



# PERFORMING THE MUSEUM

ERAC  
EUROPEAN ROMA  
INSTITUTE FOR ARTS  
AND CULTURE

## PERFORMING THE MUSEUM

CURATORIAL TEXT BY DENISA TOMKOVA

'The fault lies not in our stars... but in our institutions and our education,' argued Linda Nochlin in the 1970s when fighting for recognition and inclusion of female artists in art institutions. (1) Art produced by artists of Roma origin represents a similar 'blind spot' of our institutions. This exhibition, entitled *Performing the Museum* and presented by the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) brings together two projects which question the absence of Roma representation in arts and culture spaces. Firstly, the project "Invisible Museum", initiated by the Slovak artist Oto Hudec in 2017 at tranzit.sk, challenges the idea of traditional ethnographic role of museums, where "othering" through the observation, documentation and mapping of the essentialized subject is strongly embedded. Hudec's project rather proposes a new kind of institution which serves a more discursive, collaborative and emancipatory function. Secondly, and complementary to Hudec's idea, is the proposal by ERIAC and OFF-Biennale in Budapest which imagines a transnational Museum of Roma Contemporary Art. (2) RomaMoMA is a collaborative, process-based, transdisciplinary, transnational, and discursive art project. RomaMoMA is a platform to envision and discuss the possible roles and forms of such an institution that will spread in time and space in the course of a series of exhibitions, discussions, and art projects. While RomaMoMA enacts various functions of an imagined institution, performing and practicing its workings with the clear goal of promoting and preparing the establishment of a real institution.

In the exhibition *Performing the Museum* these two projects are brought together to connect the initial challenge with the imagined future. This exhibition is *performing* the imagined museum through dialogues and engagement with exhibited art.

We can see Emília Rigová's video performance *There is No Freedom Without Victory* (2019), which tackles the issues of the Roma identity and history.

The artist has dedicated this work to the commemoration of the International Romani Day (April 8). Rigová is holding the red fabric inspired by traditional Romani headscarves while standing against a strong wind on the beach. The subtitle of this work is 'Isthar', a Mesopotamian goddess of war and love.

Selma Selman's video performance *You Have No Idea* (2016) calls for the urgency to consider the intersectional struggles of Roma female artists. Her work, despite being based on her own experience, presents a universal message and questions the impossibility of communication. As the artist suggests: 'We have no idea about the struggles that others are facing.' Both Rigová and Selman, in their performances, challenge the physical limits of their bodies to convey the urgency of their struggles.

Robert Gabris's *Blue Heart series* (2014) tells very intimate testimonies of the people of a Romani village in Slovakia. The artist collected stories of people who documented their personal memories as tattoos. These engravings in blue ink tell are inspired by the artist's father who spent years in prison where he was a tattoo artist. The act of tattooing can be read as a means of *performing a museum*. The tattoos enable one to record, to archive and to preserve personal memories. As the artist's father says: 'My body is the place of my life. All my wounds and drawings of my past are there.'

Marcela Hadová, with the Roma women's club *Marka romňakero gendalos*, creates mural paintings in the village of Rankovce in the east of Slovakia. Through painting together in public spaces, this club seeks to establish a community and build relationships among the women in the village. The exhibition presents a photograph print of the mural painted by Hadová and the Roma women's club in Rankovce. Her work demonstrates that culture is not only formed within the walls of institutions but can have self-sufficient forms and locations.

Similarly, the project *Caravan* by Daniela Krajčová and Oto Hudec, (2013 onwards) leaves the gallery space and creates an art project within the community. The artists travelled through Slovakia in a caravan and spent a few days with each Roma community. This exhibition presents the video documentation of this project. The videos depict children dancing, singing, playing football, or telling their stories while their drawings, animated on the computer, are presented in the background. The aim of this project is to dispel the prejudices towards the Roma community, and to create a public discourse. At the end of the workshops in each location the artists organised a screening of the video, inviting parents, neighbours and community workers.

The exhibited works described here present the multiple challenges that the Roma face, from the unique intersectional struggle of artists who are Roma and women, to the general difficulty of preserving the Roma memory and history by building relationships through community art projects. Through the exhibited artworks by Roma and non-Roma artists and the accompanying events, *Performing the Museum* highlights the history of decolonizing museum practices in art history and brings attention to the lack of representation of Roma art in art institutions.

