

RELATED ARTISTIC PRODUCTION

A brief overview of art projects on Roma issues which are being carried out in Helsinki or are based there, are documented here. These include the projects of Sakari Tervo and Tatu Engeström, Ivor Stodolsky and Marita Muukkonen, Sami Maalas, Maija Mustonen and Outi Yli-Viikari.



The FACADE

A facade or façade is generally one side of the exterior of a building, especially the front, but also sometimes the sides and rear. The word comes from the French language, literally meaning “frontage” or “face”. In architecture, the facade of a building is often the most important from a design standpoint, as it sets the tone for the rest of the building. Many facades are historic, and local zoning regulations or other laws greatly restrict or even forbid their alteration.

(Wikipedia)

The Facade is a project by artists Sakari Tervo and Tatu Engeström, which started in October 2009 on a Roma camp in Helsinki. Engeström and Tervo built an architectural structure covering a shack inhabited by a Romani woman. The Facade uses the aesthetics of a traditional scandinavian wooden house and was based on wheels to prevent it from being considered as a permanent structure since there was no permission to build on the land.

The inhabitants of the Roma camp kept on modifying The Facade so that the original shack was taken down and The Facade turned into a sealed house with four walls and a door. Later some parts of the camp were torn down by the city of Helsinki, but The Facade remained untouched by the authorities.

The Facade was used as a home for various people from October 2009 until November 2010, despite the exceptionally snowy winter in Finland. In November 2010 the city of Helsinki decided to pay for return tickets of over 40 Roma's. Most of the people from the camp left back to Romania for the winter. In February 2011 the camp is deserted, but the modified Facade still remains on the site. The city of Helsinki is actively building on the land around the area and plans have been made to start building on the property where the camp existed.



The Beggars

A site-specific work on city-choreography performed during The Forces of Light, Site-specific Art Festival in Helsinki in December 2007.

The work was performed along the Subway-line in Helsinki, in the ticket-selling halls.

The concept was created by dance- and performance artists Maija Mustonen and Outi Yli-Viikari.

And the work was performed by artists Saami Maalas, Touko Heikkilä, Maija Mustonen and Outi Yli-Viikari.

We got the inspiration for the work from observing the daily moving bodies in the city-space.

It stricked us then that the city mostly full of people in movement had gotten a new detail, the beggars.

The physicality of begging and this very static way of creating a social and physical tension in the city space became the staring point of the work.

In the work Beggars we choreographed several different compositions that we performed as a group along the Subway-line in Helsinki, in the ticket-selling halls.

We created four different types of compositions titled; standing, sitting, mother with child and the praying composition. Each of them lasting from ten up to 30 minutes. We were in our normal clothes.

The work of course suggested many levels for interpretation.

Our approach was to make physical performance on Begging and to deal with its peculiar physicality and how it changes and creates tension in the city-space.

In 2007 in Helsinki the issue was quite new and the beggars from

Romania had more or less just arrived in the city.

The work was left as “a sketch”.

Maija Mustonen

In the the year 2007, artists Maija Mustonen and Outi Yli-Viikari composed a performance which was realized together with artists Touko Heikkinen and Saami Maalas. They went to the streets, tunnels and metro-stations of Hesinki doing series of live-installations using the poses of Roma beggars. In the performance the artists used their own clothing and the money (very very little) in the end was given to the real beggars. At the time of the performance the beggars were new phenomenon on the streets of Helsinki. The performance was made as a sketch or structure for public intervention but was not later continued.



The PERPETUAL GYPSY PAVILION – A Nomadic Pavilion

Interviewer: Reet Varblane

Why did you initiate Perpetual Gypsy Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2009?

The launch of the Perpetual Gypsy Pavilion in Venice was a response to a twofold crisis. Firstly, the planned Roma Pavilion, first launched in 2007, was cancelled a few weeks before the opening the second time in 2009. This highly unfortunate situation was made all the more acute by the fact that the Venice Biennale was taking place amid extreme violations of the human rights of Gypsy people (Roma) in Italy and in other European countries. Although the European Parliament officially condemned the situation, other top-level institutions did not.

