

the village. This menial work is sacralised, as it were, by the delicate slivers of gold paper in the form of an imprint of the artist's palm that adorns the hardened dun-coloured substance, shaped into rectangles and aligned on the wall, their surfaces occasionally bearing traces of red pigment. The powdered colour in question is, of course, what is traditionally used by women to form a dot on the forehead or in the parting in the hair to signify their marital status but which in Gowda's application must stand as a sign of subalternity as such. The materiality of Gowda's work is inevitably linked to the harsher realities of manual toil and labour: witness the imposing structure called *A Blanket and the Sky* (2004) made out of flattened tar drums, a transposition of the kind of makeshift shelters fabricated by migrant labourers hired on a daily basis for such tasks as the laying of land cables or the maintenance of public works. So the austerity of Gowda's sculptural object bespeaks a 'truth to materials' that has an ethical basis far removed from the purely formal understanding of that venerable modernist shibboleth, just as the use, in some of her other works, of string, rope, charcoal powder, pigment and gauze has a symbolic valence that is necessarily different from, say, the recourse to comparably modest materials that register Arte Povera's resistance to the technocratic basis of American Minimalism.

Between the impersonal shine of Subodh Gupta's stainless steel utensils and the matte materiality of Sheela Gowda's tar drums, between the fulgent and the fuliginous, there is, of course a whole spectrum of work that goes by the name of contemporary Indian art. A nuanced understanding of it calls for an attempt at cultural translation in the light of Walter Benjamin's great essay, 'The Task of the Translator'.

...(A)ll translation is only a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages... It is not the highest praise of a translation, particularly in the age of its origin, to say that it reads as if it had originally been written in that language.¹

Translations, after all, are addressed to foreigners, to those who don't speak the language.

¹ Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Illuminations*, edited and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt. Translated by Harry Zohn (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970): 75, 79. These two sentences are conjoined by Susan Sontag in her essay "The World as India: The St. Jerome Lecture on Literary Translation," in Susan Sontag, *At the Same Time: Essays & Speeches* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 2007): 176.

Q and A with the artist Mircea Cantor

I will begin with a work that I did in 2000, called *All the Directions*. I was invited to New York along with a group of artists, but I couldn't go because the American embassy classified me as a potential immigrant to the United States and denied me the visa. I really wanted to take part in this exhibition. But I didn't know how to react to the situation so I did a performance: I went hitchhiking with a sign that said "Heaven," because in my mind—and in those of many people of Eastern Europe—the United States was the Promised Land. I took a photograph of it: the sign read "Heaven," but since I couldn't get to Heaven, it was almost like Hell. As it would have been too literal to write "Hell" on the sign, I decided to leave it blank, thus taking me in all directions.

Another work that I did in 2002 was called *Double Heads Matches*. It was presented at a show in Brussels, where I took advantage of my contacts to present this slightly older project. It was inspired by the Belgian context: a country divided into two parts, the Flemish part and the French part. But it is also a portrait of my life, coming from the East but living in the Western context. It was complicated to do, because you cannot make these matches mechanically. I tried in Belgium, which has the best match factories in the world, but they couldn't make them. So we did them at a factory in Romania, where they found a way to make them manually: all of these matches were done manually, at a factory.

In the context of the exhibition, they weren't presented as very interesting objects: they were given to people on the street or in restaurants. I loved the multipotentiality of the object. There are multiple interpretations. For example, it says something very different to Belgians than it does to Arabs living in Belgium, or to those living in France. There is a film documenting the process.

I also did a film called *The Landscape Is Changing*, a project for the Tirana Biennial. I was invited there and had the idea of doing a demonstration with people holding mirrors instead of slogans. Why mirrors? In Tirana, as in Romania, this sort of demonstration is very common: supporting a party or a president, like in many Latin American countries. And also, when I took a detached view of what was happening, I began to wonder what the point of all of this was. How was it possible to criticize reality without affirming or denying anything?

