

RECONCILIATIONS



Poster for original exhibition in Sarajevo
Design by: Hao Zhang and Masumi Ishii

Artists

Lana Čmajčanin and Adela Jušić
Milena Michalski
Mladen Miljanović
Paul Coldwell
Post-Conflict Research Center
Sabina Tanović and Dario Kristić
Vladimir Miladinović
Ziyah Gafić

RECONCILIATIONS

RECONCILIATIONS

Artists

Lana Čmajčanin and Adela Jušić

Milena Michalski

Mladen Miljanović

Paul Coldwell

Post-Conflict Research Center

Sabina Tanović and Dario Kristić

Vladimir Miladinović

Ziyah Gafić

PREFACE

Rachel Kerr

REconciliations was an exhibition of art work produced in response to a call to artists to investigate the concept and practice of reconciliation, specifically, in this case, in relation to the Siege of Sarajevo. It was part of a larger research project, *Art and Reconciliation: Conflict, Culture and Community*, funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council under its Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security Research programme and the Global Challenges Research Fund. The project was an interdisciplinary collaboration between King's College London (James Gow, Rachel Kerr and Milena Michalski, War Studies), the London School of Economics (Denisa Kostovicova, Government) and the University of the Arts London (Paul Lowe, London College of Communication and Paul Coldwell, Chelsea College of Art). We are grateful to the AHRC for taking a leap of faith in funding such an ambitious project, and to all those individuals involved, including the fantastic project staff, Tiffany Fairey, Henry Redwood, Jelena Petrović, Ivor Sokolic, Tom Paskhalis and Ari Salazar Volkmann, and representatives of partner organisations, including Ivan Zverzhanovski (UNDP), Velma Šarić, Leslie Woodward and Tatjana Milovanović (Post-Conflict Research Centre, Sarajevo), and, especially in this context, the wonderful Elma Hasimbegović and Elma Hodžić from the History Museum of Bosnia and Hercegovina, who managed the open call to artists, hosted us for workshops and of course the exhibition itself.

Art and Reconciliation sought to fill an important gap by producing an overarching study of reconciliation, a concept at the heart of a great deal of funded activity and linked to goals of transitional justice, peacebuilding and development, but one which was notoriously ill-defined. The immediate impetus was that large amounts of money have been spent funding ‘reconciliation’ projects in the Western Balkans (and elsewhere), but there was very little evidence of positive outcomes. Indeed, in some case, such activities seem only to have reinforced animosities among different groups. There was therefore both a gap in knowledge about what has been done, and an even larger gap in terms of what might be possible. Of particular interest were innovative projects involving the arts and artists with the potential to open up new and intriguing possibilities for reconciliation by providing alternative physical and conceptual spaces and sites of inter-group dialogue, but which also posed even more acute challenges when it comes to evaluation.

Rather than impose our own, or others’ definition of reconciliation, we sought to find out how the term was understood and practiced in different settings and with diverse constituent groups. We used this knowledge develop an innovative framework or toolkit for its evaluation, and to investigate new pathways for reconciliation activity that might be charted via a variety of artistic interventions. Broadly, the project sought to do this in three strands, integrating interdisciplinary work spanning the arts, humanities and social sciences: History, Discourse and Practice.

In Strand 3 (Practice), we conducted three major sets of activities: detailed mapping of reconciliation activity sponsored by major donors, and in the ‘everyday’ in the Western Balkans; building a database of activities involving

arts practices in reconciliation and/or conflict resolution activities globally; and commissioning and evaluating a discrete set of projects to investigate the role of visual arts and community-based practices (photography, film-making, drawing, and sculpture). As part of this last effort, we worked in partnership with the History Museum of Bosnia and Hercegovina to develop an open-call, the result of which was to commission a number of artists from the region to develop and produce work in response to the archives and artefacts in the Museum’s collections. This work was exhibited from 27 June-31 August 2018 at the Museum, and covered in the national media.

Our hope is that the exhibition, as the basis for future work with artists and the collections, will help to support the reinvention of the Museum, which already has a new lease of life thanks to what the New York Times acknowledged were the ‘superhuman efforts’ of its Director, Elma Hasimbegovic. As the New York Times observed, it is ‘[v]isionaries like Ms. Hasimbegovic [who] seem to hold the key to Sarajevo’s future (New York Times, 2015). As such, we are grateful to have had some small part in supporting the Museum’s work and contributing through research to the shaping of a creative and innovative programme of artistic interventions and the creation of a ‘living museum’. We further hope that this will contribute to the restoration and future resilience of cultural life, and to reconciliation, however it is understood and practiced.

