

Delaine Le Bas (UK)

“London Gypsyland” (2014)

3:45 min

Delaine Le Bas, among the most recognized artists of Romani background, builds her artwork around the themes of nationhood, race, gender, identity and, especially, the issues of belonging and “othering”. Clothing and textiles, especially their cultural, symbolic and identifying qualities are vital part of her works. Costumes, as in the case of “London Gypsyland” play a major role in her performative practice while fabrics are important elements in the large detailed installations that she creates.

The starting point for “London Gypsyland” film is a series of engravings from “The Illustrated London News” printed in the late 1800's of traditional Gypsy Stopping Places across London. Delaine Le Bas, together with Ronke Osinowo – a London-based artist of Nigerian background, who was fostered with a Romany Gypsy couple in Essex – made a series of performative interventions across London. In localities such as London Fields, Hackney Wick, Mitchum Common and Gypsy Hill, documented as historical Roma/Gypsy stopping places, Delaine Le Bas explores the idea of belonging and ownership of physical and identifiable spaces. This journey explores the idea of urban traveller communities that have always been part of London landscape, but that still exist within the public imagination as an ‘English Countryside’ stereotype. The video represents a symbolic reclaiming of places with identifiable Romani/Gypsy genealogies, but which today are emptied of its historical Roma tenants.

Delaine Le Bas was born in Worthing, U.K., and graduated from St. Martins School of Art, London. Delaine is a cross-disciplinary artist creating installations, performances, photography and films. She was one of sixteen artists who were part of “Paradise Lost”, The First Roma Pavilion Venice Biennale in 2007. She works with her late husband the artist Damian Le Bas creating works for their ongoing projects “Safe European Home/Frontier De Luxe” and “Gypsy Revolution”. She also creates text works with her son the writer Damian James Le Bas. She has shown her works internationally including her solo installation “Witch Hunt” which has been touring since 2009. Her works have been included in Venice Biennale 2007, Prague Biennale 2005 & 2007, Gwangju Biennale 2012, Zacheta National Gallery of Art 2013, MWW Wroclaw Contemporary Art Museum 2014, The Third Edition of the Project Biennial of Contemporary Art D-O Ark Underground Bosnia and Herzegovina 2015, Off Biennale Budapest 2015, Goteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art Extended 2015 NSK State- In -Time Pavilion Venice Biennale 2017. Delaine is currently one of the co-curators and artists for “Waiting for The Barbarians” Athens Biennale 2018.

Gabi Jimenez (FR)

“Guerillas Gitanas” (2016)

Courtesy of Gallery Kai Dikhas

Gabi Jimenez, throughout his artistic work, is committed to making visible the struggle and resistance of Romani people, both in France and throughout Europe. Especially, Jimenez remains committed to cultivating the memory of the Roma Holocaust, and the on-going systematic oppression that Roma people face today. But rather than deploying a victimizing message Gabi Jimenez emphasizes the agency and resilience of Roma communities. Jimenez celebrates the vibrant energy of Roma who stand united in the face of injustice.

In his work, vivid images of caravans and guitars are not reduced to mere clichés but represent the weapons against cultural and de facto annihilation of the Roma. Vibrant beauty of Romani culture becomes the ammunition against increasingly hostile majority societies. The seemingly joyful, bright and colourful aesthetics of his artwork contrasts with the solemnity of the truth Gabi Jimenez denounces - that of discrimination, violence and hatred. In “Guerillas Gitanas” Gabi Jimenez gives recognition to Romani militants – the real, historical figures such as Raymond Gruyeme, a Romani Holocaust survivor and a member of French Resistance – and to the collective spirit of Romani struggle. In this way, Gabi Jimenez becomes a militant himself, seeking historical truth and equality and respect. To the majority, the rise of Roma guerrillas becomes a promise and a warning, but for the Roma, it represents an opportunity for self-liberation.

Gabi Jimenez is an accomplished French painter artist of Gitano/ Roma background whose paintings are exhibited throughout France and Europe. In 2007, he represented France at the first Roma pavilion at the Venice Biennale Internationale d'Art Contemporain, a landmark event and a turning point in the perception of contemporary art of the Gypsy community. There are numerous collective and solo exhibitions in which the artist represents the Roma and Travelers community, activating through these works so that French and Europeans can open their eyes to a situation that worsens year after year, Discrimination in expulsions. In 2014, Jimenez received the prize for "Painting and Visual Arts" for all his work militant and committed by the Ministry of Culture of Spain.

