

Meet Your Neighbours

Contemporary Roma Art from Europe

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Grace Acton; Prof. Thomas Acton, Professor of Romani Studies, University of Greenwich; Daniel Baker, artist; Rita Bakradze, program assistant, OSI Budapest, Arts and Culture Network Program; Ágnes Daróczy, minority studies expert of the Hungarian Institute of Culture, Budapest; Andrea Csanádi, program Manager, OSI Budapest, Arts and Culture Network Program; Jana Horváthová, Ph.D., Director of the Museum of Romani Culture, Brno; Guy de Malingre; Nihad Nino Pusija, artist, photographer; Mgr. Helena Sadilková, curator of the Museum of Romani Culture, Brno; Gheorghe Sarau, School inspector for Roma in the Direction for Education in Languages of Ethnic Minorities, univ. lect. Dr. in the Department for Roma Language, Bucharest University; Laura Selin, curator of the Pori Art Museum; Péter Szuha, ethnologist, Head of the Roma Collection in the Hungarian Museum of Ethnography, Budapest; Vera Tomka, OSI, Budapest; Gabriella Uhl, curator, Romart Foundation, Budapest; and the Budapest Municipality Romano Kher.

One must also, perhaps unusually but importantly, include apologies in these acknowledgements. Covering broad fields, publications of this kind tend to lapse, from time to time, into lists of names. This we resolved not to do, but this meant that many interesting and important artists have remained unmentioned. All we can do now is apologize to them all.

Finally we must thank the reader for his/her consideration, and invite her or him to use this book in the manner intended: not as the last word on the subject, but as an introduction and an irritant – an intellectual provocation that will raise as many questions as it hopefully answers.

The editors | Tímea Junghaus, Katalin Székely

Foreword

by Tímea Junghaus

Roma art does exist.

The Roma are not a homogenous group. Assimilation, emancipation, migration, miscegenation, education and social status have diversified the population to an extent that today the Roma population is as diverse as the general European non-Roma population. Yet with all the diversity, a common cultural framework and a social history sustain the classification. Thus a book entitled Roma Contemporary Art from Europe must confront the challenge of defining what Roma Art is.

Romani communities are dispersed far and wide across Europe, creating discontinuous diasporas. Today, the Romani population in Europe is variously estimated at between eight and twelve million people.¹ Precise demographic data are not available, due in large part to *“the reluctance of many Roma to identify themselves as such for official purposes, and the refusal of many governments to include Roma as a legitimate category for census purposes.”*² The May 2004 enlargement of the European Union meant that approximately 1.5 million Roma became EU citizens. The forthcoming accession of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007 will mean an additional 3 million EU citizens of Romani origin.

The Roma speak different dialects of Romani, as well as a variety of languages from their “host” countries. They share a number of religious and church affiliations, whilst maintaining at the same time cultural boundaries not only between themselves and the surrounding environment, but also between different Romani groups. As the distinguished Romanologist Thomas Acton points out: *“Multiculturalism might be an appropriate concept to describe the basic reality of Gypsy people.”*³ Such understandings of Romani identity also correspond to Stuart Hall’s concept of cultural identity as a *“matter of ‘becoming’”*⁴ or to Homi Bhabha’s *“restless, uneasy, interstitial hybridity: a radical heterogeneity, discontinuity, the permanent revolution of forms.”*⁵ However, it is difficult to interpret these in a global context where it is amongst numerous ethnic and racial groups that diverse Romani communities strive for unity and specificity, struggle to identify and establish themselves.

Cultural representations play an important role in the construction of the Roma identity. For centuries, Roma people have been the victims of representations created exclusively by the non-Roma. As a new generation of Roma intellectuals is emerging, we are witnessing the birth of Roma consciousness,⁶ a state when successful, wealthy and well-educated Roma proudly acknowledge their origin, rather than opt for

assimilation and the relinquishment of their cultural heritage.⁷ These well-educated researchers are rewriting the history of Roma culture, representation and art. If we draw on Stuart Hall’s analysis of minority cultural politics, we could suggest that in order to deconstruct dominant cultural representations, Roma artists need to fight on two fronts. Firstly, they need to reverse the existing stereotypes created in the media, by making images of the Roma that oppose the ones created in the mainstream culture. Secondly, they need to fight for access to mainstream audiences. Otherwise, even the rare examples of truly authentic self-representations remain visible only within the narrow circles of academia or human rights festivals. If, as leading Romani scholar-politician Nicolae Gheorghe suggests, the representation of Romani identity is a process of ethno-genesis which involves the Roma self-consciously playing with their identities, then perhaps we must recognise that constructing effective representations involves the artist as much as the scientist or politician.⁸ Visual art is, above all else, a language. As such, it has the palpable power to define and communicate particularized ideas, as well as collective cultural codes. Makers of art throughout history have exercised their immanent power to define themselves through art and to fashion a self-definition that reveals them and their respective societies in the best possible light. Roma artists have exercised the same right, but until recently they were condemned to anonymity and their voices have been hushed. If nothing else, this book stands as evidence that their voices are now heard and will continue to resonate over time.

When Roma intellectuals defined one of their chief missions as the exploration and presentation of Roma art, and the removal of stereotypes and prejudices from the image of the Roma, they only expected to face, in Hungary, a scarcity of resources and very difficult circumstances under which to realize ideas; what they did not anticipate was that the international cultural scene and cultural policy would become sensitive towards, and interested in, the same cultural products, contents and problems they were examining, and that this context would be essentially appreciative and encouraging. Since 2000, Roma artists have been successful participants of several international contemporary art events.⁹

This catalogue is the climax of the process that began in Central and Eastern Europe in the middle of the 1990s, when the interpretation of the cultural practice of minorities was enabled by a paradigm shift, commonly referred to in specialist literature as the *“cultural turn.”*¹⁰ The idea of the cultural turn was introduced; and this was also the time

⁷ This is a real source of danger, which we have to start considering even now when there are only a few positive examples and well-to-do Roma. As OSI Chairman George Soros put it, *“it is a very natural inclination to try not to be Roma, to meld into the general population, to assimilate. And therefore what is left, what the rest of the population sees, are the disenfranchised, the underclass. And that is the stereotype that prevails in society.”* (www.romadecade.org)

⁸ Felja, Dragica: *Representation of Roma Culture in Contemporary Film* [PhD Dissertation], 2004; Acton, Thomas: *Citizens of the world and nowhere: Minority, ethnic and human rights for Roma during the last hurrah of the nation-state, Between Past and Future*, ed. Guy, Will, University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001

⁹ A few examples: János Balázs, monographic exhibition, Hungarian Institute, Paris; *“We are what we are” – Aspects of Roma Life in Contemporary Art*, Minoriten Galerie, Graz, Austria, 2004; the exhibition travelled to Slovakia, Czech Republic, Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary (2006); Tibor Balogh, Teréz Orsós, *International Sinti Festival*, Hungarian Institute, Berlin, 2004; *Hidden Holocaust*, Múcsarnok, March 2004; *North and South LAB, Culture and Colonization*, Tranzquartier, Vienna, March 2005; *Strategies of (In)visibility*, Camden Arts Centre, London, May 2005; *Omara at the Rijeka Arts Biennial*, Rijeka, Museum of Modern Art, November 2005; *Second Site – Daniel Baker, Ferdinand Koci, Damien Le Bas, Delaine Le Bas – An Exhibition by four artists from Roma / Gypsy / Traveller communities*. The Stephen Lawrence Gallery – University of Greenwich, London, 2006

¹⁰ Fraser, Nancy: *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989. A series of essays analyzing various recent theorists (Foucault, Derrida, Rorty, Habermas) in terms of their usefulness and limits for feminist theory and practice. Concludes with an exemplary analysis of women and the welfare system that applies aspects of the various theorists surveyed.

¹ Roma Inclusion: *Lessons Learned from OSI’s Roma Programming*. Edited by Bernard Rorke, Andre Wilkens, OSI, June 2006.

² European Commission: *The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union*, 2004, http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/fundamental_rights/pdf/pubst/roma04_en.pdf

³ Acton, Thomas: *‘Modernity, Culture and ‘Gypsies’: Is there a meta-scientific method to understand the representation of ‘Gypsies’? And do the Dutch really exist?’*, Sociology Review, September 2001, p. 26

⁴ Hall, Stuart: *Cultural Identity and Diaspora, Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*. Williams, Patrick and Chrisman, Laura, Longman, 1993, p. 394

⁵ Young, J. C. Robert: *Colonial Desire, Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. Routledge, 1995, p. 25

⁶ I introduce the term in the wake of Gloria Anzaldúa, one of the greatest theoreticians of Chicano studies. In her writing, *La conciencia de la Mestiza: Towards a new consciousness*, she describes notes the state when instead of revolt, resistance and anger, the Chicano’s consciousness is characterized by pride and peace, evoked by the esteem and respect of the majority society.

when the notion of cultural democracy became crystallized in the debates carried on at various public forums. The civil society gained strength, and civil politics appeared, which is a prerequisite of cultural democracy. This shift of attitude in scholarly circles derived from concerns specific not only to ethnicity, but also to society, gender and class.¹¹



Serge Poliakoff: "Dances Russes"

This change brought about an interest in exploring the history and value of Roma art. Not only has it become obvious that arts are laden with stereotypes about the Roma, but also that the cultural classification describes the visual products of the Roma with terms the experts themselves claim to be positive, like naïve, barbarian, primitive, primordial, archetypal, autodidactic. Roma art was evaluated solely by non-Roma experts, who excluded it from the official canon on the grounds that it is outdated, merely illustrative, or, at best, nostalgic. Roma artists rarely had the opportunity to experiment with new techniques, and they could exhibit only in community centres, venues which seem marginal from the perspective of the cultural discourse.¹² Now an event of historical importance, the 1979 1st National Exhibition of Self-Taught Artists was also

housed by the Pataky Community Centre (Budapest),¹³ and nor was it considered inappropriate to hold the third such display in the Museum of Ethnography, rather than an institute of contemporary art, as if the exhibits were the exotic objects of an alien civilization.

Serge Poliakoff, Otto Mueller, even Sandra Jayat, were welcomed to the artistic context they lived in, the avant-garde. When (after 1971) the Roma artists claimed recognition as a group, their works were relegated to the status of collective (folk, popular) manifestations of Roma culture, of exotic Roma objects, and if the artists were not reduced to anonymity, their fate was circumscribed by being presented, for

¹¹ The shift was originally initiated in western societies by intellectuals outside academia, in a response to the civil rights and student movements, which generated social changes.

¹² Pál Bánszky: *A képzőművészet vadvirágai. 100 népművészeti és naiv alkotó*. [Art's Wildflowers. A Hundred Folk and Naïve Artists], Kecskemét, Írisz Repro, 1997; István Kerékgyártó: *A magyarországi roma képzőművészet* [Roma Visual Art in Hungary]. An introduction to the catalogue of the 3rd National Exhibition of Roma Artists. Budapest, MMI, 2000.

¹³ *The First National Exhibition of Autodidactic Gypsy Artists in Hungary*, 1979, edited by Ágnes Daróczi and István Kerékgyártó; *The Second National Exhibition of Autodidactic Gypsy Artists in Hungary*, 1989, Edited by Ágnes Daróczi and István Kerékgyártó, Debrecen, Hungary; *The 3rd National Exhibition of Roma Artists*, 2000, Edited by Ágnes Daróczi and István Kerékgyártó, Budapest, Hungary

over three decades, in marginal institutions which did not have the necessary infrastructure for creation and exhibition.

For the Roma artists, acknowledging their identity and cultural heritage is still a double-edged weapon. However, the increasingly vigorous discourse on Roma identity and representation, together with the appearance of Roma experts, has begun to dismantle this sophisticated machinery of cultural oppression. Thanks to the communicative and informative power of vision, Roma visual art has a far more important role in today's policy of representation, and the rendering of an authentic image of Roma identity, than any other artistic media.

The new wave of Roma art has generated such interesting new cultural phenomena as the Museum of Romani Culture in Brno, a professionally installed museum space with multiple functions and a carefully worked-out strategy of presenting the history of Roma representation accurately and engagingly. Most of the museum's staff are Roma (including the director, Jana Horváthová, Ph.D.), and it is a place where everyone in the populous Brno Roma community can spend their time constructively. The building is decorated by a large mural, painted by David Zeman and his team: The *Roma Road* is screaming for recognition with vigorous oranges, reds and blues. Similarly momentous are those attempts which present Roma artists in the official spaces of contemporary culture. The 2004 exhibition *Hidden Holocaust* was the first



Tibor Balogh: *Tiszadob*

in Hungary to open the gates of Műcsarnok, this bastion of contemporary art, before the Roma artists. This was in effect the first time that Roma artists (eleven, in all) could exhibit in an official space of contemporary art, and could use the infrastructure of the institution to realize their works. A glimpse at the exhibits of the *Second Site* show, held in London in March 2006, will also convince us that the way we are invited and allowed to think about Roma visual art has changed irreversibly. Looking at the exhibition space, we feel the same odd familiarity that is evoked by contemplating a work of János Balázs from 1971. The objects and creators of the *Second Site*, however, do not invite us to use the outdated and inappropriate terminology: the paradigm shift has occurred, though a few questions have remained.

The creation of the Roma minority's own infrastructure – museums, theatres, concert halls etc. – remains on the agenda. There are countries where the need for the Roma's own institutions has been an issue in social discourse for decades.¹⁴ Despite the many available proofs (institutions, exhibitions) of the advantages of acknowledging the culture of the Roma minority, of how it improves the image of the Roma in society and the self-esteem of Roma individuals, it is still debated whether there is any need for purely Roma institutions. The present publication does not

¹⁴ *Hidden Holocaust*, Műcsarnok, March 2004.

¹⁵ For example, the Hungarian Roma have been maintaining a discussion about the founding of a Museum for almost 25 years. The Roma minority of the Czech Republic and Romania have succeeded in their effort of building their own Roma Museums.

attempt to answer this question, though it does seek to keep the debate alive and provide facts for the debaters. We ask what would happen if Kiba Lumberg from Finland, Omara and Teréz Orsós from Hungary and Delaine Le Bas from Britain could join forces in thinking about the representation of female Roma identity (a state of being in minority on two accounts). Will Tibor Balogh, the first Roma in Hungary to finish the Academy of Arts, ever meet Daniel Baker in London, who was recently admitted to the Royal Academy of Arts, to discuss their ideas? Would the Péli school of painting have Czech or Slovak members, if the artists could travel and educate themselves at will? The editors admit that this catalogue is their attempt to enable Roma artists and communities to find their way into the institutions of mainstream culture, and to each other.

The artists presented outline the history of Roma art in the past four decades, and introduce the most important artists of Europe (in a geographical sense), without any claim to exhaustiveness. All the artists included own a Roma heritage. This heritage, their memories, experiences, traumas define their pieces, and their identity will never be irrelevant when interpreting their work. They all set models before the majority society, as well as the Roma, and represent the Roma as a group of civilized, successful individuals whose dignity is complete and worthy of acknowledgement.



Kiba Lumberg

Editors

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Jana Horváthová, PhD, is an art historian, and director of the Museum of Romani Culture, Brno.

Nathanial Hepburn is a curator and a community arts manager living in London.

Milena Hübschmannova was an acknowledged Romani linguist, one of the founders of the department of Roma Studies at Charles University in 1989. She died in 2005, at the age of 72. We honour her memory and contribution to Romani research with the posthumous texts published in this catalogue.

Sybil Milton is a resident historian of the US Holocaust Memorial Council, the monographer of Karl Stoika.

Nihad Nino Pusija is a contemporary artist, a photographer born in Sarajevo and now living in Berlin. He has been studying, and taking photos of, the Roma people for more than 15 years now. (www.fotofabrika.de)

Tibor Wehner is an art historian. He received the Munkácsy Prize in 1993. He specializes in 20th-century and contemporary art, especially sculpture. He published his studies in Hungarian and international specialist journals. He is also a creative writer, has published prose and drama. He is a monographer of sculptor Tamás Szabó.

Second Site¹

by Thomas Acton

This exhibition is an act of affirmation, not one of defence.

For some four centuries Romani/Gypsy/Traveller communities lived in the aftermath of a social disaster. Although the details vary enormously from country to country their image in Europe, and taken by Europeans to their colonies, has been one of *problem*. In consequence any analysis of their situation by Europeans tended to be in the context of finding a *solution*, right up until Hitler tried the *final solution* – which failed as all the others had done. They failed, of course, because these communities had strategies of self-defence and survival, of accommodating to, rather than challenging racism and ethnic cleansing. Some accepted slavery; others, more fortunate, became taxable collectives of traders; others, survivors of genocide, became marginal commercial nomads, especially in north-western Europe. Whatever public performance they put on, they had to play along with non-Gypsy stereotyped images that suggested they had somehow deserved the genocides and enslavements of the 16th centuries. Only after Hitler, only after the discrediting of racism, could Roma challenge the self-serving silences of European historiography, and Romani nationalism emerged.

In a way, however, Romani nationalism was another kind of defensiveness. Built into its ideology is acceptance that nations are entities entitled to a selfish defence of their own interests – the very ideology that led to the Romani calamity in the first place, and seems to make prejudice against Gypsies/Travellers seem natural. Roma/Gypsies/Travellers who became educated were faced with a terrible dilemma. Either they could keep their ethnicity to themselves and “pass” to get on in life. Or they could become the new progressive miracle, the literate, educated Gypsy, the token ethnic minority member, the professional Traveller community worker helping the educational and planning agents of the state, who, however anti-racist they may be, are still trying to solve the *Gypsy problem*.

I do not mean to question either the goodwill or the courage or the necessity of the Romani movement. I have been involved in it myself since 1967, and we have made some progress. Visual art had a place in it. One of the heroines of the struggle, Agi Daróczi in Hungary used her position in the Hungarian ministry of culture under communism to encourage dozens of Romani artists². But their exhibitions were labelled *naïve art*. Progress came at a price. This marginal minority struggle made those in it, whether they are Roma/Gypsy/Travellers themselves, or non-Gypsy friends, become marginalised, obsessive, and in the older generation, even paranoid – in a word, *defensive*, still.

Daniel, Delaine, Damian and Ferdinand belong to the first generation that has transcended this dilemma. They are not professional Gypsies; they are not *Gypsy artists* any more than David Essex is a *Gypsy singer*. They are definitely not *naïve*. They are artists who happen to be of Roma/Gypsy/Traveller origin. They are not part of any *Gypsy problem*. If you have a problem with their origins, that's your problem, not theirs.

¹ “Afterword” of the catalogue: *Second Site – Daniel Baker, Ferdinand Koci, Damien Le Bas, Delaine Le Bas – An Exhibition by four artists from Roma / Gypsy / Traveller communities*. Compiled and edited by Thomas Acton and Grace Acton, University of Greenwich, London, 2006

² Daróczi, Ágnes: *The Second National Exhibition of Autodidactic Gypsy Artists*. Budapest, National Centre of Adult Education, 1989. Not until 2000 was she able to catalogue *The Third National Exhibition of Roma artists* Budapest, Hungarian Institute of Culture. The change of name and publisher marks more progress.

This doesn't mean, of course that they don't still have to face prejudice and misunderstanding. When the *Sun* tried to start an anti-Gypsy pogrom with her infamous “Stamp on the Camps!” headline, Delaine's own parents suffered vicious anti-Gypsy graffiti daubed on the fences of their (long-established, perfectly legal) site. But *normal* people will realise that it is not Delaine's parents, but the *Sun's* racism which is *the problem*.

“Ah, but!”, exclaims the romantic ignoramus, the one who has read no serious Romani history but thinks he knows some hidden wisdom of the ages about *racial purity*, “are they really true Gypsies? You use this politically correct inclusive term ‘Roma/Gypsies/Travellers’ but what are they really? Are they Romanies or just Travellers?”

To deconstruct this question we have to look again at the disaster which befell Roma



Daniel Baker: *Vardo Looking Glass*

about 200 years after they arrived in Europe, When the mixture of Muslim, Orthodox and Catholic feudal empires gave way to the fiercely nationalist states of the 16th century, the Roma found themselves, along with Jews and Africans, the victims of enslavement, ethnic cleansing and genocide. As capitalism replaced famine by unemployment, both migration and commercial nomadism became demonised as *vagrancy*. Within national boundaries Romani traders often dominated commercial nomadic groups, even though the majority of Roma remained sedentary. A mosaic of groups was left behind when the tide of persecution receded a little, some still very Indian, some localised and acculturated, and some like Irish Travellers and Dutch Woonwagenbewoners *starting* their account of their own identity by asserting that whatever else they are, they are not Gypsies.

All of the groups, and all of the individuals in them or straddling their boundaries, are *what they are*, with their own history and culture, and no-one does them any favours by asking whether they are really something else, whether the racial essence of Bohemia, or the wild deviant of non-Gypsy fears. The 20th February is the day celebrated by Romanian Roma as the anniversary of the ending of slavery. Looking at those real histories and cultures means that we are no longer imprisoned by them, but can celebrate them as our starting point for the future.

This exhibition is an act of affirmation, not one of defence.

Each of these artists looks to the future. As I have laboured in the long slow struggle of *Romani Studies* to replace the *Gypsy problem*, coming across their work has been like a glimpse of life beyond that grind, a holiday from the constant *duty to explain*. Their styles are utterly different, but each expresses vital components of what it means to be Romani in the 21st century. I dreamt of seeing their work together in one place.

Damian Le Bas' extraordinary stream-of-consciousness concrete poems embodied in images, evoked Gypsy history and everyday experience, and spoke to me so personally as someone trying to make sense of Romani history, that sometimes I wondered if anyone else could understand them as I did. But when I spoke to other people, I realised they did. I learnt the salutary lesson that an artist can put together in one image what a professor strives to say in a hundred lectures, and still cannot quite encompass.