ARTISTIC PRACTICES IN POST CONFLICT SOCIETY

Paul Lowe

A fundamental question for art is how it should relate to and engage with the broader social, political and economic climate of the times, and how far the artist should concern themselves with the world they inhabit. These questions are particularly troubling in those parts of the world that have endured the scars of war, where artists and arts organisations have to deal with the complex and problematic issue of whether the past should be remembered and commemorated, or whether such attention is actually counterproductive in imagining how in the future further conflicts might be prevented. The works in this exhibition were produced as an intervention to question the role of the artist in post conflict society, and more specifically the role that creative arts practices can play in the process of reconciliation and peace building. They were commissioned as part of *Art and Reconciliation*, an innovative and collaborative interdisciplinary AHRC funded research project involving King's College London (War Studies), the London School of Economics (Government) and the University of the Arts in London (London College of Communication) [Project Team] and non-academic collaborators in its design, production and delivery, commissioning artists in a variety of media to create and develop practices and artefacts. The primary geographical focus of the project was on the Western Balkans, but it also conducted comparative and

historical research to investigate how reconciliation has been understood, conceptualised and practised in multiple contexts across time and space.

Our research identified four key ways in which artists and arts organisations conceive of the role of creative interventions in post conflict situations, identifying with the arts as a force for healing, as a process of remembering, as a space for dialogue and as a vehicle for imagining new futures. Art has potential as a parallel space to political and social arenas that has the ability to unsettle dominant narratives of what reconciliation is or isn't, should or shouldn't be, and as a platform to give voice to dissent and differing views.

As a result of our initial research process that questioned the role of the arts in post conflict society, a series of commissions were undertaken in collaboration with The History Museum of Bosnia and Hercegovina in Sarajevo, and **Stacion Centre for Contemporary Art in Pristina, Kosovo**. As a result of open calls issued by each organisation, a number of artists from the region were selected by an international jury for funding to produce works for the exhibition. For the History Museum commission, the artists were invited to produce works that related to its permanent collection of objects and artefacts relating to the Siege of Sarajevo, whilst for the Stacion commission the brief was more broadly related to reconciliation in general. In addition to the open call, a number of works were directly commissioned by the project as they represented particular forms of artistic intervention that our research had identified as worthy of investigation. These interventions investigated how different forms of artistic practice might affect the perceptions of inter group relations in the region. Each intervention was evaluated to assess its impact on the

artists involved, the participants in creating the artwork, and on targeted and general audiences. Treating the artistic processes as emergent, and the artist commission model as a creative leap of faith, the impact of which is unpredictable. The research alongside this commission focused on documenting and capturing the creative artistic process, the participants' response to the artistic intervention and the work that came out of it. The words of Mladen Miljanović serve to sum up the ethos of the project, 'if we don't take risks in art we are lying. Art should reflect these difficult circumstances, but art should ask not how can we face trauma but how can we redefine the question of trauma. That is the power of art, the artist can reformulate the problem of the present and its relation to the past. That is the power and the responsibility of the artist today'. The artists reflections on their process, and the responses to the work from audiences, identified a series of key features that art can contribute to post conflict situations. Firstly, art is personal, allowing for an individual response to a complex issue. Secondly, art remembers and pays testimony to the past. Thirdly, art pays attention to things that would otherwise go unnoticed and unseen. Fourthly, art has a transformative potential, both in terms of material objects but also perceptions, and finally the arts are empathetic, enabling a shared emotional response that can bring people together.

RECONCILIATION

Paul Coldwell

The exhibition *ReConciliation*, first staged in the History Museum in Sarajevo in June 2018 provided me with a very particular and demanding challenge. How can I, with no first-hand experience of the Bosnia war or indeed any conflict, present work that I believe might contribute to an understanding of events whilst also offering some attempt at reconciliation?

To begin to address this question I will examine the works that were included in the exhibition; two pieces made twenty years ago before ever visiting Sarajevo, and two new pieces made as a result of a research and study visit in January 2018, when I was able to explore the collection of the History Museum.

The pieces made in 1998, rather than taking inspiration from a physical object or collection, took their genesis from the chance hearing of a radio broadcast. The broadcast was the BBC's *From our own correspondent*, in which reporters present a short broadcast about something topical. On this occasion, Martin Bell, the then BBC War Correspondent, used the occasion to sign off and reflected on his most recent experience reporting the Bosnia War.

