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**LIVE-DANCE-PAINT-WRITE: A Multi-Media Project on Romani ("Gypsy") Artist,
Writer, Singer, and Educator Ceija Stojka**

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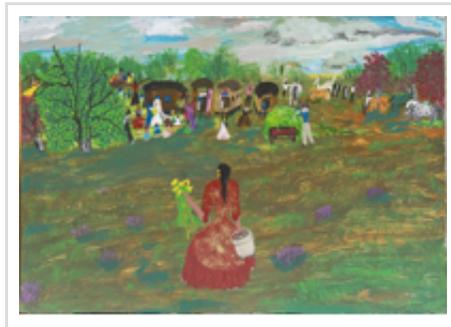
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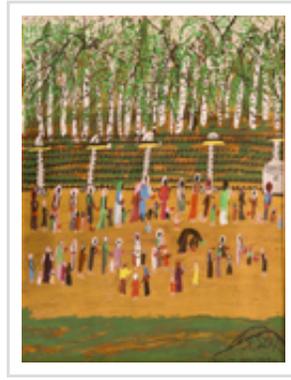
LIVE—DANCE—PAINT—WRITE: A Multi-Media Project on Romani (“Gypsy”) Artist

Posted on **April 1, 2010** by **Editor**



By **Lorely E. French**





Introduction

The Roma, with their origins in India and populations residing in Europe, the Americas, and the Middle East, are one of the most global ethnic groups in the world and the largest minority group in Europe. Estimates of their entire population range from eight to twelve million people and include numerous diverse groups. Amongst those groups there are at least sixty dialects divided among four major language groups [1]. With the expansion of the European Union into Eastern Europe, where large populations of Roma reside, many governments have seen the need to improve socio-economic situations for Roma. News reports in the past year, however, have made clear that violence and discrimination against the Roma continue [2]. Initiatives such as the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 show a heightened need for the recognition of the importance of the Roma for future European success [3].

The Austrian Romani writer, artist, educator, and activist Ceija Stojka was born in 1933 in Kraubath in Austria to a traveling Lovara family. The Lovara are one of six major Romani and traveling groups in Austria [4]. She was one of the first Roma to publish her life story in the German-speaking countries. Her paintings, graphic art, and writings depict her life as a traveling Roma before and after World War II, the trauma she and other Roma experienced in Nazi concentration camps (she was interned in Auschwitz, Ravensbrück, and Bergen-Belsen), and the hope she has for future generations to overcome the oppression that plagued her life and that of the Roma.

Project Description

The multi-media project that I undertook as a Berglund Center for Internet Studies 2009/10 Research Fellow built upon the success of the exhibit “LIVE—DANCE—PAINT: Works by Romani Artist Ceija Stojka,” which I and Michaela Grobbel, Associate Professor at Sonoma State University, organized in 2009. The exhibit traveled to three sites in the United States during the year: the Cawein Gallery at Pacific University; the Sonoma State University Library Art Gallery in Rohnert Park, California; and the West Branch Gallery in Stowe, Vermont.

Also included in the exhibit were transcriptions from conversations with Ceija Stojka about each art piece, which I and three students from Pacific University had taped in her apartment in

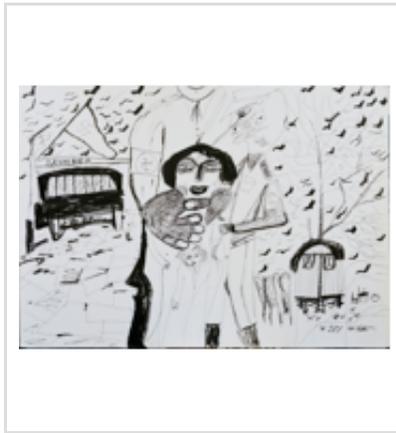
Vienna in January 2009, thanks to the support of the Elise Elliott Trust at Pacific University. At all three sites, the exhibit was accompanied by a program that included interpretive lectures on Romani music, art, history, and culture. The program at Pacific University also included a live flamenco concert and demonstration by professional guitarist Mark Ferguson and Singer Stephanie Sanchez, films, and a final music performance by the Sinti/“Gypsy Jazz” group Hot Club Sandwich.

At Sonoma State University the program included films, live Romani music, and a Romani dance workshop with Sani Rifati from *Voice of Roma*. The artwork and artist’s commentary, as well as information from films, musical performances, literary texts, historical accounts, and linguistic studies, supplied necessary background for developing a sophisticated powerpoint presentation, a Web site, and a blog.

