

# ZUZANNA JANIN

**The Visual Arts as a Non-narrative Form of  
Communication:**

**Definitions, Methods, Postulates, Priorities  
(selection)**

*VISUAL ART in the PRIORITIES of the Framework  
Programme Horizon 2020*

# INTRODUCTION

Before I really start please allow me to present myself: my name is Zuzanna Janin. I'm a visual artist; I create installations, sculptures and video work.

I began a work as an artist in 1989, just in the moment of symbolic and fundamental change in the political and economic system in Poland and Europe.

Last year I celebrated the 25th anniversary and received his Ph.D. in visual art at the Media Arts Department of Warsaw's Academy of Fine Arts, with the title:

***The Last Sentence: The Time of Cruel Miracles is Not Over. On the Non-Narrative Nature of Art.***

My research concerned the transformation of written narrative language and its linear recording into non-narrative visual communication: sculpture, installation and visual objects.

So my presentation is that of an active artist, creating and exhibiting right now, and I would like to show from my point of view the most important problems related to the work of contemporary artists, in the context of EU projects.

## “IN BETWEEN”

Please allow me to briefly present my work: In the field of visual arts I deal with space, memory, time, relationships. The theme of my work could be just a word “**in between**”.

The material of my art can be parachute silk, fog, memory trip, cotton candy, performative action, a boxing match or travel.