... the abiding memory I shall take away with me is not of any particular massacre or atrocity or ruin or traitor or front line, but of hundreds of refugees fleeing on foot down a mined country road all

wearing their Sunday Best, formal black suits for the men, ample black dresses for the women. For if all you can take is what you can walk away with then you walk away in the best clothes that you have and, in the pockets, you carry the family photographs.ⁱ

I experienced the Bosnia War like so many, through the media and the daily news reports of atrocities and Sarajevo under siege, but from the safe distance of London, Sarajevo seemed far away and it wasn't until I visited in Ljubljana 1996 and saw a road sign pointing to Sarajevo that I had the realization that this war was happening in the middle of Europe, literally in our back yard. This provided a trigger, and remembering the broadcast, I wrote to Martin Bell who was by then an independent member of Parliament, to ask permission to use his text.

I began working on an artist's book and an installation of abandoned objects. The objects were all commonplace, books, bottles, children's toys and I wanted to present them as if they had been discarded in a hurry, the residue of conflict, that which can't be carried has to be left behind.

The artists book took as its title *With the melting of the snows*, a phrase used by Bell to describe how following the winter thaw, the full horror of the atrocities was revealed, a perverse coming of spring. The book consisted of three visual chapters with all the images extensively worked on the computer.

For the installation entitled *Abandoned Landscape* I imagined the siege of Sarajevo as evidenced by skeletal objects, dropped while fleeing or simply discarded. I wanted these objects to reference the everyday aspects of life, and together begin to conjure the idea of the life of a city. Conflict begins by disrupting the simple activities,

the daily rituals of meeting friends, shopping, working and playing. For me it was poignant to see this work in Sarajevo twenty years after I made it, and to see how it might work in this context.

When I finally visited Sarajevo earlier this year, it was an uncanny experience, both familiar and **different, and** despite the amazing transformation of the city, the scars and reminders of the conflict were still self-evident. The History Museum itself, carries the trace of the conflict on its façade and environs, while inside an exhibition focusing on the siege included many personal objects that vividly expressed the day to day life under conflict.

One item in the collection above all resonated with me and seemed to represent the tragedy of civilians involved in a war zone. That object was a sweater worn by a young boy Nermin Divović who, at the age of seven, was shot by a sniper's bullet 100 yards from the entrance to the Museum. The family donated the sweater to the Museum, where it is displayed alongside photographs which capture his brief life.

Nermin's story is made poignant for the fact that his life was so suddenly cut short at just seven years old. I wanted to capture this loss of both a life and its potential through memorialising his life through a series of sweaters, one for each year of his life. T.S.Eliot in his poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1915) talks of 'measuring out my life in coffee spoons'. I in turn wanted to memorialize Nermin by measuring out his life in woollen sweaters.

I set about trying to find someone to knit duplicate sweaters. Following a chance conversation with Ann Jones, (a friend and curator from the Arts Council Collection) who took the project to heart, we located a lady, Carol

McDavid in her nearby village in Wales, who offered to knit the sweaters, working back from one to fit a 7-year-old to a tiny sweater for a baby 0-1-year-old. It seemed in keeping with the circumstances that the piece developed through conversations, one person passing on the story to another so what started in Sarajevo continued in London, then Wales, before being then returned.

I printed and sewed into each sweater a label indicating its size by year, so 0-1 yrs, 1-2, yrs etc. The sweaters were presented in a line in a case as if on display in a shop. I hoped that through the progression, from the smallest to one for a seven-year-old, the tragedy of a life cut short would be made visible.

I also wanted the softness of the wool to provide a contrast to the hardness of the majority of the Museum's collection, which is dominated by the metal of the guns, shells, hardware etc. and in the bright blue and white colour, a contrast to the military greys, greens and blacks. Here was something colourful, soft and warm. Wars are invariably waged by men but it is the women and children that are too often the innocent victims. I wanted to give space to those feminine qualities of nurture and resilience in a museum whose architecture and collection invariable testify to the masculine idea of strength and power. Furthermore, I saw my set of sweaters as a memorial in contrast to the public commemorative stone located on the spot 100 meters from the museum where the tragedy occurred.

