

fine arts / new media

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“We do not need a spectacle”

As the word itself implies, “tranzit” is the act of passing over, across, or through something. The word also refers to this process - “tranzit” as a conveyance, a vehicle for movement.

When, some three years ago, Kathrin Rhomberg and I were asked by Erste Bank in Vienna to name art institutions in the Czech Republic and Slovakia actively operating in the international contemporary art arena as potentially interesting partners for involvement in sponsorship, we hesitated. Not only was the existing institutional infrastructure in these countries, to our knowledge, locked inside a circle of perpetuated production resembling residues of the past, but we also believed that the strategies of corporate funding needed to be rethought in terms of the challenges contemporary artistic production articulates nowadays. If we were serious about investing in these art scenes in a way that could potentially result in a long-term change of attitudes towards art and institutions, we did not need a spectacle, a one-off show with a large banner announcing who paid for the event. What we felt was needed was a long-term engagement in developing a range of possibilities for cultural producers to take active part and engage in the production of visions for the future. To employ the metaphor of “tranzit,” we felt the need to create both a vehicle and a path to move towards a new institutional creativity.

Tranzit has been developed as a series of diverse, dynamic, and flexible projects geared towards overcoming the international isolation of the art scenes (even though more than a decade has passed since the political changes), and the generational, as well as the disciplinary, divide. All projects are embedded in local expertise and have the potential to contribute to local and international contexts. Tranzit’s support is oriented towards individuals (rather than institutions), and values small-scale, process-oriented, and innovative projects. For example, modest grants are awarded to artists and curators, based on project proposals that tend towards experimenting with the limits of what is currently possible, and which invoke the potential to work on another, larger scale. Partnerships are established with artists and art organizers with excellent ideas, whose projects can be facilitated and brought into being through minimal financial assistance or the sharing of networks and expertise. Based on an analysis of what is lacking locally, talks, presentations, performances, screenings, and publications are being developed in order to enter into a dialogue with recent artistic and intellectual production in an international context. The intellectual traffic, so to speak, is organized as a two-way exchange. If, for example, curators, theorists, or writers visit Bratislava or Prague to deliver a lecture, the visit is embedded in serious research of local art scenes by these professionals, who see knowledge exchange as a starting point for potential future collaboration. Similarly, Tranzit supports art professionals (such as the curators of biennials and larger exhibitions) who visit these countries in discovering the various scenes by helping them arrange visits to studios and meetings with artists and other art practitioners. Young, talented professionals in the arts from Slovakia and the Czech Republic, on the other hand, are offered the possibility of taking part in internships at professional art platforms abroad, to which Tranzit contributes both by utilizing its network and providing financial support. Tranzit strives to contribute to the ideal of a functioning, balanced structure capable of

accommodating current artistic practice. To achieve this, a number of investments, both intellectual and financial, need to be made in the “zones of potency”, fragile, but potentially visionary artistic ideas and projects that in times of transition need committed advocates. I recall a comment made in one of his writings by Borut Vogelnik, a member of the artists’ collective IRWIN from Ljubljana, Slovenia. He refers to a general agreement we all seem to have entered into by acknowledging that artistic production in what we are used to call “Eastern Europe” is, with regard to its quality and subject matter, practically indistinguishable from art produced in the “West.” He fears that we do not clearly recognize the very fact that the context in which this art is produced, as well as the local and regional institutional infrastructures it must circulate in, are simply incompatible with those in the “West”. The production of contemporary art in an environment that not only lacks a comparable, mature art infrastructure but is very often even hostile to art production is something quite different from the production of contemporary art in countries with an extensive gallery and museum structure linked to international currents, a well-organized marketplace and a sense of continuity in the critical-theoretical treatment of present, past, and future art production, says Vogelnik. I believe this is exactly the complex situation that Tranzit is committed to resolving, by modestly contributing to narrowing the gap, and engaging in myriad small, almost invisible steps forming part of a long journey.

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