Gabi Jimenez (FR)

“L'apocalypse selon Saint Nicolas” (2010)

Courtesy of Gallery Kai Dikhas

The painterly style of strong contours and vivid colors organized in tight rhythmic surfaces create an ultimately decorative feeling about Gabi Jimenez compositions. But this is only a first impression. The artist chooses topics of utmost importance or problematic character. For example, his art often works with the memory of the tragedy of the Roma in France during and after the Second World War, he addresses current evictions, and questions, taboos or issues within the Roma community. In “L'apocalypse selon Saint Nicolas”, Gabi Jimenez denounces the discriminatory policies of the French government towards Roma, both French citizens and immigrants. In the triptych, we see a Roma person being hit by a policeman and observe the chaos that ensues. This is a direct reference to real-life events. In July 2010, French police shot and killed a 22-year-old French Romani man who fled a police check-point; in response a group of *Gens du voyage* rioted in the village of Saint-Aignan in protest. Following the incident, French president Nicolas Sarkozy initiated a program to repatriate thousands of Roma migrants, most of them EU citizens, resulting in demolishing of Romani camps, forced evictions and deportations of thousands of Roma residing in France. The deportations sparked international controversies but no procedures were initiated against the French government.

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Sead Kazanxhiu (AL)

“A Choice To Be Made, A Price To Be Paid” (2016)

15 min.

In his performance, Sead Kazanxhiu discusses the notion of homeland and belonging, but also of self-determination and sovereignty of Roma as a non-territorial nation. The Roma, as a people, have never sought territorial claims although an imagined, utopian “Romanistan” represents the dream of having a “Romani phuv” – a Romani land that can be called home. As “others”, migrants and “nomads”, Roma are dislocated from their respective nations and from national identity discourses; they don’t belong. This is why, “Romani Phuv” is an intangible, intimate treasure which Roma people carry with themselves, internally in their hearts. “Romani phuv” is as much a utopian dream and an imagined political goal, as it is a real struggle for dignified housing and safety in the land which Roma share with the non-Roma majority. In this performance, Sead Kazanxhiu becomes the “chef” who prepares a meal from “shishik” - a kind of soil that some Roma traditionally use to wash themselves and pregnant women eat during her pregnancy. Once the meal is prepared, the “chef” becomes a “diplomat”, symbolizing the rise of Roma intellectual elites who lead the Roma community struggle for a “Romani Phuv” – a Romani land.

Sead Kazanxhiu is a visual artist from southwest Albania who comes from a family of Roma ethnic minority. This fact has profoundly shaped his childhood years in Baltez, a village nearby Fier, where he was raised in an environment sensitive to social and cultural inequalities. In a community, aware of hierarchical structures and un-privileged positions within a nation-state, the very condition of being an Albanian Roma citizen turned out to be a determining factor for Kazanxhiu’s status of an artist as well as for his overall cultural practice so far. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the issues of prejudice, exclusion, discrimination and racism have taken center stage both in his artistic and activist work. While offering a good example of citizen participation in decision-making processes through social campaigns, trainings and workshops that involve Roma youth in his native country and abroad, Kazanxhiu advocates less asymmetric power relationships not only in urban and rural settings of contemporary Albania but also in the nowadays increasingly segregated global world. This includes his active role as arts and culture advisor in IRCA - Institute of Romani Culture in Albania.

Emilia Rigova (SK)

“(Out of) the deadlock” (2016)

2:18 min

“(Out of) the deadlock” is a powerful piece dedicated to commemorating the victims of the Roma Holocaust. The installation was produced in Poland, in a forest near one of the numerous sites of mass killings of Roma during the World War II. Rigova brought a carpet to the forest with the intention of transforming herself into a living memorial, dedicated to the Roma victims. The composition of the image of the forest, the carpet and the naked body in embryonal position is complemented by a deconstructed musical piece, an authentic recording from a funeral of Rigova’s relative.

In this video-installation, presented originally in 2016 at the Gallery 8 in Budapest, the forest becomes a refuge and a shrine. Rigova makes reference to the tragic history of the Roma Holocaust and the safety offered to innumerable Roma families by the vast forests across Europe. Indeed, in Slovakia in particular, Roma communities sought hideaways in forests – and Nature was their home, which provided safety, shelter and food unconditionally. Rigova, celebrates the hospitality of Nature; the forest in the installation represents the welcoming shelter and a space of acceptance and love. In contrast, the naked body in embryonal position transmits the sense of danger and vulnerability of the human life; its stillness of the body communicates the paralyzing fear and historical entrapment. The deadlock symbolizes an emptiness but simultaneously a potentiality, a lack of agency and a step towards its reclaiming; a step towards shaping the future and overcoming the past.