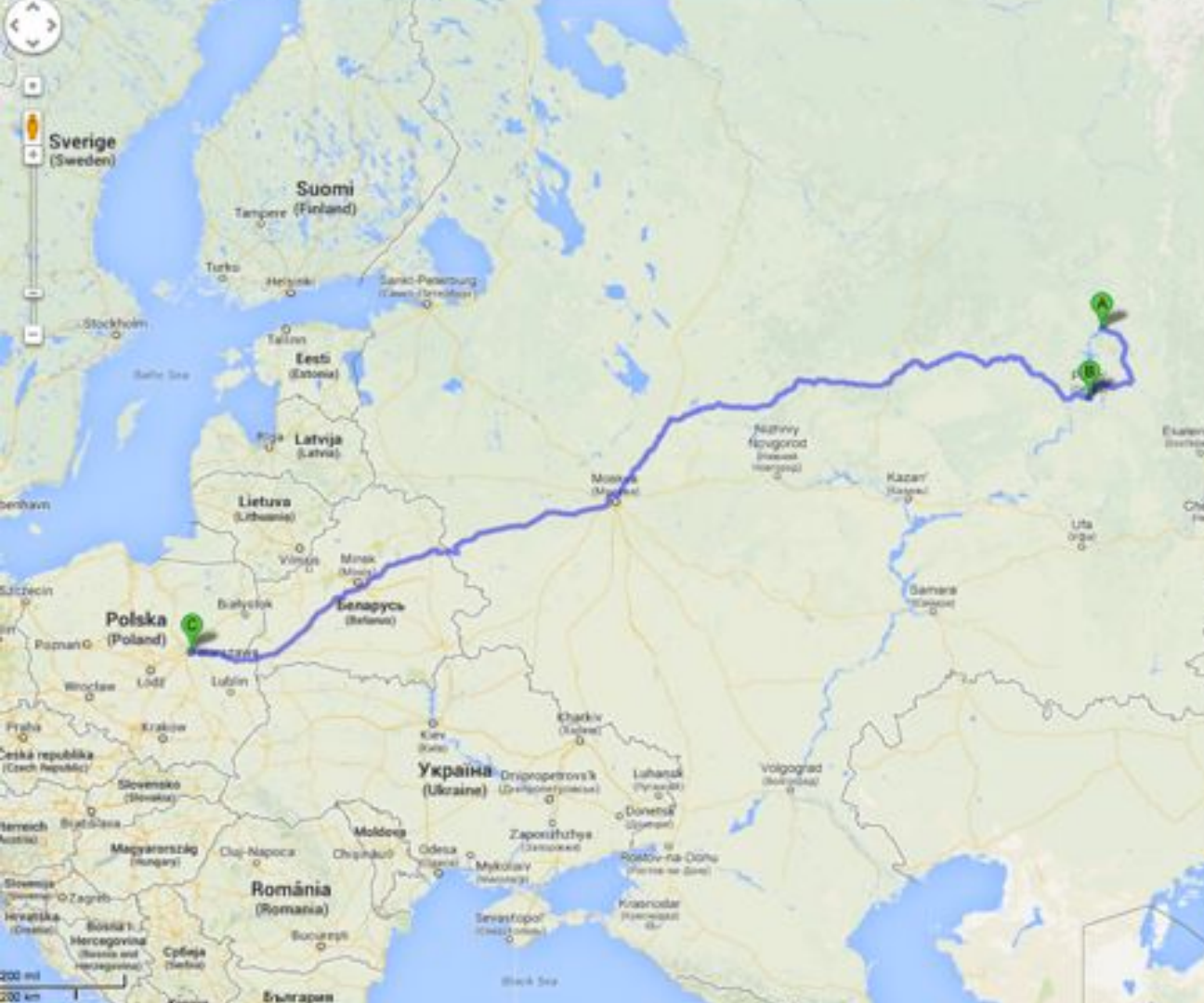
***COVER (HOME)***

1998-2012

cotton candy



***MEMORY***  
1992-2013  
artificial fog



*THE END. Chapter1. A Trip to Fear.*  
2013  
video, 16:9, 25'







*SWEET GIRL (Zuzanna),*  
1997  
cotton candy



**KISS**

1998-2012

sweet performance // cotton candy



***FIGHT***  
2001  
DVD, 3:4, 9', loop

In the end of this short introduction, I'd like to show you one of my works that addresses the problems of the geography of memory and the rewriting of history at the intersection of private and universal memory, and whose main motif, as well as its main material, is travel:

*Meeting Halfway Warszawa-Sofia (47° 33' N, 22° 19' E), 2014, video triptych*

This is a project which I worked on with Kamen Stoyanov, a Bulgarian artist from Sofia who lives in Vienna. The inspiration for our project was the phrase / idiom “Let’s meet halfway,” which usually seals a declaration of agreement and compromise. We decided to create a visual representation of this concept, setting out on a journey to a point exactly halfway on a line between Warsaw and Sofia. Our attempt to reach an agreement, part of which was the journey to a designated point, was laid out on the geography of a group of Central and Eastern European countries – land that is a bit mysterious, uncharted, which merges into a single space, although it is made up of many different states, nations and societies with different ethnics, traditions and cultures. This part of Europe, the area through which a whole range of ideas have travelled from East to West and West to East, South to North and North to South.



Zuzanna Janin & Kamen Stoyanov Meeting Halfway Warszawa-Sofia (47° 33' N i 22° 19' E), 2014 video, 16:9, tryptych

These countries have their history of a fight for identity, strong feelings of individuality but still great potential for co-operation, acceptance and multiculturalism. So we met at the spot, which was a field in Romania; we sat down at a common table made of two halves: Polish and Bulgarian, and conversed: Kamen in Bulgarian, and I in Polish.

Although as it turned out after our dialogue was translated, we only understood each other partly, because many words that seemed understandable to us, because they sound similar in our two Slavic languages, meant something completely different in the other person's language.

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The meeting halfway project is a trans-verbal **representation** of the symbolic concept of negotiation and agreement, a process that must take place on many levels, above languages and above borders, showing the points that reveal both: the possibilities and the lack of communication. FOTO This project is a sort of research inquiry at the intersection of visuality and language.



Zuzanna Janin & Kamen Stoyanov *Meeting Halfway Warszawa-Sofia (47° 33' N i 22° 19' E)*, 2014 video, 16:9, tryptych



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I

# CONTEMPORARY ART

## Definitions

Art as non-narrative communication

Art as representation

Art as a social exchange/presence/action





Zuzanna Janin & Kamen Stoyanov *Meeting Halfway Warszawa-Sofia* (47° 33' N i 22° 19' E), 2014 video, 16:9, tryptych

# II

## COMMUNICATION IN THE FIELD OF ART

### Methods

basic fields of activity:

**Presentations**

**Exchange**

**Education**

**Organisations**



## Presentations

Concerning this point, except of a new museum and spaces are being created, I **would like to draw particular attention to** the activity of NGOs: independent spaces and initiatives run by independent curators and artists.



## Exchange

An important element of artists' work is the creation of public debate through art, using sensitivity and capabilities of observation. Here what is important is supporting artists in international projects and academic exchanges, programmes for visiting artists and professors, art residency.