Before even beginning these projects, however, the entire exhibit needed to be photographed professionally. The Berglund Center helped enlist the time, expertise and skills of Bill Carrigan, faculty member in the art department at Pacific University, and Jennifer Hernandez, Student Intern in the Berglund Center. Bill Carrigan then generously spent countless hours photographing the works and then selecting, cropping, and organizing the photographs so that they were readily accessible for use. He also offered advice on the design and layout of the powerpoint presentation and the Web site. He recommended Nancy Duarte’s insightful book *slide:ology* as a guide for design and layout [5]. Photos by Bill Carrigan and John Sappington (SSU) were used for the images on the Web site and in the catalogue that the West Branch Gallery published from the exhibition, the first catalogue in English of Ceija Stojka’s artworks [6].

The next step was building the Web site with the help of student interns in the Berglund Center. Maria Walters made the basic template through Word Press, and Jennifer Hernandez built the Flash slide show with Ceija Stojka’s artwork and commentary on each piece of art. Jamaica King assisted in the final step of setting the blog up on the site so as to maintain current commentary and updates. My main focus has been writing content for each web page as well as working on visual design as I learn to build on the Web site and blog myself.

In the rest of this article, I will explain the content of the Powerpoint presentation, the Web site, and the blog. I will then reflect on the importance of technology and the Internet for making Romani arts more visible.



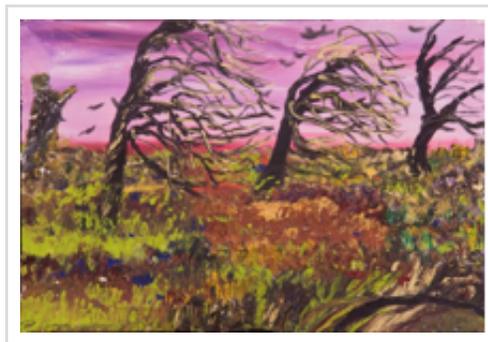
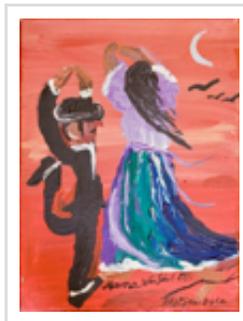
Powerpoint Presentation on Ethical Remembrance through Artistic Biographies: The Example of Romani Artist Ceija Stojka

The Berglund Fellowship provided support for me to develop a sophisticated Powerpoint presentation to showcase and analyze Ceija Stojka's artwork in a variety of venues. The first main occasion on which I used the presentation was on October 10, 2009, when Michaela Grobbel and I co-presented our paper “Ethical Remembrance through Artistic Biographies: The Example of Romani Artist Ceija Stojka” at the international conference of the German Studies Association in Washington, D.C. The photographs of the artwork that Bill Carrigan and Jennifer Hernandez had taken were combined with other photographs taken by John Sappington at Sonoma State University through a grant from Interdisciplinary Partnerships for Investigations that Connect the University (IPICU) . These photos, coupled with the technical assistance of the student interns in the Berglund Center made it possible to enhance the presentation with visually powerful imagery as well as with music, links to Web sites, and a short film slideshow of her artwork.

After a theoretical analysis of the notion of ethical remembrance in Ceija Stojka's artwork, we

examined eight pieces from the exhibit in detail to demonstrate how her artwork is a form of visual memory space. For purposes here, I will concentrate on the self-portrait that Ceija Stojka painted entitled “Ceija nach dem Krieg/Ceija after the War,” with which we also ended our presentation. Here Ceija stands in the foreground with depictions of her family with the wagons in the background. This is a scene after the war when the remaining Stojka family resumed traveling.

While those in the background are wearing what Ceija identifies as traditional Romani dress—the women in long, colorful skirts; the men in dark suits and hats—the artist has dressed herself in the traditional Austrian Dirndl. In addition, her hair is colored blond, which she only began doing later in life to be more successful in business. The painting thus amalgamates three different periods in one picture—the past, present, and future—and alludes to the challenges that Roma face as they attempt to maintain their culture but also integrate into today’s united Europe and a globalized world.



“Romani Arts” Web site

As the home page of my Web site, entitled “Romani Arts: Artists, Literary Figures, Filmmakers,

and Musicians,” states, the site is “dedicated to making the visual and literary arts by Roma more visible. That visibility will lead to a better understanding of Romani culture and history as diverse and vibrant. The tight interconnection between the visual and literary arts and language also spurred the idea to include information on Romany, the language of the Roma people [7].” The first highlighted artist is Ceija Stojka because of the relevancy of the recent exhibit and because there are no Web sites on her works.