Delaine Le Bas: *Meet Your Neighbours*

Delaine Le Bas' work both embodies the assertive spirit of all the Roma/Gypsy/Traveller children's art I have ever seen, combined with the hard-won self-reliance of maturity. I once heard a Gypsy preacher in his sermon say *"Before I was converted, I lived what I thought was an honourable life - I earned good money and liked nice things around me, good cups and saucers and pieces - well I still like nice things around me - God doesn't take those away from you..."*. Delaine's creations, the soft figures and images, incarnate the spirit of those nice things. They are not the statuettes and Crown Derby themselves, but they are a commentary, both ironic and loving, on the Gypsy determination to create an environment with style. And also a warning about the threats to that environment from intolerance and ignorance.

In contrast to the inter-twined lushness of Delaine and Damian, some of Daniel Baker's earlier abstract works examined questions of identity and difference through the vehicle of process painting, exploring boundary formation as a means of protection and segregation. The non-figuration of these earlier works was partly a response to the absence of the

human figure in traditional Gypsy decoration with painted scrollwork and motifs in contrasting colours set apart by strong outlining. Daniel saw this use of strong outlining as an attempt to maintain clear boundary definition between diverse elements while at the same time seeking compositional harmony – a concern echoed in Romani people's desire to preserve their cultural identity from the perceived threat of assimilation. The works on display here, however, have moved on, from his concentration on the boundaries to a far less austere exploration of the imagined space within them, which like the sites actually occupied by Gypsies, is marginal, and constantly under threat from ever more restrictive laws which undermine their own formal commitment to progress and equality. Because we find both parts of the contradictory myth in this space, the romance and the deviance, the possibility is finally offered of transcending it.

Ferdinand Koci's work is a further contrast, not just realist, but hyper-real, - and yet some of his most telling images are the caricatures with which he savages hypocrisy, and pretension in Romani politics, while affirming the desperate necessity of its aspirations. He contrasts the poverty of Roma and Gaje in his native Albania, with the unreality of life in the West. The offhand brilliance of his draughtsmanship enables him to subvert our sense of the established order with tiny details which tell us what is wrong about the world - and yet to tell us that brilliance does not enable us to escape from injustice, marginalisation or personal dilemmas.

All four artists have to refer to the visual vocabulary with which world culture has represented Gypsies, and so cannot escape the legacy of the past because they have to use it so that their wider audience know what they are talking about. Lemon³ has shown brilliantly how this worked for music, theatre and film for Roma in Russia before, during and after the Soviet era. But among the arts, visual art can always be the avant-garde to take the past on board and then move on. This exhibition is staged as a curtain-raiser for the London International Romani Film festival, with its mixed bag of bold experiment, historic stereotype and worthy documentary. For better or worse those films show the concepts with which we think about the place of Roma/Gypsies/Travellers in the world, the challenging of stereotypes which is the first site of resistance. These four artists have reached a second site, where they transcend the stereotypes, affirm the value of their experience, and represent the future.

³ Lemon, A: *Between Two Fires: Gypsy Performance and Romani Memory from Pushkin to Postsocialism* Durham NC, Duke University Press, 2000. For further contextualising discussion of Romani aesthetics see Acton, Thomas: *Modernity, Culture and Gypsies* in Saul N. and Tebbutt S. eds. *The Role of the Romanies: Images and Counter-Images of 'Gypsies'/Romanies in European Cultures*. Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2004.

The collection of the Museum of Romani Culture in Brno¹

by Katarína Čierna

The interest in untutored artistic expression and the discovery of its poesy began at the turn of the 19th and the 20th century, with the appearance of a new concept of art. It was sparked off by the journeys of Paul Gauguin to Polynesia and Tahiti, a symbolic act of modern art returning to nature and its creative sources. Leaving behind the illusionistic conventions of the Renaissance and technical virtuosity, the Modernists started to search for spontaneous types of creativity, and discovered the poetic beauty, power of expression and symbolic force of untutored artistic expressions. 20th-century man was still seeking answers for the questions asked since antiquity: "What is the aim of art?" "What does it reveal of the creator's personality?" "What is the story behind a work of art?" "What mysterious powers urge a man to represent his own world?"

The recognition of naïve art by significant artists, poets and art historians led to the discovery of more and more artists, whose purity of vision exerted a significant influence. New, specialized collections were established, exhibitions were organized and literature dedicated to self-taught artists was published. The turn of the century brought a number of new questions and answers in the study of naïve art. In 1991, the Museum of Romani Culture started to acquire the works of self-taught Romani artists in order to explore and discover the creativity of this ethnic minority in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. From the beginning, authenticity and aesthetic quality were the criteria of choice during the acquisition trips. The curators discovered new talents and created a collection important both in terms of quality and quantity, one that provides an objective view of Roma art.

The collection represents a wide range of stylistic and morphological properties, as each of the artists in the collection has a unique approach to artistic creation. The formal and thematic differences derive from the differences in the artists' temperament and lifestyle, while their ethnic origins provide the pieces with a specific character. These authors belong to different generations, vary in their inherited skills, education and, naturally, their artistic talent. Some of them took the chisel or simple kitchen knife, pencil or paintbrush in their hands for the first time as mature adults. For some of them, the visual arts have become a means of overcoming personal tragedy, disillusion and anxiety, others are driven by the pure joy of creation. Despite the many individual differences, as well as their different educational backgrounds, all of their artworks share a deeply human approach. Whoever has met them will notice their complete dedication and enthusiasm. The reason behind this is not only their attachment to nature and the place where most of them have lived throughout their lives, but also their honest and friendly relationship to the people around them.

As for all activities that create value, invention and vision are the most important for the visual arts as well. Beside purely decorative pieces, there are works in the output of these artists which invite interest with the originality of the artistic thought.

The works in the collection range from instinctive artistic expressions through self-taught artists' works to amateurish artworks. In contrast with amateur artists who are still trying to find their own voice, the instinctive artist considers his or her artistic expression a part of his or her personality. These instinctive artistic expressions show considerable diversity. There are artists who recount experiences and memories,

especially of childhood. Others are making poetic landscapes or genres, some have even reached the realm of abstraction during the exploration of their own imagination. Others again explore their subconscious and dreams in search of inspiration. Thanks to their instinctive approach to, and sense of, form, the work of naïve artists are characterized by deformations, distortions, anatomic inconsistencies. Their use of colours is spontaneous, so they tend to employ primary colours. Their natural representation of perspective, which was typical of our ancestors, resemble the solutions of Levantine, Egyptian and Etruscan art. There are close affinities with children's artistic expressions. Rudolf Dzurko stands out among instinctive artists in the collection, and is indeed one of the most important representatives of instinctive

art, not only in the Czech Republic but also in Europe. The artist has created his own imaginative painting style and technique, using interesting colours and composition methods ever since the beginning of his carrier. The content also reveals an extremely rich imagination, a profusion of themes and stories in a context of Roma childhood and adolescence. His paintings relate real and imaginary stories about the life of the Roma, or are idealistic portraits or dreamscapes.



Rudolf Dzurko: *Mother India*

The amateur works in the collection are well-balanced in terms of quality, and what they offer is far from superficial decorativeness, even open vistas of original artistic thought. Artists are in search of individual and free forms of self-expression, unfettered by strict conventions. Especially interesting in this regard are those artists who have been active in the creative workshop of the Detva community centre since 1985. A passionate style of painting, intensive colours, and creation as an "all-out" struggle: these are the hallmarks of Ján Berky's work, who conducts a philosophical investigation into the questions of life and death, the origins and life of the Roma. Dušan Oláh's work also represents a new and original approach, when his figures emerge, intuitively, as it were, from the picture plane, often with a symbolic meaning. His works are contemplations on "the myth of man as it interlaces with the myth of nature." In Oláh, the cycles of nature have a myriad links with the events of man's life, and the spirit becomes a land. Further themes include the past of the Roma, fragile love, and death. The natural spirit radiates from the imaginary landscapes of Tibor Oláh as well, which capture the viewer with their strange lights. Conceptual thought meets a painterly investigation into the condition of the Roma in the art of Alexander Bohó, who graduated as an art historian at that Komenský University of Bratislava. He seeks the answers for his questions in Roma mythology and ancient philosophy.

It is of course impossible to mention in such a short introduction all the artists featured in the Museum of Romani Culture. Greatly varied artistically, the works reflect not only the individual artist's biographical facts and inner life, but also the experiences of the Roma as an ethnicity. The power of the individual authors' commitment ensures that the Roma can be ever more successful in their exploration of true creativity, so essential for self-respect and sophistication.

¹ Výtvarné umění / Visual Arts, Romští autoři / Romani Artists, Příůstky 1991 - 2005 / Acquisitions 1991 - 2005 ed. Jana Horváthová, Museum of Romani Culture, Brno, 2005

Roma visual artists in Hungary and Europe

by Ágnes Daróczi

We are aware of Roma visual artists even in historical times: Antonio Solario (c. 1465-1530), also known as El Zingaro, was a contemporary of Leonardo, and his pictures can be seen in the Louvre and the National Museum in Naples. Otto Mueller (1884-1930), a member of the Expressionist group Die Brücke, or Serge Poliakoff (1900-1967), a figure of 20th-century avant-garde, could also act as paragons for today's artists. It is, however, only since May 1979, that there is talk in Europe of "Roma visual arts" as such: this was when the first group exhibition opened in Hungary.



János Balázs: *Lovers*

with the work of János Balázs and Tamás Péli, even as a friend of the latter, I was forced to acknowledge similarities in their themes and colouring, despite the marked dissimilarity of their styles. We could in fact talk about a kindred emanation, a liberating power that works in a like manner, whatever the differences of their work, their iconography. This liberating force exerted its influence in two directions. On the one hand, their international success encouraged several Roma to take up visual arts, many of whom would never have considered the move, what with their poor schooling and social status. On the other hand, their being acknowledged as artists of Roma origins fostered social inclusion.

It was due to their talent, and their claiming credit as Roma visual artists, that from the early 1970s on there was a growing demand for the recognition of the Roma, a call for social prestige – and not only among the Roma, but also in that part of the majority

The 1st National Exhibition of Self-taught Roma Artists was organized by the Institute of Hungarian Culture (Magyar Művelődési Intézet) – and a group of Roma intellectuals in the background. There was an overtly political aspect of their action, because the Roma lacked the rights of a minority, both on the Soviet-dominated Eastern, and the Western, hemisphere. (The only exception was Yugoslavia, which lived in relative isolation, and which had a minority policy at the time that became a point of reference for the Roma...) "Coming out" as a group represented a refusal of forced assimilation, was an act of gate-crashing elite culture, a desire to demolish prejudices. As one of the organizers, as one familiar

that professed solidarity with them. This was true even if János Balázs, the Roma hermit-philosopher of Salgótarján – "a naïve for the smaller part, and a visionary painter for the larger"¹ – was quite dismissive of his own people, and did not think of his own origins as a factor of importance.

It may seem a contradiction in terms, but the way he opened, i.e. being an intellectual and acknowledged artist without formal advanced schooling, had the same message as the 1934 exhibition in Hungary, *Natural Talents*. In his *Natural talents – the signs of the times*, Zsigmond Móricz reflected on the peculiar process of simple peasants inventing their own formal idiom in painting and sculpture, with which they rewrite the world: "the people, the millions of agricultural labourers, gave little indication, until the World War, of how talent struggles with impossibility, in it's all-embracing bosom. But ever since the World War, for the past fifteen years, we have seen the rapid tendency of common folks invading the zone hitherto controlled by schools, and interfering with life with their school-less self-education."

Usually lacking even elementary education, let alone specialized training, the Roma visual artists emulated the natural talents' appearance on the scene with their group action. Thitherto condemned to being outsiders who have almost no influence on their own image, those visual artists who also defined themselves as Roma now suddenly appeared as a collective actor. Until then, it would have been impossible, either in Europe or Hungary, to imagine the emergence of a group of Roma who acknowledged their identity and sought to fulfil the functions of the intelligentsia – coming as they were from a people that at best invited fantasies of a romantic, wild, unrestrained, freedom-loving group, or worse, was stigmatised with prejudices. Tamás Péli's activity gave a special impetus to this process. When he returned to Hungary in 1973, after studying at the Amsterdam Royal Dutch Academy, he made a programmatic effort to create the visual art of the Roma, and gathered disciples around himself. With tools that derive from Renaissance art, and a "D'Artagnanesque" attitude of appropriating the whole world, he became a crucial figure among Roma intellectuals. Consciously acknowledging his origins and creating a mythology in his art that draws upon Roma culture, were the cornerstones of his work. In his *The Creation of the World* or his series on the passions of Christ, he includes Roma characters as a matter of fact. This is historicizing, an incitement to revolt, to protest against the unacceptability of the world as it is, against "established" values. While unmistakably individual, the respective arts of János Balázs and Tamás Péli also established a peculiar Roma school of art. The common denominators of this school, however, are not features of style, form or colouring, but characteristics of attitude and themes.

It is a denial of that irrational mode of being that was produced by the Cold War and the bipolarity of the world. Of the provincialism that was created by the closed borders and the isolation of the country's art life from the European processes. Of the feudal state, which did exist and which, despite its hypocritical show of egalitarianism, banished the Roma to the bottom of society, merely on racial grounds. János Balázs took refuge from the real world in his own surrealistic universe, behind the vibrant colours of his pictures, and through his asceticism, he physically removed himself from the rush for money and power. Tamás Péli rephrases the genesis of the world, the birth of the Roma as an entity, even the mystery of the Fall, with the presentation of Roma figures, as if to attempt a justification of our presence, our peaceful marching in, our "inscription" into the book of peoples. All this, the birth and

¹ Kerékgyártó, István: *A magyarországi roma képzőművészet* [Roma Visual Art in Hungary].

An introduction to the catalogue of the 3rd National Exhibition of Roma Artists. Budapest, MMI, 2000.

symbolic invasion of the Hungarian Roma intelligentsia, demanding emancipation through art, took place in the late sixties and the first half of the seventies. In the Eastern bloc, this was the time of the Prague revolution, the beginning of the new economic deal, the time when communism tried to transform and was revealed to be wanting. In Hungary, this was when writers and performing artists began to report on the presence and oppression of the Roma. This was when Károly Bari, merely sixteen at the time, rocketed into contemporary literature, followed by the “Hungarian Marquese” of the novel and the short story, Menyhért Lakatos, and then by József Choli Daróczi, who translated international and Hungarian classics into Romany. Even in the face of the official policy of forceful assimilation, the public could be stirred by the recital of poems about the Roma in live cultural shows on television. This was the beginning of the movement for emancipation and social recognition.

Emancipation movement

When we visited János Balázs in 1974, we found that others in his community were also inspired to creative activity by his energy.² We were also aware of Roma artists who gained recognition through the amateur and folk art movements. “How many could have been captured by the visual arts in the country, and stirred to creativity?” we asked ourselves, acting already as cultural managers. The question was all the more important for us, the fledgling Roma intelligentsia, because we had already started, following the model of the Monszun Society and parallel with the Hungarian folk dance club movement, our campaign for Roma folklore clubs. We were in search of opportunities and means to give an account of the presence of the Roma people, their similarities and differences. Armed with what was at the time a sensational thing for a young Roma girl, my fresh university degree, me and my friends set about to find a solution within my first workplace, the Institute of Hungarian Culture. The staff of the visual arts department and the few enthusiastic Roma intellectuals started travelling the country, and in May 1979 we could open the *1st National Exhibition of Self-taught Roma Artists* in the Patáky Gallery.

The first exhibition struck international resonances, it was reported on in the Hungarian and foreign press and television, the Museum of Ethnography in Frankfurt am Main bought works from some of the artists, and the following year saw 35 individual and group exhibitions of Roma artists.

On the strength of the exhibition's success, and the international relations we developed during the organization, we soon set about compiling a volume with the working title *Roma Visual Artists in Europe*. Corvina Publishing House – at the time the most prestigious Hungarian publisher in the visual arts, with extensive international relations – welcomed the project, and we started contacting art historians and critics, commissioning studies. One and a half years later we had a volume ready, which concerned itself with the work of several visual artists, from Swedish silversmith Rosa Taikon, who draws on the smithery heritage of the Kalderash, to the Bulgarian Souli Samuil Seferov, a painter of Surrealistic pictures. The manuscript also included Coucou Doerr, Torino Ziegler, Django Reinhardt, better known as a jazz guitarist, or

² Balázs András Balogh and Jolán Oláh lived in the same Pécskődomb shantytown as János Balázs. Sculptor Tamás Szabó and poet József Szepesi also come from there.

Ruda Dzurko, famous for an original technique in glass art. These promising beginnings were brought to a sudden end by the newly appointed director of Corvina, who had hardly settled in his new seat when he terminated our contract. He seems to have acted upon the same charge, never made public, as harboured by the leaders of the Ministry of Culture, to wit, the appearance of the Roma visual artists en masse was a nationalistic conspiracy. The studies still gather dust in my attic, and every time I chance upon it, the volume is a sore reminder of missed chances.



Sandra Jayat: *Interdependance*

We were still busy finalizing the manuscript, when we received a letter from an artist we did not know. Sandra Jayat from Paris sent us the catalogue of her most recent exhibition, and asked us to include her in our volume. Because of the pressing deadlines, the general uncertainty induced by the changes in the publishing house, and our incomplete knowledge of international contemporary art, we turned her down. Our reluctance was to become the yeast of the most exciting fermentation in European Roma visual arts... A contemporary and personal friend of Picasso and Chagall, Sandra Jayat was known primarily for her mythic poetry, though she also painted surrealist pictures with a peculiar air. Offended by our refusal, Jayat, who was an

insider of France's art life, organized the *World Exhibition of Roma Artists* in 1985. Presenting thirty artists and a Roma artist circle from Jihlava (now Czech Republic), the show, which was held in the Chapel of the Conciergerie, became a culmination of the Roma artists' symbolic ingress. It is since 1985 that we have been referring to the visual arts of the European Roma, it was then that the wider public became aware of Roma artists active in the visual arts.

Nationalism or revolt against oppression

As I already mentioned in connection with the 1979 Hungarian Roma exhibition, the visual arts of the Roma was not endorsed by cultural policy makers. Though they did not dare to ban the exhibition, they lent no support to the artists, either through purchases, commissions or the organization of exhibitions abroad. Only one of the twelve artists, Teréz Orsós, who had illustrated several books, was admitted to the Visual Arts Fund. That the others could actually exhibit and sell their works was due to a real interest and demand in the market, and this did not change until recently. (Note that there



Teréz Orsós: *Becó**

was hardly an entrepreneurial class in communism, cultural production and consumption were not regulated by the market, but were instead dependent on the redistribution of the state.) Only a few institutions and initiatives offered our artists the chance to appear in public collections. When a decade later, in the year of the political transition, the Museum of Ethnography provided the venue for the second national exhibition, we had every reason to believe a new era had dawned in the inclusion of the Roma as well. Let me add, this was a symbolic gesture in that euphoric spring of 1989. It seemed the museum itself made a political statement, declared its willingness to act for a change in public thinking about the Roma. There seemed a chance to invite solidarity, we believed in the rise of the Roma, believed the majority society would want to share our culture. We suggested that a Roma Museum

be established, where historical, ethnographic and arts exhibitions, education and public learning programmes could have helped us influence public thinking, make the centuries we spent together part of the social discourse.

To date, there is still no Roma Museum in Hungary.

In 1995, on the initiative of the (by then) only Roma Member of the freely elected Parliament,³ Antónia Hága, a large event series was organized under the title "Rom Som – I'm a Roma," which included an international arts exhibition. Though only a few foreign artists were actually invited, tens of thousands could encounter not only the art of the Hungarian Roma, but also the works of Sandra Jayat, Karl Stojka and Ruda Dzurko, thanks to the excellent location and prestige of the hosting institution, the Museum of Ethnography.

The 3rd National Exhibition of Roma Visual Artists, held in 2000, again in the Pataky Gallery (the venue of the first exhibition) represented both continuity and reversal. It was thanks to a sense of responsibility and solidarity on the part of Roma intellectuals that they secured substantial external support to provide a new opportunity for the visual artists to present themselves. It was, however, to be considered a reversal that not only was the exhibition held in the same venue, but the necessary institutions were still sorely missed. This is so even though the tiny exhibition facility of the Roma Parliament is always available for Roma visual artists, and thanks to a new generation of cultural managers, a few important international exhibitions were organized. Beside "targeting," our main intention is "mainstreaming," connecting Roma art to the cultural life of the country and the continent.

The content of identity

Quite obviously, those who sound the charge of nationalism want to deny oppression, which is manifest in culture as well. The two fundamental questions are: to what extent can the Roma influence their image; and what is the content of Roma identity?

It is a telling evidence of oppression that almost all of our artists could master the craft only through self-teaching, outside the framework of formal education, and the values they have created still cannot be found in public collections and museums.⁴

The visual art of the Roma does not seem to fit the focus of county museums, local collection and contemporary art institutions, nor are our crafts and craftsmen remembered, and the permanent displays of ethnographic collections often lack exhibits that would reflect the presence of the Roma, our contribution to the country.

In the present, we only exist as a social problem, a burden for the country, while from the past we have been erased. This is of course the symbolic destruction of our future, which is none other than oppression.

Self-hate and escapism are natural consequences under the pressure of forced assimilation. But however eager is one to give up one's Roma identity, there is no willingness for inclusion in the majority society, and these attempts are doomed to failure. The awareness of being excluded and oppressed will easily lead to anger and revolt.