## **Education**

Here creation and support of projects of education, directed at students in artistic fields, but and in the humanities, medicine and technical areas, as well.



## Organisations

Concerning the last point, **I would like to draw particular attention to an organisation that I also work with as an artist: the Civic Forum of Contemporary Art.** This organisation has operated in Poland since 2012, addressing social issues and questions of artists' well-being and financial security, while simultaneously promoting artists' presence in competitions and programme councils.



We have to remember that the European Parliament documents are tools for making changes within legislative processes and in the hands of credible organizations representing artists, such as the Civic Forum, this can be well implemented. CF among other ideas, propose f. ex. setting up an insurance organisation for artists supplemented by funds from sources related to intellectual property rights.



Zuzanna Janin & Kamen Stoyanov Meeting Halfway Warszawa-Sofia (47° 33' N i 22° 19' E), 2014 video, 16:9, tryptych



# III

## PROBLEMS (selected issues)

Education

The social situation

Help for those starting out, and mid-career assistance



## Education

The post-communist countries, including Poland, are struggling with serious neglect in the field of artistic education at the primary and secondary levels, as well as conservative, obsolete institutions of higher artistic education. There is a gap between what is taught, and the way contemporary art functions and what it communicates. Poland also suffers from a glass ceiling: dramatic under-representation of women-artists teaching in post-secondary artistic schools, which significantly restricts the development of a modern society; here I would like to point out the example of Poland's largest and oldest art institution in Warsaw, the Academy of Fine Arts, in which there is not a single master studio led by a woman-artist. We have to put special attention to academic programme, supporting the development of the art-studios run by artist-women at collages in academic level.



## The social situation

Assistance and support for artists' activities should be based on social solidarity, an understanding that artists are often in a precarious social situation, paid very little in proportion to the effort they put into their work and their importance for society. An artist's work is not only creating pieces in the intellectual field for eventual purchase (often in the undefined future...), but also the exhibition work in the field of communication, which brings with it the payment of honoraria, and must be compensated immediately after the performance of this work – here the notion of “promotion of creativity” is abused, denying artists the compensation they simply deserve.



## **Help for those starting out, and mid-career assistance**

There is almost universal agreement that we need to help young artists who are just entering professional life and the market, which is accompanied by the neglect of artists who are already active and significant, but who do not function on the international market for art. We must seek a solution that will bring real equality in the social, program and market support granted to artists in old and new member states.



Zuzanna Janin & Kamen Stoyanov *Meeting Halfway Warszawa-Sofia* (47° 33' N i 22° 19' E), 2014 video, 16:9, tryptych

# IV

## POSTULATES / PRIORITIES

Between art and social policy

Education by teaching - using artists' potential (obvious, but...)

Education by collections - using the potential of art-works

# IV

A reflective culture is a culture that has become aware of the tensions between the different identities in Europe and the tensions between the legacy of history and the new European identity which is re-creating itself, that which is active and being created. At this level it is essential to create educational programmes that teach **cultural reflectiveness**, on the basis of **mutual recognition**, the acceptance of difference and enrichment by those differences. The absence of this process results in the isolation of immigrant and local groups and the conversion of multicultural societies into culture and civilisation ghettos. All these groups – local and migrant - lose the ability to communicate with each other.



Zuzanna Janin & Kamen Stoyanov *Meeting Halfway Warszawa-Sofia (47° 33' N i 22° 19' E)*, 2014 video, 16:9, tryptych



# CONCLUSION

With regard to contemporary problems, such as terrorist attacks and conflicts at the intersection of cultural difference in Europe, work in the field of culture must supply a counterbalance to post-religious narratives, to the populism of extremist and fundamentalist groups, remaining in focus for all groups and people for whom the progress and development of coexistence in Europe is important.

The breakdown of confidence in social and political systems in Europe leads us to see what a great scope there is for the focusing on the roles of art and culture, and, possibly, for engaging artists in the processes of integration, interchange and affirmation that are bringing nations in Europe into a new reality. Here, the hope lies in a departure from the cementing of identity, in favour of practices of understanding, solidarity, co-operation, interchange and affirmation of the other, with the engagement of contemporary artists' practices.

THE END



Zuzanna Janin & Kamen Stoyanov *Meeting Halfway Warszawa-Sofia* (47° 33' N i 22° 19' E), 2014 video, 16:9, tryptych