Most of the existing Web sites on the Roma focus on the minority group’s status in individual countries and concentrate on political, social, and

economic issues. Moreover, while there are several Web sites promoting various individual Romani artists, musicians, and filmmakers, I have found none that attempt to bring the Romani arts together in one central location. The more I have researched for my own site, the more I have become amazed at the wealth of Romani artists, writers, filmmakers, and musicians, which is both inspiring and daunting. Such a central site, although very ambitious in nature, seems particularly important as the Roma try both to assert their own identity and integrate into an expanding European Union.

Two Web sites have been particularly helpful in building my own site. The first is that of the First Roma Pavilion at the 52nd Venice Biennale, a prestigious biennial art extravaganza, which marked the importance of Romani art for asserting that identity. This beautiful Web site contains biographies and images of visual arts [8]. There are now plans for a Second Roma Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011. A second Web site was that of the organization Roma e.V. in Cologne, Germany, where a major art exhibit entitled “The Forgotten Europeans: Art of the Romanies. Romanies in Art” occurred from December 5, 2008 until March 1, 2009. The Web site [9] and catalogue of that exhibit [10] provide a wealth of information on Romani artists and their artworks as well as historical background and perspectives on the importance of art in the formation of Romani identity.

As the above quotation from the home page emphasizes, Romani arts cannot be divorced from history, politics, social-economic conditions, and language. Thus, the site attempts to address each of these areas on separate pages and links. Because of the dynamic nature of Romani culture as analyzed in the presentation on ethical memory in Ceija Stojka’s artwork, the site also needed to have a blog for updates and running commentary.





Reflections on the value of the Internet and technology for Romani arts and Future Projects

There is no denying that the Internet and technology have opened up entirely new spheres of information, networking, and transmission of visual imagery for Romani arts. Multi-media projects disseminated through the Internet and other technological means offer Roma, who have traditionally been an oral, diasporic culture with very little documentation of their works in written format, an important venue to inform others about their rich culture and artistic works. As Michaela Grobbel and I discussed in our presentation on the relationship between memory and visual imagery in Ceija Stojka’s works, art contributes to the establishment of a new cultural and political space in which both individual and community memory create and propagate the history of the Roma. The Internet can thus act as a metaphorical and physical territory in which the diasporic Roma can build a home.

For my own future projects, there is still information that I must gather to make the Web site more complete, although I now realize that such information will never be exhaustive, nor should it be. If, indeed, we look at Romani arts as a continually evolving, vibrant field, then the methods to convey the value and beauty of those arts must also be continually evolving and vibrant. This has given me as an academic, who is used to publishing books and articles that reach a final stage upon publication, a totally new perspective on the process of information dissemination. This does not mean that we dedicated scholars should be less than thorough and meticulous in the research we post on the Internet. On the contrary, the vastness of the audiences that the information will reach should force us to be even more vigilant and careful in what we present. The blog, I am finding, can be an incredibly useful tool not only for keeping the Web site up-to-date, but also for commenting on the process whereby we find the information and select what to disseminate. As I am seeing from Romani blogs, the blogging process can also be a powerful means to allow others to interact on significant issues. I have just begun to post my own entries on the blog. I would like to enlist commentary from other experts so as to keep the blog fresh, vibrant, and up-to-date. In this way, the project will continue to thrive in the hopeful manner that Ceija Stojka advocates the Roma do as well, that is “say Yes to life [11].”

I wish to thank the Berglund Center for Internet Studies; Maria Walters, Jennifer Hernandez, and Jamaica King, student interns in the Berglund Center; and Bill Carrigan, Instructor of Art at Pacific University; Ceija Stojka; Michaela Grobbel, Associate Professor of German at Sonoma State University; and the Elise Elliott Fund at Pacific University for support and assistance in this project.

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- . 2005. *Träume ich, dass ich lebe?: Befreit aus Bergen-Belsen*. Vienna: Picus.
- . 2003. *Meine Wahl zu schreiben—Ich kann es nicht: Gedichte und Bilder*. Landeck: Emirgan Yayinlari Editions.
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Endnotes

[1] For information on the history of the Roma see Fraser, Hancock, and the “Patrin” Web site. For information on the language Romany, see the “Romani Linguistics Site” of the Romani Project at the University of Manchester. <http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/index.html>. Accessed 15 March 2010.

[2] Westervelt, 2009.

[3] “Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015.” www.romadecade.org. Accessed on 13 March 2010.

[4] Halwachs, 1999.

[5] See Maria Walters review of slide:ology in *Interface*, volume 9, Issue 6 (July-August 2009).

[6] Ceija Stojka: *Live—Dance—Paint*, 2009. Two catalogues in German (Ceija Stojka, 1995, *Ceija Stojka: Bilder & Texte 1989-1995*; and Ceija Stojka, 2009, *Auschwitz ist mein Mantel: Bilder und Texte*; and), and one in Czech (Ceija Stojka, 2008, *Zijeme ve Skrytu: Vyprávění rakouské Romky*) have appeared of her artwork.