A further element that attracted me in the collection was the importance of plastic bottles for collecting water during the siege. These were evidenced in a number of pieces donated to the Museum and brought into sharper focus following a visit to the artist Edin Numankadić's

studio on the top floor of one of the social housing projects in the company of Dr Paul Lowe. In the course of our conversation Edin told me a joke, that a man was crossing sniper's alley with plastic bottles to collect water when a sniper shot his bottle, so the water poured out. The man screamed at the sniper, 'don't shoot the bottles, shoot me!' Here in the dark recesses of humour, lies a sad truth that without water you cannot live.

Responding to this story, I made three small sculptures, of damaged plastic bottles on landscapes of fingerprints. I had been struck by the poignancy of the *Sarajevo roses*,ⁱⁱ the resins stains on pavements marking where mortar shells had exploded and also in the presence of the EU flag on tins of beef and other items in the Museum's collection. In one of the sculptures I have the stars from the EU flag like an ironic halo, since for all their authority and influence, it seemed so little was done to resolve the conflict. Without any authentic experience of the conflict, my approach throughout was based on traces that have been left, either in the form of physical evidence on the buildings and pavements, artefacts in the collection or from stories and accounts. This results in work which I hope addresses an audience quietly as opposed to the sensational and shocking.

In the work that I presented in ReConciliations, I was aware that the location of the History Museum was not a neutral space. Not only was it a museum that itself had gone through changes, but also as a location, opposite The Holiday Inn that had functioned as the refuge and centre for the International Press from which the news of the conflict was transmitted across the world, but it was also a prominent building in what became known as Sniper's Alley, and as such bears its own scars.

Against this backdrop, I was aware that my contribution was adding to already existing layers of memory and that that collective memory was still in the stage of being formed. My hope is that in presenting a view of conflict based in imagination rather than first hand witness, I am able to show how such conflict affects all involved and how an empathic approach might serve to aiding reconciliation.

THE WORK

ⁱ Bell, M, 4/4/1996 Farewell to War Reporting, In; From our own correspondent, London; BBC Radio 4.

ⁱⁱ A Sarajevo Rose is a concrete scar caused by a mortar shell's explosion that was later filled with red resin. Mortar rounds landing on concrete create a unique fragmentation pattern that looks almost floral in arrangement. Because Sarajevo was a site of intense urban warfare and suffered thousands of shell explosions during the Siege of Sarajevo, the marked concrete patterns are a unique feature to the city.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarajevo_Rose accessed 03/09/2018



Paul Coldwell / continued



Three Bottles for Sarajevo (for Edin Numankadić)
Painted bronze 2018



Abandoned Landscape
Bronze objects 1998

Milena Michalski



Safe Water for Sarajevo,
glass, concrete, wire, 2018
(above and opposite)

'Safe Water for Sarajevo' is a line from an article in the *New York Times* about the provision of clean water to homes during the siege of Sarajevo, in which 'safe' refers to the purity of the water, but also to not having to dodge snipers. In this installation, the crumbling concrete, protruding wires and broken glass allude to architectural ruins, while at the same time the glasses and bottles suggest a domestic setting for socialising — all made impossible.

Milena Michalski / continued

This series of prints and collage/drawings is an ongoing series. **'Reconciliations III'** is created as a dialogue with the History Museum of Bosnia and Hercegovina, Sarajevo – specifically with the stained glass artwork by Vojo Dimitrijević (*opposite page, above*). It features an abstracted drawing from an architectural plan of the Museum. **'Reconciliations IV', 'V'** and **'VI'** (*opposite page, below*) are based around close-up photographs of the war-damaged piece, which I took during our project exhibition in June 2018. Dimitrijević's artwork collapsed a few months later, and is awaiting restoration.

Reconciliations I (right)
pigment ink print, 2018



Reconciliations II
pigment ink print, 2018



Reconciliations III
acetate collage, paint pen drawing on glass, 2018



Reconciliations IV, V, VI
Pigment print, acetate, paint pen drawing on glass
2018



Mladen Miljanović

Project created within the framework of 'Art and Reconciliation' project

MWRL 100mm

(Multiple Water Rocket Launcher)

Public intervention at ex-military base Vrbas
(Today, Botanical garden of Banja Luka
University in development)

Sculpture

Technical: Concrete, metal object, watering
system, timer, battery, electro motor

