



Oto Hudec: *Invisible Museum*, project, 2017

# Decades of inclusion? Roma artists and contemporary art

27 April 2023

## Nihad Nino Pušija (\*1965)



'I was able to achieve a successful disruption of the canon of visual representation of Roma with the selection of Nihad Nino Pušija's photographic works. I invited him to the exhibition with a small collection of non-typical "gypsy" photographs. My aim was simply not to repeat the images expected from the "ethno-industry" in order to point out a very important aspect: In order to legitimize themselves as artists, Romani artists do not have to create "gypsy-typical" works. I go even further: the versatility of the photographic motifs in Pušija's work (see also the catalogue text by Dr. Sibylle Badstübner-Gröger) refers much more "honestly" to the complexity of ethnicized determinations of identity or to national affiliations and simultaneous hybridities - in Pušija's case to ex-Yugoslavian and German culture - than is the case in "conventional" illustrations of Roma.'

André Raatzsch

<https://www.romarchive.eu/en/collection/50x-fotografien-ohne-antiziganismus/>

<http://www.fotofabrika.de/>

## 52nd Venice Biennale (2007): "Think with the Senses, Feel with the Mind: Art in the Present Tense"

### Roma pavilion – transnational representation; ethnic collective

Tunali, T. (2011). The politics of "Roma inclusion" at the 52nd Venice art biennale. *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review*, 11(4), 701-711.

Is art history lagging behind processes of inclusion? – first Romani Group exhibition in 1979 (Budapest)

Inclusion as “the consequence of a sudden and spontaneous humanitarian interest. They are the continuation of a complex set of political, economic, and discursive relations marked by the collapse of State Socialism and EU expansion which helped to institutionalize “Western” human rights discourses to frame “Eastern” ethnic conflicts and tensions in the process of the ongoing “liberalization” and “democratization” of the CEE countries”

Tunali, T. (2011). The politics of "Roma inclusion", 702–703.





Did the Roma Pavilion in the 52nd Venice Biennial aim for negotiating the Roma's "particular political vocabulary" in need to be visible to Romany populations around Europe to build an alternative political solidarity?

Or was this exhibition part of the institutional creativity aimed at the socio-political integration of the former communist Europe into the global economic circuits?

Tunali, T. (2011). The politics of "Roma inclusion", 703.

## Identity and artistic expression

The title of the exhibition, *Paradise Lost*, refers to the fact that the majority society should at last give up not only negative stereotypes about the Roma, but also the exotic “Gypsy romances.” The self-image that is to emerge at this display through the reinterpretation of Roma identity is not expected to be homogenous or stable. It is our belief that the identity of the Roma serves as a model for a modern, European transnational identity that is capable of cultural fusion and adaptation to changing circumstances. This is how the artists invited represent themselves, and this is how they experience their Gypsy identity. But while the goals of the Pavilion include the representation of this flexible identity, the individual artists have not been requested to deal with their own identity. Not every one of the artists in the Pavilion is of Roma origin. Nihad Nino Pušija, for instance, who lives in Berlin, has been documenting the life of a Gypsy family for two decades and had built strong links with this minority before learning (about two years ago) that he himself has Roma ancestors. The Finnish Kiba Lumberg’s video work ends with this sentence:

*“I don’t recall being a Gypsy, but I have Gypsies in my dreams, and Gypsies surround me.”*

This Roma heritage, the traces of it, the memories, experiences and traumas define the pieces, and the artists’ identity will never be irrelevant when interpreting their work. As Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe, the distinguished expert of mixed-race studies said:

*“So many things have happened to me because of what I am, and they shape the way I am today...”<sup>20</sup>*

Gabi JIMÉNEZ



*Caravans and the Cypresses*, 2001  
oil on canvas, 80 x 60 cm, collection of the artist  
photo: Gabi Jiménez



*Saintes Maries de la Mer 3 - The Caravans*, 2002  
oil on canvas, 73 x 116 cm, collection of the artist  
photo: Gabi Jiménez

## András KÁLLAI

All my works are the results of an intuitive creative process, as regards both their subjects and the process of realisation.

It was always after the event that I could recognise my method and identify its sources, whether it be an attraction to primitive art, representations of Venus, compositions built from used dolls and toys, or Barbie dolls.

Which is to say the work always comes first – spontaneously or by chance, – and the idea, the subject follows in its wake, whether immediately or much later.