The unbelievable injustices against Roma-Gypsies orchestrated and/or permitted by the Italian government in 2008-2009, and carried out without the intervention of other states, had to be made a focus of attention. As Europe's, and especially Italy's, most visible international arts festival, the right place for this was Venice.

The actual ideas for an initiative started well before this, based on a rather different concept by the Macedonian curator Suzana Milevska. This was to include, but was not focussed on issues concerning Roma people. As this project was not realised and the dire predicament of the Romani people left unaddressed at the Biennale, we decided to continue with the independent project which became the Perpetual Gypsy Pavilion.

How was it connected with Roma Pavilion “Paradise Lost” in 2007 at the Venice Biennale? “Paradise Lost” was one of the most exciting projects at that biennale, and it was not the case of the most brilliant contemporary art projects and star artists, it just the idea. Roma artists need to have their own platform for speaking out. And it worked.

The 2007 Roma Pavilion was the first ever pavilion for Roma-Gypsy art at the Venice Biennale. It is incredible that it took so long for it to be possible, but it was a great beginning. There were some excellent art works, and the very opening of it caused a great wave of sentiment. First of all, the artists who had to fight to just carry out their calling are to be given great credit, and also the curators. Yet it seems George Soros's Open Society Institute (OSI) deserves to be applauded for the very existence of the pavilion. That is non-trivial, long-term support and thinking.

The Perpetual Gypsy Pavilion was launched during an emergency, and with little time to spare. The Pavilion made strong political statements criticising European governments, and as such had to act at its own risk. Furthermore it must be pointed out to readers of Sirp, that this was not the launch of a pavilion with walls and works and artists and curators. Rather, the launch of the Perpetual

Gypsy Pavilion took place in 10 different national pavilions: The Pavilion of Greece, The Pavilion of Hungary, The Pavilion of Italy (Arsenale), The Pavilion of Poland, The Pavilion of Estonia, The Pavilion of Serbia, The Pavilion of Turkey, The Pavilion of Uruguay, The Nordic & Danish Pavilion and The Pavilion of the Comoros Islands.

It is remarkable, that to the best of our knowledge, this was the first time that the issue of Gypsy art entered the symbolic space of the national pavilions.

True, Venice has seen an Iraqi of origin from Finland, Jews from France, Britts exhibited by Germans, a New Zealand curator for the Lithuanian Pavilion and so on. But never has there been an exhibition of a publicly-proclaimed Roma-Gypsy artist in any of the national pavilions of the countries they live in. So we are happy that with few exceptions, almost all countries which we asked joined in such a short period of time. Let us hope they also start looking at their own Gypsy communities for artists to exhibit at future bienials.

How was Perpetual Gypsy Pavilion received?

Well, this needs some explaining. How do you receive a pavilion without walls? The pavilion consisted of a special Postcard from Venice: a return-addressed, stamped and postage-paid postcard. This special postcard stated the harsh facts of the Roma-Gypsy situation, the purpose of the Pavilion, and also included a brief questionnaire to be filled in before sending the postcard. Lastly, it also had a life-size image of a hand, with five circles at its finger-tips for fingerprints. Each national pavilion had someone at their desk to explain and instruct those willing to join us: "Ink each of your fingers individually on the ink-pad, and fingerprint yourself in solidarity."

This was in solidarity with those Roma in Rome, outside Naples and across the country still right now, adults and minors, who are (according to the European Parliament) being fingerprinted against the European Convention on Human Rights, and very much against their will.

The audience of the Biennale Preview reacted very positively. Also on the first day, when it was open to the general public, there was a lively response. All the postcards we had were fingerprinted and taken away within a very short period. The physical nature of the fingerprinting brought forth interesting reactions – "I haven't done this since... I went to the US", or "...I went to the army." But also an instinctive wiping of the hands, an attempt to remove the trace, the stigma, the bureaucratic instrument of racist targeting. Something that has a fascist history across Europe. In Estonia too.

