

Popular education

Ljubljana research group

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The Ljubljana group research is concentrated mainly around the art institution Moderna galerija (Museum of Modern Art plus Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova in Ljubljana, Slovenia) and its research interests. These have been focused in the last five years within the Glossary of Common Knowledge (a research project run by Moderna galerija (MG+MSUM) within the framework of the broader European project "Uses of Art - the Legacy of 1848 and 1989" by the European confederation L'Internationale. Project was curated by Zdenka Badovinac and Bojana Piškur (MG+MSUM) and Jesus Carrillo and it corresponded in many ways to another research project that L'Internationale was running, on-line platform L'Internationale OnLine. The research threads, defined by the platform's editorial board (the member of which is also Adela Železnik from the Ljubljana group) are Real Democracy, Decolonising Practices, Alter Institutionalality, Politics of Life and Death.

The group is particularly interested in education in the context of the first three threads. Moderna galerija has its specificities regarding its geo-political position; it was founded in 1948 as a regional modern art museum in Yugoslavia. At the time »workers self-management« was a political and economic system, which marked the s.c. "Third Way" of Yugoslav socialism after the break with Moscow in 1948.

As for the museum education, historically, all art museums on the territory of ex-Yugoslavia are heirs of this socialist doctrine „education to the people.“ Museum education was part of the state cultural policy and educators were supposed to put into practice what politicians were propagating - workers should have an active part in culture and should experience culture as their essential need as well as their intrinsic right.

In the late 1950s first job positions of the so -called »curators for education« were established and their task was to make bridges between museums and factories (sometimes literally to bring art to the factory workers), to organise educational exhibitions, to provide visiting school groups with information and guidance. All these activities were very much attuned to the socialist command that art is to belong to everyone.

Up until the collapse of the common country, Moderna galerija's collecting and exhibition policy was directed primarily at Slovenian art production. With Slovenia's independence in 1991, Moderna galerija became the principal national institution of modern and contemporary art, gradually taking on an important connecting role both in the region of former Yugoslavia, then still in the grip of nationalist wars, and in the

wider Eastern European region. In 2000, it founded and presented to the public the first collection of Eastern European art, Arteast 2000+, which, by focusing on the art of the historical avant-gardes became a starting point for re-imagining the educational role of the state art institution.

Origins of politicization of by then more or less museum contents based education came with the Radical Education project in 2006. Radical Education (RE) was initiated as a project within a public art institution, – Moderna galerija Ljubljana (MG), – in order to direct itself through analysis of its own work towards a different level of relation with this institution and others like it. In RE, from the very beginning, the ways of opening the museum for various “publics” were deliberated, bringing different practices from the “outside” into the very context of an art institution as well as creating common micro-political situations through different alliances and collective actions. RE was at the time also a rather heterogeneous group of people with different backgrounds and experiences of working in communities and institutions, so as a consequence of this, very different and sometimes rather conflictual ideas arose on what kind of space a museum actually was.

One of the important shifts in understanding of a problematic relationship between the »institutional« and »political« was an attempt to connect two institutions: the museum – Moderna galerija - and the movement - Social Center Rog. First encounter organised by RE in 2006 was in the Social Centre Rog, a then temporarily occupied space in the former bicycle factory, used by a collective of activists and co-researchers including migrants, precarious workers, students, academics and others. The topics were the construction of spaces, potentials of new collaboration and not art itself. After a series of seminars organized jointly with the SC Rog and Moderna galerija with the invisible workers of the world, asylum seekers, activists, cultural workers, artists, militant researchers etc..this close collaboration came to its end, being followed by other forms of more educational and maybe less political activities. The activities are partly taken over by the Ljubljana group (curator Adela Železnik, educators Lucija Cvjetković and Dana Terzić and designer Đorđe Balmazović (Škart) and take place at the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova and occasionally at the Social Center Rog.

When the so-called »Balkan migratory route¹« expanded to Slovenia's state borders in 2015, many cultural institutions as well as individuals kept asking themselves how to act.

Moderna galerija saw its role in establishing a discourse that would fight against racial prejudice, recognise the existing initiatives (especially the *Antiracist Front Without Borders initiative*, who is based in the Social Center Rog and who

¹ There were several migratory routes to Europe: besides the Mediterranean and African, there was already existing Balkan route, leading from Syria-Turkey-Greece-Macedonia-Serbia-Hungary towards Northern Europe. On 18 September 2015 when Hungary closed its borders, migrants/ refugees re-directed their way to Austria and Germany through Croatia and Slovenia.

organised solidarity protests such as *Refugees, welcome!* and activities on the borders) and reflect on the possibilities of building a common solidarity network. In September 2015 we organised a panel talk *The Geopolitics of Migration* where participating theorists, artists and activists presented their views of the refugee crisis in Europe primarily from the Balkan perspective (the panel was part of *Glossary of Common Knowledge / Geo-Politics*). Theory turned into practice when, as the result of more and more restrictive EU migrant policy, the number of asylum seekers in Slovenia increased; they were accommodated in the asylums across the country.

When an asylum opened in the neighbourhood of the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova, **the Ljubljana group** activated ourselves and initiated a series of activities with the residents, mostly young men from Syria, Iran and Afghanistan (We invited them to various events at the museum, involved them in the carpentry workshop with students from the Faculty of Architecture and Design, we are about to publish a book by a resident poet from Syria, we provided some residents with temporary jobs as exhibition guards at the Moderna galerija).

In 2017 we continue this relationship by giving space to an alternative cultural association run by the recent migrants in Slovenia who took over the cafe at the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova. We are officially opening it this Sunday, 3 December 2017.

We initiated a series of workshops within the exhibition *Heritage 1989* at the Moderna galerija where female asylum seekers from Iran and Afghanistan were making embroideries together with the local women, migrants, who arrived to Slovenia from Bosnia and Herzegovina in the early 1990s. The idea of inviting women of different generations, ethnic and cultural backgrounds to socialise, exchange their experiences and do something together originates in our belief that by creating things the participants are reminded they have power. Especially the female asylum seekers, coming mostly from patriarchal societies and taking care of small children, have considerably less opportunities for a social integration in the new environment than men. At the moment we are continuing crochet activities with the migrant women in collaboration with an activist *Group for Women* at the Social Center Rog and sell their products in the museum shop at the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova.

The Ljubljana group with the activities with the migrants refer to the »socialist« notions such as *friendship* and *solidarity*, as well as »hospitality« denoted by Jacques Derrida (*On hospitality*, Anne Dufourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to respond, Stanford University Press, 2000) or in a more feminist way by Maurice Hamington (Hamington, M. (2010). *Toward a theory of feminist hospitality. Feminist Formations*, 22(1), 21-38). For the feminist aspect of popular education we are starting a co-research with **Eva D. Bahovec**, a professor at the Philosophy Department at the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana.