

NOMAD STORIES

TÍMEA ANITA ORAVECZ



*1975 Budapest

EDUCATION

2009–2011 Master Student of Prof. Olafur Eliasson, Institute for Spatial Experiments, IfREX, UdK Berlin
2008–2009 DAAD Fellowship, Berlin
2007 BFA, Accademia di Belle Arti, Department of Sculpture, Venice

EXHIBITIONS (SELECTED)

SOLO

2011 Tranzit.hu at Lake Bánk Festival, two-person show with Khoór Lilla, Tranzit.hu, Bánk, Hungary
2010 *Transparent Rooms – nach hause?*, Galerie M, Berlin
2007 *Place_less*, Hungarian Cultural and Scientific Centre Gallery U, Helsinki
2006 *Packing-Case*, two-person show with Katarina Šević, Dorottya Gallery, Budapest

GROUP

2012 *In Other Words*, NGBK and Kunstraum Kreuzberg / Bethanien, Berlin
2011 *Joy and Disaster*, Bunkier Sztuki Contemporary Art Gallery, Krakow
2011 *Speaks for Itself*, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest
2011 *Free Port of Art*, Central European Initiative and the Trieste Contemporanea, within the framework of the "Biennale Diffusa", Warehouse 26, Trieste

2010 *Seeing New York*, Futura and Triangle Arts Association, New York
2010 *Where do we go from here?*, Secession, Vienna
2010 *Agents and Provocateurs*, Hartware MedienKunstVerein, Dortmund
2010 *Neue Heimat – Zwischen den Welten*, Zeppelin Museum, Friedrichshafen
2009 *Tusovka New Act*, Eastside Projects, Birmingham
2008 *Testvériség? / Brotherhood?*, III Triennial of Contemporary Art, Budapest

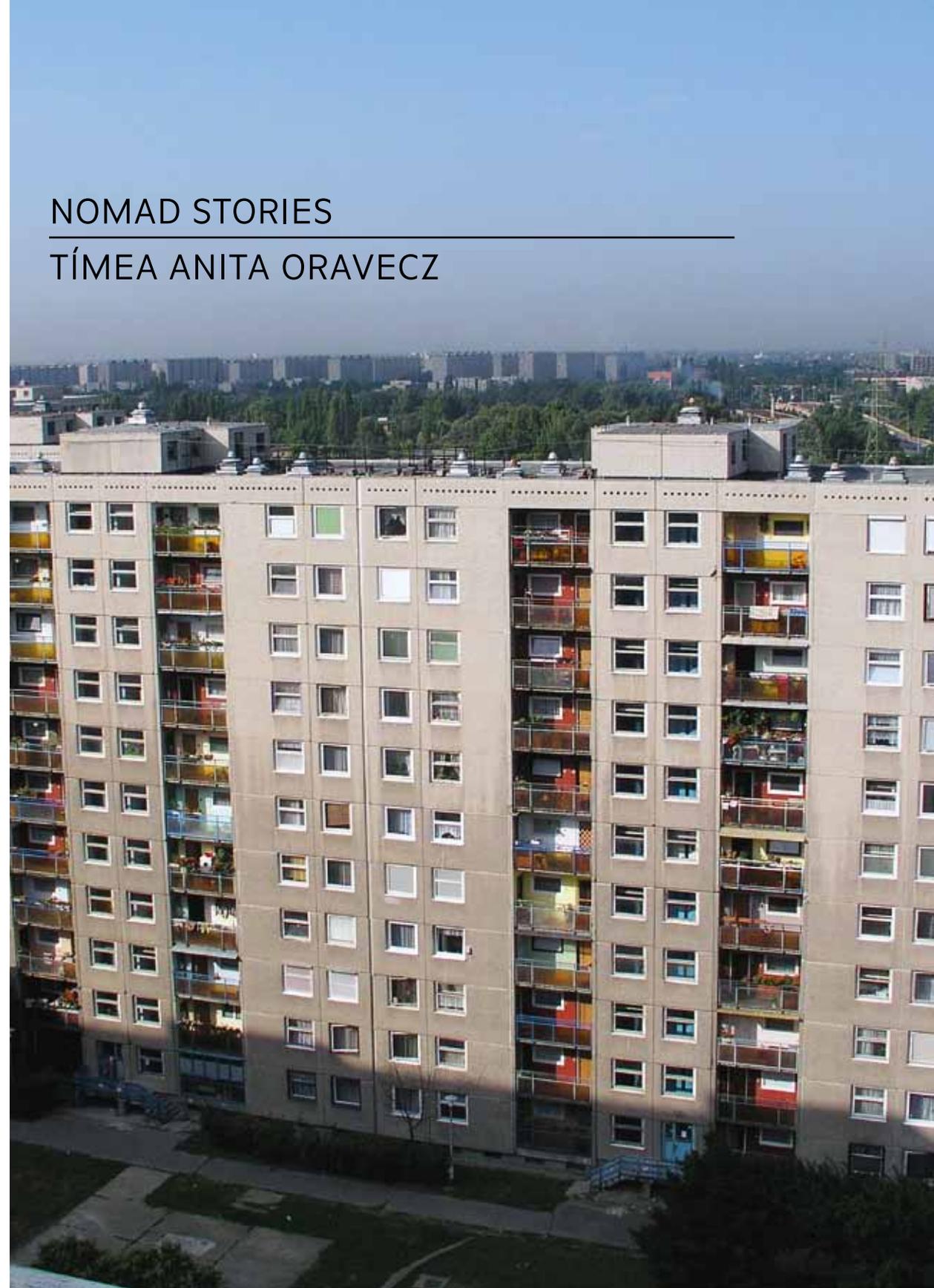
GRANTS and AWARDS

2012 Goldrausch Künstlerinnenprojekt, Berlin
2010 Visegrad Artist Residency Program in New York, organized by Futura (CZ) and Triangle Art Association (US), in cooperation with FKSE (HU), Space Gallery (SK), Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej (PL)
2009 First Prize, Hans Purrmann Prize, Speyer
2008–2009 DAAD Fellowship, Berlin University of the Arts/UdK Berlin
2006 XII Advanced Course in Visual Arts, Antonio Ratti Foundation, Visiting Professor Marjetica Potrč, Como
2005–2006 Scholarship involving the use of an artist's studio, Bevilacqua La Masa Foundation, Venice
2004 First Prize, 88ma Mostra Collettiva, Bevilacqua La Masa Foundation, Venice

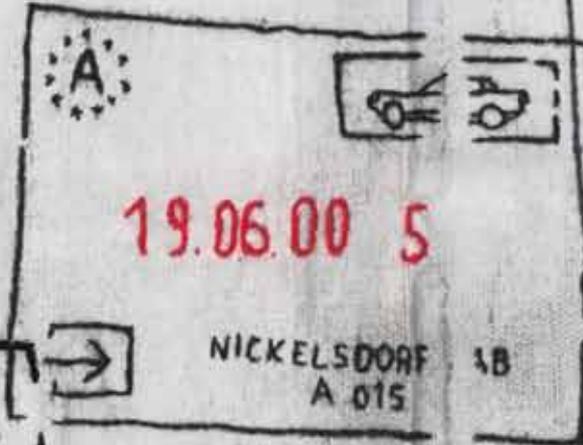
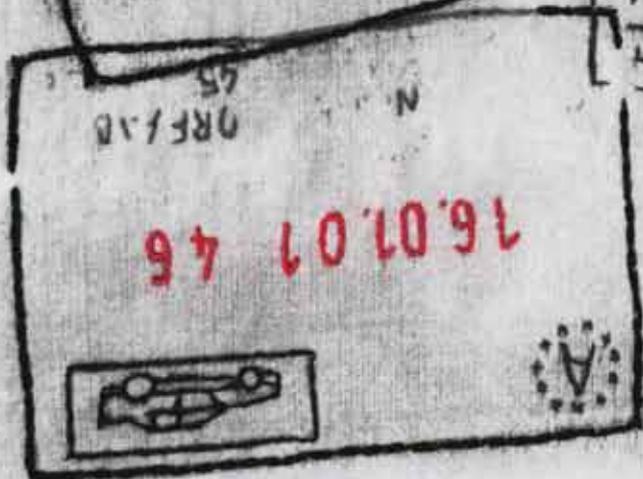
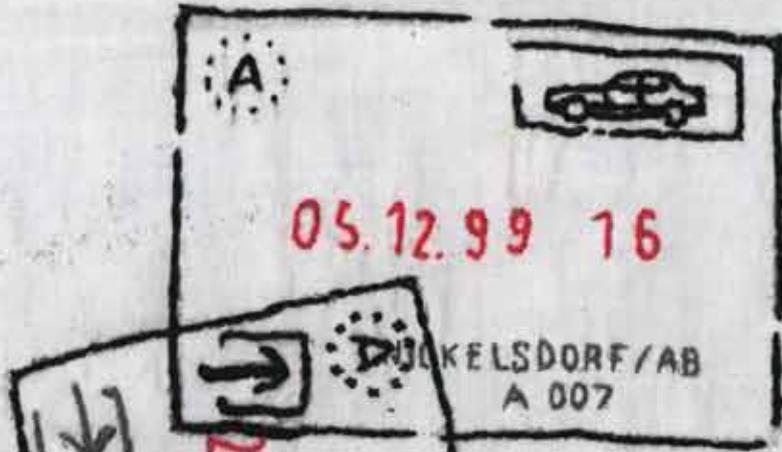
www.timeaoravec.com

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Time Lost (Series II), 2008
hand embroidery on fabric
framed, 60 x 70 cm



Cosmopolitan, 2009
video installation, three videos on three screens
videos in Italian, German, and Hungarian; each 6' 30"
installation view, Hartware MedienKunstVerein, Dortmund

Instant Bag (Series I–VII), 2006
installation, mixed media, dimensions variable
installation details, Dorottya Gallery, Budapest



A BIRDCAGE LEFT EMPTY

BEATA HOCK

Hungarian artist Tímea Anita Oravecz relates contemporary narratives of social and professional mobility from the periphery to the center(s). Her life story unfolds in the various cities of the allegedly borderless European Union. But as her experience shows, the individual is occasionally driven to use unauthorized means to achieve her goal when starting out from the position of Europe's disadvantaged Other-within. In the pieces, the artist foregrounds some salient aspects of her personal and artistic identity: her Central European origin is exposed in some works, while several other projects explicitly narrate her history of itinerancy from the perspective of her working-class background.

In the video *Socreality* (2003), the artist expands and generalizes her own childhood memories of life under state socialism. She blends her own family photos with film sequences broadcast at the time by state-run television presenting the life of socialist youth. *Panorama* (2002) is an installation featuring the corner of a petty bourgeois living room: a coffee table with upholstered chairs around it—the arrangement faces the window. The view, however, is obstructed by the grayish façade of a prefab apartment block that is disturbingly close by, the rigid geometry of which creates a harsh contrast to the colors and shapes of the over-decorated interior. The sculpture *Monument* (2008) and the mixed-media installation *The reason you are not flying is because you don't think you can fly* (2005) revisit the lingering visual memory of the monotonous housing estates of Eastern Europe. In both works the figure of the birdcage hints at the audacity required to even dream about getting out of this imprisoning environment. At the same time, these pieces poetically inflate the young artist's leap from a bleak housing estate on Budapest's periphery to the art schools and residency programs of Vienna, Venice, Granada, Berlin, and New York.

Oravecz started her studies at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna in 1998. Later on, she attended art schools in several other countries (Italy, Spain, Germany), enrolling either as a student or as what she describes as a "long-term tourist". During her Vienna years, Hungary had not yet joined the European Union, which made her stay strenuous, both administratively and financially. During the

artist's wanderings, her native country became part of united Europe, theoretically ensuring the free flow of people and labor. Despite this, acquiring the documents needed for a legal stay in the EU remained a demanding and time-intensive process, often presenting absurd moments or plainly unfulfillable requirements. The series *Time Lost* (2007) presents administrative documents acquired during a period of nine years (residence permits, visas, passport stamps) in embroidered patterns. Oravecz did her very best to painstakingly jump through all the bureaucratic hoops, and to illustrate this, she embroidered every tiny letter, code, stamp, and signature on these forms, even if the task proved time-consuming, senseless, or sometimes simply undoable—and even if she occasionally hurt herself with the needle. The same subject is taken up again in the video installation *Cosmopolitan* (2009), where in three films and in three different languages (Hungarian, Italian, and German) the artist relates the absurd difficulties of changing her residence from one country to another. She dispassionately lists the kind of detours that self-contradictory regulations within the EU have compelled her to take. As her experience shows, some sort of productivist bias creates a situation in which the free movement of workers is conveniently regulated only for those who toil in the economy at large, while the endeavors of an emerging visual artist obviously fall outside this category. In exhibition situations, the screens of *Cosmopolitan* are installed in such a way that the sounds of the simultaneously running monotonous narratives converge into a cacophony, which conveys the feeling of befuddlement over the discrepancy between the proclaimed liberty of EU citizens and the artist's own frustrating experience.

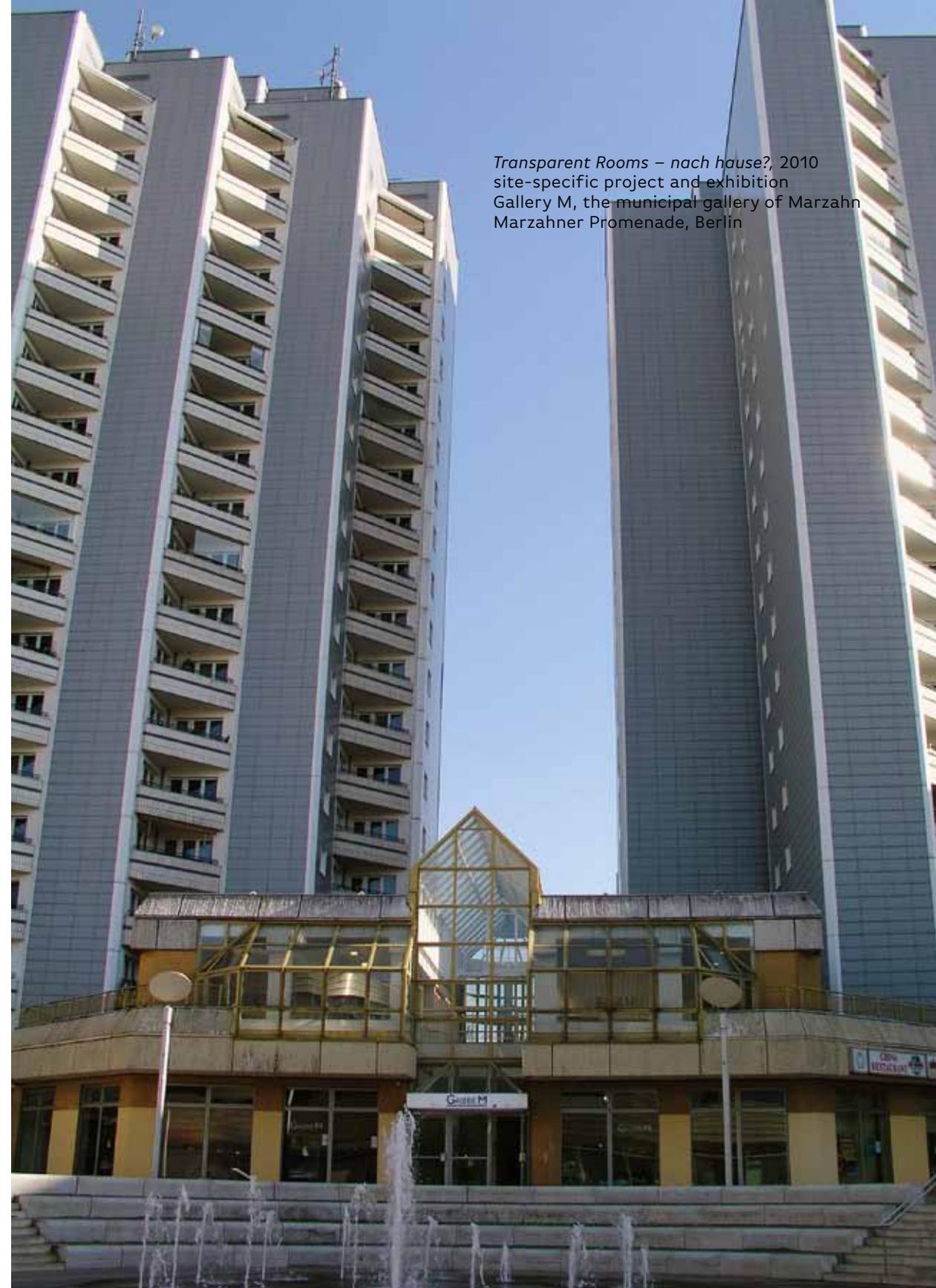
Time Lost and *Cosmopolitan* find their correlates among Oravecz's other works. Installations from the year 2006, such as *The Cube*, *Tetrix Wardrobes*, or the series *Instant Bag*, take a more lyrical approach to a creative migrant's life. These are trunks and angular constructions crammed with, or meticulously built up from, various sorts of personal items. They store the objectifiable traces of experience, pieces of self that the artist gathered at her transitory residences or which she left behind upon moving on to her next location. These items normally have found refuge in the wardrobe or storage room of a local friend for an indefinite time, and in some cases remain forever abandoned.

