underground, and had them published in Europe. So my aunt typed his books because the government wouldn't allow anybody access to copy-machines. My aunt would use a type-writer and type the books by hand and circulate them underground.

All of this happens in "Apartment 34" over the course of 24 minutes. It's a piece where you don't walk in and see everything, but you stand in the apartment and this stuff happens around you. It's meant to be seen as walking through, but also from above.

How much research did you do before beginning this project?

The project came together very slowly. I got together with some other graduate students, and I wanted to see what filming something from above would be like. And we worked it out, and we had a dinner in the metal shop, and I liked the footage I got from that, but it wasn't what I was going to use. Then I started talking to different members of my family about things that went on in our apartment. I talked to my mom and my uncle and other people. As it turns out I had forgotten most of the things that had happened, like I forgot about the family of four that had been living in the apartment.

Why were people so scared?

After the soviet revolution, communists took command of the country, and decided to make communism happen in this really large country of about 130 million. Not all of the people wanted communism, so their method

was to make it happen through force. The man that is renowned for this is Stalin, who besides being a dictator, was a very paranoid person, and felt that people around him couldn't be trusted. The unofficial record is that he probably wiped out as many citizens as WWII did, which is about 20 million. So after his legacy other people like Khrushchev and Brezhnev came into power. During Khrushchev there was a slight thaw, and during Brezhnev it wasn't back to Stalinist days, but it was still fairly restrictive. I remember as a little kid knowing that I wasn't supposed to talk about the government, or say things that could get me in trouble at school or at home.

What was it like growing up in Soviet Russia? Besides not being able to talk about the government, do you feel like you had a fairly normal childhood?

I actually really enjoyed my childhood. I felt like my existence was fairly normal. I hung out with my friends and played hockey and soccer and enjoyed my life. I left Russia when I was sixteen, so I wasn't quite aware of everything, but I did know that I wasn't supposed to speak about politics. But at this point, during the Brezhnev era, there were a lot of anti-government jokes. I remember a friend of mine and I walked out of a store once, and he spontaneously shouted some anti-Brezhnev sentiment and this cop appeared out of nowhere. My friend was quick enough to say that two guys who ran around the corner had said it, so the cop went chasing after them.

You are aware of these things: I left in 1980 and in 1990 I went back to Russia. I met up with a good childhood friend and we started talking about Politics. I was whispering to him, and he turned to me and said, "You don't have to whisper anymore." I had remembered for ten years that this was not something you were supposed to discuss.

How has recreating this apartment affected you?

Recreating it made me learn a lot about my family. Another part of this installation is going to be people's stories that can be heard coming out of the walls about these objects. So my next little project is to do recordings over the phone. I'm going to call Russia and talk to some of my relatives and call my mom in Philadelphia. Through creating this installation I am learning all of these things about my family, and I feel about a lot of families that lived in this era.

What remnants of this era can be seen in Russia today?

My wife and I just went back to Russia in May, and I was amazed by how many police I saw. We must have seen six different kinds of police in different kinds of uniforms. We went by two of the major prisons and courts, and we saw all of these men sitting in cars looking suspicious and tons and tons of police everywhere.

Putin, who is the current premier in Russia, is believed to be a puppet of the KGB or one of the strongmen of the KGB. After Gorbachev, people were able to choose the governors of the 15 republics that are now part of Russia. What Putin did was he changed the law so that he appoints all of the governors. It would be like President Bush appointing the governors of each state. One of my relatives works at a television station and friends of his have died for reporting the wrong things.

What steps do you feel people should take to prevent something like this from happening?

A senator by the name of William Fulbright said something to the extent of: it is paying a compliment to your country to criticize your country. I think it is important for people that live in the US today to be able to voice any concerns or protest any taking away of their civil liberties. In 1980 when I was leaving the Soviet Union, if you would've told me that this whole empire would crumble in ten years and would be a shadow of its former self, I would've never believed it.

Though this piece is about Soviet Russia, did you intend to draw a parallel between the historical infringement on people's privacy and the American's increasing tendency to violate our privacy today, via avenues such as the USA PATRIOT Act?

The name of this piece is "Apartment 34 Parallel Construction." I took my apartment in Moscow, recreated it in the US, and I filmed the dinner scene with my American family, my wife's family, so these things that are happening with the Patriot Act, like information that can be had by the government from libraries or websites or wiretapping and things of that nature, are things that can escalate. I think it's the responsibility of American people to point a finger at that. One thing I find happening more and more often is that my art is reflecting my thinking. I want Americans to walk through this space to let them understand what it feels like.

There is a very strong historical and factual basis for this piece, what personal touches have you added to transform this piece from a replica into a piece of art?

I made a lot of choices in making this piece. One of the choices was to focus mainly on the objects that have some significance with the story. Most of the things you see in here tell a story; there are very few objects that don't speak to the story I am trying to tell. Another thing I think I will add is a mirror, because I want people to see themselves as they are walking through here. I also made the walls grey because I didn't want to make an exact replica of the apartment but I wanted to abstract it for people.

What are your plans, as an artist, for the future?

Since coming to UConn my art started reflecting my thinking a lot more. Before, I was mainly a landscape and cityscape painter. I dealt with history and the history of architecture; but now I want to do more with my thinking process, and how I feel about subjects like civil liberties, certain freedoms, oppression you can find around the world. My art now reflects more of how I feel as a person, and I wanted to continue to do that.