

IŠTVAN IŠT HUZJAN

INTERVIEW BY: TEVŽ LOGAR

TEVŽ LOGAR: Istvan, you studied at the Art Academy in Venice, than at Rijks Academy in Amsterdam. After that you continued your physical horizontal »moving around«, living and working in different cities. But also on the level of your artistic practice a person can strongly sense these journeys of yours, maybe more on vertical level. Since we live in the period where »contemporary art nomadism« is very strongly present, someone could argue that you are just catching »Zeitgeist« but I believe your journeys are rooted much deeper. Can you tell me something more about that, your urge that results in horizontal and vertical travels.

IŠTVAN IŠT HUZJAN: Most of my travels intertwine with gathering or distribution of knowledge and so I believe that my so-called horizontal and vertical travels are one and the same. Your question starts perfect by mentioning my studies abroad. To me studying is part of growing up, a vertical notion, and a vertical travel. Whether I would have moved only out of my parents house or to a bigger city from periphery, in my case to a different country, in my opinion every youngster goes through an odyssey of some sort. It is given to almost everyone to physically grow upwards like a tree, from seed to canopy, but our roots and branches move horizontally so our growth depends strongly on our environment. To me it is the same with acquisition of knowledge. Depending in what kind of, not only ideological system but also particular family (family tree) one grows up in, defines who one is. Creation of family ties is the essential knowledge we gather and all other later actions / travels are a recreation or a reaction to it. The notion of travel in my work relates to these human archetypical experiences: upbringing, separation and fear of death. For example when I walked from Ljubljana, Slovenia to Rijeka, Croatia (about 100 km) in the summer of 2013 I was reenacting a travel my father did in 1984. I was searching for his signature at mid station wooden hoots where they keep traveler's sign-in books because he is an artist as well and I wanted to compare our marks. In 1984 he did it in Yugoslavia and I did it in Slovenia crossing the green Schengen border on the date Croatia entered the EU. The two countries erased the border after 22 years of separation and again decided to be part of a bigger geopolitical frame. I thought maybe the relationship between father and son can tell me something about the relationship between citizen and country or peripheral countries to the center of power.

TL: There is also a lot of intimacy in your projects. In a way you are telling us stories about your life, your family, partners, memories, but in a way that a viewer can relate to that as well. How do you see this gesture of bringing out the intimacy, as a "conceptual anchor" for your work, as a romantic gesture, social or political act,...

IH: For me this principle or method is the only one that has a chance at a truth. I don't really see it as an option. It is I guess for me a necessity. Maybe this intimism of mine is hard to define as only one kind of gesture (romantic or a socially or politically engaged act) because it is kind of 'total' it can even be all of that together, a reading of a romantic manifesto.

If I were to tell a story about the wild west to some one in California I would probably start by re-reading Karl May's novels my father read to me when I was a child and think about how writings of an European author who wrote in prison about something he never experienced was read to me from a position of authority and how that constructed my image of a Sierra Nevada gold rush from the mid 19th century. I am sure that the piece in the end even though it would possibly carry images of a toy revolver, gold, Clint Eastwood and Germanic gods my story of the wild west would be the one about how we

are thought to read history and everything else by those we entrust of possessing knowledge. That would be the truth of my interest.

TL: Some of your projects are establishing strong relations to avant-gardes. Why? Do you see these historical practices as a point of reference for your work, possibility for appropriation, something that needs to be considered for general understanding of contemporary art today,....?

IIH: My interest in avant-gardes and neo-avant-gardes comes directly from my interest in relationship between life and art. How everyday life can inspire an artwork, how art can directly influence our lives and of course how these processes question existing art practices and systems we live in. There is a strong link between my practice and that of these previous avant-gardes and I also use their work to make mine. I think It is also possible to understand my art through this tradition within art history.

TL: You work in various media, performance, object, books, sculpture, painting, photography... is it because of different sensibilities that media offers in relation to the conceptual grounds or is there any other reason. What is your attitude towards the medium?

IIH: I was thought as a classic painter, but soon, already during my studies I turned towards combining mediums. It came to me organically since I was very soon interested more in why an image instead of how an image. Since my interests lead me towards language of art and conceptual approaches I see no differentiations between art mediums. There is only art.

TL: Your performance OD TU DO TU (in which you are barefoot measuring the distance between two random architectural elements), on a material level shows your relation towards the space. On formal level I could make a parallel with 60s and 70s minimalist sculpture and it's exploration of relations between object and space. But I always believed that »your measuring« is always happening also on the immaterial level, something that goes beyond the physical frame of the walls. How did you measure the space for this particular project presented at EASTWARDS PROSPECTUS?

IIH: The work at E.P. is about the feeling of separation and I see it as a collage of some of my previous works. OD TU DO TU is one of this works. I conceived it as a performance that archives another performance of mine when I crossed Eurasia by using only public transport that touches the ground. My whole trip was from Seoul, South Korea to Haarlem, the Netherlands and it took me about a month to complete. Measuring the distance in any other exhibition space is a way to reenact this move of mine across the continent. Just like in an artistic atelier I see my travel as an empty space caught between departure and arrival, caught in a moment of separation. A traumatic place in between where all is possible, where a new image is created. At E.P. I am exhibiting in their basement space in a sort of subconscious part of the gallery. It reminded me of a metro system where most of the movement of a city happens and it strongly influences the life of a city but it is not seen from above. So I sketched my movements in the gallery space based on a schematic drawing of the Bucharest metro. I made in fact 4 short walks in the basement corresponding to the 4 lines of the Bucharest metro. These walks are cast in concrete and the start end end of the walk is announced by a female voice saying for example: "The next stop is Berceni?, your exit is on the left."

TL: The Subway can have a various symbolical readings. What can you bring out as the strongest point in the context of this project, the one that drawn you the most and led you to realisation of this new piece.

IIH: The subway is an infrastructure we use to arrive from A to B in a shortest possible way. There is very little we can do when we use it. It can even be contra productive if you choose a wrong side and then it takes you for ages to change sides and travel back. Once you are in, you move only in one direction and you are in no way connected with the outside. It really reminds me of our subconscious. Particularly because of the voice that appears and informs you of where you are going. As if our uber ego (paternal voice) and our subconscious are directly connected and our ego can do very little to control it.

TL: As I see your work, space is never just a space for you. You worked within different situations: in white cube, in nature, on a train, on a street, public or private,... How do you deal with that?

IIH: Yes of course space is never only a space. Understanding of every particular new space is in my opinion a reenactment of our previous experience with another particular one. Like a luggage compartment of a bus can also be a uterus. I also did a show there once. Exhibiting art in different environments is one of the most intriguing parts of doing art.

TL: How in general in your project concept effects the space or how space effects the concept?

IIH: Almost organically they are constantly effecting each other and I would like that the space becomes something completely different for me and the viewer. Not only that we will find our selves in an artwork instead of an exhibition space but in an experience from our forgotten memories.

TL: Is there any other element that you would maybe stress in the context of the reading this particular work you realised here Bucharest?

IIH: Element of surprise.

TL: Thank you and good luck with your next projects!!

IIH: No, thank you.