There was some media attention, although not as much as desired, there being no time to prepare a wider campaign. We gave interviews to TV RAI-Veneto, and spoke to Radio France Culture and several art publications, including for example the video to found on Domus's website. Luckily, the information did reach most dedicated art-world people, which was our target of choice: e-flux in New York gave us a free slot on the day of the official launch on the steps of the

Hungarian Pavilion, our first participating pavilion.

Perhaps most importantly, there seems to have been some immediate effects in the arts. We have been asked by curators of Manifesta to recommend some Gypsy artists. Let's hope we see more such interest.

Perpetual Gypsy Pavilion was not one-time biennale project, it is long-term response to Roma people situation (to arise their self-esteem, self-confidence). Tell more about the process: what are the next steps?

Absolutely. The launch took place in the difficult and fast-paced context described above, but the long-term continuation is just as, or more important. From the outset, we planned to have the Perpetual Gypsy Pavilion travel. It would be a nomadic pavilion. Given funding, it would have walls, artists, curators and naturally exhibit art works. The good news is that we have received some seed funding, and will be holding the Helsinki Perpetual Gypsy Pavilion within a year's time. We also hope to hold a Pavilion in other cities, including Belgrade and Venice.

There are also things that we are trying to do and suggest for others to do. There are small and very easy ways. The simplest is to involve more artists of Gypsy origin in any project you do. In November we launched a whole new international project called The Arts Assembly. Among the few first members of the Assembly was Damian Le Bas, a young playwright and multi-talented artist from London...

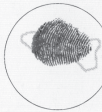
Have You thought how to engage (carry) Roma people from Estonia?

We held a talk at the Art Academy of Estonia this January, and the organiser Airi Triisberg herself suggested to invite one of your Estonian Roma-community figureheads, Roman Lutt, to join us. This started off a very interesting dialogue in the seminar, for he is especially interested in changing the dire educational situation in Estonia for young Roma. We would like to build a bridge between Tallinn and Helsinki when we hold the Helsinki Pavilion, and would like to invite Roma to cross back and forth for workshops and other sessions. In order to make this bridge a reality, we are looking for young Roma, and others too, even those with little experience but some courage, to join us.

You can find us on www.perpetualpavilion.org, or e-mail gypsypavilion@gmail.com

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PERPETUAL PAVILION GYPSY



The Italian government is carrying out a forced fingerprinting campaign targeting Romani people.



The mere presence of Romani in a given area may be considered as a cause for declaring a state of emergency.



Romani children are forcibly removed from their families, and parents forcibly separated.



The post-World War II consensus that raw racism is a vicious crime against humanity, is being violated by the Italian government and its supporters.



The UN, the EU Parliament and Amnesty have condemned these practices. It is for us to make sure that action is taken.

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The **Perpetual - Gypsy- Pavilion** is an initiative with and of Romani people.

In 2009, the Venice Biennale is taking place amidst **extreme violations of the human rights of the Romani People (Gypsies)** in Italy and in other European countries. 2007 saw the acclaimed first Roma Pavilion in Venice. The late cancellation of the the planned Roma Pavilion 2009 makes the dire situation all the more acute. Alternative projects have had very little time.

In response to this state of affairs, we are calling on the public and the art community to **fingerprint yourself & return this card** in support of the project for a Perpetual Gypsy Pavilion.

This designation carries within it the hope and demand that no matter what the organisational, financial, artistic or political situation, a Romani pavilion or representation will have a presence within the established art context.

Further - it leads to the demand that Romani artists to be represented in the National Pavilions of their countries of residence, which is happening in the mediated shape of the Postcard, which you hold in your hands, for the first time in 2009.

Several renowned artists, thinkers, curators, public figures and national pavilions have already declared their solidarity.

Planned events at the Venice Biennale 2009 will be announced as they are confirmed. Post-Venice Gypsy Pavilions are already planned for Helsinki and Belgrade, and more are to follow in the lead up to Venice 2011.

Read more at www.PerpetualPavilion.org

1. In your opinion how should Romani artists be represented at the Venice biennial?

Yes

2. Please name Roma Culture/art projects and artists you know?

Jookim Erkildsen's photo -
Project 'ROMA REISEN'

3. Name three obstacles to Roma integration in Europe.

- accept tradition

Helsinki 2010