



Curated by **Aniko Erdosi**
April 12 - May 20, 2006

Re_dis_trans *Voltage of Relocation and Displacement*

Big Hope (Miklós Erhardt and Dominic Hislop)
Ian Burns
Sonja Feldmeier
Andrea Geyer
Wang Jianwei
Szabolcs KissPál
Moshekwa Langa
Little Warsaw (Bálint Havas and András Gálik)
Myrna Maakaron
Katarina Sevic

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cover image: Myrna Maakaron, *BerlinBeirut*, 2003, documentary video, 23 min., color, sound (detail)



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The act of leaving one's given place and occupying another is both emotionally and spiritually intense. Whether it is the relocation of people or the displacement of objects, the negative or positive charge of this movement is determined by cultural, historical, temporal and spatial factors. Is this a common life experience or a poetically charged site with immeasurable potential?

The artworks featured in this exhibition represent the unpredictable personal and cultural psychological effects, as well as the societal impacts, of relocation and displacement. Confrontations with the new, which affect the individual ego or a given social group, are often unexpected and astonishingly powerful. The tensions and frictions created by motion activate powerful energies and voltages, and corresponding actions of resistance. Their effect-mechanisms can include culture shock, identity crisis and other complex, refined and imponderable elements. These are mostly invisible, even when the acts themselves are radical.

What happens after acts of relocation and displacement? How do these acts influence our personal lives, our mental states, or our cultural perceptions? These questions are relevant in the context of "local-versus-global" intellectual discourse, but even more so in our everyday lives, in which we constantly seek greater mobility. Individuals and groups are



Moshekwa Langa, *Where Do I Begin* (from the *Waiting* series), 2001, dvd, 4 min.

relocating themselves geographically, objects are displaced locally, data and information transferred digitally, and point of view refocused intellectually. How do these acts rearrange a situation, a narrative or an ethos? What happens to these material and immaterial things within their new contexts? How does it shift our illusions about the permanence of things?

Some artistic responses to these questions are based on clear personal experiences, like those of Myrna Maakaron and Katarina Sevic. Both were urged by radical political events, namely ongoing wars, to relocate from their home countries. In her documentary *BerlinBeirut*, Maakaron tells stories about her childhood in Lebanon, about war, destruction, and hiding in bunkers. She also tells about her experiences living as an adult in Berlin. The video footage is edited to show the two different cities as one, and Maakaron, who is shown riding her bike through the streets in a purple dress, beautifully presents memory as a form of resistance.

Katarina Sevic humorously confronts foreign language difficulties and administrative obstacles in her work *Easy and Fast – Hungarian*. She videotaped a series of everyday conversations based on those found in a basic Hungarian language textbook, and exhibited this work in a Hungarian immigration office in Budapest. Who would want to settle in this small country with such a difficult language, and with immigration laws that are strict even compared to those of the US? Through her work we can sense something doubtlessly charming in the difficulties of immigrating to a country that historically has not attracted any immigrants.

Processes of remapping and the activities of emigrants who relocate to big western cities aiming to find a better life for themselves are the basis for projects by BIG HOPE and Sonja



Little Warsaw, *INSTAURATIO!*, 2006, documentary video, posters, book

Feldmeier. *Re:route* was a cooperation between the BIG HOPE group (Miklos Erhardt and Dominic Hislop) and 30 individuals in Torino, Italy who emigrated from Bangladesh, Bosnia, China, Congo, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Kenya, Kurdistan, Moldova, Morocco, Nigeria, Romania, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Tunisia, and Yugoslavia. The artists

asked the emigrants to sketch 'mental maps' to show how they perceived and experienced the city after a short period of time, and they gave each a camera so the maps could be illustrated with their photographs.

BIG HOPE's project shows how relocation influences one's mental and cultural perceptions, as does a work by Sonja Feldmeier titled *Pot Luck*.