It was in the light of this vain attempt that the Roma intelligentsia, emerging in the early seventies, demanded the freedom of choice. They called for a tolerant society in which individuals can identify the most important one of their identities (there are always multiple identities in the case of the Roma, which are ideally not conflicted), can decide whether to assimilate, dissolve without a trace, or be emancipated, proudly acknowledge their Roma identity. It takes political will, however, to create the conditions under which this free choice can be made. It takes Roma institutions, and a reform in public education. It takes effecting a fundamental change in how people think about the Roma, so that "Gypsy" be as neutral a term as the name of any other nationality or minority.

There is, no doubt, a similar need to change the Roma's view of themselves, their identity should be designed. Thinking that the gadjos (non-Roma) are our enemies and that no matter how we try, contempt and exclusion are to be our lot, cannot be part of this new identity.

We must stress, in contrast, that the knowledge of modern skills and our ability to quickly react to the demands of the market has always secured the survival of our people. And if those modern skills were once handed down from one generation to the next, now they can be attained only through formal education, reading and computer literacy. We must emphasize that there are several among our traditions that we need not only preserve, but teach the rest of the world. These include a love of peace, and the knack of conciliation, multilingualism, interpersonal and trading skills, just as well as the tradition of solidarity, respect and helpfulness towards the afflicted and the old.

When we wanted to break into high culture with our selection of Roma visual art, we meant to attract attention to our similarity and our values through surprise and curiosity.

It is time we became noticed!

³ Between 1990-1994, Aladár Horváth set in the Parliament among the Free Democrats (SZDSZ), and Tamás Péli among the Socialists (MSZP). Péli died in 1994 and Horváth left the Free Democrats.

* The publication is permitted by the artist.

⁴ Only a few works by János Balázs and pieces by István Szentendrassy, donated by the Minister of Culture 2006, can be found in the National Gallery. Some of our naïve artists, Vince Horváth, Teréz Orsós, Mara Oláh - can be found in the Kecskemét Museum of Naïve Artists, thanks to art historian Pál Bánszky and film maker Domokos Moldován. The Roma collection of the Luzsok Village Museum can be seen in the Aladár Rác Community Centre in Pécs.



Adam and Eve 1993
oil on canvas; 70 x 80 cm
Museum of Ethnography, Budapest

BADA, Márta [H]

Erdőtarcsa, 1951

Márta Bada says this about herself: *"I was born on March 19, 1951, in Erdőtarcsa, Nógrád County, into a family of seven. My parents made adobe and traded in rags. Only two of us finished elementary school, me and my sister. At bedtime, my mother would tell us long tales. It is also our custom to keep a wake until the deceased is buried, console each other for days, and if someone knows an old story, they will tell it to the others. This may be why I wish I was a child again, because I don't like what we live in now. From 1963 to 1976, I was working at the Budapest Heavy Ceramics Works as an unskilled labourer, and in the hand-painting workshop I was allowed to try and design floor tiles. Then I worked as a cleaner at the Gödöllő Town Management Company. I owe my painting to two painters, Iván Remsey and Pál Mizser, and to my arts teacher, Lilla László. I'd like to make people happy with my paintings, pass on the same pleasure I feel while painting. I have three children, whom I bring up on my own."**

Márta Bada is not a self-taught artist. She acknowledges her teachers in the above quote, and her pictures reveal her fascination with Impressionism. This attraction is more due to Pál Mizser's guidance than to exhibitions or albums the artist had studied. Her landscapes, representing chiefly forests and foliage, swirl with a lush vegetation and an orgy of colours. These are disturbingly unstable pictures: only now and then does a detail that helps interpretation – a branch, a stem, a fence, a roof – flash out of the all-engulfing vegetation. To date, every student of Roma visual art has noted that one recurring feature is the use of lively, powerful, suggestive colours. An observation to which we might want to add another salient characteristic: beside vivid hues, Roma artists also share an almost musical sense of the rhythm of colours and shapes.

Márta Bada heard a tale from her father, who returned from the Dachau death camp: *"As a young man, Hitler loved to paint. As he was painting once, he heard music, and lo, there came the Gypsies. They played nice music, and then asked for some money, but Hitler was mean and wouldn't give a penny. So they beat him up – because they were many, and Hitler was all alone. Later, when Hitler became Führer and was persecuting the Jews for their money, he took revenge on the Gypsies too, for treating him so badly once."*

Tímea Junghaus

*Zsigó, Jenő (ed.): *A Magyarországi Roma Parlament Képtára*
[The Gallery of the Hungarian Roma Parliament]. Budapest, 1998.



The Haughty Princess 1987
oil on canvas; 86 x 87 cm
Hungarian Institute for Culture, Budapest



Bride and Groom 1991
oil on canvas; 70 x 80 cm
private property



Mother and Child 1986
private property
Photo: Nihad Nino Pusija



BAJRAMOVIĆ, Rifet [BiH]
Bare, 1952

Rifet Bajramović was born in 1952, in a village called Bare near the central Bosnian town of Kakanj. Even though he had only obtained minimal education from his father and family in creative work with copper and steel, it did not prevent him from dealing with his art. The production of copper-handcrafts for everyday use has had long lasting tradition among Roma population in this area. More than 30 years ago, Marijan Kocković a sculptor from Dubrovnik (Croatia), recognized Bajramović's artistic potentials and presented his art throughout the former Yugoslavia. He organized numerous exhibitions presenting Bajramović's art. Which brought him several awards, some of them abroad. In 1979 he became a member of the Italian Academy of Arts. His work on sculptures and relief's is inspired by tradition, scenes from everyday life and Roma heritage, combined with his vivid imagination. His works can be found in many public institutions. They are also owned by collectors. Since 80's some valuable sculptures can be admired in the Sarajevo City Museum (Muzej Grada Sarajeva).

At the beginning of Yugoslav wars he fled with his family to Germany (near Berlin). After four years he got back to Kakanj, where he still lives. Despite of poor economic conditions with barely any possibilities to earn for living he still refuses to sell out his works in order to raise his five children. He produces arabesque coffee pots and other stylish items for every day use, so that he can provide enough money for himself and his family.

While the overall attention to Roma art has declined, quite the opposite happened to Bajramović. He grew older and enriched with self reliance and the experience of living abroad which is reflected in his recent works. Even though his early works were more detailed and ornamented, they possessed strong narrative aspects which, from today's perspective is seen to be redundant. His recent works are denser and more honest, though.

Two years ago his art was presented once again in a prominent gallery in Sarajevo, during the Sarajevo art Festival "Baščaršijske Noći". Since then, Rifet Bajramović has had hard times finding new possibilities to present his art, due to changed circumstances in his home country.

Nihad Nino Pusija



Cock 1978
private property
Photo: Nihad Nino Pusija



Warrior 1978
private property
Photo: Nihad Nino Pusija



Gold Bird Looking Glass 2006
mixed media on perspex; 51 x 21 cm
property of the artist

BAKER, Daniel [GB]

St Mary Cray in Kent, 1968

My current work explores the imagined space occupied by the Gypsy, offering a window into the marginal area allocated to them - outside of, yet surrounded by, connected, yet dislocated from a society that they have existed within for hundreds of years. The imagined space here refers both to the symbolic space of myth and misconception held in the popular imagination as well as the absence or disappearance of geographical space for Gypsy habitation in the light of recent legislation.

These works use painted, etched and gilded glass to produce illuminated mirrored surfaces, or looking glasses. Images appear behind the glass but in front of the mirrored background, locating the subject in a liminal or in-between space - a space which the Gypsy continues to inhabit both physically and symbolically. The somewhat obscured nature of the gilded reflection allows the viewer to inhabit the landscape of the work whilst at the same time evading true likeness and recognition.

These looking glasses seek to highlight an ambiguity and confusion in the way that Gypsies are seen - a state of obscured likeness and masked visibility that has been internalised by the Gypsy over time making it difficult for Gypsies to fully see themselves in the world. This difficulty in visualising the self has left popular stereotyped images relatively unchallenged, the legacy of which is a symbolic Gypsy that is ever present but never truly seen. These works are intended as a meditation upon identity and dislocation

In earlier abstract works I have examined questions of identity and difference through the vehicle of process painting. These abstract pieces explore boundary formation as a means of protection and segregation. Concerns regarding the perceived threat of difference and the consequent construction of boundaries refer in part to my experience of growing up in my Romani community in Kent. The works explore boundary patterning formed by conflicting identities and are informed by the ongoing negotiations between this enclosed group and the adjacent non-Romani community. The non-figuration of these earlier works is partly a response to the absence of the human figure in Gypsy artifact decoration. An example of this can be seen in the painted caravan, where artwork consists mainly of painted scrollwork and motifs in contrasting colours set apart by strong outlining. As well as the more obvious decorative function served by this means of ornamentation I see the use of strong outlining in Gypsy paintwork as an attempt to maintain clear boundary definition between diverse elements whilst at the same time seeking compositional harmony - a concern echoed in the Romani peoples desire to preserve their cultural identity from the perceived threat of assimilation.

Daniel Baker



Sign Looking Glass (No Travellers) 2006
mixed media on perspex; 21 x 87 cm
property of the artist



Static 2006
collection of the artist



Blue Bird Looking Glass 2006
mixed media on perspex; 73 x 73 cm
property of the artist



Ornament 2006
mixed media; 33 x 33 x 15 cm
property of the artist



TIP 2006
mixed media; c. 200 x 200 cm
property of the artist



The Astronauts 1972
oil on canvas; 60 x 70 cm
Hungarian Institute for Culture, Budapest

BALÁZS, János [H]

Alsókubin, 1905 – Salgótarján, 1977

János Balázs was born on November 27th 1905, in Alsókubin. His grandfather and father were both renowned Gypsy band leaders. His family moved to Salgótarján when he was five years old. He finished only two grades at the local primary school, but as a voracious reader and inquisitive mind, he went on to educate himself and developed a peculiar world view. From age ten, he also worked throughout his life, collecting firewood and mushrooms in the forest, making adobe, sorting coal, doing any odd job to supplement his family's meagre income. He came to see the world under the most tragic of circumstances, as a soldier during World War II: he was thirty-seven when he was taken to the front. He served in the 23rd infantry regiment, became a prisoner of war for three years, and was forty-three when he returned to Salgótarján, which he would not leave ever again. The same small hut in Pécskő Street, in the shanty-town, was his home throughout his lonely life – as well as his studio. He was sixty-three when he began to devote himself to art systematically, and worked for the next eight years with fervent dedication.

The tabloid press of the late sixties was instrumental in the popularization of Balázs's oeuvre: the genial, "*fabulous poor man*" from the rubbish heap had great story potential. János Balázs's greatest achievement was his attainment of recognition. His example of self-expression and self-realization through creation became attractive for many people; he brought an audience, admirers to Roma art, and thus the discourse about the position of Roma works within Hungarian art could begin. Balázs's oeuvre is an integral part of Hungarian Roma culture, and should be available for those interested: scholars, Roma youth working on their identity, children and their teachers. Regrettably, not even a catalogue, let alone a monograph, has been prepared that could serve as an introduction to his art.*

Tímea Junghaus

* Note however the illustrated collection of poems privately published by the artist. Balázs, János: *Ecsettel és irónnal* [With Paint-brush and Iron]. Salgótarján, 1969.



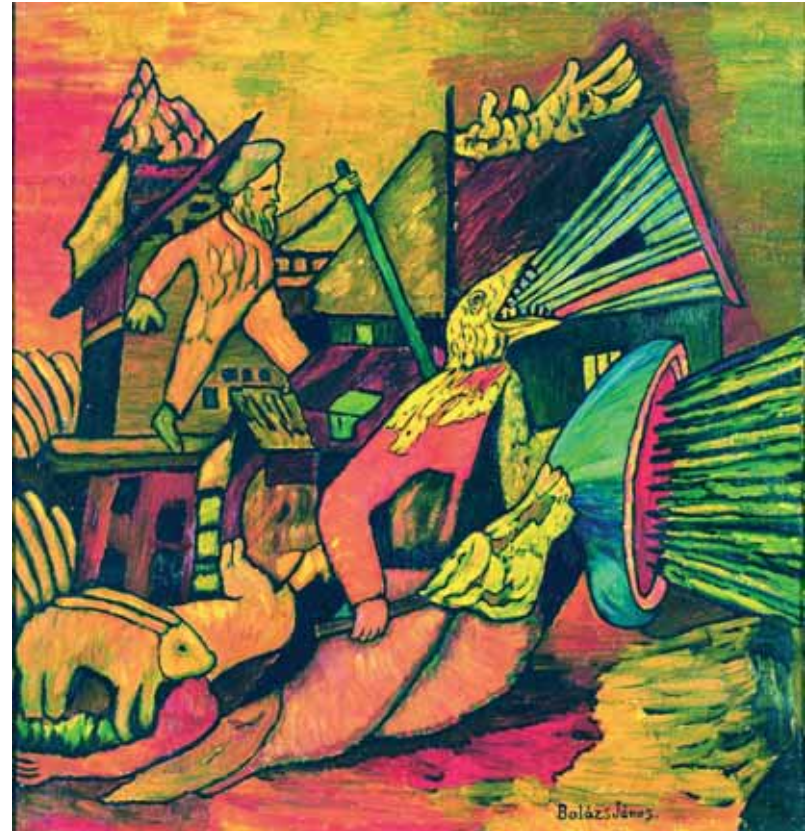
Pécskődomb c. 1968
mixed media on panel; 26 x 37.5cm
private collection



A Snake with Ancient Animals undated
oil on canvas; 53 x 56 cm
Hungarian Institute for Culture, Budapest



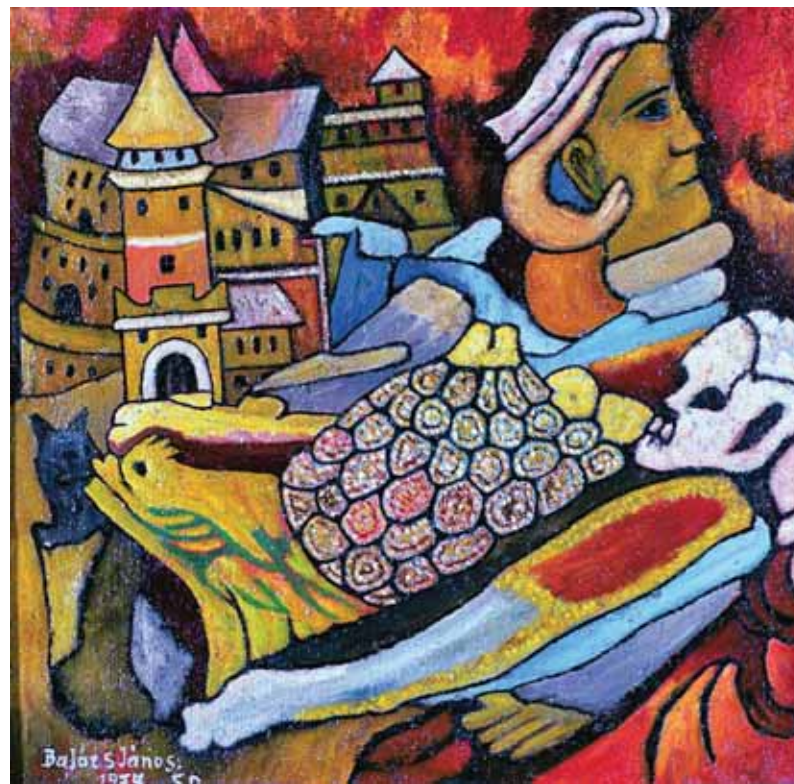
Waiting for Peace undated
oil on canvas; 60 x 81 cm
Hungarian Institute of Culture, Budapest



The War of the Future 1972
oil on canvas; 68 x 65 cm
Hungarian Institute of Culture, Budapest



The Family of the Birds c. 1975
oil on canvas; 58 x 80,5 cm
private property



House-Faces with Skulls 1977
oil on canvas; 61 x 67 cm
Hungarian Institute for Culture, Budapest



Romani Woman Dancing with an Angel 2003
etching, 1154 x 830 mm
property of the artist

BALOGH , Tibor [H]
Fehérgyarmat, 1975

Tibor Balogh is the first Roma artist to be admitted to, and to have graduated at, the Budapest Academy of Art. Testifying to a full mastery of his art, his diploma piece, a series of copperplates, blends childhood memories of the artist with fragments from another scene of his life, the 8th district of the capital, which has the highest percentage of Roma population in the city, and which gave home to Balogh during his Academy years. After graduation, his first important appearance was at Műcsarnok's exhibition, *Hidden Holocaust*.

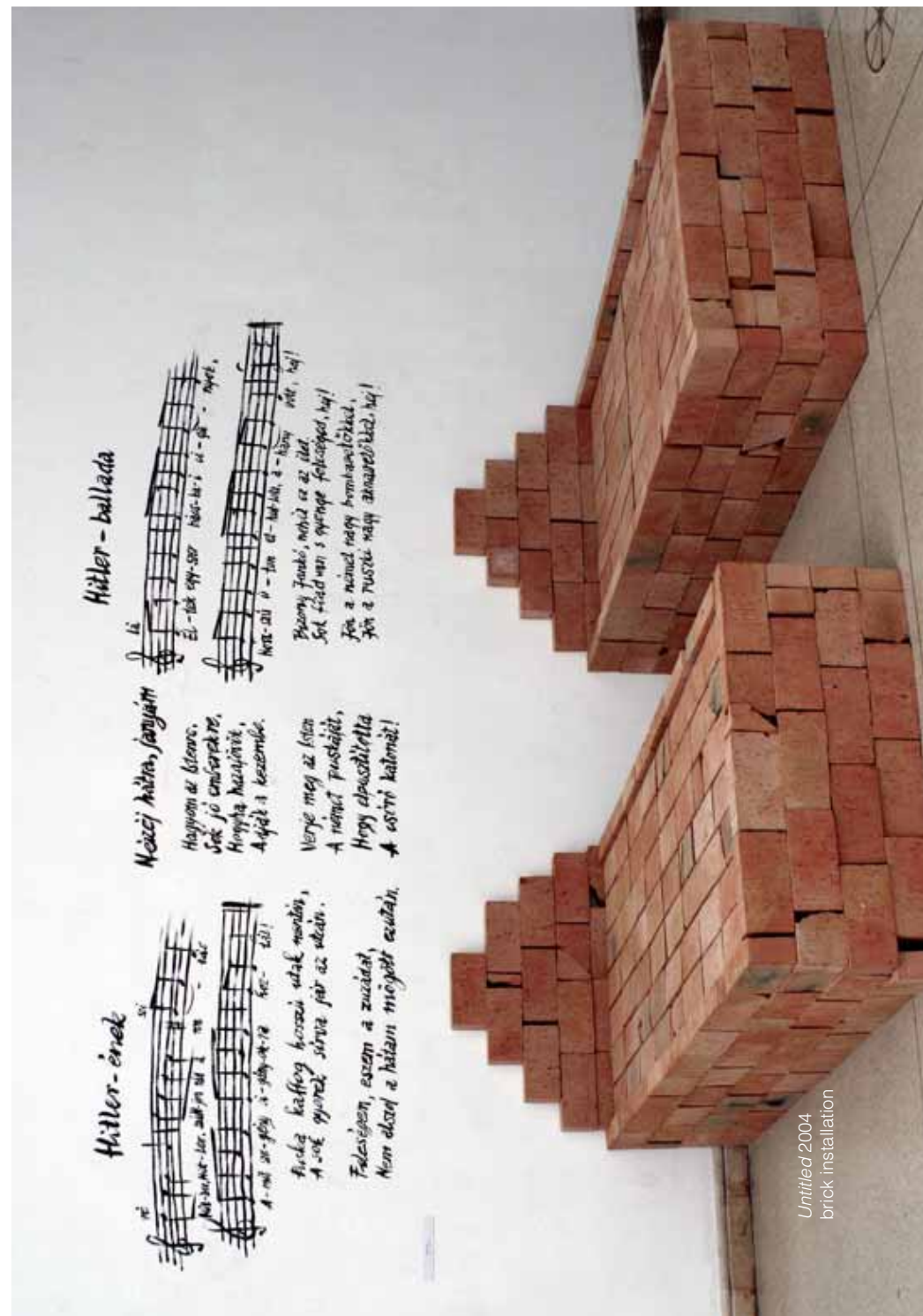
Balogh left the installation he set up in the apse of the building untitled. The cold brick piles and the songs about the Roma Holocaust that hovered about them like a prayer, invited a great many associations, and the artist did not want to delimit or control the flow of ideas provoked by the vision. Two bed-sized piles of brick formed the core of the work. They were at a distance that is exactly the same as in the sleeping quarters of the Tiszadob children's home, where the artist spent his childhood; the two beds evoked an abandoned children's room. These beds would never be warm again, not only because those who slept there would never return, but also because they were made of a rigid material, bricks. The brick smokestacks that became the symbols of thousands of Roma deaths, turn in this installation into graves. The complex thought of the work is enhanced by the Holocaust songs, painted above the installation, which radiate with endless pain and bitterness.

Balogh made yet another provocative work for the Holocaust exhibition, a booth with the dimensions of 1 x 1 x 2.3 m. Illuminated by a bare light bulb, the walls of the booth were papered with shocking documents, articles and photos on the Holocaust of the Roma and their ongoing discrimination. Stepping inside, it was impossible to ignore the evidence of their harrowing fate, no matter where one turned. Outside the booth, there were small test tubes, with the instructions pasted on the wall. You could take a test tube inside the booth, where you could spend as much time as you liked. You could collect your tears in the test tube, which you could sign if you wanted to. The test tube was to be passed on to a small table through an opening, whence the artists took it, and hung up around the booth, among the other "raindrops." A hundred people took part in the action that preceded the exhibition, and the event had the mood of a Roma wake.

