

**Minna Henriksson:
Altered Landscapes**

What follows is a short extract from the text “Never Ending Construction” by Shkelzen Maliqi and a passage from an interview conducted by Sezgin Boynik with Minna Henriksson. Being invited by Rizoma Space for Contemporary Communication Minna stayed in Prishtina during the months of October and November 2008. During her stay she mainly studied the different manifestations of collective identification in the public space of Prishtina and other cities in Kosovo. Her artistic research into these various kinds of signs resulted in an exhibition that consisted mainly of photographs.

Shkelzen Maliqi **Never Ending Construction**

She has taken snapshots of hundreds of spaces and construction sights, almost all of them unfinished, as well as shop displays, billboards, posters and graffiti of various natures. In this exhibition they act as a half-tuned cry of a simple Kosovo citizen, as well as the cries of those with great ambition that have turned rich and powerful overnight.

These collected images all have a specific theme and are divided in five parts. They are displayed with anarchic density in one corner of each floor of this building. Altogether they render an image and reflect the consciousness of contemporary Kosovo that emanates a rigid energy that has blocked any transition in the city. What is displayed is repression, war trauma and the hardship of building a new Identity for Kosovo and obtaining the country’s independence. It is done with the energy of obviously anarchic competition towards the so-called values of a society and system that strives for democracy and freedom, but actually constructs a reality of a wild capitalism, a society in which roles and functions have collapsed.

The images we see testify to the fact that we are ‘on the right path’. At the same time, they give evidence of the uncoordinated individual competition with arbitration and babbles. The errors in the inscriptions, graffiti and slogans show (not with a bad intention since the artist does not read Albanian) arrogance, incompetence and the bad taste of idealist fighters who took over public and private spaces.

We see these images every day, but paradoxically we do not perceive them as the artist does, as ‘controlled’ separate events, modern spaces, ‘decorative’ shop designs and isolated objects with postmodern shapes, with window displays full of designer commodities but mostly falsifications. Our view stops being holistic, like a view of a functional whole with aesthetic value, but we see reality as our own daily battle, like the oasis we have created in the chaos, where everyone creates their part of reality with a positive energy and view, resembling the reality of the inner asylum.

**Translated from the Albanian
by Nurhan Qehaja**

**Excerpt of the Interview with
Minna Henriksson**

SB — Judging from the way you produce and display your artworks one can get the impression that making art can be very cheap and easy. Your installations are direct, simple, cheap, and not overly aestheticised and at the same time they are informative, provocative and composed through careful research. Sometimes I have the idea that your installations are more about using the gallery as a communicative or discursive tool.

MH — My installations are cheap and easy because I don’t have the means to make more complicated works. If I had a video camera I would probably start making video works, but as I don’t have one, I don’t even think through that medium.

I don’t know how else to understand gallery space than as a tool. To me a gallery is like an empty page, which you fill with images, sounds, and installations instead of words. Of course during the time of the exhibition the space is not empty. But at the same time it is not exactly a gallery, which is what I find more interesting and challenging.

SB — The connection between contemporary art and nationalism is very central to your work. For instance, in Prishtina you co-organised one workshop (‘Altered identities’, at Stacion CAC, 2006) and co-edited a critical reader on this topic (published by MM publishing house, 2007). Your latest work in Prishtina, an installation entitled ‘Construction’, also deals at length with national imagery and symbolism. In your statement you are further referring to Benedict Anderson, the main theoretician of nationalism.

MH — The word ‘construction’ in my exhibition does not only refer to the building that is under construction, but also to the situation in Kosovo. In Kosovo a national identity is being constructed. I find this very interesting. In Finland for example the same process happened 90 years ago. Of course much is happening still today and will do as long as the state exists, but more secretly. When Finland was constructed 90 years ago, or even long before that, the process of becoming was obviously not completed. Nationalism

keeps changing and updating itself very quickly, keeping pace with the trends. And contemporary art plays an important role through its contemporariness.

It is a rare moment to be able to witness this construction of a nation state. There is a very strong Kosovo identity. Yet, people have still not got used to the flag of Kosovo. In the demonstration in Vetevendosje I didn't see any Kosovo flags, only Albanian flags.

By showing these national symbols it is my aim to make them visible so that people become more aware of them. I want to show the sheer number of them, how dominant they are in public space. It is by no means my intention to elevate the national symbols, but rather to ridicule them.



200: NEW PUBLIC SPACES
MINNA HENRIKSSON — ALTERED LANDSCAPES



201: NEW PUBLIC SPACES
MINNA HENRIKSSON — ALTERED LANDSCAPES









208: NEW PUBLIC SPACES
MINNA HENRIKSSON – ALTERED LANDSCAPES



209: NEW PUBLIC SPACES
MINNA HENRIKSSON – ALTERED LANDSCAPES