Her video installation shows New York-based emigrants speaking about where they are from. Using the social act of eating as a descriptive language, she asks participants to sculpturally reconstruct parts of their homeland by using their favorite food. A large video projection of these food-landscapes is projected within a room where visitors are invited to watch and listen to the stories while sitting on a heated



Sonja Feldmeier, *Pot Luck*, 2001, video projection and seating wall with integrated heating, 37 min., dimensions variable

wall. This enjoyable experience is another example of how the memory of home can be an act of resistance.

What happens to one's expectations and illusions as a result of relocation? Wang Jianwei's documentary describes a specific process of removal from the Sichuan province in China, a very typical story nowadays. For months he filmed a complex of abandoned, unfinished villas in a gated community in Sichuan and followed the illegal inhabitants of the houses, peasants who had left farm life in order to—unsuccessfully—find jobs in the city. We witness their efforts to assimilate their skills and habits into an urban context, while we are also reminded about the consequences of centralization in overpopulated metropolises.

Individual, but not necessarily personal, experiences inspired the works of Andrea Geyer and Moshekwa Langa. Expectations and dreams confront real life in Geyer's half-fictional, newspaper-format diary *Interim*, which tells the story of a young woman who after a long travel arrives—seemingly without purpose—in an unknown urban space somewhere in the US. The epic narrative of this woman's travel intersects with strangely formulated representations of American habits and customs.



Katarina Sevic, *Easy and Fast - Hungarian*, 2004, video installation with photographs and vinyl text, 15 min.



Ian Burns, *Road*, 2006, mixed media kinetic sculpture generating live video feed, 55 x 46 x 46 in.

epic narrative of this woman's travel intersects with strangely formulated representations of American habits and customs.

Moshekwa Langa's video installation is another example of this melancholy narrative of relocation. Featuring an

image of the sea as a metaphor for the voyage, Langa's video shows a more poetic treatment of the energy-inductive process of relocation. His work remains enigmatic because it resides in the utopian space of "some-where else."

Being on the road, thus never ending the process of relocation, seems to be a practical method of postponing the potential losses of this act. Ian Burns uses the western road movie cliché and a cinematic *trompe l'oeil* effect to honor the idea of displacement as an enriching and enlightening state, rife with the myth of self-discovery. His piece explores the idea that the road movie has romanticized notions of displacement as a catalyst for insight.



Szabolcs KissPal, *Desert*, 2006, photographs and dvd, 39 x 70 in.

The displacement of cultural objects and shared historical narratives can have a significant impact on certain groups. The tensions, reactions and new readings caused by changes of context are investigated through the works of Szabolcs KissPal and the artists collective Little Warsaw. KissPal's installation refers to a certain

significant moment in western art history, the creation of Duchamp's first readymade, to query the losses and gains of a virtual relocation—a shift in perspective. Working with reference to a well-known displace-



Wang Jianwei, *Living Elsewhere*, 1999, dvd, color, sound, 40 min.

ment, he plays with the literal and abstract meanings of the term that imply something is missing. Recalling this historical act, KissPal reminds us of the revolutionary potential of displacement.

The *INSTAURATIO!* project by Little Warsaw offers a great example of the impacts of displacement on group psyche. Their temporary removal and displacement of a public monument from a small Hungarian town to a Dutch art museum (Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam) agitated the fragile social and cultural memory of different local communities, and evoked unexpected scandals. With the interpretive documentation of their conceptual project, shown here, the Hungarian artists point to the mutable nature of perception and the fragility of collective identities.

The artworks and projects featured in this exhibition represent some surprising attitudes about relocation and displacement, and express instinctive strategies of resistance to their effects. The artists come from different corners of the world and use varied artistic approaches to examine the same experience. All provocatively offer answers to the questions that inspired this show: What can be the gains of the physical and intellectual relocation? And, more importantly, can we displace our focus without losses?

Aniko Erdosi, 2006.



Andrea Geyer, *Interim*, 2002, 80-page newspaper with photographs and text (detail)



Big Hope, *Re:route*, 2002, installation, dimensions variable