Production period: 5 months

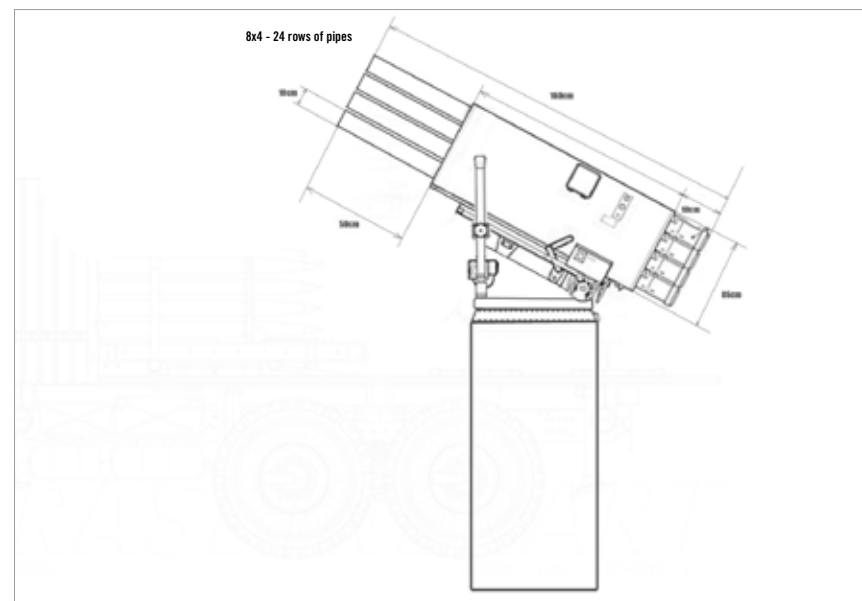
Short project explanation:

This intervention is research into the question of how to reconcile place and form. What role can the artist play in this constructive deconstruction of a space in transition and in transformation? More specifically, it concerns the very speculative space of the military barracks which were used in the recent war by the army of 'Republika Srpska', before that by the 'Yugoslav Army', and founded a hundred years ago by the 'Austro-Hungarian Empire'. So, in this place the intervention creates a direct confrontation of spatial and social forms of transformation. This work opens up the question of how artistic interventions can reconcile opposites into something with useful, with a purpose in real life. I think that micro examples of this kind of methodology can be matrices for wider social transformations and reconciliations.

Short description of a previous project connected to the same site:

The project "MWRL 120mm", of deconstructing spatial memory, is paradigmatic for understanding the genesis of my previous artistic work "I Serve Art". This project took the form of a radical action/performance I Serve Art, which took place during the academic year of 2006/2007, for which I put myself in voluntary social isolation inside what was formerly an enclosed area of military power, now an open space within the University - Academy of Arts. I did this for the precise same length of time as I had spent 'serving the nation', i.e. doing national service (9 months, 274 days). However, my syntagma in the title of the project, which renders ironic the position of neutrality in terms of value, also speaks of the constructive power of art in the existential world, which eventually, claims to possess the meanings of works of art. Because meanings belong in various contexts of society, ideology, art, culture or nature, and no semiotic system is meaningful in itself – it only becomes such once it establishes a relation to other signs or systems of signs. In contextualising signs and meanings, transferring or removing them from one context to another (from one factual and symbolic plane to another), the process of re-semanticisation grows in importance – it turns into a process of 'space decontamination'.

The artist is a social subject whose actions are critical in reality, and as such, he or she assumes responsibility for it, which means his or her direct participation in the ("therapeutic-healing-humanistic") processes of its decontamination and (re)construction.



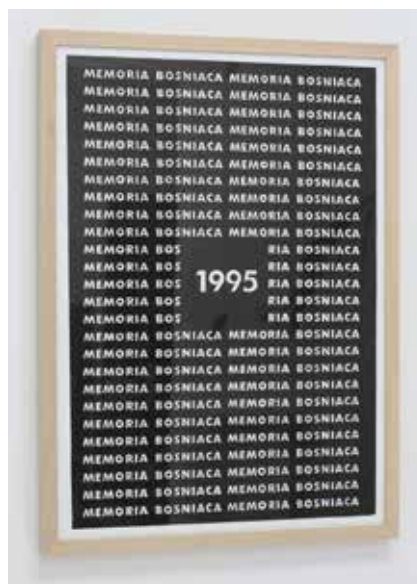


Vladimir Miladinović

This series of drawings, entitled *Memoria Bosniaca* consists of 38 handmade ink wash drawings based on archival materials from the History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Miladinović has recreated a selection of materials including newspaper covers, official documents, lists, maps, posters and other visual documents from the History Museum's collection that testify to the everyday lives of people who were trapped in the city during the siege of Sarajevo.

