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Tracing Treacherous Terrain

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Place of Seeing

Thoughts, Suggestions, and Reflections on Galerie Kai Dikhas

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Introduction

I am not going to write here about the so-called Roma artists and their works, nor about so-called Roma art and its reception in the European art scene, etc., as one might well suspect from the given context. Instead, I am interested in the question of how an art institution such as the still-young Galerie Kai Dikhas might be able to strengthen its position in the coming years. How does this “place of seeing”¹ wish to be perceived while establishing itself in the framework of local, national, and international art events?

1. Isolated places: classical galleries and other gallery types

For the sake of orientation, let us explore the following question. Which gallery types exist

¹ In Romani, Kai Dikhas means “place of seeing”.



Ceija Stojka: Ohne Titel, 2011
29,5 x 42 cm, gouache on paper
Courtesy Galerie Kai Dikhas



Imrich Tomáš: Drom, 1997
75 x 55 cm, hemp on wood plate
Courtesy Galerie Kai Dikhas

alongside the classical gallery?² As a basis for our discussion, we might turn to the documentation accompanying Anna Flach's 2011 project *Galerie-Einsichten*³, which investigates the "role of reputation and expert opinion in Central Switzerland's galleries." The activity of an art gallery might seem self-evident. There works of art are sold, artists presented, catalogues published. The gallery is a place for art lovers and curious passers-by.

But there is more going on behind the scenes. There is also the art market and its related economic mechanisms, in addition to the gallery's objectives and artistic orientation. As a result, different types of galleries come into being. According to "The Galleries of Central Switzerland", which catalogues and categorizes all of the well-known galleries in Switzerland's six central cantons, there are four different types. The first is the classical gallery described above. The next are the *off-space gallery* and the *producer's gallery*, both of which have a commercial focus. The fourth category is the *hybrid gallery*: "[...] which no longer figures among the regular galleries. Examples are publishing houses with exhibition space, simple exhibition spaces alone, art and cultural centres, museums, collections, auction houses, and art fairs."⁴

2 Anna Flach, Projekt *GalerieEinsichten*, 2011.

3 Ibid., p. 2: Classical galleries "[...] are characterized by their commercial orientation as well as by the presence of professional employees. The orientation of the classical gallery extends from regional, national, to international levels. They are looked upon as art dealers."

4 Ibid. p. 2f.

The Airport: The Passenger in Transit

The airport is a place of arrival and transit. The passenger knows exactly where he wants to end up. In a sense, it is an isolated place, since a passenger frequently gets lost there. But precisely the negative experience of losing one's way triggers a process of self-awareness, one that is necessary in order to perceive things in unaccustomed ways. And when the passenger in transit is sitting and waiting for the aircraft, this is a "special time" for reflection. About what? About whether he has in fact lost his way!

2. Public way station: gallery visitors of the future

The last type cited in Flach's list is the "hybrid gallery".⁵ Kai Dikhas belongs to this category. Describing a publisher's gallery in central Switzerland, the author reports: "Exhibitions take place in connection with publications, and represent a kind of quality control, even an added value. [...] Their survival on the art market is characterized by the quality of their work. [...] Admittedly, they cannot survive from sales alone. They are also dependent upon support, public and private financing."⁶ But there are other aspects, besides the economic one, which integrate the community and play an indispensable role in mediating between gallery and public, as well as between educational and cultural facilities. Here I am speaking of the gallery education program, an "exhibition space for theoretical and practical art education in conjunction with contemporary art – something that is almost never done in Germany."⁷ Carmen

Mörsch's investigation provides concrete examples, including the "rich tradition of activities of the Whitechapel Gallery London"⁸, the projects of the Chisenhale Gallery, and of the Institute of International Visual Arts (Iniva) in London, etc. Here, she discusses the way in which "the above-mentioned institutions see broadly-conceived educational activities as the fulfilment of their public mission. They are intensively networked with one another and with local institutions such as schools, associations, and cultural, senior, and youth centres in order so as to draw as many people as possible through specific opportunities to view and think about contemporary art."⁹ Using such an approach, it has been possible for Galerie Kai Dikhas to fulfil its most important task: cultural and artistic education about so-called Roma art and Roma culture in the public sphere through "deconstructive and transformative art education."¹⁰ Gallery visitors of the future, then, might hopefully grow

8 Ibid.

9 Carmen Mörsch, "Gallery Education in Großbritannien: Beispiele guter Praxis für die Kunstvermittlung in Deutschland", in: *Kunstvermittlung zwischen Partizipatorischen Kunstprojekten und Interaktiven Kunstaktionen*, conference proceedings, Kassel 2002, edited by the Working Group of the deutsche Kunstvereine and NGBK Berlin, Berlin 2002.

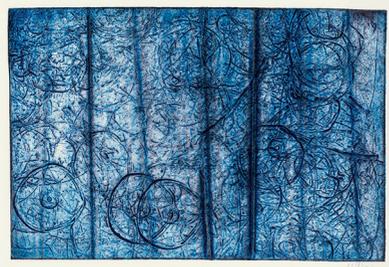
10 Same author: "The task of art education is to expand the functions of the museum/exhibiting institution and to position it as a protagonist vis-à-vis the active shaping of society (politically as well). Art and the museum are conceived as teaching organizations which are in a state of change, and which are concerned less with 'attracting' certain groups than with the necessity for involving the surrounding social milieu – for example the local community – and which must pose the question: To what degree is this active shaping of the most diverse public spheres necessary for our long-term viability?" iae.zhdh.ch/fileadmin/data/iae/documents/vier_funktionen_der_kunstvermittlung.pdf (5 Jan 2012)

5 Ibid. p. 3.

6 Ibid.

7 Carmen Mörsch, *Kunstkooperationen*. kunstkooperationen.de/vermittlung.htm (3 Jan 2012)

up perceiving gallery exhibitions against the background of their own habitus.