Emília Rigová (born 1980) is a Roma visual artist coming from the Slovak Republic who lives and works in Banská Bystrica. She graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Banská Bystrica from the department of sculpture. She is a multi-media artist, combining 2D and 3D installations, performances and graphic design. In addition to her engagement with art, she is involved academically as a teacher and lecturer of art courses (object, multi-media, inter-media) at Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica. For Rigová, an object in the form of an installation or as a performance or a site-specific intervention is a basic element of her art language. In her work, she is driven by the exploration of the intersubjective emotion and experience, informed and modified by a specific socio-cultural environment. The main themes of her works include cultural or social stereotypes, alter ego, Romani identity, and psychological shadows.

Emilia Rigova (SK)

“Genesis” (2016)

“Genesis” or “The Birth of Venus” belongs to the “Pra-Bari series”, in which Rigova explores her alter ego and the various emanations of her personality and community she comes from. Bari Raklori – the artistic alter ego of Emilia Rigova – allows Rigova to communicate her personal experiences by intentionally exploring the public, the intimate and the secretive aspects of individuality. In “Genesis”, the lower piece represents the process of transformation through a process of change and re-making. The upper piece represents the emergence, birth, becoming. On the one hand, it makes explicit reference to the myth of birth of Venus – as the ultimate element of beauty and femininity, and the indispensable component of universal balance. On the other hand, the reference to Venus acquires a cosmological – and cosmic – symbolism. Biological and metaphorical fertility transcend through the artwork.

“Genesis” is an artwork deeply rooted in the Romani experience. Numerous cosmogonic myths of Roma creation make references to fire as a catalyst particle. Roma oral history, and the collective accumulated knowledge of the Romani diaspora, have been traditionally transmitted by the campfire. For Rigova, gold symbolizes fire. “Genesis” is covered with 24 carat gold which has a semiotic character, allowing to contextualize the individual layers and stories encapsulated in this artwork. The gold – fire represents a new beginning, a process of re-making and re-birth, of re-creating of the Romani communities, of a new “Genesis”.

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Małgorzata Migra-Tas (PL)

“Three Graces” (2017)

In her artwork, Mirga-Tas glorifies the everyday and mundane events in the life of the Romani community. In her paintings, ordinary scenes acquire an enchanting character of magical realism, resonating with beauty and affirmation. By using colourful, decorative fabrics full of sequins and shiny ornamentation, the artist engages in an auto-ironic coquetry with the stereotypes associated with Roma aesthetics, winking at the viewer/audience who typically anticipates such multi-colored and joyous “Gypsy-ness”. But beyond its lively aesthetics, the painting acquires a performative, collective and participatory character. The materials used in the artwork are made from pieces of clothing used and donated to the artist by Roma community members and her extended family. The personal memorabilia and personal objects become carriers of memory and transmit experiences of every-day life of present-day Roma.

The “Three Graces” is inspired in a photograph made by an uncle of Mirga-Tas in late 1970s in a Romani settlement in the South of Poland. The three persons depicted transmit confidence, pride and self-assurance. The painting represents the triumph of self-affirmation over stigma of stereotypes imposed on Roma by the majority society.

Małgorzata Mirga-Tas (1978) graduated from the Faculty of Sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow; she lives and works in the Romani settlement in Czarna Góra, in the South of Poland. She participated in the International Sculpture Symposium in Brno (2012). She was a co-curator of Zalikierdo Drom exhibition in Warsaw (2014). She received distinction at the 42nd Painting Biennial Bielska Jesień 2015. She was granted a scholarship from the International Visitor Leadership Program on Promoting Social Good Through the Arts (2015). She engages in social and artistic projects against exclusion, racial discrimination, and xenophobia and has participated in conferences focused on Roma community. She is an organiser, curator, and coordinator of Romani Art Foundation JAW DIKH! and the International Roma Artist-in-Residency JAW DIKH! which takes place annually since 2010 in the Romani settlement Czarna Góra, Poland.