Miladinović's process involved a detailed study of the entire Museum archive, the creation of a digital archive and then the drawing of a selection of the archive material. He redraws letter by letter, entire pages of newspapers, documents, lists, maps and anything else he finds of interest. He intentionally selects drawing as a medium for its performative effect, and because it takes time for both himself, as the artist creating the work, and for the viewer looking at the drawings and trying to decipher their meaning. The process of researching, digitising and drawing is an act of reliance on the historical heritage that the museum preserves and nurtures. Miladinović views his artistic engagement as being above all a learning process for himself and for the viewer which stimulates an active engagement with, and re-interpretation of, archival documents which might otherwise be consigned to history.





Lana Čmajčanin and Adela Jušić

Bedtime Stories

Bedtime Stories is a sound installation made up of 3 enclosed 'bed' cubicles, in which the audience lies down to listen to the stories of people talking about what happened in their basements during the war.

During the 1425 day siege of Sarajevo, the longest siege of a capital city in the history of modern warfare, people spent a lot of time in the small storage basements of their apartment buildings taking shelter from the constant attacks. Many families took out their old stuff from these basements and transformed the cramped spaces, into which they could just fit a bed, into sleeping rooms. Most of the spaces had wooden bars instead of doors. These basement communities created their own survival systems and sets of rules. Adaptation and solidarity were essential, as people shared their food and clothes, and had to invent solutions, alternatives and pull together to survive.

Čmajčanin and Jušić collected stories from people they knew and met with, and the interviewees were free to tell the first story that came to mind relating to these basement spaces during the war. The final testimonies are overlapped with music, and audience members lie down in the enclosed bed cubicles, comfortable and peaceful, to listen to these stories of the raw struggle of basement warlife, which testify to the resistance, resilience and creativity that people harnessed to survive day to day life in besieged Sarajevo.

Bedtime Stories has been shown in Sweden, Croatia and Slovenia, but had never been exhibited within Bosnia before this. It has now become part of the permanent collection of the History Museum of BiH.



I will never talk about the war again
Fargfabriken, Stockholm, 2011



Bedtime Stories

Gallery 90-60-90, Pogon Jedinstvo, Zagreb

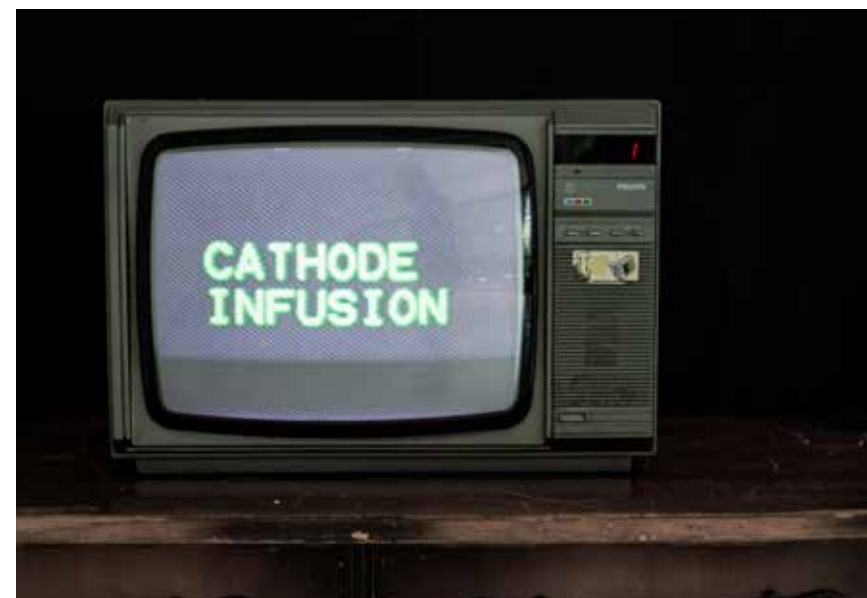
Sabina Tanović & Dario Kristić

Cathode Infusion

Cathode Infusion is an installation that consists of a freestanding, old school television that randomly shuffles footage of the 1994 Olympics, MTV clips, game shows and other world media coverage from 1992-96, in between which occasional news-feeds from occupied Sarajevo appear. Each clip is broadcast briefly and then suddenly interrupted or stopped, often at a particular significant moment.