Femininity and gender as aspects of identity do not figure as a central organizing force in Tímea Oravecz's migration narratives; the artist is not

unaware of gender discourses in contemporary art, but whenever she thematizes femininity in her work, she does not politicize her private narrative. Oravec frequently uses embroidery, weaving, or other types of textile work, but this represents more of an affinity for handwork in general than a tribute to an early feminist elevation of traditional forms of women's creativity. *Trousseau Box* (2009) is a video installation featuring a wooden container, a replica of folk craftsmanship, which was used in earlier centuries for storing a young woman's dowry. This collection of clothing, bedding, and other sorts of housewares used to be the woman's contribution to establishing a new household. Instead of real tangible objects, Oravec's box contains an LCD screen projecting a slide show of all her belongings. This quasi-anthropological survey reflects on the changing preconditions and attributes involved in becoming an adult woman, and this survey is communicated in an equally modernized language: a multitude of digital images replaces actual objects, while this multitude also highlights the incredible increase of items that a young woman in the twenty-first century must (or tends to) possess.

The precarious working and living conditions of the creative class, which several projects by Tímea Oravec also address, have been discussed on various occasions in recent years in the artistic centers of Europe. Oravec consciously supplements this discussion with the perspective of those who are not citizens of the Union's dominant nations and thus are often doubly marginalized. The artist's other intention with her stubbornly Eastern European viewpoint is to expose the ethnocentrism of Western colleagues and audiences by setting in motion a two-directional flow of knowledge between post-socialist societies and the continent's older democracies. Because the Cold War may well be over but, as film scholar Dina Iordanova pointed out, "after the West won the propaganda battle over the hearts and minds of people in the Eastern Bloc, the culture of the East remains as little known in the West as before."

(This text contains excerpts from my article "Moving across Europe and the use of sex-appeal", which offers a comparative analysis of the migration narratives of Tímea Oravec as well as the Hungarian and Serbian artists Judit Kele and Tanja Ostojčić. Publication details: *Sexing the Border: Gender, Art and New Media in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Angela Dimitrakaki and Katarzyna Kosmala, Cambridge Scholars Publishing; forthcoming.)



Transparent Rooms – nach hause?, 2010
site-specific project and exhibition
Gallery M, the municipal gallery of Marzahn
Marzahner Promenade, Berlin



Perfect View, 2010
site-specific installation, dimensions variable
bamboo plants, hammock (circa 4 x 2 m)
installation view, Galerie M, Berlin

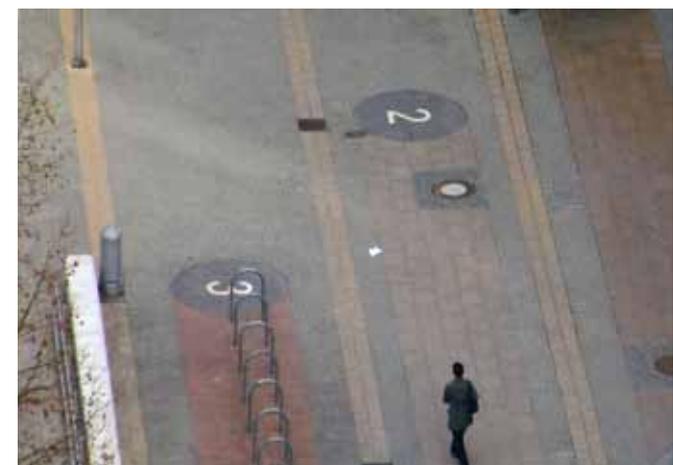


Backstage, 2010
installation
six photographs printed on fabric, each 240 x 300 cm
installation detail, Galerie M, Berlin



