

Barbara Rüdiger in Conversation with Flaka Haliti

Barbara Rüdiger (BR): The Henkel Art.Award. is given to artists from Central Eastern Europe. You were born in Pristina, now you are living in Munich and Vienna. How important is your origin for you?

Flata Haliti (FH): It is like a gravity point—no matter how far away I am, and how great or small the distance, the connection is always there. If I would have to draw myself, I guess would look something like this.



BR: Do you see yourself as a political artist? Is your art intended to be political? Or does non-political art even exist?

FH: Yes ... I guess my works are always somehow politically engaged, even the ones which maybe appear at first sight to be grounded “only” in poetic gestures. Generally speaking, in my work I always begin with a quite personal or even a sentimental position in which I find myself, but through the creative process this ends up to be less personal. Nevertheless I would like to repeat that the “personal is political” and, as such, art is a form of political practice.

BR: The Städelschule was your second academic institution. Why was it important for you to continue your studies after Pristina and why did you choose Frankfurt?

FH: At the art faculty in Pristina it was only possible to practice “traditional” artistic media, and only in quite a limited context, so by the time I graduated I felt I needed more. The experience at the Städelschule was empowering, since it was more based on contemporary art and new media, which are not only much closer to my conceptual approach but also gave me a more theoretical “base,” and with that also certainty in my practice. The Städel as a new environment was indeed crucial for my artistic practice, and it opened up further interest and knowledge. What is crucial about the Städel is that it very quickly brings its students closer to the art system including the art market, which also makes the experience of studying there hard-bitten too. And Frankfurt as a city was a choice because the Städel was there, there could be no better reason.

BR: As you told me once, when you came to Frankfurt people wanted you to talk German because you were from the East but they did not demand this from other international students. You reacted by creating an artwork. How does it feel to experience this in our so-called globalized world?

FH: After studying five years at an international school and living in Frankfurt, it has been quite an interesting process to realize that the biggest challenge for me was to live as an “international” there, as I was constantly perceived as an emigrant. Naively enough I understood that the story simply works like this—if you come from southeast Europe, and you find yourself in the West, returning back to your country would be perceived as a failure. So you had better learn the language because that is the first step to get “assimilated” and stay forever. A result of these experiences was the sound-installation work *Ex-Spatium* (2013), and the work *Als ich ein Kind war, wollte ich Künstlerin werden* (2010), in which I try to decode meaning by simply making a breakdown grammatical analysis of the sentence in German.

BR: When talking about Städel, it's always somehow surrounded by networks, at the moment very strongly with terms like post-internet art. Do you feel connected?

FH: Well, the omnipresence of the internet does influence the conditions in which more or less we are all working, acting, or just being a participating observer, right? And being aware of the physicality of a network, it creates a somehow honest relationship from the moment you come up with an idea to the production process and public exposure. Furthermore it brings a new understanding of materiality, I think. Anyway you are right. When I think back to the Städtelschule open house *Rundgang*, the fashion of the network, and particularly post-net aesthetics were quite dominant each year. This definitely did affect my taste and perception of new aesthetics. This is also maybe most evident in my work *I Miss You, I Miss You, Till I Don't Miss You Anymore* (2012–2014), where I speak about love in long-distance relationships based on a collection of individual love letters delivered and received via e-mails, which is also one of the three works that I am showing at mumok. The other work would be *Artist Immunity* (2012–2013), which I published as fake news via different media magazines and spread through social media and the internet. And the more the news was shared and commented online, the more the work in itself was happening.

BR: At the mumok you are mainly showing new works, with varied forms, above all in their media appearance. Artificial surfaces seem to be a main topic, with Google Translate on screens, clouds on the horizon, or barriers made of concrete. In which context do you see your new works?

FH: The exhibition at mumok is designed in a way that each displayed project stands independently, or points to its own “story” or presence, but at the same time the different works do have a joint “epicenter” when it comes to questioning the visual or even the artificial, the question of appearance you already pointed out, through different means. I think that is very visible when illusion, communication, and trust are deconstructed in the video installation *I Miss You, I Miss You, Till I Don't Miss You Anymore*, and *I See a Face. Do You See a Face.*, a series of photographs (2014). Or when the boundaries and different perspectives in aesthetics are decolonized, as in the work *Untitled* (2014), the “concrete” barrier sculptures.

BR: Currently you are part of the PhD in Practice program at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. The focus is on research on artistic methods and on reflection of your work in the fields of art in an academic context. What is the background for this decision?

FH: My previous education experience was somehow based on two different extremes, the one very conservative education in Pristina, and the other super progressive Städtelschule, which as a “school” continuously attempts to question all kinds of teaching methods in contemporary art education. Both were important for different reasons, but still I find it highly problematic to make any comparison between these two educational experiences, and to try to question their temporalities. That is why I consider that the PhD in Practice at the Academy of Arts in Vienna is somehow a trajectory of my two previous and utmost divergent educational experiences. However, I am not sure if this doesn't also have to do with a specific geopolitical and demographic position of Vienna. In addition, the importance of the PhD in Practice program lies in the fact that it continuously encourages me as a producer to be engaged with my own position by thinking critically on subjects that are relevant in research, based on intersections between art and knowledge, and as such I believe it helps my conceptual approach in my artistic practice to be much more complex.

Barbara Rüdiger is curator of the exhibition *Flaka Haliti. I See a Face. Do You See a Face.* (6.6.–5.10.2014) at mumok, Vienna.

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