Ceija Stojka (AT)

Untitled (2004)

Courtesy of Gallery Kai Dikhas

After Ceija Stojka endured three concentration camps and finally escaped, she lived hidden in a forest during eight months, surviving thanks to the benevolence of Nature. During this time, she developed an attitude of fondness and gratitude towards the Mother Earth. After transmitting and digesting the trauma of her experiences during her work on „The Black Series”, Ceija Stojka turned to the memories of her time spent in the Nature, where she felt a certain type of happiness. She then began to create colourful paintings full of appreciation through which she celebrated and gave tribute to the natural world.

In this painting, numerous elements, typical of Ceija’s work can be found. The wind in the painting, symbolizes memory – the haunting images of the past but also coming to peace with the trauma through the importance of remembering. The trees, clouds and flowers have been painted using not only brush but also fingers; Ceija often highlighted that she places her fingerprints in the paintings “to believe that she is really here”. The branch, in the bottom right corner is Ceija’s signature element, a symbol of the ever-present scar left by the trauma of the war experiences.

Ceija Stojka, Roma Holocaust Survivor from Austria, was one of the most influential and iconic artists of Romani background. Born in 1933 in a nomadic Romani family, she survived three concentration camps. After the War, Ceija Stojka emerged as an artist, painter, writer, singer and a public lecturer, raising awareness about the Roma Holocaust among the majority society. She wrote three autobiographies and started painting at the age of 56. Her art was exhibited in Europe, the United States and Japan.

Ceija Stojka (AT)

Untitled (2001)

Courtesy of Gallery Kai Dikhas

This artwork was painted by Ceija Stojka on the Christmas night in 2001. Following the family Christmas dinner, Ceija used the serviette from the cake she shared with her relatives and used it to paint a winter landscape. For Stojka, coming from a Catholic family, Christmas was an important occasion; but even here the shadows of her past traumas were present. Stojka recounted that every year for Christmas, there was an empty plate prepared for the starving visitor and that food was celebrated with reverence.

The artwork includes the iconic elements found in Ceija Stojka's paintings – the naked branches and the black birds, as symbols of fleeting freedom. In the painting, through the wintry landscape, first green sprouts of grass emerge through the snow, symbolizing a new beginning and rebirth.

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Krzysztof Gil (PL)

“Bergitka” (2013)

“Duj Deszu” (2013)

Lithography is where Krzysztof Gil feels most comfortable – it allows to combine purely painting effects with sketches giving almost unlimited possibilities. In his work, the picturesque drawings and comic-like compositions give the artwork vivid and contemporary character. Much of the inspiration in Gil’s work come from family archives and family photo albums, objects which bear visible traces of the passing time. For Gil, the image that is destroyed, blurred, in which modernity is stirred with the past, symbolizes the changes and the need for re-definition.

Krzysztof Gil’s artwork is deeply rooted in subjective Romani experiences and intimate family histories. The point of departure for this series of lithographs are the oral histories and stories which Gil’s grandfather shared with him during his childhood. These stories, often the only trace of family history, overtime transform into fairytales bound for oblivion. Gil attempts to loosely interpret those stories to give them continuity and new life. It is an interpretation of how Romani life once was and an account of a world long gone. In his artwork the tradition, history, myth and stereotype are intertwined; stereotypical elements and real-life events are deconstructed, disassembled and re-created to illustrate the process of building of a contemporary Romani identity.

Krzysztof Gil is a Roma from Nowy Targ, in the South of Poland. He graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow in 2013 and is currently finalizing his PhD degree. Recipient of numerous artistic scholarship in Poland, including of the Polish Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration Scholarship, Krzysztof Gil has exhibited in solo and collective exhibitions in Poland and abroad. Since 2008, he has been part of an artistic group “Romani Art” and has been involved in the Roma youth movement as activist and participant.

Marina Rosselle (FR)

“In Winter” (2016)

Courtesy of Gallery Kai Dikhas

Marina Roselle’s artwork is profoundly linked to personal and family stories. Coming from an itinerant community herself, Roselle attempts to transmit the beauty of landscapes which contain their own poetry that majority may not perceive or care to notice. The temporality, appropriation of places and recuperation of objects play an important role in Marina’s work.