Landing in a Dreamland, 2010
video installation, 4' 38" (loop)
color, sound, DVD, projector
installation view, Galerie M, Berlin

video stills





Container, 2010
two-channel video installation, 18' 42" (loop)
color, sound, DVD, projector
installation view, Galerie M, Berlin

video stills



Wishes are flying up to the stars, 2010
performance on the Marzahner Promenade, Berlin
photo and video documentation of the performance, 2' 20" (loop)

digital photos, dimensions variable



Interference, 2012
video installation, source material
modified geographic map about the displacement
of the German-Russians, 18th–21st centuries

scanned sheet music of a German-Russian folk song sung in the performance



C-dur.

1.

Frühlingslied. *Volksweise.*
Text: H. v. Fallersleben.

Moderato.

mf
1. Schö-ner Frühl-ing, komm doch wie-der! Lie-ber Frühl-ing, komm doch

mf

bald! Bring uns Blu-men, Laub und Lie-dar, sätze sie wie-der Feld und Wald.

La la

1. 2. 3. 4.
la la la la la 2. Auf die II la.

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It features a treble and bass clef for the piano part and a single treble clef for the voice part. The time signature is 3/4. The key signature is C major (C-dur). The tempo is marked "Moderato". The music is in a folk style, with simple, rhythmic patterns. The lyrics are in German, and the score includes a chorus of "La la la".

Interference, 2012
two-channel video installation, 7' 59" (loop)
color, sound, HDV, projector
installation view, Kunstraum Kreuzberg / Bethanien, Berlin

photo documentation of the video shoot in Berlin
digital photos, dimensions variable



A NOMADIC SUBJECT*

FRANCESCA BOENZI

For generational and cultural reasons, Tímea Anita Oravecz embodies the nomadic subject par excellence. She lives the condition of those who never stop and settle down, whose subjectivity is defined by an ever-changing map of locations and encounters. Therefore it would be impossible to consider her work without bearing in mind her background and a certain disposition conditioned by this perpetual state of uncertainty. Nomadism and multilingualism have defined her identity and thereby shaped her practice. Using diverse media and drawing on many cultural traditions, her projects seek to respond to positionings in the world that are permanently temporary. Far from being simply a lifestyle, nomadism encompasses a proper intellectual form, an approach to understanding based on continuously questioning, relocating, and rethinking the idea of home and belonging.

In the past, Oravecz often based her works on the need to facilitate this process from a practical point of view, by reducing her baggage and pursuing a greater ease of movement. Her personal experiences have long played a central role in her works; recently, however, her approach has increasingly distanced itself from any biographical factors. Lately, the artist has been developing an empathetic inclination to move closer to other communities and to place herself in society as the teller of the stories of others.

In 2010, Oravecz realized an important project, *Transparent Rooms – nach hause?*, in the eastern district of Marzahn in Berlin, thanks to a scholarship offered by the DAAD program. She worked closely with the neighborhood's Vietnamese community, one of the district's most populous with a migration background, which at that time was about to be deprived of one of its most important gathering places in the area—perhaps the only one—the neighborhood house significantly called the Container. For a period of one and a half years, the artist decided to follow this process, to observe the daily life of this community closely and accompany it in a transition phase, when the Container was temporarily relocated to new premises made available by Gallery M, where the artist was invited to do a show. The exhibition itself plays second fiddle to a much longer and more structured process. The artist

