

Letter from Lublin



Recently Lublin, Poland, hosted an international political/artistic Festival Transeuropa on the rights of women, minorities and refugees, on hospitality and on artistic freedom. It was organized by TCDS associates and D&D alumni Tomasz Kitlinski, Pawel Leszkowicz, Sylwia Nadgrodkiewicz and other local activists.

May 26, 2011

Transeuropa Lublin: Festival for Lublin and Europe without Prejudices

"I left Rome on a sunny spring day and arrived in a freezing Poland. However, taking part in Transeuropa Lublin could not have made me feel warmer. The Festival managed to attract a large group of diverse citizens interested in hearing about or visually experiencing themes and issues that are still quite marginal in Polish public discourse. From gay rights to abortion, from recycling and composting to exploring the Jewish heritage of the city, Transeuropa Festival did not shy away from topics that can be thorny everywhere in Europe and particularly so at the Eastern border of the EU. Not being able to understand Polish, I did appreciate mostly the visual arts elements of the festival, in particular the exhibition Love Is Love on gay visibility in Europe, featuring campaigns on LGBT issues from around Europe, contrasted with shocking images of violence during the Gay Pride parades of Zagreb and Belgrade."

Alessandro Valera, Rome

Held in Lublin 5-15 May 2011, Transeuropa Festival celebrated hospitality and the rights of women, minorities and refugees. Through exhibitions, performances, debates and workshops, it fostered the acceptance of LGBTQ community, feminism and transnational cultures. The Festival tried to remember and revive the murdered interculturality of the city. Before the Holocaust, Lublin was a major centre of Jewish culture; that is why we organized a number of talks on Jewish life: about the rebellious women coming originally from the Lublin area (Rosa Luxemburg, Bela Shapira, Nan Goldin), Goncourt-winning writer Anna Langfus, and a conversation with Professor Irena Grudzinska-Gross of Princeton who demonstrated Poland's anti-Semitism in her book *Golden Harvest*, co-authored with Jan Tomasz Gross. At Tektura alternative collective, Grenoble-Lublin poet Adrien Gros read his poetry on looking for his own Jewish roots in this city. The transnational character of Lublin was further explored in the presentations by Roma and Ukrainian communities. We also met with Chechen refugees who presented their precarious situation: exclusion, unemployment, problems with education and residence. Chechens feel neglected by the municipal institutions.



Meeting with Poland's leading feminist Kazimiera Szczuka - in the space of Love Is Love show (Igor Grubic's video in the background)

Photo by Diana Kolczewska



Author Irena Grudzinska-Gross in conversation with philosopher/activist Tomasz Kitlinski
Photo by Marcin Fedorowicz

Gender and queer culture was another aspect developed in the Festival, vital to this city where the political class has turned religion into an ideology. Feminism and homosexuality were examined in the exhibitions mounted especially for Transeuropa: Love Is Love, The Body, The City of Love, and The Madonnas. Curated by Pawel Leszkowicz at Labirynt Gallery, Love Is Love—Art as LGBTQ Activism: from Britain to Belarus surveyed performative campaigns for lesbian and gay visibility across Europe; through the video art of Igor Grubic (Croatia) and Bergamot (Belarus), it showed the burning issues of anti-gay violence in Belgrade, Zagreb and Minsk. The exhibition was accompanied by a discussion on Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka, feminist and LGBT rights advocate, killed in the Smolensk air crash. She was instrumental in mounting Poland's lesbian and gay visibility campaign, Let Us Be Seen, presented at Love Is Love. In the context of this exhibition, together with invited panelists, we participated in lively debates over “Art as Performing Human Rights” and “Art as Gender and LGBTQ Activism.” A sexual panorama of Lublin, The City of Love, by Piotr Nazaruk, sparked a discussion over artistic freedom. Curated by Magda Linkowska at Labirynt Gallery, The Madonnas presented feminist paintings by Katarzyna Holda; critic Iza Kowalczyk called them “courageous works which break conventions.” In his exhibition The Body at Zacheta, Pawel Korbus explored the social body, commenting on the problem of homelessness in Lublin.

Images from Love is Love, curated by Pawel Leszkowicz



Tomek Kitlinski,
Queer bibliotherapy,
instalacja, 2010.



Queer Bibliotherapy, installation of a hundred
lgbtq books in the exhibition Love Is Love;
Photo by Diana Kolczewska



Arcigay Udine e Prodenone
fotografia, 2010.

The performances by Szymon Pietrasiewicz and Piotr Salata problematized the political issues of this region of Europe. Salata protested in front of a "Catholic centre for curing homosexuality." Theatre productions analyzed femininity and masculinity through the work of choreographers/dancers Pawel Korbus and Janusz Adam Biedrzycki. An evening of homoerotic poetry and a workshop on transgender were coordinated by the Campaign Against Homophobia. We also organized a lecture about the problem of sexually transmitted diseases in the Lublin area. A debate for the democratization of higher education was also held, rooted in our academic protests against the threat of firing 400 university auxiliary personnel in 2009.

