

CALLING CARDS

In the past, the exchange of calling cards was a largely widespread social practice (in some places, a social obligation as well). The **CALLING CARD** is the forebear of the present-day “business card”: a means of communication, a formal introduction of a person and a proof of good manners. It used to convey a personal message to the receiver. The exchange of calling cards used to be a social custom that fostered the advancement of friendship. For instance, during the Victorian era, one of the dominant themes on the calling cards was hands clasped in friendship. A calling card was designed exquisitely with hand tinted etchings, embroideries and hand-written poems by skilled calligraphers. Yet, its main function was not an aesthetic one but to convey a message. As the historians of etiquette posit, style, design, material and even the color border of a calling card carried a message to the addressee. Therefore, there was also an elaborate hermeneutics of the folds’ meanings.

“Calling Cards” is an itinerant exhibition; inspired by Adrian Piper’s *Calling Cards* (offset lithographs on brown paper published by Angry Art). Piper has used calling cards as a form of social activism challenging viewers to take the confrontation with racism “into their own hands”. From 1986 to 1990, Adrian Piper handed a brown *Calling Card* to anyone who used a racist remark or joke in her presence. The confrontational content of the card usually made them feel uncomfortable. She encourages others to reenact and use this piece of work and to keep the fight against racism alive.

“Calling Cards” exhibition reenacts, extends and re-stages Adrian Piper’s *Calling (Cards)*. The pieces displayed within and beyond the art space vary: from mail art, diary pages, poems, conceptual textiles and confession art to video performance and digital-collages. All of them act symbolically, as a calling card against discrimination. The participants are from various educational, ethnic and cultural backgrounds and their contributions are not evaluated in terms of skillfulness but in terms of the ideas they express. “Calling Cards” is an accumulative artistic project which aims to generate an ever-expanding, non-hierarchical, egalitarian artistic network of participating cultural workers, artists, amateurs, political activists and writers. To this end, it will highlight the joy of producing and experiencing art by people that share a common ideal: to disclose discrimination and to purge it. As such, writing becomes a performance and a path towards public participation and you are invited to write your own “calling cards”.

The exhibited works focus on the question of visibility and overcoming a difficult state of affairs. The young artist Selma Selman (Bosnia and Herzegovina) is exhibiting her work for the first time in Hungary. In both her video-performance *Roma Performing the Flag*, and in the photo-installation: *I'm a Lady*, Selma Selman deals with Roma identity concerns.

In *Roma Performing the Flag* the artist performs over and over again the flag of the Romani people. Performing the flag is like performing an inner world. Selma states: “We Roma have no state but we have our world. This work is based on it. Our flag consists of the upper part of the blue, the green on the bottom and in the middle is the red wheel. That means that we all have a world. Performing these flags, I am a wheel, as the initiator. I cannot make a star, but I am trying to make one to imitate the wheel”. The photo-installation *I'm a Lady* is a confessional piece of work which narrates the intimate story of the artist's life as a Roma woman, from early childhood to present. In the first photographs of this “encyclopedia of identity”, the artist confesses in Romani language her struggle with bitterness, poverty and prejudice. Eventually, she confesses that she has managed to overcome this anxiety, being *A Lady* now.

Eszter Deli Kinga's *Mme Recamier* is the paraphrase of Jacque-Louis David's famous painting with the same title. Eszter posits that she produced *Mme Recamier* after meeting on a regular basis single mothers with different ethnic backgrounds in a Housing for Single Mothers from nearby Budapest. These single mothers helped her to create the story of the picture. The artist recalls “One day one of them was wearing a long dress similar to the one in David's picture. As I mentioned it to them, along with the description of the painting, they found the comparison so funny that we decided to reconstruct the scene of Mme Recamier. This event's atmosphere gave the initial idea of creating the animations based on the photo series I took of them”. *Mme Recamier* deals with vulnerable women and single mothers who are eager to perform and impersonate with humor, criticism and wit the “stars and masterpieces” of art history. In this way, they are no longer subject-matters of art but art producers.

Marika Schmiedt's digital collages function like artistic interventions or, how Marika calls them, “*Confrontages*”. They attempt to break the silence and to expose the visual culture of racism – and its many languages - and simultaneously counteract the ongoing discrimination of the Roma people. She states: “By mirroring these widespread but generally unacknowledged forms of racism, and also highlighting the marginalized history of the persecution of Roma, I want to

create possibilities for constructive dialogues about improving the situation for Roma in Europe today”.

Liliana Basarab’s “Beauty Marks” performance project involves asking random people in the street of Iasi (Romania) to wear a sticky black dot resembling a mole, on their faces, a beauty mark, in order to be photographed and then have their pictures exhibited in the gallery. The black dot becomes in this context a code for beauty as an alternative for desired visibility acting as an intrusion into someone’s sphere of privacy that usually remains untouched.

Laszlhó Sefcick’s video dispels both the negative stereotypes about the travelers’ communities and the romanticized image of the “gypsy caravan”.

Cristina David’s short video “A Wish” speaks about allowing kids to grow up in harmony with their own wishes; especially if their wishes entail fairness, broadmindedness and willingness to recognize and respect the “Other”.

And last but not least, this exhibition displays anonymous postcards, collages and letters, signed postcards, collages and letters, diary pages, poems and other material traces of the calling cards’ exchange.

Opening Speech: Maria-Alina Asavei

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