Tímea Junghaus



Rain of Tears (with Janó Bari) 2004
installation, paper, test glasses



Untitled 2004
brick installation



Autobiography of a Cherub

BARI, Károly [H]

Bükkaranyos, 1952

He was born into a large Roma family with seven children. His early but great Rimbaud-like talent for poetry was discovered when he was at grammar school. He spent one year at the Theatre and Film Academy in Budapest, then from 1975 on he studied at Kossuth Lajos Science University in Debrecen for three years. Since 1977 he has published eight volumes of his own poetry, edited and translated several collections of Roma folk literature and done other translations from French contemporary poetry. The visual power of his verbal images in his poetry is very impressive and the same goes for his paintings and graphical work, in which he often uses archetypal motifs from Romani culture.

Spring

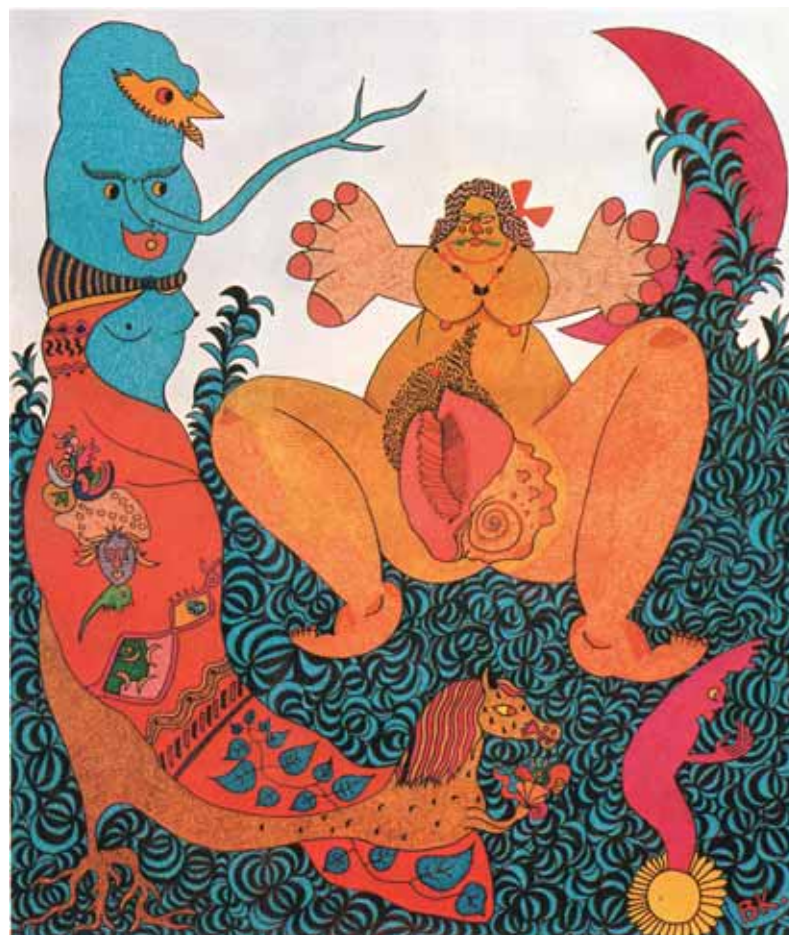
Spring wouldn't stop showing up
on black scum nights.
The slut stars screamed in her face,
The Frost prince still hung on
with his sick fingers.
She just breathed
and his stinging robe of snow
vanished from the world.
She sat down to rest
by the ditches.
Flowers bloomed beside her.
She smoothed her tangled forests,
her meadow lap,
with a sunbeam comb.
Rattling bone branches,
blood-drained leaves
ran from her, scared.
Terrified,
because around them
the green life was beginning
to squeeze the throat of the earth.

[Translated by Laura Schiff]*

* All photos and texts are taken from the catalogue *Bari Károly: Kiállítás az Alföldi Nyomdában* [Exhibition in the Alföldi Nyomda], Debrecen 1983. (except *Discussion*)



Discussion 1987
coloured ink on paper; (size: unknown)
property of the artist



Night



Roma Exodus (Emigration) 1999
oil on canvas; 55 x 42 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



*Downcast-looking Old Man
(Study for Exodus)* 1999
ink on paper; 297 x 210 mm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno

BERKY, Ján [SK] Studenec, 1951

Ján Berky was born on May 28, 1951, in the Romani settlement of Studenec, near Detva (SK). To improve their lot, the family moved near the Czech-German border in 1957, but later returned to Detva. Berky learned to be a welder, and worked in the local engineering works for 21 years. In 1990 he had to look for a new job, for reasons of health. Struggling with employment problems and suffering from depression, he finally found his way to art. On the other hand his disablement probably helped him to avoid getting on the unemployment list, which is the typical fate of the Roma in Detva. He finally lost his job in 2002. *"An unemployed Roma in Slovakia is not considered a human being,"* Berky says. *"Not to make any trouble at home I prefer to go to work for the non-Romani, for pittance."*

He was introduced to oil painting by an unnamed artist in Detva. Ján Berky likes to paint, though his financial situation forces him to draw instead, most of the time. His works are mostly expressions of the dismal conditions of the contemporary Roma, while his style represents a return to the lasting values of the Romani tradition. The fate of the Roma seems to have remained both the most sensitive topic and the inspiration of his works. Of the piece *Pieta Máriovi*, he says: *"One of the inspirations I have ever experienced happened at Žiaru nad Hronom where I saw skinheads set fire to a young man called Márió. He died by their hand when he was not even 18. I wanted to express my own protestation against such crime and sin. The painting, which I gave to the Museum of Romani Culture in Brno, must remain a memento of that young man and the incredible way he died."* Music is another one of Berky's favourite themes, and he himself is an accomplished musician. His paintings have won several awards for amateur visual artists. He still lives and works in Detva (SK).

Jana Horváthová



Descendant Relatives 1989
oil on fibreboard; 39 x 28.5 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



Portrait of Igor's Grandson 2004
oil on pasteboard; 29.8 x 23.5 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



Roma Compensation – "Mamo and Papo" (detail) 2005
installation, household



BÓDI, Katalin [H]

Salgótarján 1950

Katalin Bódi's installation titled *Mamo and Papo* deals with the compensation of the Roma.

The two packs are displayed on two plinths:

- 2 kg flour
- 1 kg pasta
- 2 kg sugar
- 2 litre cooking oil
- 0.25 kg coffee
- 0.57 kg tinned meat
- 1 set of bedclothes
- 4 towels
- 1 litre shampoo
- 4 bars of soap
- 4.5 kg washing powder
- 1 box of multivitamin

In the background the questionnaire, mounted and framed, which the Fellow Traveller Foundation (Társutas Alapítvány), entrusted with the job of compensation, had the Romani fill out in Zala, Tolna and Somogy counties of Hungary, in return for the gift voucher worth HUF 2000.

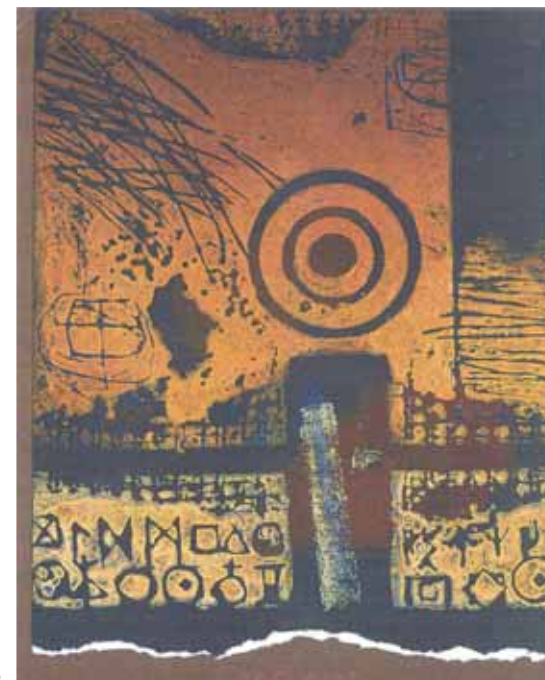
Source: Romani journal *Amaro Drom*, July-August 2003. A series of article, the most complete to date to deal with the case of the Roma compensation in Hungary.

Tímea Junghaus

Katalin Bódi | 61



Memento 1996
mixed technique on board; 91 x 64.5 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



PF 1999 1998
monotype; 21 x 15 cm
Museum of Romani
Culture, Brno

BOHÓ, Alexander [SK]

Brezno nad Hronom, 1947

Alexander Bohó was born on Jun 8, 1947, in Brezno nad Hronom (SK). He spent a large part of his childhood with his grandparents, in the small Roma village of Širkovce (district Rimavská Sobota) (SK). As he recalls: *"Our childhood was unrestricted freedom itself, with long evenings and music played on the violin and accordion, and when the children fell asleep, the adults took them home in their arms."* Although the artist has been living away from the community for a long time now, he still considers it a present and unfailing source of inspiration for his spiritual art.

Bohó graduated at the University of Banská Bystrica, and studied art history at the University of Komenský in Bratislava.

He makes drawings, graphics and paintings, and his works show Conceptualist influences. Bohó is a free-lance artist and belongs to the minority of successful artists in Slovakia. He is a member of several Slovak and international associations of professional artists, and has been exhibiting regularly since 1969. He lives and works in Rimavská Sobota (SK).

Jana Horváthová



The Gypsy Wheel undated
tempera on paper; 75 x 90 cm
private property



The Golden Cupola undated
tempera on paper; 50 x 40 cm
private collection

CARI, Olimpio [I] Trentino, 1942

The majority of Roma artists in Western Europe are connected to modern art. Olimpio Cari is a good example. He is an acknowledged poet and writer, and his visual art has emerged from the illustrative sketches he made to help readers imagine the unique world he creates in his poems and novels. His drawings are colourful narratives of autobiographical events, or representations of his dreams and desires. The interesting narratives often employ humor and magic. In some of the works the artist is obviously enjoying the challenge of creating the whole composition with a single line. This does not detract from the significance of the stories told, which are testimonies of the difficulties and discrimination Cari has experienced, and transformed into literature and visual art.

Timea Junghaus



A Fairy between the Houses undated
tempera, paper; 50 x 60 cm
private property



The Imprisoned Bird undated
tempera, paper; 60 x 75 cm
private property



Waiting undated
bronze and stone; h: 20 cm
property of the artist



My portrait
black and white photo, 30 x 20 cm
property of the artist

CIMPEANU, Mihaela Ionela [RO] Bailesti, 1981

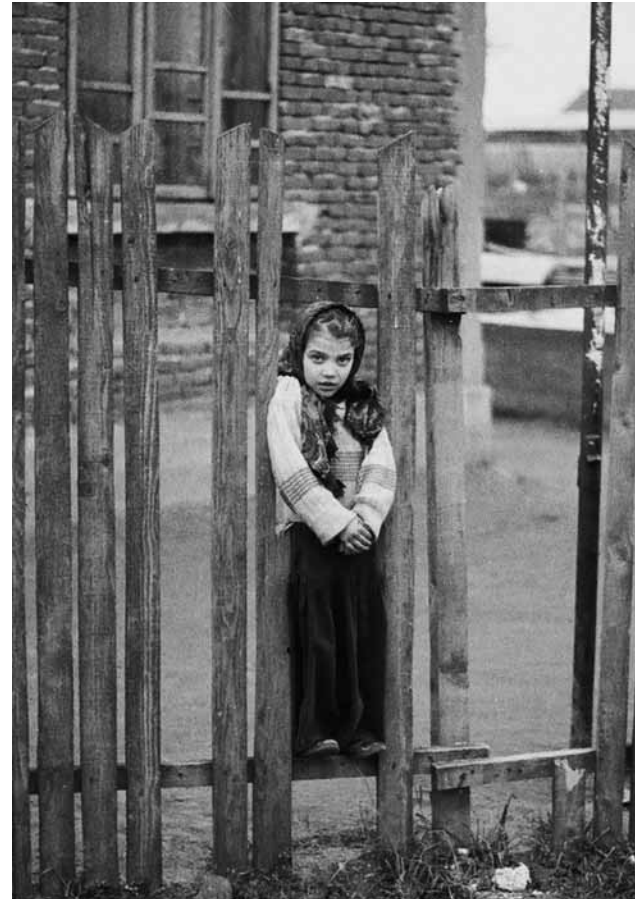
Mihaela Cimpeanu was born in 1981 in Bailesti, Romania. She is now a resident of Bucharest. She graduated in 2005 from the University of Decorative Arts, Bucharest. She is a member of Artisrroma Cultural Association, a non-governmental organization, founded by a group of Roma artists and art enthusiasts, serving as the information and advocacy platform for the community of Roma artists in Romania. She is a lecturing professor of freehand drawing at the Ioan Socolescu Architectural High School in Bucharest.

Cimpeanu took up photography during her university years. Since then she had several individual and group shows. The most successful ones were the one in Sutu Palace at the Museum Hall in Bucharest in 2004, the one titled *Baxt te del o Devel*, CNR - U.N.E.S.C.O. Hall in the same year, and the *Thana Romane* in the Goethe Institute of Bucharest in 2002.

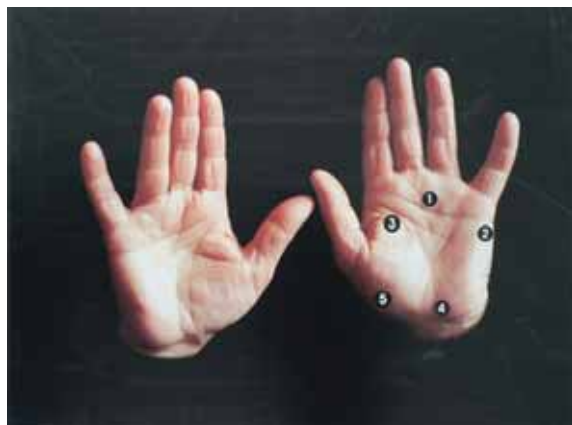
Tímea Junghaus



People and People undated
mixed materials; c. 30 x 50 x 50 cm
property of the artist

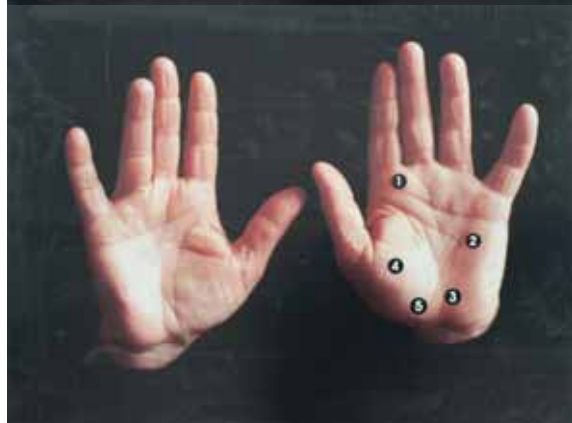


Childhood undated
black and white photo; 30 x 20cm
property of the artist



A Woman's Fate II. 2004

- ① Early Suffering
- ② Grief
- ③ The Trauma
- ④ Unsuccessful Marriage
- ⑤ Longing for a Child



A Woman's Fate III. 2004

- ① Unhappiness
- ② Misfortune
- ③ Pain
- ④ Hard Life
- ⑤ Poverty



A Woman's Fate IV. 2004

- ① Bitterness
- ② Dark Future
- ③ Illness
- ④ Broken by Life
- ⑤ Fleeing from a Bad Life

Palmistry 2004
C-Print; 70 x 100 cm each



My God, What Have You Done? 2004
oil on chipboard; (size: unknown)
property of the artist

CSÁMPAI, Rozi [H]

Pusztamonostor, 1956

Rozi Csámpai writes poems and then transforms them into abstract pictures, whose sadness is alleviated only by the bright, vibrant colours. This contradiction creates a tension, in a sarcastic gesture the devastating, difficult confessions appear in a seemingly light-hearted world of pastel colours. Those works of Csámpai whose devices are less abstract and more figurative, are of an astonishing expressiveness and lyricism. The artist admits to be using art for therapeutic purposes. Each tragedy of her life can be linked to a prolific period in her painting. Living in a temporary abode in the 8th District, she and her family live under the permanent threat of losing their home, which is a source of unbearable stress. She is not the only Roma woman artist to "use" the creative activity as a way of dealing with trauma.

In her *Palmistry* project Rozi Csámpai analyses the hands of victims in studies of a scientific accuracy. The numbered explanations point out foreseeable tendencies, tragedies and experiences in the lines on the enlarged hands. The hands photographed are those of Romani women who survived forced labour or deportation. Placing them next to one another, we can find formal similarities in the patterns of the fine lines.

Timea Junghaus

Women's Fates I. 2004
oil on canvas; 110 x 90 cm (p. 74-75)

Mothers

*Women, infinitely defenceless,
Your motherly wombs have not healed up
And you have already left me*

*Why this dreadful death?
You, alive, join, so that the horror of the past
Would not repeat itself!*

Anyák

Végtelen kiszolgáltatott
asszonyok,
Anyaméhetek be sem
gyógyult,
Már is itt hagyatok.

Miért ez a döbbenetes
halál?
Ti élők, fogjátok össze,
hogy a múlt szörnyűsége
ne ismétlődjön meg!

CS R.





Cosmic Vision (mosaic) 2000
coloured ink on paper; 75 x 109.7 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



Destroy – Let Live? 2000
black ink on paper; 25.6 x 36 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno

DEMETER, František [CZ, B] Prague, 1948 – Gent, 2003

Demeter František was born on December 28, 1948, in Prague (CZ), but grew up in a Romani settlement, Ladamírové, the district of Svidník in Slovakia. He died on June 29, 2003, in Gent, Belgium. After finishing elementary school, he earned his living by delivering coal in Prague, later as a cimbalom player. In 1996 he immigrated to Belgium where he settled, and started a restaurant where he continuously exhibited his works.

His career as a visual artist was initiated by a mystical meeting with an alien civilization. Before he started to draw, he was more active as a writer. His poems and short stories were published ever since he was a young man, five of his works appeared in the collection *Romane gil'a* (Romani poems), and the periodical of Romani studies *Romano džaniben*.

Jana Horváthová



Untitled 1993
oil on canvas; 48.5 x 74.5 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno

DUDÁŠ Damián [CZ]

Stará Plzeň, 1973

Dudaš Damián was born on October 10, 1973, in Stará Plzeň, Plzeň district. Fascinated by colours since his childhood, he started painting when he was fourteen and when his mother bought him the five basic colours tempera set instead of a whole set. He picked up painting again after military service. At the beginning he learned a lot from a local painter, Václav Benedikt, and regularly visited the workshop called "Dílo", but as he keeps saying about his self-education: *"I just looked around with an open mind."*

He is still fascinated by painting and he says he is not interested in drawing at all: *"I need to feel the colours."* He calls himself a mystic realist since his meditative paintings and artworks are not just decorations but also serve therapy in the psychiatric clinic run by Eva Suttnerová in Stará Plzeň. He also decorated the newly opened Orthodox Church in Rokycany, where the priest is the first Romani Orthodox minister, the painter's brother David Dudáš. Damián works as a free-lancer and lives in Stará Plzeň, where he had his first solo exhibition in the Esprit Gallery in 1998.

Jana Horváthová



Untitled 1995
oil on canvas; 55 x 75 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



Untitled 1997
oil on canvas; 57 x 89 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



Ruining Civilization 1984
colour scrap glass on glass plate; 94 x 49.5 cm
Museum of Romani Culture

DZURKO, Rudolf [SK, CZ]

Pavlovce, 1941

Rudolf Dzurko was born on July 1, 1941, in Pavlovce in East-Slovakia (SK). He lives in the north of the Czech Republic since 1945, and used to work in the glass factories of Northern Bohemia.

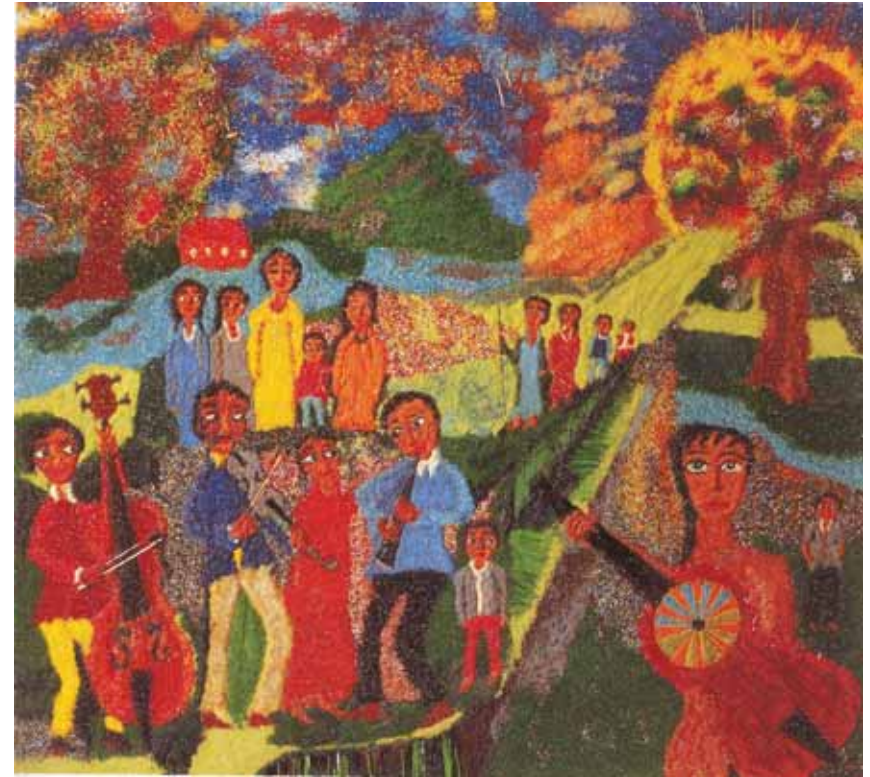
He started his carrier in the early 70's, with the invention of his original technique, one of gluing coloured scrap glass on glass plates. He also creates statues from sandstone and wood. His pieces have been on display since 1977, when he held his first solo exhibition in Prague (Cultural Centre Sokolniki). His retrospective exhibitions were organized in the Gallery Klenová in Klatovy in 1998, in the Museum of Romani Culture in 2001, and the Egon Schiele Art Centre in Český Krumlov in 2002.