At the same time, Roselle’s work is deeply political. Installation “In Winter” becomes a manifesto of injustice faced by travelling and Roma communities in France while at the same time becoming a symbol of resilience and adaptation. Marina’s mother shared a campsite with immigrant Roma communities, when the French police evicted and destroyed the camp and humble homes of Roma families. The destruction and burning down of the camp became a strong inspiration in Marina’s work. The items presented “In Winter” have been recuperated from the destroyed Roma campsite and given a new life. The video shows the brutal images of the demolished homes. But the dried flower symbolizes life against all odds. Marina argues that the beauty and vulnerability of the Roma people resides in the fact “that we grow like weeds and can make a life anywhere”. The title of the work is ironic; while “In Winter” bears witness to destruction, it communicates the resilience to re-emerge and resist.

Marina Rosselle, born in 1980 in France, is a member of the nomadic “Gens de voyage” community in France. She is a graduated of School of Fine Arts in Valenciennes. She has exhibited extensively in France and abroad, and received Prix Galerie and Prix de la Fondation de France awards. Since May 2016, she is a member of the National Consultative Commission for the Gens du voyage/ Itinerant communities in France. Marina Rosselle’s artistic method is linked to her family history. Born into a travelling community, she challenges the condescending view of the Gypsy/ Roma/ Traveler community. She attempts to describe their way of life, their many journeys and their successive appropriations of places and landscapes. Her artistic methods are similar to the methods of the scrap merchants around her: she collects, recuperates, appropriates, during her wanderings, noticing the humblest and unusual objects and materials.

Kálman Várady (DE)

“Gypsy Warrior VI” (2013)

Courtesy of Gallery Kai Dikhas

The “Gypsy Warrior” is part of a series of totemic-like figures oscillating between magic, myth, ritual and cult which have an animistic-aesthetic quality. Várady refers to transience and dying; the use of bones, teeth, bullets and weapons symbolize the permanent danger and fragility of life in general, and the insecurity and hostility faced by the Roma, in particular.

The “Gypsy Warrior” denounces the notion of orientalism and exoticism assigned to Roma culture by the majority. The stereotypical and superficial fantasy of “The Gypsy”, in hands of Várady is turned into a nightmarish-like vision. For the non-Roma majority, it is a threatening message - a warning of the consequences of mistreatment and oppression. More broadly, the use of multitude of items from outside of Europe is also a reminder of the legacy of centuries of colonization and exploitation, and of its costs which should be borne by the colonizers.

For the Roma, the “Gypsy Warrior” is a reminder of the power and agency residing within Roma communities, and of the need to resist in the face of injustice. The multiplicity of the items and attributes given to the “Gypsy warrior” fascinate and intimidate the viewer – they represent the countless tools, skills and weapons available for the attack and defense. The use of craftwork, cult-objects and folkloric elements coming and belonging to minority groups across the world also communicate the universality of the struggle.

Kálman Várady is a German artist of Hungarian Roma background. He studied painting at the Kunsthochschule in Cologne under Professor Wolfgang Schriefer and became his master student from the mid-80s. Until the 1990s, he made numerous, extended trips through Africa, North and South America which influence his work and are part, as he describes, of his itinerant lifestyle. For Várady, nomadism is not economic necessity or cliché-fulfillment, but pleasure, broadening of horizons and an attitude towards life. In his work, Várady oscillate between painting, object, sculpture, installation and photography. His work deals with magic, mystery, ritual and death. Kálmán Várady's art forms his own universe of mostly old found and collected objects, which he collages into something new and thus skillfully plays with the associations of his observers.

Kálman Várady (DE)

“La Famiglia” (2015)

Courtesy of Gallery Kai Dikhas

In the work of Kalman Varady, humor, irony and political struggle intertwine. In the context of Roma, an open hand might be associated with taking rather than giving. The images of Romani beggars, with the hands extended to the majority in search of a benevolent gesture, represent the struggle and scarcity of numerous Romani families. But the image of the extended hand has been corrupted and compromised by being associated with claimant attitude and passiveness. Varady examines this gesture but turns it around. The open hand is an invitation to join, to seek and to listen. It is a giving hand that extends generously to those who come closer. Varady places a silver heart in the palm of the hand – a symbol of hospitality, generosity and transparency. It is an offering hand and a noble gesture that aims to provoke a reflection. It is the artist's intention to communicate the gesture of offering the Roma hearts to the public; at the same time the hand is meant to keep the Roma family safe and protected.

Roma cultural heritage – the heart of Roma artistic expression - has been given and re-appropriated by the majority cultures across Europe. Generosity with which Roma shared their creativity and talent is yet to be acknowledged as part of the cultural panorama and a shared European legacy.

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