

ALANICA 2013

By: Beral Madra

Since 2007, *Alanica*, a residency symposium and exhibition of contemporary art has been taking place in Vladikavkaz, situated in a strategic regional locality in the Northern Caucasus. With its Modernist grid urban planning, eclectic Russian revival architecture and mix of cultural heritage, Vladikavkaz is an enigmatic city. Positioned on the Valley of the Terek River between the majestic Caucasus Mountains, the location not only defines the topography and ecology but also determines the historical, political and economic vectors of the city.

This year *Alanica* was realized during the first two weeks of August. The exhibition, with the production of works, can be visited until the end of September. With 20 artists from North Ossetia, as well as artists from Berlin, Cairo, Istanbul, London, Makhachkala, Moscow, Omsk, Tbilisi, Vienna and Zagreb, the group quickly settled down into the daily life of Vladikavkaz. The exotic 19th and 20th century Russian provincial architecture, the mild climate with clouds appearing on the peaks of the Caucasus Mountains bringing occasional rain showers, and the leisurely rhythm of life all contributed to the goodwill and enthusiasm of the artists to contribute to the symposium with their knowledge and experience. During their fifteen day residency in Vladikavkaz, the artists of *Alanica 2013 contemporary art symposium* tried not only to gain access into daily life but also into the historical, cultural, economic and political facts and factors behind the city. The only way to see the effects of past and present ordeals, wars and sufferings, alongside the prevailing problems and visions for the future, beyond this peaceful environment, was to find possibilities for dialogue with the people of the city. Thus, this was the goal and task of the artists. A complicity of phenomena, Ossetia's traditional culture with its rich mythology and the continuing practice of Pagan rituals, alongside its Orthodoxy and 20th century history loaded with Soviet Modernism, as well as conflicts between the dominating forces and local resistance bestows Vladikavkaz with a strong consciousness and awareness of history and tradition. The artists discovered that the geo-economic position, on the thoroughfare from Russia to Central Asia, South Caucasus and Middle East, and the urgency of globalization on the other hand, are deeply entwined with personal memories related to the past. They have evidently reflected their discoveries and impressions in their works and included the micro histories and stories which are the main accumulation behind the official history, but they have also opened new ways of seeing and discussing the status quo and its current noticeable transformations. As an act of greeting and acknowledgment of the efforts of the artists, the local public showed great interest and could discover the artists' backgrounds, statements and desires during the evening programme of artist presentations. The outcome of the exchange and dialogue can be



Taus makhacheva, Landscape, 2013 ongoing, Wood, variable dimensions. - Courtesy of the artist.

seen in the artworks which have been donated to the future contemporary art museum of Vladikavkaz.

Dilara Akay (Turkey) conceived a work of memory about the determinedly commemorated Beslan tragedy in 2004 by contacting the association of the mothers of the child victims and getting their approval for the way she intended to make a performance and produce the work. She based her performance on pouring water on the graves, which is a common ritual in most of the local cultures. A number of bottles, after being emptied, were filled with images of the victims (on photographic negatives) and another number of bottles were filled with letters to the victims and to loved ones. She also installed her white winged sculpture on a light box that is garlanded with these bottles as a protective angel.

Sophia Cherkezishvili (Georgia), reflecting on the recent conflicts in the Caucasus between neighbours, produced a video showing an animation of two female dolls in a bizarre fight as a reaction to the hostile undercurrent in the region. White silk flags ornamented with black drawings of anatomic hearts and veins symbolizing her poetic approach to the ideological meaning of contradictions and antagonisms were placed on a mirror base.

The whole work is an allegory dealing with basic dilemmas, namely the antagonism between the ambitious and competitive nature of human beings and national ideologies.

Ivan Egelski (Russia) is focused on creating a new fusion between electronic or digital technology and traditional painting and sculpture to indicate the power of technology on today's art-making. He has produced new tablets consisting of iPads and historical scriptures such as hieroglyphs. In this project he presented the most emblematic landscape of North Ossetia, namely the Waterfall Zeyqalan, as a loop-video-painting on the surface of a monitor. The work, which is an assemblage of painted frame and monitor, targets the appreciation of the viewer under the ongoing influence of traditional art and surprises them with an illusion. The pixel-based nature of this electronic-painting is indicated within a smaller frame added to the surface of the monitor.

Alaadin Garunov's (Dagestan) three mixed-media on canvas works are icons of his theoretical calculations and reflections on the particular socio-political developments in Post-Soviet territories. For the last decade, he has conceived and produced material paintings consisting of aesthetically calculated horizontal layers of carpet, tarpaulin, rubber and fur as well as schematic black and white paintings based on photography. Each layer signifies the power of an ideological content: namely religion and tradition, industry and consumption, media and visual culture. Three of the paintings displayed in this exhibition are emblematic for his series in their content, namely the prayer of the President of Dagestan, Ramazan Abdulatipov, and the spiritual leader of the Republic shown together with the people in the cathedral mosque of Dagestan, a minimalist black on silver image on the tragic events of the war in Iraq, and an assemblage of the shoes of Muslims who are in prayer.