Dzurko is one of the most respected naïve artists, regardless of his Roma origin. His works too are featured in the National Museum (folklore section), the National Gallery Prague, the Gallery of North Bohemia in Litoměřice, the Gallery Klenová in Klatovy and the National Gallery in Bratislava. He lives and works in Prague.

Jana Horváthová



Jančo and his Wife 1990
colour scrap glass on glass plate; 79 x 60 cm
Museum of Romani Culture



Wheel of Fortune 1987
colour scrap glass on glass plate; 119 x 128 cm
Museum of Romani Culture



Dachau 2005
carved wood (oak); h: 56.5 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



Dancer – Caspar 2004
carved wood (cherry); h: 65 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno

GADŽOR, Ondrej (Andriš) [SK]

Krásná nad Hornádom, 1956

Ondrej Gadžor was born on July 9, 1956, in Krásná nad Hornádom, Košice district (SK), where he still lives. After finishing elementary school, he had temporary jobs. He was attracted to woodcarving even as a child, and started doing it for a living when he lost his job in 1989.

He met sculptor Vojtech Löffler (1906-1990) and started to help him in his studio. Gadžor works with various materials, not only wood; in fact, he prefers harder materials like stone, bones and shells. He finds inspiration in what he sees around him: *"First I create the whole picture in my head, and when I see that I do not let it out of my hands."* His works vary in size, there are miniatures as well as life-size sculptures. He has taken part in several sculptors' symposia in Slovakia, has had numerous solo exhibitions, and his works can be found in several Slovak and foreign collections.

Jana Horváthová



Priss 2005
carved wood (cherry); h: 62.5 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



'Horenos' undated
pig bone with lead pedestal; h: 23.5 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



On the Edge of Time 1992
oil on canvas; 92 x 73 cm
private collection

JAYAT, Sandra [F]

Sandra Jayat was born into a Roma family. She was fifteen years old when she fled Milan to avoid a forced marriage, and went, on foot, to Paris. There she became acquainted with French avant-garde writers and artists, and about a decade later she was an acknowledged figure of French art life as a poet, writer and painter. A multi-faceted talent, she introduced an innocently abstract, unassuming style. As a self-taught artist she explores the limits and possibilities of the rules and criteria of painting. Her works are never inspired by reality or ordinary life, but take shape in her dreams. There is no school of painting that could accommodate Sandra Jayat's work. She is always, as she says, inhabiting two, apparently contradictory states, dream and reality, which merge in the "Surreal." In 1985 Jayat organized the first international exhibition of Roma art in Paris, the *Première Mondiale D'art Tzigane*.

Tímea Junghaus



The Graffiti of Hope is Fading Away in the Waves of Illusion 1985
oil on canvas; 81 x 116 cm
private property



Invitation of the Memory 1984
oil on canvas; 116 x 81 cm
private collection



Yesterday Comes after Tomorrow 1992
oil on canvas; 65 x 108 cm
private property



Drying clothes in the caravan 2006
acryl on canvas; 18 x 24 cm
property of the artist

JIMENEZ, Gabi [F]
Paris, 1964

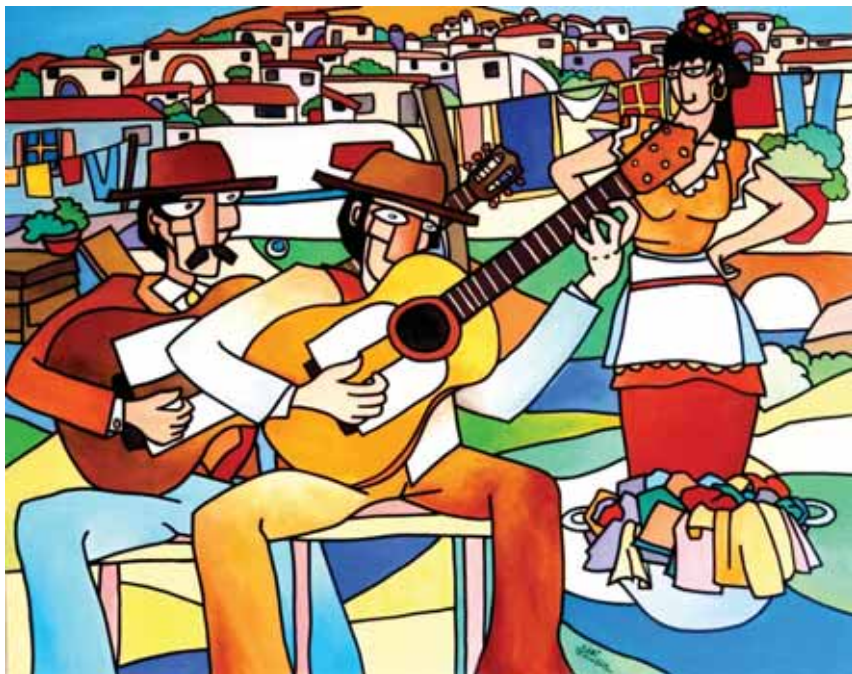
There are things we see, notice, remember – and there are things we don't want to see.

The Roma are frightening. Who are they? Where do they come from? What are they doing?

*"I try to relate scenes of life in pictures, the moments of joy, the places we have borrowed for this while, the painful memories that still haunt."
All our memories are colourful. All my paintings, graphics, illustrations are coded, by necessity, in colour. Becoming independent of its material, my work concentrates entirely on the meaning, and the message that derives from it. A bit like in the stained glass windows of churches, only without the regulation. The cloisonné and the contours that curb the colours; the will to do without aesthetic devices that are completely meaningless; the desire to get as close to the essence as possible – these are the things that animate all my visual and artistic intentions. As in flamenco. Because I am flamenco.
"Y que tengo sangre de Rey en la palma de la mano."*

*I could have called all my exhibitions "DUENDE," which is the flamenco trance, what enables us to live in a community, to feel this is our part in nature, to understand who we are and what position things assume in space. In other words, it is the Gypsies' voodoo. So while you see washing lines in my pictures, mud, piles of garbage, caravan camps and Gypsies, I can see happiness there, my family, and what I am. I could have submitted a detailed biography, an exhaustive account of my artistic intentions, all of it in perfect chronological order, but unfortunately time does not exist for me, for us. So I may have created a lot of things, but to neatly arrange them, that would be an impossible undertaking for me.
Thanks to me and to us for being here with me, with us.*

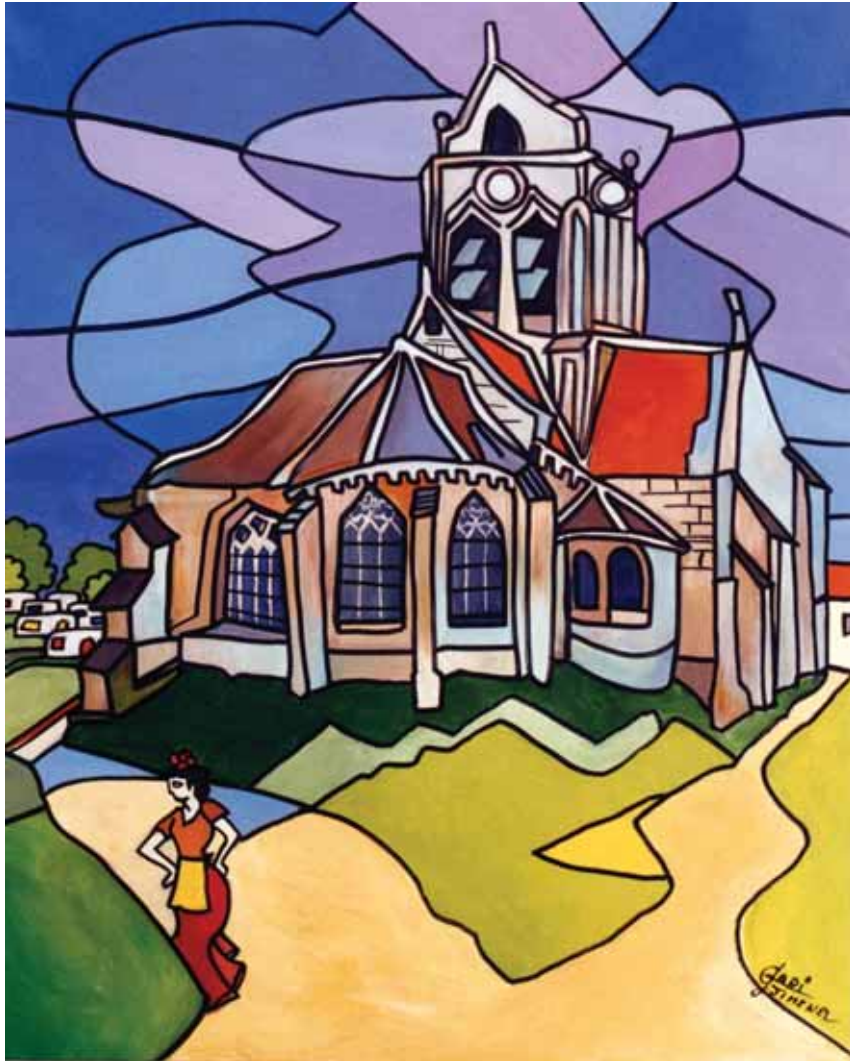
Gabi Jimenez



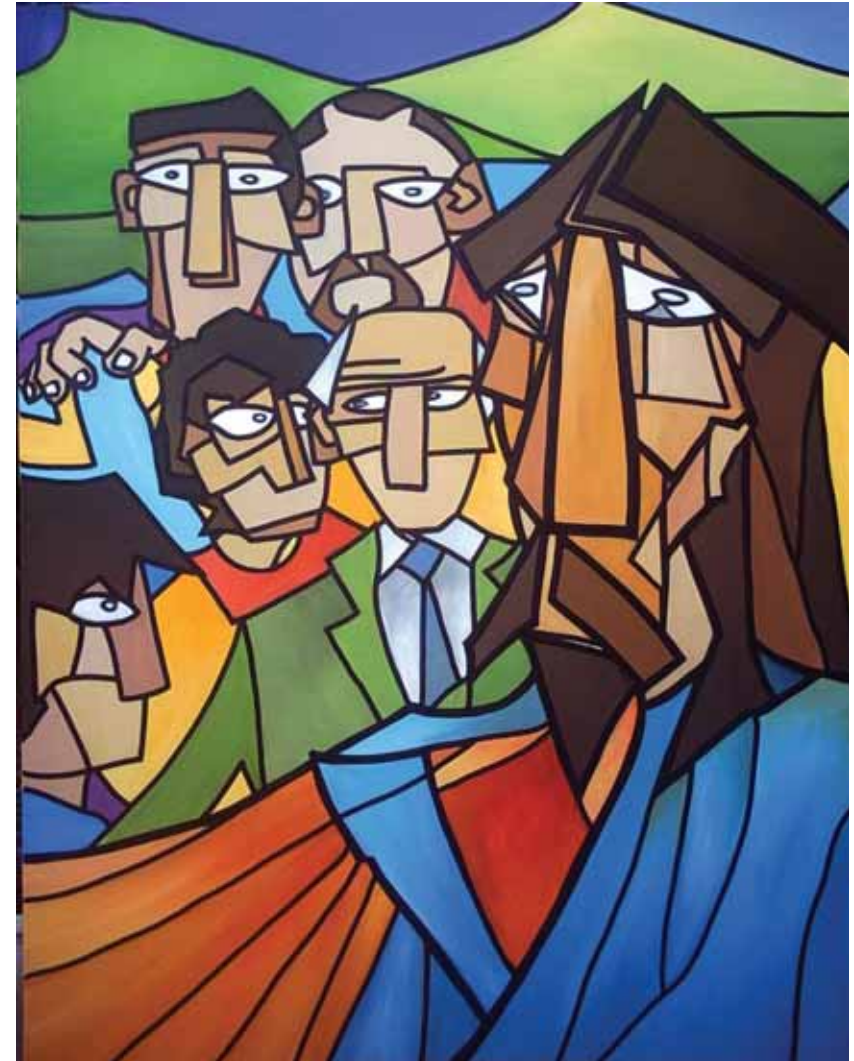
Gitanos Canasteros "les guitares" 1999
acryl on canvas; 130 x 195 cm
property of the artist



Pipe Smoking Roma 2006
acryl on canvas; 100 x 81 cm
property of the artist



Voyagers near Auvers sur Oise 2000
acryl on canvas; 92 x 73 cm
property of the artist



Familia Jimenez 1999
acryl on canvas; 116 x 89 cm
property of the artist



Rromni 2003
oil on canvas; 79 x 62 cm
property of the artist

KOCI, Ferdinand [GB]

Fier (Albania), 1968

Ferdinand Koci was obsessed by the desire to create from his earliest childhood. Born into a Romani family living in a village in communist Albania, he escaped into art from the everyday contradictions between socialist equality and age-old marginalisation. Whatever he was supposed to be doing, in the fields or at home or at school, he would start drawing on scraps of paper with pencils or charcoal, or on the ground with a stick if nothing else was available, and become absorbed, forgetting even to eat.

His father, among other things a traditional musician, also set an example by creating painstakingly realistic drawings of birds which the young boy tried to copy. When he could not match his father's technique straight away, he turned to other materials. Even when he was set to watch cows grazing, he would become lost in modelling animals and people in clay.

When his father came, he asked Ferdinand *"Where are the cows?"*

"There" replied Ferdinand, without looking up. But they were not. Two of the cows actually died. Ferdinand's special vocation was recognised, however, and he was allowed to concentrate on art at school, and then at college where he won a place at the art school in the University of Tirana, the first Rom ever to do so. Again, as in the village, he had to face the constant surprise of non-Gypsies that a dark-skinned Rom should be where no Roma had been before, but again his overwhelming talent allowed him to sidestep prejudice and create his own world, a detailed, painstaking but transformed reflection of the real world around him full of the beauty and sometimes the cruelty and pathos that we do not notice until an artist draws them to our attention.

Koci's subject matter, then comes from life. First the life of the Albanian countryside, with peasants and Roma who recall the stereotypes, but are in this instance, the real thing seen from inside their own culture, but marked by his training as an artist. First the formal academicism, inherited from the communist years of socialist realism, moderated by the influence of impressionists such as Renoir, gave a kind of gloss from the stereotypes. This has since been gradually deconstructed as life became more difficult after university. His work was taken up for use in as variety of causes, as he became that most desirable object of political exploitation, the token minority member with genuine ability. A bursary to study further in France was lost because of visa problems. The realism became marked by irony, and sometimes even, in caricature, a genuine Gillray-like savagery where Koci perceives arrogance or hypocrisy.

He is now settled in London for personal reasons. The *Second Site* was his first exhibition in England.*

Thomas Acton

* *Second Site – Daniel Baker, Ferdinand Koci, Damien Le Bas, Delaine Le Bas – An Exhibition by four artists from Roma / Gypsy / Traveller communities.* Compiled and edited by Thomas Acton and Grace Acton, University of Greenwich, London, 2006



Khereski Rromni 2001
oil on canvas; 72 x 61 cm
property of the artist



Untitled c. 2002
monotype; 50 x 36 cm
property of the artist

LE BAS, Damian [GB]

Sheffield, 1963

When we gaze into the embers of a fire we can see endless stories in the flickering interplay of glow, shadow and ash. In Damian's images there is the same depth of narrative, but the stories are not creatures of our own imagination, but paths through the labyrinths of his intersecting universes, real adventures that will not fade like a dying fire but capture forever confrontations of people, ideas, and culture.

The Damian of the pictures is in constant dialogue with a cast of bystanders, traders and grafters, and with oppressive, but ridiculous and ephemeral authorities, and celebrities like the iconic Elvis* and above all with the recurring figures of his wife and son. The ultimate bystander is the one standing watching the drama in the picture. I don't "see" Damian's pictures, I watch them, eagerly but warily, half-hopeful, but half-fearful of what will happen next, of what emotions might be stirred.

For Damian the first complexity is his own identity. Is he an underground musician who just happens to be a professional artist? When he is collecting scrap metal, could Travellers who comment *"Kushti to see you doing a bit of real work, mush!"* be half right? He is the outsider who, curiously, seems to be at ease almost anywhere. He stands at the confluence of three diasporic currents, his own family Huguenot and Irish Traveller heritage, and the English Romani heritage of his wife and in-laws. Sometimes the allusions to history are mythic – preachers in the forests, potheen in the hills or caravans from India, but more often they are in little details, of clothing or utensils utterly characteristic of their time, place and provenance, (but you don't realise this, till Damian picks them out). Not least the cultural specificity is in the written words which are sprinkled across much of his work, sometimes to the point of becoming a torrent of concrete poetry. Phrases in Irish Traveller Cant or Gammon jostle knowingly with various dialects of Romani, and other European languages and argots, scoring witty points off each other. Possessing a linguistic facility that would be the envy of many anthropologists, Damian, like Shakespeare's Henry V *"can talk with every Tinker in his tongue"*.

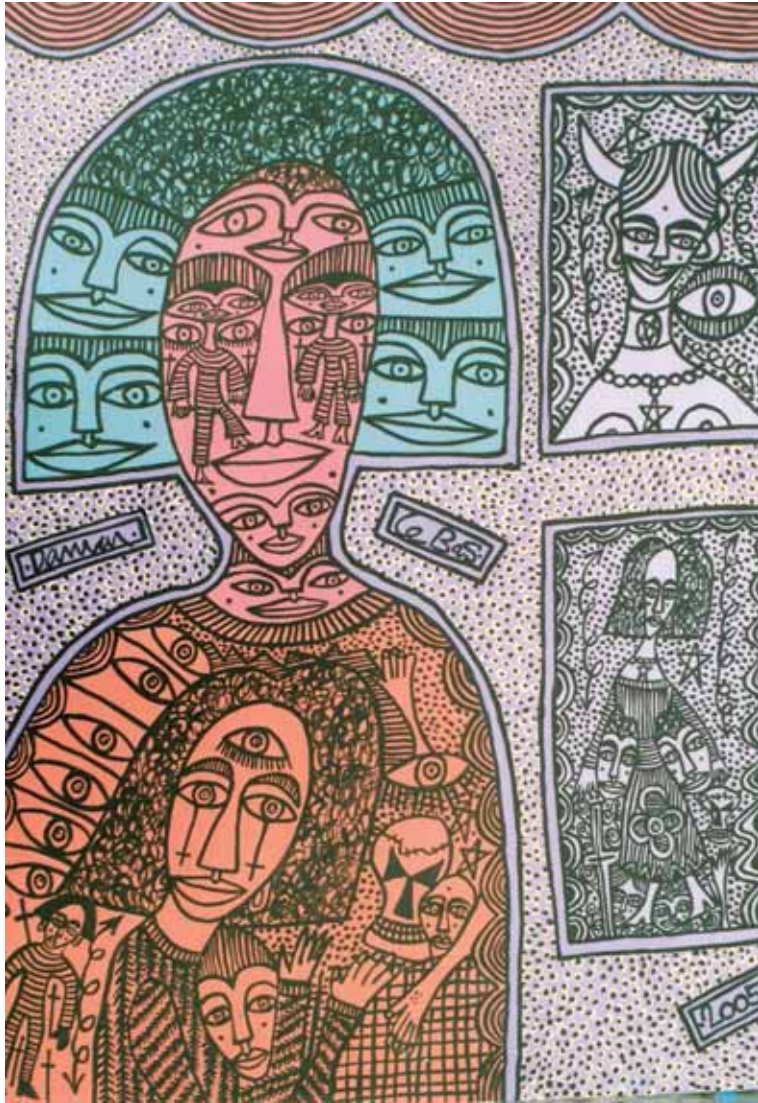
You don't have to know the meaning of every last Cant word to find meaning in Damian's pictures, however. It is not just every Tinker, but every watcher who will find himself addressed. The imagery of the family is universal, of man and woman, wife and husband, parent and child. The works of Damian and Delaine constantly quote from each other, take note of and respond to each other. They are not a joint artist, but the watchers find themselves the privileged observers of an ever-deepening relationship. You don't need to know the details of their son's achievements to see the sometimes perplexed but always committed development of the dialogue between father and son. The faces of the characters in this family drama are embedded in the clothes and limbs and flowing hair of the other characters, sometimes loving, sometimes angry, sometimes quizzical, always intimate, and always connected to their heritage by a myriad of peripheral details. Exhibition by exhibition the images broaden their scope and strike deeper and harder. In the end, don't look at these pictures for what they tell you about Damian and his family; look at them for what they will tell you about yourself.

Thomas Acton

* Painted a time when there was much speculation about Elvis' Scottish Traveller ancestry.