The Festival made news in the nationwide editions of broadsheets *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*. Poland's biggest newspaper, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, defined the Festival as "Getting to Know the Other" and "Art Breaks the Taboo"; its chief art critic Dorota Jarecka wrote on *Labirynt's Love Is Love*, *Tektura* alternative collective and the "bold nudes" of *The City of Love*. The fundamentalist *Radio Maryja* took to calling *Transeuropa* a "festival of sodomites"; its daily *Nasz Dziennik* claimed that "swarms of reformers of the traditional social order and of Polish mentality were invited" to the Festival. *Transeuropa* thus served as dissidence just as Lublin was a hub of dissenters in the past: in the sixteenth century this city constituted a centre of the Reformation. When socially radical (anti-war and anti-serfdom) Unitarians/Socinians had been exiled from seventeenth-century Poland, they found refuge in Amsterdam and Cluj. Via *Transeuropa*, we could connect again with these cities, as well as with Paris where our inspirers, thinker Julia Kristeva and theatre-maker Ewa Wojciak, spoke at the Festival. In Lublin we also presented the contemporary art of Albania: Wacław Kuczma curated an exhibition, *The Gardens of Dreams*, with works by Ilir Butka and Genc Mulliqi.

Transeuropa Lublin was well-attended: we had over 150 guests for the openings of *Love Is Love*, *The City of Love* and *The Madonnas*. The Festival integrated a variety of milieux as *Labirynt* Gallery known for its postconceptual exhibitions organized it together with the countercultural *Tektura*; *Grodzka Gate-NN* Theatre, Campaign Against Homophobia, Amnesty International, *Krytyka Polityczna*, UN Social Programme *Spółdzielnia*, *Zieloni*, *Homo Faber*, *Lublin 9-L'Étrangère* and a number of individual scholars/artists/activists joined. The Festival cherished hospitality in the sense of philosopher Hélène Cixous; Lublin is becoming again a city of a variety of cultures, identities and loves.

We have decided not to conclude *Transeuropa*, but continue it in a postsituationist way of a non-stop action for social and cultural change: a Festival of Every Day to create a Lublin and a Europe without anti-Semitism, misogyny, and homophobia.

Tomasz Kitlinski, Lublin

The media on *Transeuropa* Lublin:

"*Transeuropa* Festival was engaging and educational: for the first time in Lublin the art of LGBTQ minorities was so exponentially presented [...] The main exhibition of *Transeuropa* *Love is Love*. Art as LGBTQ Activism: from Britain to Belarus curated by Pawel Leszkowicz should be the example to follow in the canon of art's initiating a discussion about minorities [...] At *Labirynt* Gallery the exhibition *The Madonnas* by Katarzyna Holda is also worth recommending; it inscribes itself in *Transeuropa* in a different way: corporeality, the body's stigmatization by gender and time." Grzegorz Jozefczuk, "Getting to Know the Other", *Gazeta Wyborcza* Lublin daily

"*Transeuropa* Lublin reminds me of looking under the carpet and dusting the uncomfortable problems which are pushed to the margin: social inequality, the rights of women and sexual minorities, access to education. The word democracy refreshes its meaning."

Marta Ryczkowska, *Zoom* monthly

“Transeuropa is not only a festival of knowledge and art. It is also a test of openness in the society.”

Rafal Czekaj, Krytyka Polityczna

“Szymon Pietrasiewicz began performance art with his nude in a supermarket bearing a label ‘Human being, sale, 9 zlotys’. Today Pietrasiewicz alongside Amnesty International, Labirynt Gallery and a group of young scholars organized Transeuropa Festival in Lublin. It is part of a bigger European project... In Cluj the exhibition Pulse, in the Veil was mounted, inspired by Ars Homo Erotica at Warsaw’s National Museum. Also Lublin continues Ars Homo Erotica as its curator prepared here an intriguing show of social campaign posters for lgbt rights entitled Love Is Love. Poland’s 2003 action Let Us Be Seen, posters of Croatia’s organization LORI and Britain’s excellent design of Stonewall UK are on show.”

Dorota Jarecka, Gazeta Wyborcza national edition

“The Festival includes meetings with feminist Kazimiera Szczuka, co-author of Golden Harvest Irena Grudzinska-Gross, founder of the Campaign Against Homophobia Robert Biedron and a set of talks on contemporary politics, philosophy, ecology and art... Transeuropa finishes with Activities for a transnational Lublin with refugees, migrants and NGOs.”

Polish Press Agency

“Transeuropa is a rich programme of debates, workshops and performances.”

Malgorzata Szlachetka, Gazeta Wyborcza daily