Aikaterini Geqisian (United Kingdom) pursued her research in the National Library of Vladikavkaz. She studied historical and cultural books to reach the essence of the past, and drew on the vectors of Modernist utopia and the

influence of traditional culture through the visual material produced in the 20th century. She collected a vast corpus of images that mostly signify the utopian ideals of the Soviet past. Using the touristic images of a photo-book as a base, she added her pictorial comments and created a comprehensive series of collages that reflect the transformation of narratives through visual signs from folk imagery to the domination of popular culture.

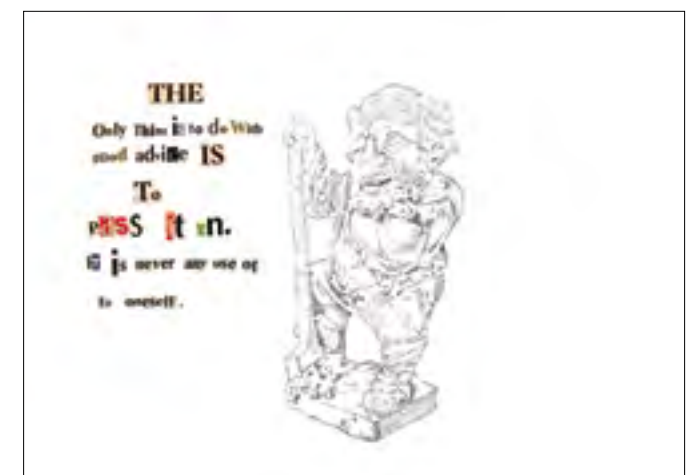
Being a native artist, Tembolat Guqkaev (North Ossetia-Alania) intended to create awareness by the public of the problems of the modern "consumption culture". The outcome was an ecologically conscious sculpture: an uncomfortable sofa made in the form of an iron cage filled with the most imperishable rubbish from human consumption.

Khaled Hafez (Egypt) worked on the multi-faceted city and landscape that he documented through photography during the first week of the residency. He transformed over 50 photographs through computer manipulation into onetime Polaroids, which he calls "fake-Polaroids". The idea is an invention of the artist, with nostalgia for the values of the past, referencing the bright, primitive colours and the style of old prints. He created images of the city, with its characteristic human and natural environment, as super clean and neat memories and impressions. In addition to the photography series, in collaboration with the composer and musician Mohammed Saleh, with whom Hafez has worked on audio-visual projects for the past three years, he also produced a 3 minute video-loop of the original sounds of Vladikavkaz.

Dejan Kaludjerovic's (Austria/Serbia) work Hopscotch, designed on an old black-board, is a familiar game to children all over the world. The blackboard is surrounded with 6 loudspeakers which broadcast statements from children of the city (aged 5-10) on serious topics such as political issues of social exclusion and inclusion, foreigners, being local, different languages, ongoing wars, money, poverty etc. The questions asked not only had the intention of challenging the children but also creating a new awareness in the public about how local children see the world they live in. By asking these questions, Kaludjerovic intended to reflect and question the ideological, cultural and socio political patterns that are imposed on children through family, education, media and their reasoning on the subject of what it means to be an outsider, outcast or marginal in any sense.

Stas Kharin (North Ossetia-Alania) reflects with a series on the function of contemporary art images that are supposed to have influence on the appreciation of today's society. Can the whole process of visual production supplied by artists from the past to the present rescue them from the wrong perception of the world? He appropriates the iconic images of Modernism and Post-modernism, such as the self-portrait of Van Gogh and ready-mades by Marcel Duchamp and Joseph Beuys. In this exhibition he appropriated Andy Warhol's Elvis Presley, which he painted on the canvas of a ready-made, namely a stretcher with all the stains of sickness and death on it. This juxtaposition conveys questions about art-icons, fame, immortality and mortality.

Taus Makhacheva (Dagestan), with the technical support of Kazbek Alikov, produced 7 different wooden noses, on the scale 1:1, to be displayed in a Plexiglas showcase. She grounded her work on linguistic and ethnic cultural facts and stories. In Avar language "meher" means mountain and nose at



1. Ferhat Ozqut, Untitled 1, Aphorism Series, 2013, drawing & collage on paper, 80x60cm. - Courtesy of the artist.

2. Ferhat Ozqut, Untitled 5, Aphorism Series, 2013, drawing & collage on paper, 80x60cm. - Courtesy of the artist.

3. Ferhat Ozqut, Untitled 2, Aphorism Series, 2013, drawing & collage on paper, 80x60cm. - Courtesy of the artist.

the same time, which combines the two features of the region. Within the ethnographic classification facial features are significant, and, according to fairy tales in Dagestan, men lose their noses (which signify their phallic power) and go in search of them in order to prove their masculinity. The work, is thus a satire on the mystic significance of the mountains and the common fantasy of male power.