Alfred Ullrich: Ex und Hopp
monotype from embossed and folded lead, 2006,
Courtesy Galerie Kai Dikhas

The Passenger in the Café

Music, city noises, people everywhere. The café offers all manner of stimuli and pleasures. The passenger reads the local newspaper in order to learn more about this unknown land, while at the same time overhearing the other customers' conversations – what language are they speaking, what are they talking about? It's a funny feeling not to understand the language well, unnerving, the risk of misunderstanding. In such a situation, one needs help and support from someone in order to understand things accurately.

3. Galerie Kai Dikhas Berlin and the Studio Museum in Harlem

One is invariably compelled to take a look at the Studio Museum in Harlem – the big brother, so to speak, and doubtless a prototype for Galerie Kai Dikhas. The museum justifies its existence with its history of twenty-four years of activities. Let us compare the respective philosophies of the two institutions:

“The Studio Museum in Harlem is the nexus for artists of African descent locally, nationally, and internationally, and for work that has been inspired and influenced by black culture. It is a site for the dynamic exchange of ideas about art and society.”¹¹

“The Galerie Kai Dikhas shows temporary exhibitions of work by Roma and Sinti artists from all



Exhibition view:
Diary of a Mad Artist, Kiba Lumberg
Galerie Kai Dikhas 2012
Courtesy Nihad Nino Pušija / fotofabrika.de

¹¹ studiomuseum.org/about/about (9 Feb 2012)

around the world. It is a 'place of seeing' [. . .]. It creates a new and free space which makes it possible for Roma artists to develop and showcase their talents and capacities. The Galerie Kai Dikhas contributes to the inner and outer emancipation of Roma culture."¹²

The term *descent* is used by the Studio Museum in the sense formulated by the anthropologist Wolfgang Kraus, as follows: "*Abstammung* or *Deszendenz*: English: *descent*, French: *filiation* (*descendance* is rare). In its most general and ethnologically relevant sense, the German word *Deszendenz* (regarded here as synonymous with the English *descent*) refers to the culturally recognized genealogical relationship between a person and some number of their ancestors, regardless of gender."¹³

In the context of Galerie Kai Dikhas, the word "Roma" corresponds to the definition of popular scholarship, as well as to the self-designation of the Roma people: "'Roma' is a generic term for a series of ethnically related populations having their origins on the Indian subcontinent [. . .]."¹⁴ "The choice of the word 'Roma' as an official self-designation is intended to overcome ancient prejudices and to generate new self-confidence."¹⁵

I would like to pose the following question to cultural anthropologists and ethnologists: Which

aspect of our physical context can be illuminated by the word *descent* or *Deszendenz*? What additional meanings are inherent in words such as "origin" or "background"? It might also be productive to reflect on combinations of terms: "artists descended from Roma and Sinti", a construction of meaning which even integrates their Indian origins. These reflections are put forward here as a challenge.

While conducting research on the Studio Museum in Harlem, I was fascinated by another term: "catalytic". The museum has achieved recognition in particular for its *catalyzing* role in promoting works by artists of African descent. What does this mean in practice? First of all, it refers to the museum's activities, including its artist in residence program, as well as a broad spectrum of projects involving public and cultural education – activities Galerie Kai Dikhas also plans to develop in the long-term. Moreover, this encompasses the philosophy already formulated by the Berlin gallery, namely to contribute to efforts "for the inner and outer emancipation of Roma culture."¹⁶ Both the art world and society at large need institutions like the Galerie Kai Dikhas and the Studio Museum in Harlem as "catalysts".

The Passenger in the Gallery

In the gallery, the passenger stands before a photograph which depicts a "young Roma" who has become lost in the metropolis. The image would be little more than an occasion for "routinized pity" except for the fact that he has just had the same experience earlier in the café. As a consequence, the passenger is able to recognize himself in the

12 Galerie Kai Dikhas kaidikhas.de (9 Feb 2012)

13 Wolfgang Kraus, "Zum Begriff der Deszendenz. Ein selektiver Überblick", in: *Anthropos*, 1997 (92), pp. 139-163.

14 de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roma_%28Ethnie%29 (30 Jan 2012)

15 First World Roma Congress launching this international human rights movement in London in 1971, romani-uni-graz.at/rombase/cgi-bin/art.cgi?src=data/hist/current/self-inter.de.xml

16 Cf. Galerie Kai Dikhas kaidikhas.de (29 Jan 2012)

photograph in the gallery, to regard it against the background of his own experience.

The gallery is a place for arrival and continuing travel. The passenger knows exactly where he wants to end up. In a sense, it is an isolated place, since a passenger frequently gets lost there. But precisely the negative experience of losing one's way triggers a process of self-awareness, one that is necessary in order to perceive things in unaccustomed ways.

kaidikhas.de



Lita Cabellut: Changing Perspectives III
50 x 90 cm, video still on aluminum dibond panel,
2011, Courtesy Galerie Kai Dikhas



Delaine Le Bas: Gypsy Power 1/15
Edition Galerie Kai Dikhas 2012
50 x 40 cm, etching
Courtesy Galerie Kai Dikhas