During the siege of Sarajevo, the city's districts were supplied with electricity for only brief periods of time during the so-called 'reductions'. Alongside the household jobs that needed to get done in those short spans of time, TVs were turned on and car batteries were charged.

Images of the outside world would penetrate homes reinforcing the indifference of the world towards the besieged city, while also providing Sarajevans with glimpses of normality that were instrumental in preserving fragile notions of sanity. These infusions of 'normality' and reminders of another life, prior to the siege, were key in maintaining a sense of humanity. The siege transformed the life of Sarajevans into a complex play of survival, which became the reality and a way of living. At a certain point it was only through having a reference to the outside world that one was aware of what the reality of the siege was: an isolated case of systematic destruction.





Balkan Diskurs Youth

Photographs, 2017-8

Various artists

Balkan Diskurs Youth is a media training and mentoring program run by the Post Conflict Research Center (PCRC), which has directly engaged over 70 young people from across Bosnia and Hercegovina since 2014. Each year, a cohort of young people participates in 5 days of photography and journalism workshops in Sarajevo. Following the training, the young people, ranging from 18-28 years old, take part in a year-long mentorship during which they are provided support to produce publications for PCRC's *Balkan Diskurs* online news platform. During 2017-18, eighteen young people participated in the program, finding stories from within their communities that related to inter-ethnic co-operation and that highlighted issues of importance for them and other youth. PCRC staff support the youth correspondents to develop their research, writing, and media skills and to do the editing and production for their final published pieces.

Balkan Diskurs Youth is a primary component of PCRC's multimedia peace-building programs, which harness the arts and media to promote reconciliation and inter-ethnic cooperation between Bosnia's divided citizens and youth. *Balkan Diskurs Youth* seeks to transform the way in which inter-ethnic co-operation and reconciliation are reported on in Bosnia and Hercegovina—through the voices of its youth. It aims to encourage new approaches to promoting reconciliation by empowering young Bosnians to take a more active role in the peace-building process, and by increasing their skills and

credibility as peace-building actors. The project aims to catalyse a new form of participatory media, which seek to challenge existing media norms by diversifying the producers and seeking out positive stories around peace and reconciliation. PCRC continues to work with active participants beyond the year-long programme, supporting a thriving network of youth journalists and activists throughout Bosnia and Hercegovina.

2017-2018 Youth Correspondents

	Marko Mlikota
Alma Mujanović	Medina Rizvanović-Razić
Ammar Lidan	Milan Ilić
Anja Zulić	Nejra Džabija
Armin Durgut	Marko Milikota
Azra Memišević	Monija Markić
Delila Sujić	Slobodan Blagovčanin
Eldin Mujkanović	Tamara Zrnović
Harun Bećirević	Tarik Čalkić
Kristina Gadže	

This catalogue includes a selection of images produced by *Balkan Diskurs Youth* correspondents. To see more of their work please visit the *Balkan Diskurs* online platform: <https://balkandiskurs.com/en/>

For more information about PCRC, visit: <http://www.p-crc.org/>

Balkan Diskurs Youth / continued



by Alma Mujanović



by Marko Mlikota



by Monija Markić



by Azra Memišević



by Armin Durgut



by Harun Bećirević



by Kristina Gadže

Ziyah Gafić

The Rope

Duration: 27mins HD,

Stereo sound: Ziyah Gafić and Nermin Hamzagić.

“Two ageing athletes and old friends, who fought on opposing sides in the Bosnian civil war, meet after a quarter of a century, for one last climb.”



ART AND RECONCILIATION?

James Gow

How did we get to art and reconciliation?

The route to 'Art and Reconciliation', the project, and so the subjects themselves, began with war and war crimes in the Yugoslav lands in the 1990s, especially, regarding Bosnia and Hercegovina.

The siege of Sarajevo, the concentration camps around Prijedor and the mass murder at Srebrenica: these are among the most salient and lingering memories of war in Bosnia and Hercegovina during the 1990s. They symbolise a war marked by atrocity — a war in which war crimes were committed with strategic intention. Crimes against humanity and war crimes were the very essence of the war, not merely contingent blemishes, attributable to rogue elements. These criminal acts were at the core of 'ethnic cleansing' — neolo-gism that emerged alongside the war. The point was to use atrocity to ensure the emergence of ethnically pure territories: murder, rape, persecution, abuse of a proportion of an eth-nic community in order to induce the others to take flight and seek refuge, or to be forcibly removed from their homes.