Natalia Mali (Dagestan). A Window to Your Own-Self, is a wall installation with images from the past which reflect fragments of her memories of growing up in the Soviet State and of her later life and experiences in Western countries such as the US and Great Britain. She presented the selected images of her youth in the form of a scrap book and used her own collection of photography and documents as well as visual material found in Vladikavkaz. The documents and images are framed and hung in the way they are traditionally displayed in the homes of local people. Mali juxtaposed the power of traditional visual memory with the power of today's contemporary art applications.

Marko Markovic (Croatia) based his performance and sculpture on the title of the symposium: Sensible Action! He invited the choir of the Church of the Nativity of the Virgin, one of the oldest and most beautiful buildings in Vladikavkaz, to perform a concert with the former "Electrozinc" factory worker Maharbek Baroeva in a gesture of "Rot Front". The arm of Baroeva was moulded as a zinc sculpture in the same factory. The whole work signified the ongoing tension between the revolutionary industrial past and the patriarchal and religious present.

Mediterranean Carpet Project of Michelangelo Pistoletto and Lovedita. Org, realized in the National Science Library of Vladikavkaz by Emanuella Baldi and Filippo Fabrical (Italy) in conjunction with 20 women participants, had the title Kairos, which in Greek means the right or opportune moment or the supreme moment for an important purpose. The workshop was based on the "co-creation methodology" derived from contemporary art concepts and thinking which guides the individual toward an inner freedom, to creative expression and possibility of choice. The carpet consists of numerous knitted circular pieces combined to form a colourful maze of difference.

Damir Muratov (Russia) works with found objects or ready-mades and creates an art-transformation between their past and present significations. He names this process "sanitART", indicating a healing through art-making. In Vladikavkaz, he found many objects in the shopping areas and street bazaars which he transformed with collage and painting techniques into humorous metaphors for political or cultural ideologies. His aim is to approach the viewer with familiar everyday objects and surprise them with a presentation that reflects their convictions and subconscious.

Ferhat Ozgür (Turkey) works with a wide range of techniques and materials including drawings, paintings, photography, video and performance, mainly focusing on the individuals' feelings, positions and behaviours in metropolitan cities and their urban transformations. He was inspired by the influence of the medieval cultural heritage in the region and made a transmission of an allegorical work which he encountered in Salzburg Park, namely bizarre medieval sculptures of marginal citizens. He associated these figures with current cultural, economic and political problems through the quotes of

Oscar Wilde by adding speech bubbles with cut-out letters from newspapers. **Rivka Rinn (Germany)** succeeded in shooting 5000 specific images of the city, citizens, daily life, economy, sport and culture during her residency in Vladikavkaz, which she showed in an 8-images-in-1 video-loop. She was able to discover and work in a town which she has never visited before but which she had a personal interest in as her mother's family is from Russia. Sabina Shikhinskaya's (Azerbaijan), "Moment of Silence," 1 minute video-loop is a tribute to the tragedy in Beslan. The video and photography installed as a diptych reveals the loss and the task of sustaining the memory of the victims, which she advocates can only be through "silence". She placed a photograph of the porcelain angels people have placed on the wall of the cemetery of the victims of the "City of Angels" next to a video showing a girl-child with her back turned to the viewer who leaves the stool she is sitting on and disappears.

Johannes Voql (Germany) realized a sculpture and performance during the symposium. The sculpture, which looks like an anchored float used to guide ocean navigators but that will not float because of its bottle shaped concrete anchors, signifies the false steps mankind is taking, or the faultiness that determines the fate of nations and societies. Voql also brought a ready-footprint of a phantom person and installed it on the pavement in front of Lenin's monument.

Kazbek Tedeev's (North Ossetia-Alania) photographic work involved the citizens of Vladikavkaz in a cultural investigation which dealt with the current meaning of museum objects in today's socio-cultural-economic context. He invited the people to select a museum object and express their thoughts and feelings on the value and meaning of the object. They were photographed and video-taped with the selected object. Their comments were exhibited with the photographs and in video-documentation. Kazbek invites the public to question their historical heritage and its system as well as to be aware of the significance of the sociological contents of contemporary art.

Alanica 2013 was organized by the Ministry of Culture and Mass Communications of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania and the National Centre for Contemporary Art and was supported by the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation. Together with the general coordinator of Alanica 2013, Ms. Gala Tebieva and her team, we intended and aimed to convey to the people of North Ossetia news ways of understanding and interpreting global affairs and developments through contemporary art works. We hope that our goals have found their way into the minds and souls of the people of Vladikavkaz.

ABOUT THE WRITER

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Johannes Voql, Bodenboje/around bouyaqe, 2013, concrete, steel plates of 20 pieces, 250x32x12 cm. - Courtesy of the artist.