Needy Coves and Blornars 2005
acrylic on canvas; (size: unknown)
property of the artist



Borers Gred 2005
acrylic on canvas; (size: unknown)
property of the artist

*Installation of paintings varied
dimensions for ENG-ER-LAND 2005*





Meet Your Neighbours 2005
installation

LE BAS, Delaine [GB] Hampshire, 1965

Delaine Le Bas' work is brightly coloured, sparkling with sequins and cooing with a cartoon safety, the safety of Tom never killing Jerry. Fairy tale scenes, dotted with nursery rhymes and images from children's books clutter each work. Her images are of an England, a pretty, perfect, rosy England, one of sunshine and smiling policemen. Le Bas fills her art with what she identifies as a Traveller's love of 'textiles and patterns... patterned carpet, patterned wallpaper, the most rich cushion covers, patterned china... there is a magpie attraction to things.* Using these collaged images allows us to feel the safety of familiarity and it is from this position that Le Bas is able to question our preconceptions. Delaine Le Bas works the assumptions we bring to her work, with great pleasure: "I am playing with imagery and what people think it means, like language, giving it a double entendre, a different meaning. It's a word play, a visual imagery play."

It is only in Delaine Le Bas' art, 1950's story books and nursery wallpaper that England looks so green, so full of white bunnies and yellow ducks. Her girls wear pretty skirts; have bows in their hair and teeter on the edge of childish innocence with only the slightest suggestion of a greater knowledge. This outsider position occupied by her fairytale girls, this silent observer holds our key to understanding the double meanings within Le Bas' work. Within their landscapes of perfection we can read the small girls as a kind of portrait of Delaine, the little girl "always on the outside looking in... the only girl in school with pierced ears, the only Romani child."

And so the perfection of the images is broken, whilst Le Bas deconstructs the romanticised image of England and her Gypsy community: 'the Englishness of things, very pretty-pretty, but often with something sinister lurking there ... things aren't always happy ever after, that's also to do with my background, people wanting to glamourise it not see it for what it is, like my Nan said going out into six feet of snow with bare feet isn't glamorous'. Our interpretation of Delaine Le Bas' work changes, we begin to see through the 'pretty-pretty'. Behind the sparkle we see that the sequins spell the words 'eat, drink, fuck and die', the dolls wear black rubbish sacks as dresses, the nursery rhymes expose our racism - 'my mother said you never should play with the gypsies'. The elves in the woods are poisoning the bunnies; little girls are hiding with fear, not playing in the flowers.

The narrative of England becomes corrupted. In *A Nation of Dog Lovers* we see the absurdity of our pride as an animal loving nation which leaves a trail of dog's mess along each daily walk, whilst dismissing any Gypsy as dirty. In another work, a scene of fairytale spring is disrupted by an army badge from the first Gulf War, and the perfection of the new born animals is disturbed by the question marked cliché, 'What we don't know won't hurt us?' These works act as snapshot observations within what must be seen as a longer narrative of Delaine Le Bas' work, 'it is an ongoing project, elements of you change but others don't, it is all a continuation'. One work acts as a part of a sentence which may later join with another work, an old image may be changed and integrated into a larger image, a character re-emerges traced in from an earlier work forming an evolving image of England. Returning time and again still balancing on the edge of innocence and knowledge, between revealing and hiding sit the perfect, shy Delaine-girls.

Delaine's autobiographical art is most clearly articulated in her self portrait dolls, her husband Damian claiming that 'they're alive those things'. One of the dolls is tattooed on the breast with the embroidered words 'they say little girls should be seen but not heard', and so Delaine Le Bas takes these words to create her visual narrative, 'its like storytelling, but there isn't a written Romani culture, then maybe mine is the visual equivalent of that, mine is visual storytelling.'

Nathaniel Hepburn

* All quotes from interview with Nathaniel Hepburn at Delaine Le Bas' house in Worthing on 20.1.06



Four Facts of Life 2004-2005
mixed media on fabric; 38 x 24 cm
property of the artist



A Nation of Dog Lovers 2004-2005
applique and embroidery; 65 x 88.5 cm
property of the artist



Installation
Photo by Tara Darby



Crucified 2005
mixed media; h: 30 cm
property of the artist



Damaged Good (detail) 2003-2005
mixed media on fabric; h: 70 cm
property of the artist



Black Butterfly 2000
installation

LUMBERG, Kiba [FIN]

Lappeenranta, 1956

The pictures I make. There is no common theme, only pictorial glimpses of events, moods. When you try to do your best. Sometimes the brain was completely stumped, nothing moving in the mind's recesses. And the sleepless nights, watching the night sky, the yard and the park – the familiar haunts. Sleepless nights. How the night transforms even familiar places. It gives rise to images in the mind, memories, fragments of things you forgot you remembered, things that never were, places, moments, sensations – as if from the realm of dreams, even though I was awake.

I also portray loneliness in some of my work, the loneliness that is in all of us, one way or another. And Gypsy thoughts, tableaux of the dark people. In some picture a person or persons get caught up in events, in another a woman sits looking at a table; letters are reflected on its surface, a dolphin and a palm tree. How I would like to go on holiday, lie under a palm tree, lazily watch a dolphin play in the sea. Somehow the mind took wing away from itself, outside as it were, under the skin of the people in the pictures, like characters in a play – each a life happening in a point of their own.

I am telling a story in images. I am making a story that might be an event in your life, a moment inscribed in the mind's memory. I am making the story together with the works, like sensing different waves of emotion – in myself and in others. To see through the night into unity, something you cannot see in the light of day. Like seeing into the collective flow of humanity opened up by the nocturnal subconscious. And of course there is the stress, the challenge that the result of my efforts, the works, be understandable to other people besides me, that the one who sees and watches would also feel something.

And money problems, studio rent is overdue. Help! How am I going to pay this and that bill, my skin is red raw. From scratching. The rash is getting worse again, my breath is whistling, asthma is gnawing at me and my lungs ache. The entire chest is aching, I've got to go on. And so I start going to the gym again after a long break. My mood gets better, I get my strength back. My mind starts working again, I believe that things will work out. I continue to make pictures, the pencil flies over the paper, the colours sing a multicoloured melody, pictures are born.

Kiba Lumberg



Black Butterfly (detail) 2000



Letters Falling from the Sky 2004
gouache; 60 x 84 cm
property of the artist



Longing for Holiday 2004
gouache, acrylic; 59 x 84 cm
property of the artist



Chastened 2003
acrylic, pencil, gouache; 58 x 83 cm
property of the artist



Golden Moment 1996
gouache, acrylic; 99 x 50 cm
property of the artist



Sculpture 1994
oil and gold on wood; 180 x 60 x 15 cm
private property

MORELLI, Bruno [I]

Avezzano, 1957

Bruno Morelli was born in 1957, in Avezzano. Originally a self-taught artist, he has experimented with several modes of expression, styles and techniques, ever since the beginning of his career. To make his own style, he found it important to school himself in art history and the various techniques, and he attended classes at the Secondary Arts School in Rome, and the Academy of Arts in Aquila. He made a degree in art history, and his dissertation was entitled *The representation of the Roma in art*. He participated at the international exhibition organized by Sandra Jayat in 1985, where he was received enthusiastically. In 1996, he held a retrospective exhibition in Avezzano, which was called *Roma Aesthetics*. On the occasion of the display, the city awarded him its arts prize.

Tímea Junghaus



Woman-snake 1994
oil and gold on wood; 56 x 130 cm
private property



Coma – Dead Faint 1997
mixed technique (watercolour, ink) paper on cardboard; 30.4 x 21.5 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



Stop Racism 1998
black ink, ink pen on board; 85.5 x 61 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno

OLÁH, Dušan [SK] Detva, 1960

Dušan Oláh was born on July 15, 1960, in Detva (SK). He has been fond of painting since his childhood, and his interest was further stimulated by a visual arts workshop he attended in the town, and by the meeting visual artist Mikuláš Wölfi. He devoted himself to the arts completely after he became unemployed in the early 1990s. Though oil painting is his favourite technique, Dušan Oláh resorts to pen drawing for financial reasons. His lines and points give the impression of graphic art. The artist's works reflect his disappointment at the loss of traditional Romani values. He has won several prizes at amateur artist's competitions in Slovakia. Currently unemployed, he lives in Detva. His brother Tibor is also an artist.

Jana Horváthová



Jarovnice Tragedy (Flood on Romani Settlement 1998) 2000
oil on fibreboard; 85.2 x 75.5 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



Divine Transfiguration – Leda with the Swan 2002
mixed technique (collage, black ink, orange pastel) on cardboard; 61 x 43 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



Gypsy Girl in a Hat undated
oil on canvas; 95 x 79 cm
Romart Foundation, Budapest

OLÁH, Jolán [H]

Salgótarján, 1932

Despite being short and of a fragile constitution, Jolán Oláh once worked in a mine, as a loader: she used to work where there was no sufficient room for men. She started drawing when she was declared unfit for work and pensioned off at the age of thirty. Even as a child, she would make clay sculptures, but she could not attend school. As the oldest daughter in the family, she would relieve her ailing mother of the task of caring for nine children. She learned to read and write from her own husband and children when they were already grownups.

Jolán Oláh met Balázs András Balogh when they were both at the beginning of their careers as painters. Balogh was the one to introduce Oláh to the art of priming a canvas, thinning oil paints and mixing colours, to encourage her to take up painting. A look at the entire oeuvre shows the uncertainties of the beginnings. At first she would outline the composition in pencil, a practice which slowly gave way to an uninhibited, bold and technically brilliant use of the brush, so conspicuous in her late works. In the last five or six years of her life she would not even stretch the canvases, but lay it on her bed, kneel before it, and draw her pastose lines as if in an act of supplication, as if each work were a sacrifice on the shrine of the ailing woman artist. Even her work method was so peculiarly female: laid on her sheet, the unstretched, wet canvas became a salve on her pains and traumas. Jolán Oláh's oeuvre was usually approached through the category of the naïve (Roma) artist. This is how she is classified in Pál Bánszky's *A képzőművészet vadvirágai. 100 népművészeti és naiv alkotó* [Art's Wildflowers. A Hundred Folk and Naïve Artists],* and it was under this heading that she exhibited in the company of self-taught Roma artists in 1979, 1989 and 2000. The first approach to her art that broke the mould of folk or naïve art, and sought to position her work in the history of (contemporary) Hungarian art, occurred with the exhibition of Ernst Museum, *The Second Sex – Women's Art in Hungary 1960-2000*, which opened in September 2000.**

Jolán Oláh's works abound in emblematic signs, like small adobe houses, saplings, birds and deer, faces frozen in suggestive, uniform, mask-like expressions, as well as figures sitting in a huddled, almost foetal position, in the lower half or upper corner of the pictures. Oláh's tree representations symbolise Life and Death, ceaseless growth and development, perpetual renewal, and time (both cyclic and irreversible); they are vegetable embodiments of the divine. The figures, painted like masks, with scared looks, and usually in a foetal posture, suggest that these works are attempts, through memory and the evocation of happiness, to come to terms with trauma and pain.

Tímea Junghaus

* Bánszky, Pál: *A képzőművészet vadvirágai. 100 népművészeti és naiv alkotó*. Kecskemét, Írisz Repro, 1997, p. 32.

** Ernst Museum. *A második nem. (Népművészet Magyarországon 1960-2000)*. September 21 – October 11, 2000. The exhibition was curated by Katalin Keserü.



Girl in Blue Dress with Pigeon undated
oil on panel; 70 x 50 cm
Romart Foundation, Budapest



Horse Carriage undated
oil on canvas; (size: unknown)
Romart Foundation, Budapest



Gemerská Panica – Autumn Mood with Romani Shack 1998
oil on canvas; 69.5 x 51 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



Study for a Landscape 2000
watercolour on board; 29.6 x 32 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno

OLÁH, Tibor [SK] Detva, 1952

Tibor Oláh was born on May 30, 1952, in Detva (SK) in a family with eight children. He started painting around 1990, inspired by his brother Dušan, who is also an artist. He is interested in oil painting, using canvas or fibreboard as support. His favourite theme is nature, its atmosphere and transformation. He regularly wins prizes at amateur competitions. In 1996 he won the first prize of an amateur competition in the Rožňava region. He first participated at a group exhibition in Dubnice nad Váhom in 1995, and at many others since then.

Tibor Oláh was living and working in Rožňava for a long time, and has recently settled in Plešivce (SK) with his new wife. He is currently unemployed.

Jana Horváthová



Obuvnická street in Košice 1996
oil on plywood; 59 x 50 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



Loneliness in Detva 1998-1999
oil on plywood; 72.5 x 90 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



Mara and the Policeman 1972 2000
oil on chipboard; 85 x 105 cm
Romart Foundation, Budapest

[inscription: "Medical report the police was notified naturally I was the one who got punished because I dared to stand five metres ahead of him not behind him which is why he beat me up – he died after the political transition."]

OMARA (OLÁH, Mara) [H]

Monor, 1945

Mara Oláh started painting at the age of 43, after her mother's death. Parallel with her autobiography, she was painting major traumas in her life, in chronological order, using art as a therapeutic tool to come to terms with, and overcome, humiliation, the grief felt over losing her mother, the anguish of alienation from her daughter, the physical pain of her cancer.

Since 1992, all her pictures have been completed with inscriptions. She made the decision when at a 1992 exhibition in Szeged, where her picture of a woman on all fours in the grass was presented as "Mara Resting," when it in fact represented Mara looking for her glass eye in the grass, a real occurrence. At the same exhibition, the double portrait of OMARA and her sister was put on display as "Lesbians." Mara had to ask the curator what the word meant. Outraged by the misunderstanding, she would later paint a picture with "lesbians." The first blue pictures appeared in 1997, because, as she puts it in her self-published autobiography: "*Blue was always the colour of my daughter, blue was her best dress when she was a little girl, she wanted her room to be painted blue when she grew up, it was her favourite. The happiest day of my life was when my daughter came over to stay with me, we were making photos, and those which had my daughter on turned blue. We had no idea what happened, I'm sure it was my daughter's beautiful blue eyes that tainted the pictures blue. In 1997 I had a dream which told me I should paint the picture I was to give to my daughter on her name day in blue. I could hardly wait to lay my hands on the paint and the boards. I had ice blue and white at home. And what did I paint? Myself with my hand on my heart, bowing deeply, thanking God for creating this in my dream. My daughter is the person I love most in the world, and this way I could make my girl's dream come true.*" *

Painted in various tones of blue and complemented with textual explanations and wisdoms, the *Blue pictures* are confessions, about the artist's most important, personal experiences, her relationship with her daughter, her ordeals as a Roma and a woman. The inscriptions not only verbalize the story of the narrative pictures, but also relate the time of the event, and contain reflections that show their relevance for the present and the future. A good example is *Mara and the Policeman*: the story of young Mara, who refused to stand with her bicycle behind the policeman in the line waiting at the railway crossing, because she had arrived earlier; despite there being several eye-witnesses, the policeman beat her almost to death.

In the picture that represents the engagement of Omara's daughter, Mara gives voice to her indignation over the fiancé refusing to marry her (a gadjo, Mara thinks, who had no intentions to marry a Gypsy girl), and adds the line to the bottom: "*AND IT TURNED OUT I WAS RIGHT, HE HAS LEFT MY DAUGHTER.*" As if this sentence were the last mantra of a magic chant. This is needed for the lesson to be complete: the evil one is punished, the prophecy of the priestess-artist becomes reality.

When it comes to representing the interests of the Roma, Omara does not confine herself to the visual arts: she speaks out through actions and statements she makes on television, in printed and electronic journals. She visits prisons to talk with the inmates and tell them about the life of the Roma on the "outside." Though she would probably refrain from using such words, hers is a politically conscious, activist art.

Tímea Junghaus

* *Omara festőművész* [Painter Omara]. Self-published in 1000 copies. Szolnok, Repro Stúdió, 1997.



Little Mara in First Grade undated
oil, fibreboard; 50 x 70 cm
private property

[Inscription: "Mara in first grade"
"But if she doesn't stand it she will end up like the other gypsy kids in institutions" 1952]



Immediate Litigation 1998
oil, fibreboard; 60 x 90 cm
private property

[Inscription: "Immediate litigation", "1974", "My daughter is a secretary and she loves her job", "This is without precedent", "If - the - teacher - is - frustrated - by - the - first-graders she - should - leave - the - school - and - earn a living not with - the innocent - children - but - at - the - corner of - the - street", "Outrageous", "Unbelievable?", "Mr. Director: during - my - 40 - years - i - havent - seen - writing like this", "Little Marika's notebook. I do not acknowledge this bad grade", "Mother" "My dimond daughter", "Father", "We made her take an exam from the whole year", "To me not just the child but the mother is getting a good grade too", "Poor director has died by the time i could - have - shown - him her report - card", "Next day i took her to an other school in the country side she had to take a long bus - ride - every - day - of her - first-grade school-year"]



I Already Felt it Then That Who I Love is Not for Me 2000
oil, fibreboard; 60 x 90 cm
private property

[Inscription: "The peasant – mother – of – the – groom – sent – the – police – after – me – so that
– the – engagement – would – be – canceled", "1962"]



My Daughter is Getting Married 2001
oil, fibreboard; 50 x 70 cm
private property

[Inscription: "I was right he has left my daughter since, just as I felt he would 1989"
"I know that I think conservatively but my only diamond daughter deserves the white wedding
dress, if you are a serious groom"]



In Prison 1996
oil on chipboard;
72 x 38 cm
Museum of
Ethnography,
Budapest

ORSÓS, Teréz [H]

Komló, 1956

In 2004, Teri Orsós took part at the exhibition in Graz which was organized by the acclaimed curator, Anton Lederer, and which presented self-taught Roma artists in the company of acknowledged European creators.* The very theme of the exhibition was the interaction between the Roma and the majority society. Orsós's works were well-received by the public, and she was the one to earn the most praise from professional reviewers. This is how she describes her life: "I was born in Komló, on June 16, 1956. I come from a family of Beas Roma with fifteen children. My father was a miner, my mother tended to us. I grew up in the Komló shantytown, where I was born. I have vivid memories of my first art class. The teacher, Magdolna Koltai urged me to draw and paint. I had drawn up to that point, like any other child, but from then on, with even more pleasure, I drew what was in me, what I had imbibed. I was given the first prize at the national children's drawing contest. I was awarded holiday trips, a nice diploma. This creative period ended when I was fourteen. I didn't even finish eighth grade, because love came knocking on the door after the seventh, he was the nicest boy in the shantytown, and would become my husband. I did not paint again until I was nineteen, when I met Ms. Koltai again, and we set up an adults' creative workshop. We didn't have electricity in the shantytown, I would paint by candlelight – and I was happy. In 1979, I took part at the National Exhibition of Self-taught Artists. I met Pál Bánszky, and learned what I was doing may have some value. I had not sold a single picture up to that point. One exhibition followed another, they showed my pictures abroad, in Austria and Czechoslovakia. This provided further stimulus for me to paint. And then suddenly I could not pay the heating bill. And then something else. Things got really confused around me. I was losing something of me every day. In 1997 the flat was auctioned off. We don't even know when we will be thrown on the street. For a long time, I haven't been able to paint the way I would like to. And I would like to paint so much! I want to show the traditions of the Roma in my pictures, our culture, our customs." **

These pictures have little to do with "the careless happiness of the primitive", those paintings in the Kecskemét Naïve Museum of Hungary, the idyllic or petit bourgeois scenes of self-taught artists, or the vividly coloured visionary painting of Roma creators. They are instead unique both within contemporary women's art and contemporary Roma painting: they are indignant, angry, political and investigatory testimonies the discrimination women and the Roma experience, appeals to end prejudice and violence. With pictures the official culture deems naïve, Teréz Orsós deals with the same problems that are addressed in western countries by activist and public art, the advocates of eco-cultures.

Timea Junghaus

* Lederer, Anton– Makovec, Margarete : *We Are What We Are.*

Aspects of Roma Life in Contemporary Art. Graz: Rotor, 2004.

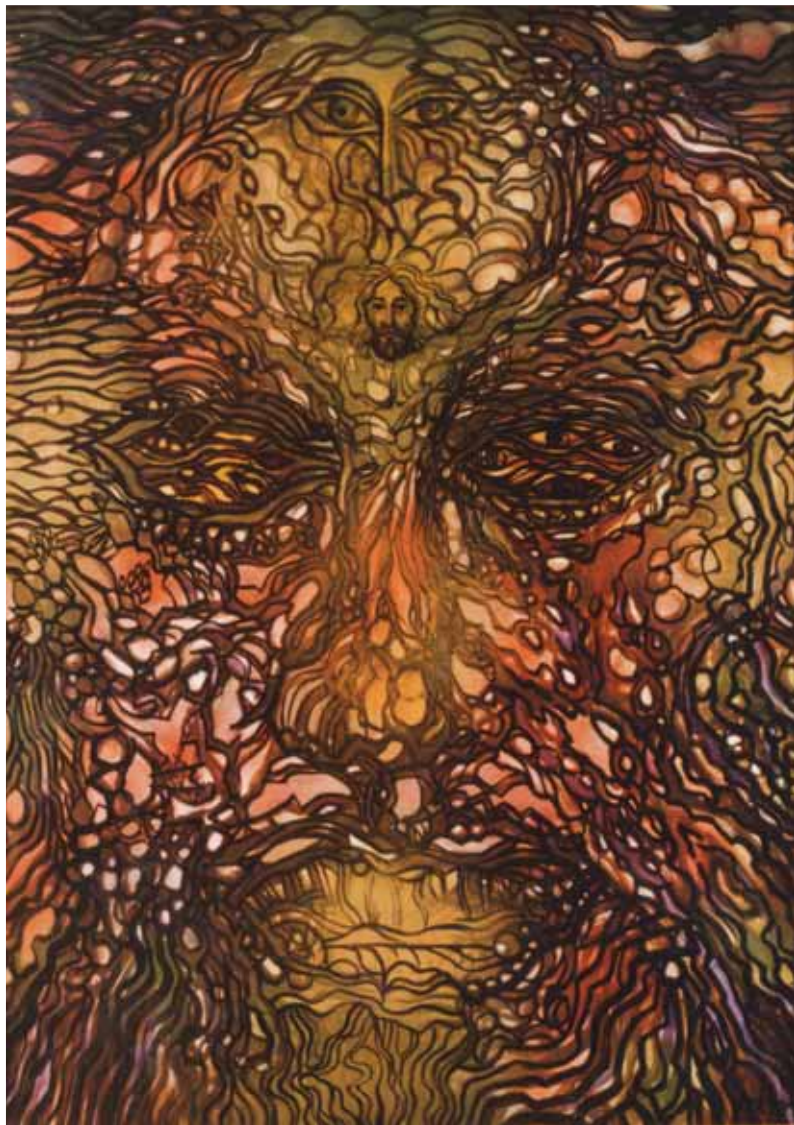
** Teréz Orsós in: Zsigó, Jenő (ed.): *A Magyarországi Roma Parlament Képtára*
[The Gallery of the Hungarian Roma Parliament]. Budapest, 1998.



