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At Home in Europe

Clymene Christoforou, Co-Director, ISIS Arts, UK

[At Home in Europe \(pl/Analiza-przypadkow/Contents/Projekty/Database-of-Case-Studies/At-Home-in-Europe\)](#) is a year-long Culture 2000 project, a collaboration between [ISIS Arts \(http://www.isisarts.org.uk\)](http://www.isisarts.org.uk), [Newcastle upon Tyne \(UK\)](#), [Interspace \(pl/content/view/full/7020\)](#) in [Sofia, \(Bulgaria\)](#), [Rixc \(http://www.rixc.lv\)](http://www.rixc.lv) in [Riga, \(Latvia\)](#) and [BEK \(http://www.bek.no\)](http://www.bek.no) in [Bergen, \(Norway\)](#).

At ISIS Arts we work with visual and media artists to create work for public spaces. With UK and international partners we are interested in developing projects which consider individual or collective 'identity' and 'belonging'.

In a climate of increased 'national' security and a greater awareness of issues of migration and assimilation we wanted to develop a project which considered what being 'at home' in Europe meant for nomadic artists and transient wider communities.

What we shared with our media centre partners was that either geographically or politically, we were all somehow on the edge of Europe.

In collaboration with our partners, *At Home in Europe* created residency opportunities for 4 artists from the partner countries and a screening programme featuring a further 16 European artists. The project is culminating in a series of exhibitions, a tour of the screening programme and a publication.

The screening programme has been touring Europe in the ISIS Arts inflatable exhibition space, the Big M. It was recently presented at the White Nights festival in Riga, (Latvia), appeared in the UK at the Berwick International Film and Media Festival, 21st – 24th September, and will be shown in central Newcastle upon Tyne, 29th September and Derby town centre, 13th-14th October. The exhibition of the completed residencies will tour European venues in 2008.

Cultural Identity

“Dario Fo rightly pointed out, *‘even before Europe was united in an economic level or was conceived at the level of economic interests and trade, it was culture that united all the countries of Europe. The arts, literature, music are the connecting link of Europe’*. Indeed, Europeans share a common cultural heritage, which is the result of centuries of creativity, migratory flows and exchanges. “(i)

In this recent **[communication on culture from the European Commission \(http://ec.europa.eu/culture/eac/communication/comm_en.html\)](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/eac/communication/comm_en.html)** Dario Fo is quoted in order to present culture as the intangible glue that holds us Europeans together.

UNESCO's Mission for the Division of Cultural Heritage tells us however that its “principal priority for the

biennium (is) promoting cultural diversity.” (ii)

Can our cultural heritage be both one and many?

Europe is a collection of diverse countries with diverse cultures. Yet in a world where communication is global at a touch of a button and contemporary culture a pick and mix from the range of influences at our finger-tips, how can we begin to consider a shared European culture?

If our culture *is* European, then what or who are we? When asked where we are from do we start with our town or village, our nation or our continent. In India during a recent visit I was undoubtedly from Europe, to my neighbour I'm from number 47. It is through dislocation, when we are outside our own cultures that cultural differences appear strongest.

If our culture is more than the accident of our geography is it also more than the history of our people?

Europe is made up of sovereign states each with their own national 'story'. Several of these states were subject to more or less totalitarian regimes for 50 years post World War Two. Others have a Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox or Islamic heritage. Some share the ancient Greek and Roman cultural heritage, others not.

In thinking of a modern European cultural identity is there an expectation that former soviet states divest themselves of their past, and that their artists and cultural producers embrace a new post communist liberal democratic European identity? And where does religious sensibility fit within this debate?

In England, where people still talk of “going to” Europe, cultural diversity is not the result of someone else's empire, but of England's own. In considering intercultural dialogue do Western Europeans think more of the legacy of our colonial pasts, than of what we might share as Europeans?'

Within a European political framework, culture deliberately remains the responsibility of the member states. The best way, it is felt, to safeguard and grow the cultural heritage of each nation. But what does this mean for the nomadic “international' artist?

Can there be such a thing as a European project? Can we share a cultural heritage *and* celebrate our difference or can European identity only ever be a fall back position in times of conflict and fundraising?

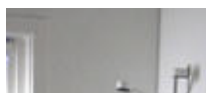
Between States

These were the questions raised as we developed *At Home in Europe* which considers cultural celebration and cultural assimilation within a European home (land).

Each artist was asked to consider European and national identities, considering what we as Europeans share and the diversity we celebrate. When daily more and more Europeans decide to live in other European countries is there a growing homogeneity of culture or an underlining of difference?