At first, my idea was to have people holding blank signs, like in *All the Directions*, but the problem was that someone could potentially write something on them, while a mirror—a simple object—just reflects reality. The film is very simple, lasting twenty-two minutes and showing many places in Tirana, as well as the demonstration and the fragmented reality. The soundtrack is a special song, edited with an audio artist.

There is a certain piece that may be worth mentioning: it says *Impredictible Future*, in my bastardized English. We are so sure about certain values in the present that we think we may be able to predict things. So I wrote these two words on a window, which is actually a light box.

Another work of mine is a stencil that reads *I'm Still Alive*. Maybe some of you know of a project by Philippe Parreno—in a word, it is a *manga*. He got the rights from Japan to bring a certain character to life: different artists created stories and films about it. In 2003 they decided to end the project. To symbolically kill it off, they set off fireworks at Art Basel Miami Beach, and I said to them, “You can’t say this about art, because we are constantly renewing art history.” So, I appropriated the graffiti language, which uses symbols. During a group show in Paris, I did the *I'm Still Alive* stencil at a gallery: I just pass from one reality to another.

I did a piece last year in New York called *Diamond Corn*. The idea was to create a new kind of value where two elements encounter. Diamonds are one of the most expensive values, and corn—which originated in Mexico—is one of the most available and common foods. If you look it up on Google, corn is one of the easiest foods to find. I did this project at a factory in Mexico, and for the exhibition, it was shown just the way corn would be sold at a market—in a very poor way, in cardboard boxes, showing only the surface. There is a short film of that exhibition.

For another piece entitled *The Second Step*, I covered the entire gallery floor with concrete—all 100 square feet—and in the concrete I reproduced the image of Neil Armstrong’s first step on the Moon. I think it was a good starting point, materializing this image—a virtual image that we have seen in the newspapers or on TV, but have never touched. I wanted to reproduce it in concrete—the most solid material on Earth. As you enter the gallery, there is no light—only the natural light which illuminates the work, and then you are left in darkness. After that, you pass into another space where you see the corn, and the concrete floor continues. In the last room, there is a film called *Departure*, with a wolf and a deer.

I also did a piece with Gabriela Vanga called *The Storyteller*. It is a six-page book, but it is much more than a book—more like a film or a sculpture. It is unique in that every page incorporates specific stories. When you open it to the first page, you see an image which looks like the original book: it is called a *mise en abîme*. On the second page, there are some false letters, a mass of letters. The idea was related to the twenty-six letters of the alphabet, which Michael Ende says represent the whole history of humanity, depending on how they are combined. We tend to say that at the very least, a book has to have letters: the imaginary idea that one can write one’s own stories based on letters. The letters here aren’t only Latin—there are also Hebrew letters. But the project is about the letter as a common denominator, or as a written text that is found everywhere. In Thailand or in China, there is always a translation that uses letters.

Another page shows us the idea of humanity’s flux, and of one person that always goes against this flux: like the blind men in Brueghel’s painting or the first man on the Moon—you have to find the others. Still another page shows the ideal city—which may indeed exist—in which we can find elements of Le Corbusier, la Casa del Fascio, the Empire State Building and also a rainbow. The rainbow introduces color, because the whole book is white, like a screen onto which you can project your own narratives. There is a parabolic antenna—the latest communication device. And the last page is a labyrinth, but it is the complete opposite to a labyrinth, because it is in only one dimension. For this part, you need another person to construct the labyrinth: you can’t go into it alone.

One of the most recent [works I have done] was for a group exhibition in Paris. We see the logo of the famous newspaper *Le Monde*—I just added an S to the end of *Le* and *Monde*. It seemed that a lot of us were talking about globalization, so it was odd that this newspaper was still talking about The World. We are living in several worlds, so I added an S. We do not live in a globalized world but within several globalizations—plural.