[7] <http://bcis.pacificu.edu/roma/>

[8] <http://www.romapavilion.org/>

[9] <http://www.romev.de/>

[10] Die vergessenen Europaeer: Kunst der Roma. Roma in der Kunst, 2009.

[11] The quote comes from a poem by Ceija Stojka that was included in the exhibit. The concluding lines are:

Look at the bees buzzing
 at the little ants
 gathering for their lives
 You too should take a deep breath
 and say Yes to life

Schau wie die Bienen summen
 wie sich die kleinen Ameisen
 das taegliche Leben holen
 Auch du sollst tief Luft holen
 zum Leben Ja sagen

Ceija Stojka. 2003. *Meine Wahl zu schreiben -ich kann es nicht/o fallo de isgiri – me tschischanaf les*. Translated by Lorely French and Michaela Grobbel, 38.

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14 THOUGHTS ON “LIVE—DANCE—PAINT—WRITE: A MULTI-MEDIA PROJECT ON ROMANI (“GYPSY”) ARTIST”

Editor

on **April 1, 2010 at 3:08 PM** said:

Poster Name: Jenn

Message: I’m glad you were able to get Ceija’s work out on the Internet! There are no limits (practically) to the audience that can now view her work! Also, thank you for sharing it with Pacific!

funny jokes

on **January 29, 2014 at 4:30 PM** said:

Good replies in return of this query with solid arguments and telling the whole thing on the topic of that.

seriale

on **January 30, 2014 at 7:10 AM** said:

Whats up. Quite nice world wide web site!! Guy .. Beautiful .. Incredible .. I will bookmark your site and take the feeds additionally...I am satisfied to uncover many helpful details right here inside article. Thanks for sharing...

naija

on **January 30, 2014 at 11:35 AM** said:

Thanks a lot for providing men and women with this sort of a remarkable opportunity to read significant reviews from here. It's always so superb plus packed using a whole lot of fun for me personally and my office peers to visit your website minimum 3 times each week to learn the new points you have. And indeed, I'm also truly satisfied in your astonishing tips served by you. Some 2 data in this posting are completely the simplest we've ever had.

headlines

on **January 30, 2014 at 1:56 PM** said:

Hello there, You've done a good job. I am going to actually digg it and personally recommend to my friends. I am certain they'll be benefited from this website.

Tonya

on **January 31, 2014 at 11:19 AM** said:

We are a group of volunteers and opening a new scheme in our community. Your web site offered us with valuable information to work on.

You’ve done an impressive job and our whole community will be grateful to you.

Veranstaltungshaftpflicht

on **January 31, 2014 at 3:37 PM** said:

Hi there, for all time i used to check weblog posts here in the early houyrs in the daylight, as i love to learn more and more.

plotka

on **February 1, 2014 at 1:56 AM** said:

Whats up. Really nice web site!! Guy .. Beautiful .. Amazing .. I am going to bookmark your web site and take the feeds additionally...I am satisfied to uncover a lot of helpful data here in the article. Thanks for sharing...

podatki

on **February 1, 2014 at 3:39 AM** said:

Hi there, Sorry for your lengthy comment Thanks for sharing your article, next time can you write about wart removal products. Also is there any proven residence cure for skin warts? Can you suggest me some? I live in Canada. Please dont forget that some stuff may perhaps not be accessible in my area. That’s why suggest me general elements that will be found everywhere. Also would you recommend buying wartrol online? is it not dangerous?

naija

on **February 2, 2014 at 5:09 PM** said:

Thanks to your advice! I am going to read it to realize far more about Holy Cross.

nigeria entertainment news

on **February 4, 2014 at 10:28 AM** said:

for that greatest cost about the marketplace super genuine all

nigeria entertainment news

on **February 4, 2014 at 10:36 AM** said:

It is my belief that mesothelioma is most lethal cancer. It's got unusual features. The a lot more I contemplate it the greater I am assured it does not conduct itself as a actual solid tissues cancer. During the event mesothelioma is often a rogue virus-like infection, then there's the prospects for developing a vaccine plus offering vaccination for asbestos uncovered people who are vulnerable to high risk connected with developing lengthy term asbestos associated malignancies. Thanks for discussing your ideas about this crucial ailment.

Augustus

on **February 6, 2014 at 6:31 AM** said:

I could not resist commenting. Very well written!

smieszne gry

on **February 6, 2014 at 12:31 PM** said:

We're a gaggle of volunteers and starting a brand new scheme in our community. Your website provided us with helpful information to work on. You've done a formidable job and our entire community will be grateful to you.