Borjana Ventzislavova (http://athomeineurope.eu/blogs/residencies/?page_id=91) is a Bulgarian artist living in Vienna and currently in residence at ISIS Arts in the UK. Her project considers the stories, opinions and impressions of migrants to the North East of England. To produce her work, Borjana has interviewed 'displaced' persons; people who are here for political, economic, religious, family or educational reasons. Some of those interviewed were artists themselves.

In Riga, **Martin John Callanan** (<http://blog.greysisgood.eu/>) at RIXC continued his project “the location of I' where he presents a world where people live online, working and communicating, inhabiting online spaces - in a state of continuous connectivity, where everything is done via the internet. Through mobile and geo mapping technology, Martin makes himself virtually findable to any one anywhere in the world. Here he becomes a citizen not of Latvia or Europe but of the digital and the physical world.



Kriss Latvian animator **Kriss Salmanis** has been in residence at BEK in Bergen. During his flight from Latvia to Norway and overhearing the various languages spoken on board, he decided to work with the pitfalls of



Salmanis, Shower Animation, 2007.

misunderstanding and understanding through translation. The resulting work is an animation of the silhouette of a man, a lively figure hopping into a shower and washing himself. The still images are painted onto the surface of the shower where they are washed off and repeated, then re-photographed for animation. Translating the original image from video to painting to photography to animation. Each stage of the translation brings with it changes to the original.

From 'East to West to East' takes American artist **Anya Lewin** (http://athomeineurope.eu/blogs/residencies/?page_id=3) from America to the UK to Interspace in Bulgaria where she creates plans for lessons on how to be European. Her playful and political work uses fragments of narrative to examine 'between states' such as that of animal and human, old and young, and humour and melancholy.

In the project and this article, we invite artists and readers to respond to and question presumptions we both share and challenge when we consider European identity and a shared European Culture. **Share your views on LabforCulture.org** (<http://www.labforculture.org/en/labforculture/forums>)

There is no conclusion here but I would like to end with an excerpt from **Anya Lewin** (<http://www.labforculture.org/en/labforculture/forums>)'s Lesson Plan number 3:

"We can now conclude lesson 3 and define 'European cultural identity as the nameless and indefinite stance that results from a precise act of will to be European.' "(iii)

REFERENCES

- (i) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a European Agenda for Culture in a Globalizing World. May 2007
- (ii) Extracts from UNESCO's Draft Programme 2006-2007 Mission – Division of Cultural Heritage. General Conference, Thirty-third Session - PARIS 2005
- (iii) Anya Lewin, InterSpace Artist in Residence, lesson plan 3, May 2007
ref: Patrick Boylan, *On being European: the contribution of intercultural communication theory and pedagogy*. Keynote talk at the 6th Annual IALIC Conference, Brussels, December 11th, 2005.

Biography Clymene Christoforou

Clymene Christoforou is a director and founder member of **ISIS Arts** (<http://www.isisarts.org.uk>), a visual and media arts organisation based in the North East of England with an international residency, research and training programme. ISIS is a currently lead organisation on *At Home in Europe* - a Culture 2000 project with European visual and media arts partners.

Clymene is also board member of **Culture North East** (<http://www.culturenortheast.org>), the regional cultural consortium, and a 2007 NESTA Cultural Leadership Awardee recently based with **EFAH** (<http://www.efah.org>) (*(/pl/Drogowskaz/Zawartosc/Sieci/Culture-Action-Europe-European-Forum-for-the-Arts-and-Heritage)* (the European Forum for Arts and Heritage in Brussels).

The *At Home in Europe* screening programme is currently touring European festivals in the Big M and will appear at the Berwick Film Festival, UK from 21st -24th September and in Newcastle city centre on 29th September 2007. The results of the residencies will be launched later in the year. For enquiries on the availability of the project for exhibition please contact ISIS Arts. <http://www.athomeineurope.eu>

<http://www.athomeineurope.eu>

Invited responses from participants in the At Home in Europe project:


We Shall Overswim

Borjana Ventzislavova, "We Shall Overswim", multi-channel video installation, 2007. Sometimes I'm a Bulgarian artist, sometimes I'm an ...

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| 25 wrz 2007


Between expectations and reality: InterSpace and the At Home in Europe Project

The themes underlying the Bulgarian participation in the At Home in Europe project were Bulgaria's recent accession to the European Union (January 2007) and ...

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European Identity Integration Lessons

Anya Lewin, a video still from European Identity Integration Lessons, Sofia 2007. The Bulgarian artist and writer Vassya Vassileva remarked to me, about ...

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