I would also like to speak about some magazines that we have been publishing since 2001, one of which is named *Version* (Edited by Gabriela Vanga, Mircea Cantor, Ciprian Muresan). It began as a need for an expressive outlet in the Romanian context. As young artists, we didn’t have much access to magazines, so we created our own version—that was the origin of the title.

Of course, being a magazine, it was very chaotic in the beginning. Everything was very vague, and we didn’t know what to do, so we began to work on concrete issues. You can find several things online: you can download and print the magazine.

Issue four was based on the concept of geography, in a very broad sense of the term. We invited—and I think this has to do with the idea of collaboration—some art historians, artists and architects to write for the issue, in particular for a project entitled *The Map of the World*. We constructed a map—the world map, printed in a very large format so you can move around on it. We invited all these people to contribute to our magazine, and it featured several items regarding geography in a broader sense.

The next issue, number five, dealt with the concept of the demonstration. It was the first time we had invited somebody from outside—a curator named Amiel Grumberg, who died in 2004 under strange circumstances. We asked him to come up with a proposal as to what we should do. He had the wonderful idea of bringing together a lot of people with ideas about demonstrations. This issue was done after his death and it was very difficult to obtain all the necessary information. I still consider it incomplete.

The most recent issue was a coloring book. We asked several artists and illustrators to propose new ways to teach children about color. Visually, coloring books are all very classic—they all have sections to be filled in with a single color. So we

wanted to distance ourselves from this model. The issue is divided into two parts: the first with proposals by the artists—some very interesting—while for the second part, we asked an architect specializing in designing spaces for children to contribute a text on how he sees his own creativity in architecture. We also invited a Scottish curator to participate. Rather than writing a text about children and creativity, she wrote a tale called *The Greedy Emperor*. The last page is by an Algerian artist and we printed it in phosphorescent ink, so children can read it at night, in the dark.

You can all find this on the magazine website www.versionmagazine.com, and you can download all previous issues.

The Same Fleas

Guillermo Santamarina

I don't like things the way they are. My capacity for surprise has diminished, or I've been stupefied by the art market's ulterior motives, or I'm bored of inadequate political quotas, or because maybe it's no longer possible to come up with another superficial derivative to go with the sofa, the mattress, Mr. Mattress, Mrs. Sofa... or maybe it's just because I'm bored, sorry... I'm making things up again.

Bored of artists and their total absence of risk and honest commitment, of art professionals, the bohemian mélange, the deluge, even the hip, cool and open-minded... enough already.

I read the Manifesto that Mathias Goeritz wrote in 1960 more than forty years ago and I can't help feeling the same way he did.

Check it out: "I'm tired of the pretentious imposition of logic and reason, functionalism, decorative calculation and, of course, all the chaotic pornography of individualism, the glory of the day and the flavor of the week, vanity and ambition, posers and artistic jokes, conscious and unconscious egocentrism, inflated concepts, the incredibly dull propaganda of isms and ists, figurative or abstract. also I'm tired of all the brouhaha about an art of deformation, the stains, the rags and pieces of garbage; tired of the preciousness of an inverted aesthetic that celebrates the exterior beauty of the wrecked and rotten; tired of all these interesting textures and empty games of a purely visual or tactile upbringing. no less tired of the abundant absence of the sensibility, with its opportunistic dogmas, that continues to flaunt its ability to milk the copy or stylization of a heroically vulgar reality for all it's worth. most of all, I'm tired of the artificial and hysterical atmosphere of the so-called art world, with its adulterated pleasures. I want a chair to be a chair, nothing else, without all the stomach-turning mystification that is created around it. I'm tired of myself, as I find myself more repugnant than ever when I see myself dragged through the crushing wave of low art and when I feel my profound impotence.

finally, I'm convinced that artistic beauty, nowadays, presents itself more vigorously when there is less involvement of the so-called artist.

all the established values must be thoroughly rectified: believing, without asking in what! turning, or at least to trying to turn, man's work into a visual prayer.

Mathias goeritz (1960 manifesto)