I want to emphasise this because the Barbie dolls are again something I chanced upon. This figure had appeared in all of my earlier toy-compositions, but I had not accorded more attention to it than to any other degenerate and grotesque toys. But as two of my interests – or more precisely, those works that utilise primitive art and those that employ contemporary toys – were approaching one another, I realised I was using two idols, two completely different images of women! One is Venus, who serves fertility, the other Barbie, who serves infertility! My sculpture *Fat Barbie* is a result, the first refined form, of the encounter of these two idols.

I want to represent the Barbie doll in certain situations, with the use of simple symbols. The works that emerged along this concept may at first sight be perplexing, even funny, but it is my hope that they are attention-arresting.



András Kállai, *Fat Barbie*. 2006, Terracotta, plastic, 28 x 13 x 14 cm,  
<http://universes-in-universe.de/car/venezia/eng/2007/tour/roma/img-19.htm>

Kiba LUMBERG



*Lace Tablecloth*, 1995  
gouache, 50 x 88 cm, National Bureau of Antiquities, The Archives for Prints and Photographs, Finland  
photo: Ritva Bäckman



Roma identity politics in the EU has not been employed to unveil the reasons of increasing social inequality; instead it has been applied to define Roma as a distinct community, which, in turn, has triggered traditional prejudices on them.

Tunali, T. (2011). The politics of "Roma inclusion", 705.



## PARADISE LOST

Edited by Tímea Junghaus and Katalin Székely



THE FIRST ROMA PAVILION  
LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA 2007

“Are we creating an ethnicising, socially motivated ‘special case’, sponsored by philanthropy, in the hybrid environment of the art establishment?”

Gottfried WAGNER, “The Roma Pavilion in Venice: A Bold Beginning”, in Exhibition Catalogue: Paradise Lost, Open Society Foundations, Budapest, 2007, p. 36.

## Vanda Zsoldos, Stációk (Stations), 1988

‘...and in order to become a Roma painter, the existence of the Roma bricklayer should be acknowledged. This is a massive and difficult question ... and I would like to be a Hungarian painter ... The time will come but I will not get the final immigration license from my colleagues for another year or two ... I am going to present a significant piece of art at the World Fair and this work of art ... will not be made by Tamás Péli the Roma painter but Tamás Péli, a painter with a European mind and soul, that of the image designer who is concerned with the future of this country and his community’.



Tamás Péli (b. Budapest 1948, d. Budapest 1994),

<https://www.romarchive.eu/en/collection/staciok-portrefilm-peli-tamas-festomuveszrol/>

**“WE ARE WHAT WE ARE” ASPECTS OF ROMA LIFE IN CONTEMPORARY ART @ MINORITEN GALLERY, GRAZ (2004)  
(SHOWN IN TRNAVA IN THE FOLLOWING YEAR)**

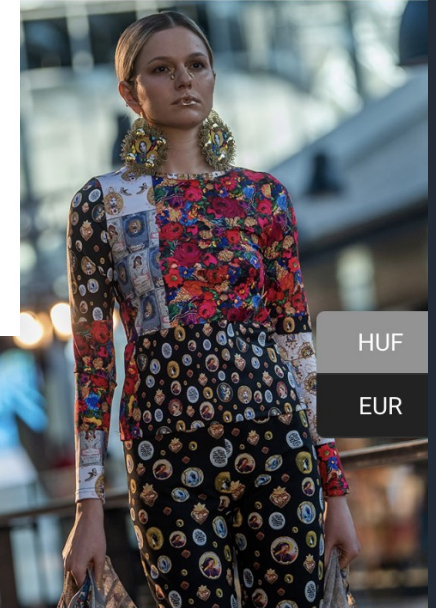
Matei Bejenaru (RO)  
Michaela Bruckmüller (A)  
Pavlina Fichta Cierna (SK)  
Cosmin Gradinaru (RO)  
Iosif Kiraly / Mariana Celac / Marius Marcu-Lapadat (RO)  
Monika Kovacova (SK)  
Aydan Murtezaoglu (TR)  
Terez Orsos (HU)  
Nihad Nino Pusija (D/BiH)  
Gyöngyi Raczne Kalanyos (HU)  
Mario Rizzi (I), Erzen Shkololli (KOS)  
Mladen Stilinovic (HR)  
Ceija Stojka (A)  
Chad Evans Wyatt (USA/CZ)  
Dusan Zahoransky (CZ/SK)



Nihad Nino Pusija, photo from the series "Ramadan Armani"

R O M A N I

A growing feminist Roma movement means we will see more Roma woman taking control of their image in fashion. “The more Roma women will be empowered to have independence, safety, and a say in their careers, the more fashion designers that the Roma will have,” Grigore says. “Probably there are quite a few that we don't know about, just because they don't have the platform and accessibility.”