established an almost daily relationship with the community, taking part in their activities at the Container, then filling the space of Gallery M with an intensive new program of workshops and performances. Taking an active role, Oravecz created a new communal platform that gave voice to the community, its dreams and disappointments as well as its determination, combining specific and general points of view to demonstrate that any personal story is a universal one. Accordingly, she produced three videos that reflect some of the important aspects of the history of this community, as well as that of any other community with a similar background. First: *Landing in a Dreamland* (2010) features the uncertain flight of a paper plane over the housing blocks of Marzahn, a poetic and metaphorical evocation of the difficulties of any immigrant who starts a new life in an unknown country. At the other extreme: *Wishes are flying up to the stars* (2010) talks about dreams that remained unfulfilled; during a performance held on the Marzahner Promenade, Vietnamese women were invited to write their wishes on cards and then release them, attached to balloons, into the sky. In between, the video *Container* (2010) speaks of everyday life, continuity, and resistance. It is a double projection that shows Container rooms full of activity on one side and on the other, the same rooms emptied after the closure of the space. Thanks to the camera's circular movement, the rooms look as though they are alternately filled and emptied, in a process that never ends. For the exhibition at Gallery M, the artist filled the lobby with typical Vietnamese bamboo and covered the walls with almost 1:1 scale photos of Container rooms. The spaces overlap and different ideas and experiences of the home finally coexist. Throughout this long-term project, the artist committed herself to giving a voice to the struggle for integration and the necessity to preserve and rethink the idea of home and community in a foreign country.

Associated with this idea are considerations about language, which Oravecz tackles in her most recent work. In conditions of errantry and transit, the immaterial baggage—cultural memory and language—represents the steady and certain. *Interference* (2012) refers to the history of German-Russians, German people who settled in the Russian Empire at different historical periods. Widely persecuted during Stalin's regime, they were forbidden from speaking their language. Almost by chance, Oravecz learned of the existence of a number of songs in the German language that were once widespread in this community. Though almost unknown in Germany today, these songs were long one of the

few links that this community maintained with its mother tongue, secretly handed down and kept alive during the persecutions. In this project, the artist researched the traces of this story and decided to bring these tunes back to life. She contacted a choir of German-Russians living in Berlin and a German children's choir and arranged for the songs to be transmitted from one choir to the other, thus carrying their memory forward. In this way, Oravec became an intermediary between communities that share a background and a certain nomadic condition similar to her own.

Oravec has dedicated some recent installations, such as *No Title* (2011) and *Some artists are subversive are shamans are real scientists* (2010), to exploring facets of the artist's role as intermediary. Inspired by beliefs ingrained in Hungarian culture—a shamanic view of a world divided into three spheres, connected by a World-Tree or a Shaman Ladder—these works deal with the idea of the artist as a shaman who has the ability to move subversively between spheres, inhabiting a space of freedom and non-belonging. Like the nomad, the shaman chooses to dwell between places and languages and rejects unitary, dominant visions. During the performance *Who is the Shaman who stole the stars?*, held in New York in 2010, Oravec cut out the stars, the moons, and the suns from a number of national flags and released them back into the sky. This gesture metaphorically liberates the symbols from any political use or connotation. Only the artist, driven by utopian ambition and by virtue of this state of non-belonging, is able to overturn conventions and constraints and convey new visions that transcend political and economic models.

* The title is inspired by Rosi Braidotti's book *Nomadic Subjects*. The philosopher interestingly frames contemporary subjectivity in relation to the figures of the nomad and the polyglot.

No Title, 2011
site-specific installation
ladder, 380 x 60 x 6 cm
mirror, diameter 80 cm
installation view
Bunkier Sztuki, Krakow



Some artists are subversive are shamans are real scientists, 2010
site-specific installation
two videos projected upside down by two projectors, 3' 00" (loop)
swing, 800 x 40 x 30 cm
installation view, Institute for Spatial Experiments, IfREX, Berlin





Who is the Shaman who stole the stars?, 2010
off-site performance on the roof of the Czech Center, New York City
photo and video documentation, 3' 27" (loop)
digital photos

Who is the Shaman who stole the stars?, 2010
installation; flags, rope; dimensions variable
installation view, Czech Center, New York City





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Birgit Effinger and Hannah Kruse,
www.goldrausch-kuenstlerinnen.de

MANAGING EDITORS:

Birgit Effinger and Hannah Kruse

TEXTS: Francesca Boenzi, Beata Hock

COPYEDITING: A. K. Lerner

GRAPHIC DESIGN: Anna Mándoki,
www.annamandoki.com

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