## References

<sup>(1)</sup> Linda Nochlin. 1971. Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists? In Nochlin's 1988 book *Women, Art, and Power*. (Harper and Row/New York), p.150

<sup>(2)</sup> RomaMoMA is initiated by OFF-Biennale Budapest based on Timea Junghaus's initial idea. It is an ongoing project of OFF-Biennale Budapest and ERIAC Berlin.

## ARTWORKS

**Oto Hudec**, *Invisible Museum*, project, videos, museum model and objects (2017)

**Emília Rigová**, *There is No Freedom Without Victory*, video performance (2019)

**Selma Selman**, *You Have No Idea*, video performance (2016)

**Robert Gabris**, *Blue Heart series*, engravings (2014)

**Marcela Hadová and Marka romňakero gendalos**, *Flowers*, mural/photograph print (2015–2018)

**Daniela Krajčová and Oto Hudec**, *Caravan project*, video (2013 onwards)

## ARTSISTS BIO

**Robert Gabris** (\*1986) is a Slovak visual artist of Roma origin. Gabris, in his artistic work, mainly deals with the medium of drawing and with experimental forms of printmaking, especially etching and engraving. His work is critical, political and a true activist confrontation with identity issues and new perspectives of different minorities in a European context. The starting point of his work is drawing, using experimental forms, as resistance to exclusion and racism. Gabris exhibited in New York, Berlin, Vienna, Paris, Shanghai, Strasbourg, Bucharest, Krakow among others.

**Marcela Hadová** (\*1995) is a Slovak painter of the Roma origin. She has been working for the Community Centre *Združenie pre lepší život (Association for Better Life)* for about 9 years. There, she manages the Roma women's club *Marka romňakero gendalos* which aims to bring together women from the Roma community and encourages them to be self-sufficient. For example, the group is doing paintings and murals which they offer for sale. Hadová is also part of the team of *Romani Suv Project (Roma Needle)*. She designs embroidery patterns that are later hand-embroidered in line with a typical technique of Rankovce village.

**Oto Hudec** (\*1981) is a Slovak multimedia visual artist who focuses on ecology, immigration and the impact of globalization on the environment. Hudec graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava. In 2012 he was a laureate of the Oscar Čepan Award, the prestigious Slovak Award for Contemporary Art. He has exhibited at the Slovak National Gallery, Kunsthalle Bratislava, the MAP Triennial in Dallas, the Threewalls Gallery in Chicago and the Georges-Pompidou Center in Paris, which even has one of Hudec's works in its collection.

**Daniela Krajčová** (\*1983) is a Slovak socially engaged artist. She uses active participation, investigation and oral history to shape society through a more critical view of Slovakia's complicated past and present. In 2016 she was a laureate of the Oscar Čepan Award. Her works were exhibited internationally in the Prague Biennale, the Venice Biennale of Architecture, and in Hungary, France, Slovenia, Estonia etc.

**Emília Rigová** (\*1980) is a Slovak visual artist of Roma origin. In 2018 she won the Oscar Čepan Award. Rigová is also a university lecturer at Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, where she teaches art courses (object, multimedia, intermedia media). In recent years, her work has been focused on the internal and external construction of the Roma identity and the acquisition of the Roma body in the long history of European culture. Rigová has exhibited at international exhibitions in Germany, Austria, Hungary, Poland and Croatia. In 2019, her work was also part of the FUTUROMA Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

**Selma Selman** (\*1991) is a visual artist from Bosnia and Herzegovina of Roma origin. Her work embodies the struggles of her own life as well as her community, employing a plethora of media such as performance, painting, photography and video installations. She is currently pursuing her MFA at Syracuse University in New York, where she's also teaching art. Selma is a founder of the organization "Mars To School"/ "Go The Heck To School" whose aim is to empower girls all around the world who are facing ostracization from society and poverty. She is also a Co-founder of a project for popularisation of contemporary art in Bosnia and Herzegovina named 'APARTMAN'.

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