HUF

EUR



FA  
V

LACKA – Ladislava Gažiová



<https://www.artlist.cz/en/lacka-ladislava-gaziova-618-video/>

*O kosmos hino kalo/The Universe is Black*, 2017,  
Moravian Gallery in Brno,



Ladislava Gažiová,  
<https://www.artmap.cz/artist/ladislava-gaziova/>

Phundrado drom / The Open Road, Ethnographic  
Museum, Prague, 3. 6. 2022 – 31. 5. 2024



<https://www.nm.cz/en/program/exhibitions/phundrado-drom-the-open-road#gallery-9>

Bílá Místa, Hranicář Gallery, Ústí nad Labem (2020)



## Romane Kale Panthera / Roma Black Panthers



### ŠEDÁ <sup>[1]</sup> AWARD – WE FEED ON THE INFORMATION IN THE BRNOX GUIDE

This is our reaction to the Litera Book Award in the category Journalism for Kateřina Šedá's book BRNOX. The Brno Bronx Guide.

The aim of Kateřina Šedá was to give general public a sense of the Brno neighborhood called Bronx and arouse interest in the place. That did not happen, though. On the contrary, Šedá in her „revealing“ process did not get further than to the beginning of her journey, which, however, most of the ambient society is familiar with. The residents of the neighborhood are caricatured and ridiculed in the book. Ordinary readers have only confirmed their prejudices and stereotypes concerning the Roma. But Kateřina Šedá is an acclaimed writer and we believe that an artist bears responsibility and should try to expand horizons – go further than what the majority can see.

Magnesia litera, a prestigious literary award, which Šedá received for the Guide, then in the eyes of most Roma seemed as if it had definitely proved the centuries lasting injustice and once again legitimized the Gadjo derision. The Guide of the locality became a lampoon thrown in the faces of the Roma!

### Romani Black Panthers

The art group ROMANE KALE PANTHERA was established as a reaction to anti-Roma marches in the Czech Republic. Based on such events, people in affected areas had to make a decision, change their attitudes and mainly take a stand on the basis of their ethnicity. People who lived normal lives became activists.

Glossary of terms:

Gadjo = Non-Romani

<sup>[1]</sup> Šedá is the surname of the author, however, it also translates as GREY in Czech. The award could be also interpreted as GREY AWARD then.



# Documents of Socially Engaged Art

EDITED BY  
RAPHAEL VELLA &  
MELANIE SARANTOU

Raphael Vella & Melanie Sarantou,  
Documents of Socially Engaged Art,  
InSEA (2021)



Figure 1. Josef Lada – Illustration for the chapter Mikeš stolen. Approx. 1934. © Josef Lada. Published with the kind permission of Josef Lada's heir. Talking tomcat Mikeš is approaching the fire, around which the 'Gypsies' are sitting, to ask them for overnight shelter and food. Subsequently, he is captured, put in a bag and beaten. This is a stereotypical portrayal of Roma as oriental travellers with bad intentions.



Figure 2. Romane Kale Panthera: Mifeš Stolen – A Rewrite of History, 2020. Illustration accompanying the rewritten chapter of Josef Lada's fairy tale book. © Romane Kale Panthera. Published with the kind permission of Romane Kale Panthera. Next, we can see the inversion of good and bad. In the artistic intervention, the good tomcat Mikeš turns into Mifeš, an embodiment of evil. Roma are portrayed as good magicians fighting against evil.



Rather than the realisation of a specific museum concept, the project connects a range of programmes (exhibitions, film screenings, performance, workshops, etc.), modelling nomadic, flexible institutional operation, which raises questions and formulates statements with the devices of contemporary art. It aspires to achieve all of this in accordance with the museum approaches of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that extend social engagement to reconsidering the relations of museum narratives, cultural heritage and contemporaneity. Although each of the presented artworks contributes to the creative act of the collaborative conception with a unique voice, they share a common desire for narrative, speech and dialogue; their raw material is also shared: contemporary society.



**ROMA  
MOMA**

<https://eriac.org/category/romamoma/>

Małgorzata Mirga-Tas (\*1978)



Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, Re-enchanting the World, exhibition view, [Polish Pavilion at the 2022 Venice Biennale](#). Image courtesy Zachęta National Gallery of Art. Photo: Daniel Rumiancew.