Bride 1998
oil on chipboard; 120 x 150 cm
Museum of Ethnography, Budapest



On the Bench 2000
oil on chipboard; 50 x 66 cm
Museum of Ethnography, Budapest



The Face of God undated
oil on fibreboard; 110 x 90 cm
private collection

PÉLI, Tamás [H]

Budapest, 1948 – Budapest, 1994

Tamás Péli was born in Budapest, in 1948. He studied art at the Secondary School for Visual and Applied Art, and the mural faculty of the Dutch Royal Academy of Art. Between 1970 and 1976, he was an active figure of the Amsterdam art scene. In 1972, he made glass window applications for the chapel of the Andreas Hospital in Amsterdam, with scenes from the Old and New Testament, and prepared paintings, wooden and metal sculptures for the Spar Bank van de Stadt. His diploma piece, on display in the Romanesque chapel of the Amsterdam Cultural Centre, was awarded first prize at the arts competition of the Amsterdam City Council.

From 1976, he also exhibited in Hungary. The characteristic colouring of his pictures – Vandyke brown, gold, red and green constituting the “bass line” –, the mythological and historical subjects, and his conscious attempt to create the monumental representation of Roma culture, together created a standard that still exerts its influence in contemporary art.

In 1982, he was commissioned by the Ervin Szabó Metropolitan Library to make a 12-square metre triptych, which commemorates Friar Juliánus, Sándor Kőrösi Csoma and János Apáczai Csere (Dagály Street, 13th District).

His large panel, *Birth*, was unveiled on September 24 1983, in the Tiszadob Castle, also a Children's Home. A documentary account of the history of the Roma in Hungary, the virtuoso piece is monumental not only in its size – almost 43 square metre –, but also in its effect. It presents the finest figures of contemporary Roma culture, and weaves together past and present with the Roma myth of origin, erecting a timeless memorial, one that stands above history and ages, for the Roma people.

Tamás Péli died on November 22 1994, in Budapest. He was laid to rest in the Kerepesi Road cemetery, near the graves of Mihály Munkácsy and Tivadar Csontváry Kosztka.

Tímea Junghaus



Untitled undated
oil on fibreboard; 80 x 60 cm
private collection



Judith undated
oil on fibreboard; 110 x 90 cm
private collection



In Memoriam undated
metal; 185 x 19 x 19 cm
property of the artist



The Trace of Suffer undated
wood and metal; 165 x 12 x 12 cm
property of the artist

PETRE, Marian [RO] Draganesti-Olt, 1963

Marian Petre was born in 1963, in Draganesti-Olt, Romania. A graduate of the Nicolae Grigorescu University of Art in Bucharest, Romania, he is an established sculptor and an outspoken and proud member of the Romanian Roma community. He is a founder of the Cultural Association Artisroma, which is providing encouragement and financial support for talented Roma people to excel in the fields of visual arts, and promotes Roma representation through the arts throughout Romania.

Petre had several individual exhibitions, in such prestigious spaces as the Bucharest Caminul Artei Gallery, (1997-1998), the Bucharest Simeza Gallery (2003), and the Ramnicu-Valcea Museum of Artin (2003). He has also presented his works with great success in the international scene: in 1999 he exhibited in the Dantesca in Ravenna, Italy, and in 2004 his show opened in the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space.

As an acknowledgement of his artistic excellence, he won the third prize at the Bucharest Salon of Art in 2002.

Timea Junghaus



The X-ray of Love undated
metal; 70 x 54 x 35 cm
property of the artist



The Trace undated
wood and metal; 28 x 22 x 18 cm
property of the artist



"Dances Russes" 1937
gouache; (size: unknown)
location unknown

POLIAKOFF, Serge [F]

Moscow, 1900 – Paris, 1969

Serge Poliakoff (Sergei Poliakov) was born in Moscow in 1900, as the thirteenth of fourteen children. He left Russia in 1919, and after moving from Constantinople to Sofia, Belgrade, Vienna and Berlin, he settled in Paris in 1923. He began to study painting in 1930 at the Académie Frochot and the Grande Chaumière, supporting himself by playing the guitar in the evenings. Between 1935 and 1937, he lived in London, where he studied at the Slade School of Art. After returning to Paris, he met Vassily Kandinsky, who made a great influence on his art. He regularly visited the "jours fixes" of Sonia and Robert Delaunay, and made friends with Otto Freundlich. Poliakoff painted his first abstract pictures in 1938, and exhibited them in the Galerie "le niveau" for the first time. His first one-man exhibition was held at the Galerie L'Esquisse, in 1945.

Poliakoff was awarded the Kandinsky Prize in 1947, and shortly thereafter, by around 1948, he arrived at his mature style, with fine-coloured abstract pictures. Though he had already gained some reputation with his pictures, it was not until 1952 that he was able to give up his career as a professional musician and devote all his time to painting.

Poliakoff became a French citizen in 1962. He took part on the Venice Biennale, where a whole room was devoted to his works. He died in Paris.

Tímea Junghaus



Red Composition 1958
oil on wood; 92 x 73 cm
location unknown



Composition 1969
gouache; 63 x 48 cm
location unknown



Holocaust Series 8 2004
acrylic, ink and pencil on paper; 105 x 75 cm
Grattan Puxon, London

POLLOK, Katarzyna [D]

Kiev, 1961

In my artistic expression I am travelling across boundaries. This also means not adhering to any fixed style or genre, but roaming in a nomadic fashion through all the forms, traditions, "icons" and images I come across in my life. My art is also both the means and the outcome of my (personal?) struggle for Roma identity. We Romani painters still have to generate something unique and inimitable from our Gypsy/Romani identity, as we did in our music a long time ago. My goal has always been to achieve something like that, but there is still a long way to go.

There are four special motifs which drive my art. One is the Holocaust: our common heritage – painting the Holocaust as a source of our people's common identity, and showing it all really happened.

Crossing, merging and integrating – I am using symbols, ornaments, designs, metaphors, patterns from all over the world; whenever I encounter a new country or culture (I travel a lot), I take something with me and integrate it in my art. Merging cultures, religious symbols, ethnicities and nations of the world is both a search for a new, cosmopolitan, universal identity, and my private quest for my own identity.

The Indian roots: intensity and vibrancy. This is also part of our common heritage, the vibrant and lucky part. I use very strong colours, strongly contrasted and contoured designs to point out the strength of our old (lost?) culture, our joie de vivre.

Hiding, survival and longing for justice – These are stories, not styles or techniques. These subjects keep recurring in my works.

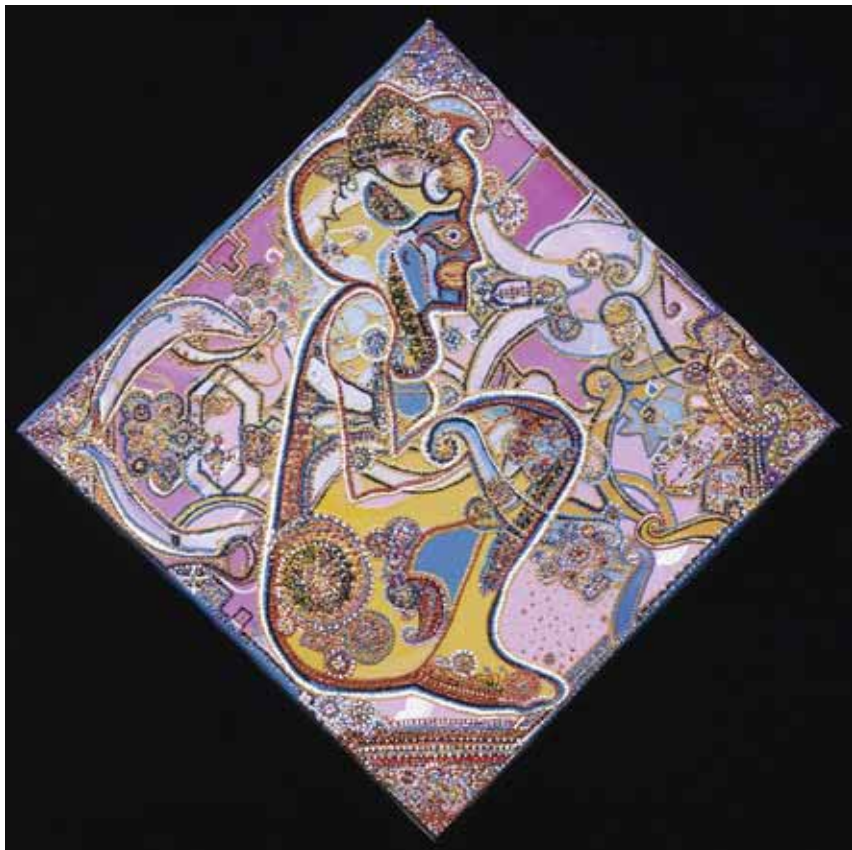
Katarzyna Pollok



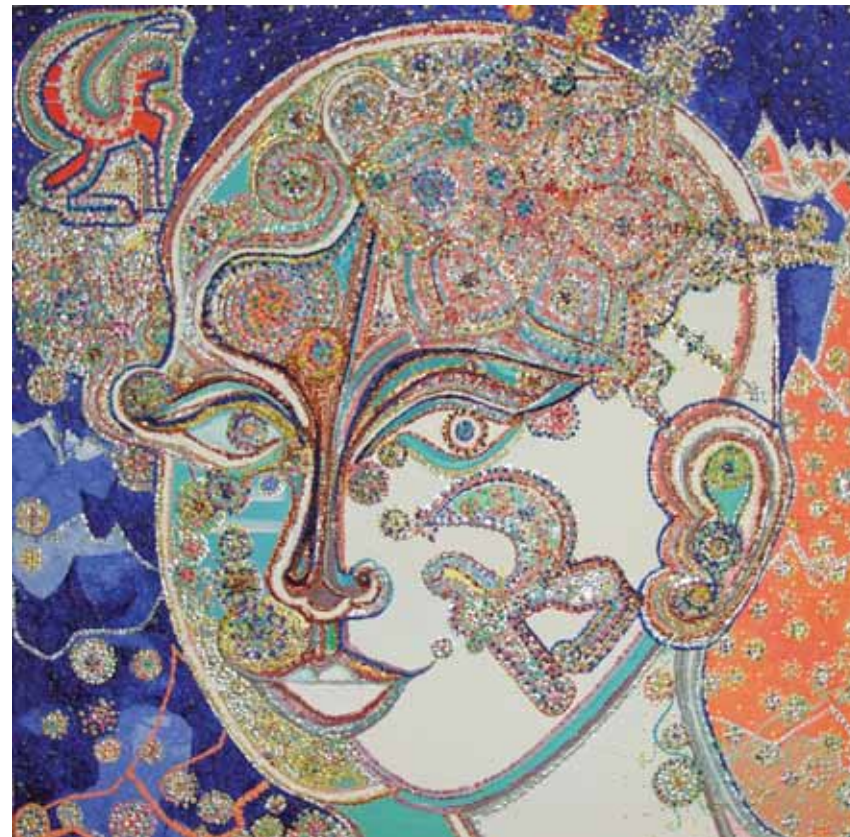
Three Indian Ladies 2003
acrylic on canvas; 150 x 107 cm
property of the artist



Gypsy Angel on Gypsy Wheel 2001
acrylic on canvas; 150 x 100 cm
property of the artist



Pink Maat 2001
acrylic on canvas; 50 x 50 cm
property of the artist



Secret of Dharamsala 2005
acrylic on canvas; 60 x 60 cm
property of the artist



Romani Wedding 2005
oil on canvas; 69.5 x 86 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



Family Home (Ladice) 2000
oil on canvas; 120 x 75 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno

RÁC, Rudolf [SK, CZ] Ladice, 1942

Rudolf Rác was born on January 9, 1942, in Ladice, Zlaté Moravce (now Nitra) district (SK). In 1955, the whole family moved to Northern Bohemia where his parents worked in agriculture. *"I went to school partly in Slovakia, partly in the Czech Republic. I had good marks in school but I did not have a chance to continue my studies. Before I could finish elementary school, my father died, and my mother could not allow to pay for my studies. In order to support my brothers and the family I went to work on construction sites. Then I became a bricklayer."*

Rudolf Rác started to paint when he was 59, after meeting with an arts teacher in France where he was working temporarily. The teacher showed him a few techniques. *"He asserted: I have talent."* After this meeting, Rác bought books, learned the techniques of oil painting, and started to paint landscapes. Later he turned to the theme of Roma life. He first exhibited in 2000 in Prague (Divadle Rokoko), in the company of other Romani artists.

The artist says he has a difficult time working, but he has not given up painting.

Jana Horváthová



Wonder-Barrack 2004
installation

RÁCSZNÉ KALÁNYOS, Gyöngyi [H]

Komló, 1956

Gyöngyi Ráczné Kalányos, comes from a family of Beas Roma. She has been painting since her childhood, and she often illustrates books and other publications of Roma culture. The world that appears in her pictures is the creation of her imagination, at a remove from reality like Márta Bada's. With Gyöngyi Kalányos, however, the figures are always taken from her own life: they are herself, her husband and their five children. Art historian and curator Emese Süvecz, one of the organizers of the 2004 Tiszadob artists' camp, recalls her impressions of Gyöngyi Kalányos thus: *"This image of the painting Roma woman is for me a metaphor for Roma emancipation. Not that I think this particular activity, oil painting, is the only form of art, restricted as it is in space and time, and formerly by class and gender. But I do think that by painting, Gyöngyi Kalányos speaks in the name of a need. A need that concerns not only the status of the Roma, but also the position of Roma women in the world we live in."**

Gyöngyi Kalányos produced what she considers the epitome of her lifework in March 2004, for Műcsarnok's exhibition *Hidden Holocaust*. The painting decorated the exterior wall of a structure set up inside the exhibition hall, whose size and architecture imitated the barracks of Auschwitz. Rácz's concept was to transform the barrack, which was finished five days before the opening of the exhibition. Thanks to those "artists, friends, Roma, Hungarians" whom the artist invited to participate, the building metamorphosed into a Magic Barrack, which was divested of its negative connotations.

The picture relates a decisive experience of the artist, one that happened at the time of her preparing for the Holocaust exhibition. Gyöngyi Kalányos feels greatly indebted to her former arts teacher, who would buy clothes, drawing instruments and school equipment for the little girl who came from a poor family. The artist was still a child when they became divided by fate. It was on the stairs of Műcsarnok, more than thirty years later, that they first met again. The desire for reunion concerns not only her mentor, the former teacher, but also her mother, whose grave is to be seen on the third panel, and with whom she hopes to meet in the hereafter. This interpretation adds to the meaning of the work with relation to the Holocaust as well, offering the promise of reunion with the lost victims in the world to come.

Gyöngyi Kalányos's pictures teem with the fantastic beings of an imaginary world, winged creatures, monsters, trees whose roots reach the centre of the Earth, yet they relate real events, a life of tragic hardships and harsh, sometimes inhuman circumstances.

Tímea Junghaus

* Süvecz, Emese: *Tiszadobi Alkotótábor* [Tiszadob Artists' Camp]. Műértő, August 2003.



Seven Twin Stag-snakes I-II. 1995
oil on panel; I. 196 x 280 cm; II. 196 x 280 cm
Hungarian Institute for Culture, Budapest



Old Gypsy Woman undated
oil on canvas; (size: unknown)
property of the artist



Old Gypsy Man undated
oil on canvas; (size: unknown)
property of the artist

RAPORTORU, Eugen [RO]

Bucharest, 1961

Eugen Raportoru was born on December 8th 1961 in Bucharest. He graduated at the Nicola Tonitza High School. His masters were Ion Brodeală, Afane Teodoreanu Tatiana, Adina Paula Moscu and Corneliu Puiu Eugen Ionescu. He is a member of the Union of Moldavian Artists. Raportoru shares a studio with three other artists. Their friendship provides influence and inspiration for their art. For Raportoru, this partnership is a source of material and spiritual stability and strength.

His talent for painting and graphics was already discovered at age of 14, when he exhibited at the Grivița Theatre. Several individual shows followed, the most successful ones were those in the Municipal Gallery of Bucharest in 2000, in the National Theatre in Bucharest in 2003, and in the UNESCO building in 2004. He was commissioned to illustrate several books, such as the Romanian-Hungarian-Romany Trilingual Dictionary of Vanemonde Publishing House (2001); a volume of Biblical texts in Romany, published by the PROVIDENTA Foundation (2002); a reader for Romani children by Vanemonde Publishing House (2001); and *The History and Traditions of the Romani People* and the *Civic Educational Guide*, both editions of A.M.M. (2004).

He has many committed collectors. His works can be found in private collections in Switzerland, Sweden, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, the USA and Canada.

Timea Junghaus



Alpha-Omega 1997
oil on canvas; 57 x 74 cm
private property

RUDEVICS, Karlis [LV] 1939-2002

Karlis Rudevics was born on 19 January 1939, as the tenth child of a family, which moved to Riga in 1942, to escape the Roma Holocaust. He was seven, when he lost his mother. From the age thirteen he had to provide for himself. Though formally he only completed his secondary schools, he became erudite in world literature, art, history, philosophy and languages, including Sanskrit, all through self-teaching. He began to write poems, mostly in two languages, while still in secondary school. His work in literature became supplemented with linguistics when he met Leksa Manush, who was to become a very good friend. They made the first Romani-Latvian-English etymological dictionary, and with Janis Neilands, a Latvian-Gypsy dictionary. He also did outstanding work in organizing festivals for all Latvian minorities, arranging for adult education for illiterate Romani people, and publishing the first Romani book for children.

Visionary realism is the term that describes most accurately his work as a visual artist. In his tableaux he tries to prove that the Roma are like any other humans, and this ambition to gain recognition for the Roma informs all his pictures. The figures in his paintings stand in dignified, proud postures, they are rich and free, they are reading books or riding horses. Nudes or the Gypsy Venus are as natural parts of his iconography as are surrealistic visions of the past, with elopements and children and dogs. Karlis Rudevics is always a civil rights activist, whether he is painting, writing poetry in two languages or editing a dictionary.

Ágnes Daróczi



Nail undated
oil on canvas; (size: unknown)
private property



We Were Birds Once 1995
oil on canvas; 85 x 110 cm
private property



Childhood 1981
oil on canvas; (size: unknown)
private property

SEFEROV, Samuil [BG]

Sofia, 1943

In the room of Samuil Seferov, a.k.a. Souli, there is a small iron bird his father smithed. It is a symbolic reminder of the past – for an artist who even had to change his name, because the presence of the Turkish and Roma minorities in Bulgaria was denied until the 1990s. Originally named Suleiman, the painter had to adopt a Slavic name when already an adult, even though he was an acknowledged artist by the late 1970s – his works were featured, among other places, at the permanent exhibition of the Gabrovo Museum of Humour. Perhaps there is no other Roma visual artists in whose works the Roma appear so much an entity, with its own peculiar world view, philosophy and values.

The figures in his works, naturally Roma, stand not only for the magic beauty of childhood, but represent a system of values that informs their outlook on the world; this includes the esteem for large families, as a supporting force; rejecting the rush for money, as if embodying the Gypsy saying, according to which "it is we who make money, and it is not money that makes us"; thinking about the celestial world of gods in anthropomorphic terms, as if it were a large family.

His first creative period abounds in childhood memories. The permanent and marked presence of the Vandyke brown distinguishes and unites these works. Yet, it does not take a distinctive brown for his hovering, lyrical figures to illuminate our hearts.