After experiences of this kind, what prospects can a post-conflict future hold? When actions have been premeditated to make cleavages even deeper than they might have been and to render improbable, if not impossible, the return of those who survived but were driven out? Of course,

humans beings are different one from another — where one sees stars, another sees mud. So, as experience confirms, some who suffered can be expected to find ways to build bridges, while others will wish for revenge. Yet others might seek to confront those who drove them out by returning, despite the difficulties and pain involved, while still others might look for justice.

Already, more than two years before war in Bosnia and Hercegovina ended, from many quarters, there were calls for those perpetrating genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity to face justice. Globally, the United Nations Security Council authorised the Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia to bring persons responsible for the commission of these crimes to trial. This was expected to restore and maintain peace and security, although there was never a clear statement of how this would work, in practice.

There was, initially, a general sense that the creation of a war crimes tribunal was little more than a gesture that would not have much significance. Yet, there was also a sense that, somehow, war crimes prosecutions would, in some vague, metaphysical way foster reconciliation in the Yugoslav lands, something akin to the way in which the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal had transformed Germany after the Second World War and the Holocaust. Of course, this version of the German experience was based on impression and false understanding. There had been far more to the German story than the Nuremberg process and its narrative. Indeed, Germany had been under complete occupation and control, and had been comprehensively changed in most aspects of social, cultural, political and economic life.

The optimism — which was shared personally — about

the potential of international prosecutions to contribute to reconciliation and to generate peace through justice, was over-ambitious. Nuremberg had created an authoritative, indisputable record; the Yugoslavia tribunal would do the same. The authoritative Nuremberg record had transformed German understanding and created a sense of responsibility in Germany; the equivalent record in the Yugoslav context would have a similar effect on the South Slavs, above all, on Serbs, in whose name, or on whose side, the majority of crimes had been committed. It was not like that. Setting aside the various issues that scholars have raised around Nuremberg and its record — none of which undermines the core narrative about Nazi Germany, the facts did not speak for themselves. The Enlightenment sense of rationality was misplaced. It was not enough to present the evidence, which when logically appraised, would be accepted and perspectives changed — the evidence, largely, was not, where the audience was not receptive, and, so, perspectives did not change.

If ‘facts’ and evidence-based narratives are not enough significantly to deal with the emotion, bitterness and anger of many victims, what else might? This is how we get to ‘Art and Reconciliation.’ Creative narratives and also non-narratives might hold the potential to have positive effect. Something of this understanding must have underpinned the large number of arts projects funded — or, perhaps, even, initiated without funding — across the Western Balkans, the former Yugoslav lands. Of course, there is no greater guarantee that the arts can have a beneficial influence — or, at least, that it will be an even, consistent, or universal one. It should be evident that people receive things in different ways. What works in one case, for one person, does not, in another, or still another.

Yet, the potential for the arts is clear, at different levels. At

higher, political community levels, it can offer the chances for symbolic transformation and cultural interchange. At a range of intermediate levels, these possibilities, but also others, including engagement in practice through workshops, or exchanges hold the prospect of bringing together. And, at the individual level, where, perhaps one human’s coming to terms with their own experience, emotions and fate, can be helped by the arts — whether through reflection on created work by others, or through reflection in creation, as practising some form of art. Narrative, or non-narrative, visual arts, or non-visual, the hope — which will only sometimes be met, to be sure — has to be that the cathartic quality of art has a link to some form of catharsis, necessary to the varied forms that reconciliation might take.

This contribution is an extract from a longer essay on art and reconciliation in the context of the Art and Reconciliation research project.

Acknowledgements

The contributing artists and writers thank the following institutions for their support:



Curators

Elma Hasimbegović

Paul Lowe

Text

Preface © Rachel Kerr

Artistic Practices in Post Conflict Society © Paul Lowe

Reconciliation © Paul Coldwell

Art and Reconciliation © James Gow

Photographs

p18-21: © Esad Hadzihasanovic

p22-25: © Milena Michalski

p27-29: © Mladen Miljanović

p31-33: © Vladimir Miladinović

p35: © Rena Readle

p36: © Jasenko Rasol

p37-38: © Sabina Tanović and Dario Kistić

p40-41: © as credited on pages

p42-43: © Ziyah Gafić

Catalogue published by King's College London

ISBN: 978-1-908951-25-0

Catalogue designed by Roger Walton Studio

Front cover image by Milena Michalski

Catalogue printed by Akcent Media Ltd