Ágnes Daróczi



Gas Chamber 2004
mixed technique (oil, plaster material) on paper; 16.5 x 11.5 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno

STOJKA, Ceija [A]

Štýrsko, 1933

Ceija Stojka was born on May 23, 1933, in Štýrsko (Kraubarth). *"I was born into a family of Vlax Roma, who followed a traditional nomadic life. I was the fifth child of my parents who had six children altogether. Near a small village my mother said: The time has come! and in half an hour I came into this world. They bathed me in the cold runnel."*

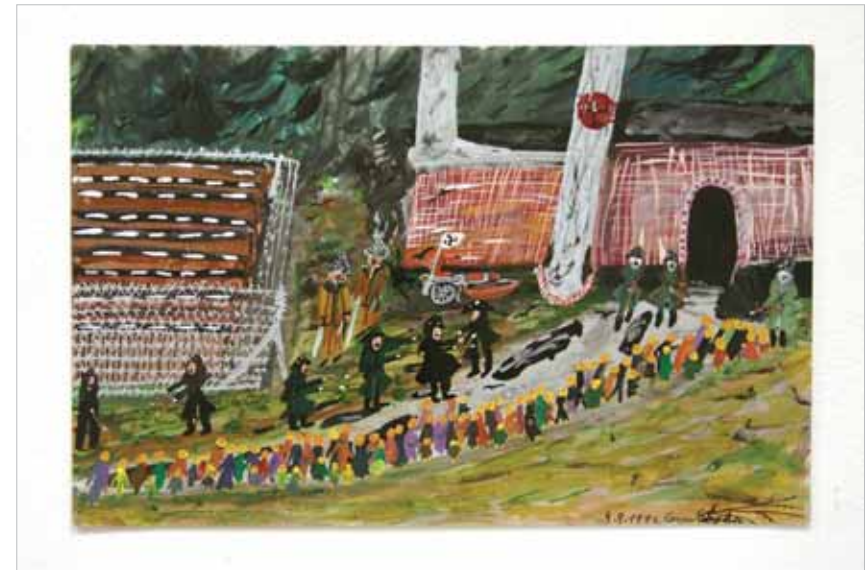
It was May. There was a lot of gypsies with us and they celebrated my birth for five more days. The next day I was baptized. This is something very important for the Roma." This happy childhood ended abruptly in 1941 when Ceija's father was deported into Dachau, whence he never returned. In 1943, the whole Stojka family was transported into the Auschwitz Birkenau II concentration camp, where most of her relatives perished. *"The crematory was in front of us. The chimney was smoking day and night. But my mother kept telling me: Never talk about this Ceija, do not talk to anyone about this is crematory. Say it is a bakery, and they are baking bread for us every day."*

Ceija survived the imprisonment, but the theme of witnessing has been returning in her art ever since she started to work in 1989. Like the paintings of her brother Karl, her own canvases also seem to reflect extreme atmospheres: now capturing bright sunny days with the feeling of freedom, now unveiling the monstrous memories of an imprisoned little girl. Some books and a film report about her life. A charismatic author, Ceija also sings and has her own album released. The works of Ceija Stojka are accepted as outstanding pieces of art in Austria, as well as abroad. Her last exhibition *"Ceija Stojka, Leben!"* was held in the Jewish Museum of Vienna (January – March 2005).

Jana Horváthová



Warden 2001
mixed technique (oil, tempera) on paper (postcard); 14.8 x 10.5 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



Death – Roma Train to Auschwitz-Birkenau 1992
mixed technique (watercolour, oil) on paperboard; 32.3 x 49.7 cm
[on reverse left atop: *Auschwitz + vor dem Krematorium stand ich auch in Der Reihe Ceija Stojka* (translation: Auschwitz+in front of the crematory I have also stood in line)]
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



Fear – This Dog is Bad 2001
watercolour on board; 34.3 x 42.3 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno

[Inscription: *Draußen auf der Straße beim Dienst, Kati wahr sehr krank*
(Outside in the street on duty, Kati was very ill)]



Corn Poppy 2005
oil on canvas; 50 x 80 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



My Brother Ossi 1985
oil and acrylic; (size: unknown)
private property

[inscription: *mein BRUDER OSSI Z 5793 IN Birkenau 1943 AN HUNGER UND FELKTIFUS GESTORBEN* (My Brother Ossi Z 5793, dies of Typhus and Malnutrition at Auschwitz-Birkenau 1943)]

"After being tattooed with prisoner registration numbers, we were taken into the Gypsy camp Auschwitz-Birkenau. Ossi was only six years old. There was very little to eat, mostly turnips. One day my brother became ill with typhus and was taken to the infirmary. There was no medical assistance there, and Ossi died of typhus and malnutrition. This wasn't considered a crime, since he was only a Gypsy child."

STOJKA, Karl [A]

Wampersdorf, 1931 – Vienna, 2003

Karl Stojka's autobiographical art draws on the tragic memories of his childhood in Auschwitz-Birkenau, Buchenwald and Flossenbürg concentration camps, where he was imprisoned between 1943 and 1945. His art-as-witness also depicts his family's harrowing odyssey through other Nazi concentration camps.

Karl Stojka, the fourth of six children, was born on 20 April 1931, in his family's caravan at Wampersdorf, near Baden bei Wien in the state of Burgenland, Austria. The Stojkas were Lovara Roma, who made their living as itinerant horse traders. In late 1941 or early 1942 Karl's father was arrested and deported to Dachau. Subsequently transferred to the brutal concentration camp at Mauthausen, he ostensibly "died of heart attack." Shortly thereafter, the second eldest child, Kathi Stojka, was deported to the cruel Gypsy internment camp at Lackenbach. After one year there, Kathi was reunited with her family when they were deported from Vienna to Auschwitz-Birkenau in early March 1943. Immediately on arrival, the code Z 5742 was tattooed on Karl; the letter Z stood for *Zigeuner*, the German word for Gypsy. The tattoo also contained two dots after the letter Z, indicating that Karl was a full Roma and had been registered by the Eugenic and Criminal Biological Research Unit. *"I lost my name on that day and was only a number."* *

The Stojkas were more fortunate than most Austrian and German Roma during the Holocaust; although Karl's father, youngest brother, and thirty-five other relatives had died, his three sisters, one brother, and their mother survived their ordeal in the camps.

After the war, the Stojkas returned to Vienna. Karl transformed an itinerant carpet business into a store specializing in the sale and repair of oriental rugs. His work inspired him to take up painting. *"Since 1948, I have worked with carpets and their beautiful colours still fascinate me... I am an artist who emerged from these colours."* Stojka painted his vivid art-as-memory canvases from 1970, chronicling his childhood from 1939 to 1945. Reflecting on his life, Stojka said:

"I was placed on this earth for only a brief sojourn. I came with nothing and will leave with nothing. God made me a Gypsy in this life, and for that I thank God, and shall always be proud to be a Gypsy".

Sybil Milton

* All quotes from *The Story of Karl Stojka: A Childhood in Birkenau. Exhibition at The Embassy of Austria, 1992*; ed. Sybil Milton, catalogue by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, A Project of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, Washington, DC, 1992.



The Death of my Father at Mauthausen Concentration Camp 1989
oil and acrylic; (size: unknown)
private property

[inscription: Häftling des KZ-Lagers Mauthausen – Selbstmord im elektrisch geladenen Stacheldraht – ES WAR MEIN VATER (An Intern of the concentration camp Mauthausen – Suicide on the electric barbed-wire fence – IT WAS MY FATHER)]

"In 1942 four Gestapo men took my father away from his family. We children cried and my mother hastily packed a few things for him... He was first taken to Dachau and then remanded to Vienna District Court II. We were allowed to visit him there. My father stood in the visitors' room behind a mesh cage, so that we could barely see him. He greeted us joyfully, but instead of his kiss my lips felt only cold metal. After only a few words, he was forced to leave. We cried. We received a letter from him, postmarked Mauthausen, two months later. My father wrote that he hoped to be reunited with us soon. Two weeks after that, we received a package with his suit, news of his death ostensibly from heart attack, and a small carton with bones and ashes. This was all that remained of my thirty-two-year-old-father."



Mauthausen 1942 1989
oil and acrylic; (size: unknown)
private property

"They died standing in line."



Searchlights and Towers Z 5742 1989
oil painted on the felt; (size: unknown)
private property

"Like Hitler, I was born on 20 April. He wanted me to submit to be gassed, cremated, or killed by other methods. He left me in chains, behind bars, and registered. Z 5742 became my name during the Third Reich."



Black Textile with a Golden Abstract 2000
splash-ink on textile; 188 x 167 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



Phuri Daj sitting next to Fire 2002
embroidery on dark canvas; 35.5 x 42.5 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



Our Life 1994
embroidery on ecru canvas; 50 x 60.3 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno

ŠESTAKOVÁ, Markéta [CZ] Rokycany, 1952

Markéta Šestaková was born on January 17, 1952, in Rokycany (CZ), with the maiden name Giřová. After the sudden death of her mother, she grew up in a children's home. Later she started to search for her roots and discovered the world of the Roma, where she found her husband and a new life. Šestaková worked as an unskilled labourer. She lost her job in the early 1990s, after which she could devote more time to her artistic passion – embroidery with genres of Roma life. Šestaková is using original motives, and draws her patterns herself. Her original embroidered pictures depict Romani life as a humane and pastoral idyll. She is also collecting old Romani fairy tales and stories which she uses in her art and literary works. She was never willing to accept the current problems of the Roma, so she regularly discusses them in essays she publishes in the Romani newspaper *Romano Hangos* (Roma Voice), which comes out in Brno. She lives in České Budějovice. Her works can be seen in the gallery *Obchůdku Romen*, in Prague (Nerudova Street, opened in the autumn of 2005).

Jana Horváthová



Head with Nails 2004-2005
wood, lead, nails; 70 x 30 x 30 cm
private property

SZABÓ, Tamás [H]

Budapest, 1952

Having studied at the free school of the Northern Hungarian town of Salgótarján, Tamás Szabó graduated from the Budapest University of Applied Arts in 1979. Gratefully acknowledging the influence of János Balázs, whom he befriended early on, the young artists made his debut in the contemporary scene with very mature works. The minute ceramic, lead and bronze sculptures which represent grotesque heads, and his imaginary portraits, hideous and beautiful at the same time, already prefigured an artist with an original perspective and an aptitude for genuine and significant thought, who also showed an in-depth mastery of the craft. Beside the single or paired, bent, shuddering, crouching or taut figures, painted in acrylics mixed with coal and ash, on surfaces that have an indefinable colouring and a feel of graphics, the most significant works Tamás Szabó created around the turn of the millennium are the distorted, cracked heads, which are adorned with geometrically conceived ornaments, variously carved from marble or alabaster, or cast in aluminum or bronze – classically inspired portraits with an Egyptian influence. A sense of oppression and suffocation, panic and terror emanate from the inside and outside at the same time; halted movements and a sense of emerging from, and fading into, nothingness are characteristic of these works, although every now and then a shoulder flashes up, a hollow abdomen is revealed, a human's back ascending from the darkness is about to explode, or a sublime skull takes the shape of a dented arch.

Ever since his debut, Tamás Szabó has constantly changed his dominant technique between painting, sculpture and graphics, always proving that he is an exceptional figure of contemporary Hungarian art who is capable of changing genres, methods and materials with a fascinating ease, exercising a remarkable control over his means, using them with brilliance, instilling his works with an air of simplicity. This diversity, however, may also be regarded as a virtual multiplicity of masks, because the content of Tamás Szabó's works has remained the same throughout twenty-five years: the human figure, its fragments, and the face in particular, were always at the core of his art, as central motifs synthesized into a medium that is imbued and burdened with intense emotions. In 2000, Szabó was awarded the Munkácsy Prize.

Tibor Wehner



The Touch – Abraham and Isaac 1987
bronze; h: 350 cm
Kisvárdá



Study after Leonardo undated
mixed media, paper; 100 x 80 cm
property of the artist



Madonna 1990
oil on fibreboard; 70 x 50 cm
Hungarian Institute of Culture, Budapest



Illustration 1983
pencil, paper; (size: unknown)
property of the artist

SZENTANDRÁSSY, István [H] Vásárosnamény, 1952

István Szentandrassy is the only disciple of Tamás Péli, the intellectual prophet of Hungarian Roma art. He is now the leader of what is a school of painting in the classic sense, which Tamás Péli created in the early 1980s, and which still has several young, exceptionally talented followers. By his own confession, Szentandrassy employs the great Renaissance masters' bravura technique in works that are modern in subject, and reflect on the problems of contemporary society. He finished one of his chief works in 2004. The large canvases, which illustrate Lorca's *Gypsy Ballads*, represent the quintessence of Roma visual art. They are the artist's parable for the coming generations of Roma artists and intellectuals: they are a compendium of the iconography of Roma visual culture, and offer a virtuoso combination of the Roma narrative tradition and contemporary Roma literature. These pictures are astonishingly suggestive Roma visions, with charging wild horses, exotic Gypsy princesses, beggars, musicians and fatal romances.

Tímea Junghaus



Lindri Dream 1994
oil on fibreboard; 110 x 130 cm
property of the artist



Gypsy Madonna undated
oil on fibreboard; 70 x 50 cm
property of the artist



Big Heart 1981
silver; (size: unknown)
National Museum, Stockholm

TAIKON, Rosa [S]

Tibro, 1926

The artist Rosa Taikon – famous sister of a famous sister, writer Katarina Taikon – indisputably ranks among the outstanding Roma personalities who have enriched world culture with their art.

Rosa is known for her silver jewellery. She herself designs and produces her pieces. Since her first exhibition in 1966, her art has been shown in prestigious galleries throughout Sweden. In addition, her work is a part of permanent exhibitions and depositories in various museums in Sweden and abroad: in Finland, Norway, England, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the United States, Australia and other countries.

Rosa Taikon stems from a clan of Kalderash (cauldron makers). Her great-great-grandparents probably lived as Gypsy slaves in Moldavia or Walachia. When Gypsy slavery was abolished – in 1855 in Moldavia; in 1856 in Valachia; and then, definitively, in 1864 – a colossal number of former Roma slaves emigrated, mainly to Hungary and Russia. The memory of the Taikons reaches back to Russia. Rosa's grandfather produced silver buttons and decorative silver cane handles. He was also a musician, and his band played in St. Petersburg, in Baku, and in other cities of Czarist Russia.

When, in 1905, the Russian-Japanese war broke out, all the members of the Taikon's extended family emigrated to Sweden. There Rosa was born in the town of Tibro in 1926. She was born in a "Gypsy wagon" because, at that time, the Roma in Sweden had no possibility of settling in flats.

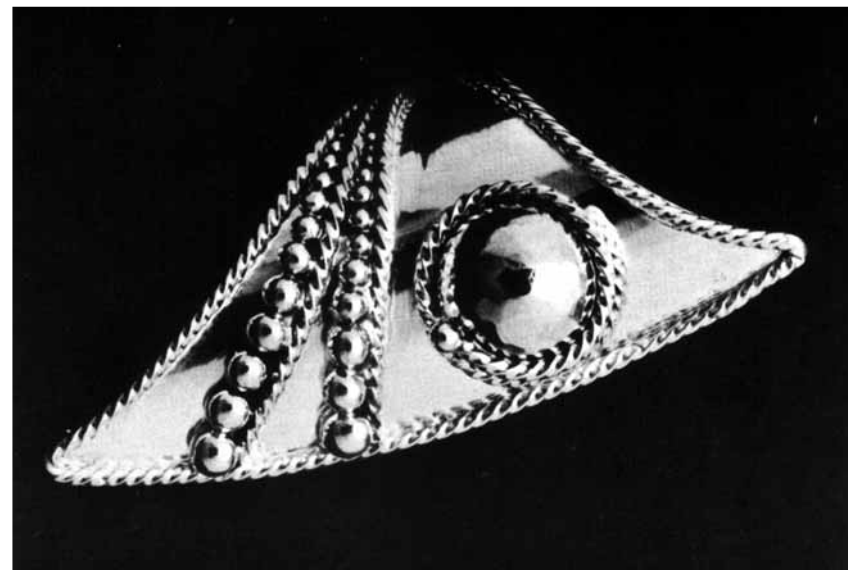
Rosa's father inherited his father's profession – a tradition that Roma clans have kept from their Indian country of origin since time immemorial. He worked with metal, earned a living by playing music and, for a certain time, even had an amusement park.

Apart from her artistic work, Rosa Taikon enthusiastically participated in political and social activities of the Roma and never stopped fighting for their rights and the propagation of Roma culture.

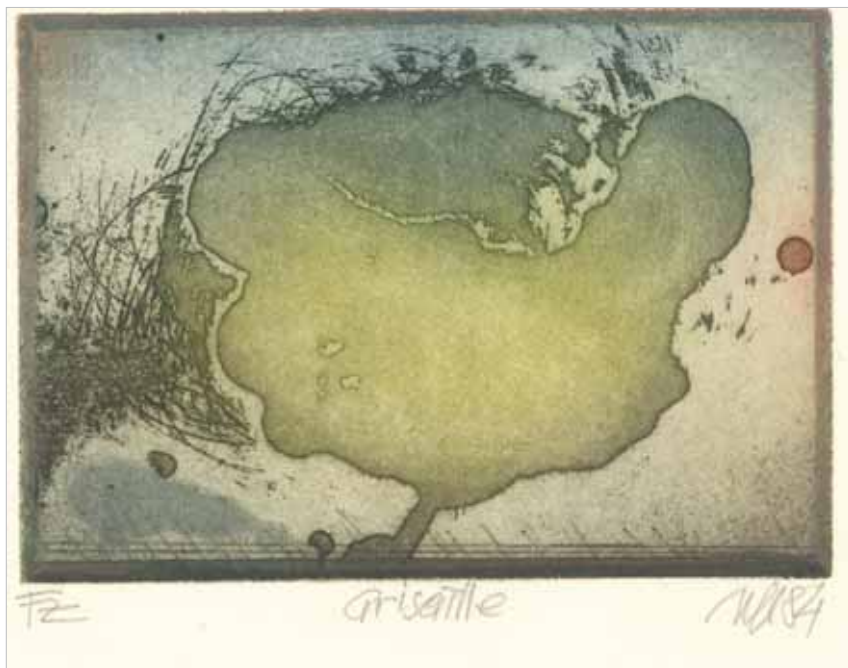
Milena Hübschmannová



The Crown of Marriage (with Bernd Janusch) 1974
silver; (size: unknown)
Collection of the Church of Bollmoradalen, Stockholm



The Good Eye 1980
silver; (size: unknown)
private property



Grisaille 1984
 colour etching; 15 x 21 cm
 Museum of Romani Culture, Brno

ULLRICH, Alfred (Fredi) [A, D]

Schwabmünchen, 1948

Alfred Ullrich was born on July 8, 1948, in Schwabmünchen, Bavaria (D) into a Sinto (German Roma) family. He spent his childhood in Vienna (A). Like all other Austrian Roma and Sinti, Ullrich's family fell victim to Nazi racial persecution. Recollections of war and the difficult social situation of his childhood form the origins of Alfred Ullrich's artistic inspiration.

Ullrich uses different graphic techniques (printing, monotype, coloured etching), but also creates objects and assemblages. He has been a freelance artist since the 1980s, and usually works in his atelier in Biberbach. He has been exhibiting regularly since 1981. His works can be found in different collections in Austria and Germany. He himself contacted the Museum of Romani Culture, and donated pieces with a view to further cooperation. An independent exhibition of his works is planned in the Museum of Romani Culture in the summer of 2006. Alfred Ullrich lives and works in Biberbach, near Dachau.

Jana Horváthová



O.T. 1980s-1990s
 graphics series; 29.7 x 21 cm
 Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



Untitled 1980s-1990s
 structural graphics series; 21 x 29.7 cm
 Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



Gypsy Girl 2005
oil on canvas; (size: unknown)
property of the artist



VÁRI, Zsolt [H]
Vásárosnamény, 1974

There are many examples of the subject of arrival in the oeuvre of photorealist painter Zsolt Vári. With the installation *Romani Wagon*, the young artist wants to emphasize that contemporary Roma art has at last arrived where discourse about it, the dialogue of interpretation and evaluation, can be initiated, an official institution of the contemporary art scene. He planned to park the wagon on the grass outside the building, but was denied right of access. Ironically, the rejected wagon is painted dark blue and yellow, the colours of the night and the day, representing as they are the endless wandering.

Tímea Junghaus

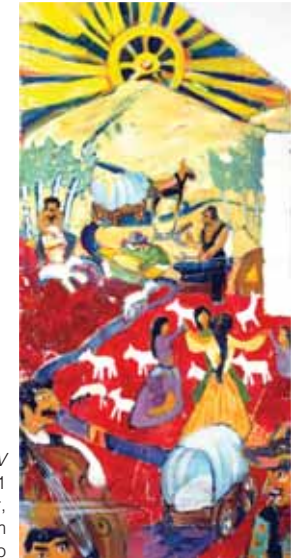


Here We Are 2004
coloured wood object
installation outside Múcsarnok/Kunsthalle





The Road of Roma 2002
Façade mural Museum of Romani Culture, Brno
Photo: Museum of Romani Culture, Brno



The Road of Roma V
(draft for the façade mural of MRC), 2001
tempera on yellow wrapping paper,
covered with sackcloth; 270 x 119 cm
Museum of Romani Culture, Brno

ZEMAN, David [CZ]

Náchoda, 1973

Born on February 18, 1973, in Náchoda (CZ), Zeman grew up in a children's home in Polička. *"They didn't let me start my studies for two years, I still don't know why. Maybe I seemed backward like all Roma pupils at that age. No one told me whether I had talent for music or art. Fortunately I found my way into high school. I had a teacher there who taught me a lot. I drew, painted and learnt art history."* After finishing the Collage of Restoration and Conservation Techniques in Litomyšl (mural paintings), he devoted himself to restoration and painting in East Bohemia. His own art had already been presented at solo and group exhibitions. The latter included a 1998 display at the Municipal Museum and Gallery in Břeclav, which also featured the scrap glass art of Rudolf Dzurko.

At that time he was engaged in rendering graphic works by Josef Váchal as sgraffito plaster on the facade of one of the historical buildings in the centre of Litomyšl. In 2001, David Zeman won the competition for the exterior decoration of the Museum of Romani Culture with his painting *The Road of the Roma*, which he and his team completed on the front wall of the museum building. Currently he is working as a restorer of historical buildings, and as he says, *"there is always enough work."*

Jana Horváthová

Photographic Credits

All photos taken by the artists, except:

Nihad Nino Pusija: R. Bajramović

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