

FRAGMENTS OF THE OTHER

ABSTRACT: An ongoing visual dialogue between the independent artist Gisela Weimann, Berlin/Germany and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andor Kómives, University of Art and Design Cluj-Napoca/Romania. By exchanging bits and pieces of drawings and paintings from their work tables the artists give each other fragmented visual material at hand that is the starting point for joint collages. This collaborative work process made them discover their common European traditions as well as the inspiring differences of their cultural roots and opened the pleasure of accepting and enjoying the mystery and the enrichment of otherness.

FREE TO CHANGE, A WORK IN PROGRESS

Prologue

Andor Kómives and Gisela Weimann met for the first time in 1998 in Madrid at the art faculty of the Universidad Complutense. She was invited as guest lecturer and he was benefiting from a research scholarship. It was then that the plan for a joint project was born. The development of the concept and the practical start took place in 1999, when Andor Kómives invited Gisela Weimann as guest lecturer at the painting department of the University of Art and Design in Cluj-Napoca.

For their presentation in the frame of the 13th Congress European Culture the artists developed a performance with a personal narrative about the history and the development of their project. It was presented in front of a video projection of a selection of 350 collages.



Image 1. *The artists during the rehearsal of their performance at the historic art museum*
(Photo: Sandor Francisc&Manuela Ghenghea)

ART IN DIALOGUE

Gisela Weimann: „Free to Change, a work in progress“. This subtitle, chosen for the first presentation of our ongoing co-operative art project “Fragments of the Other” here in Cluj-Napoca in November 1999, was an intended political statement. In many countries of the world citizens are officially free to change, but with regimes that do not stick to the principles of democracy and personal freedom, unofficially this is a work in progress that has still a long way to go.

Andor Kömives: Our common project – “Fragmentele Celuialt” – has already a long history, by now 15 years, without losing interest for us at all. Our first meeting in 1998 in Spain was the beginning of an inspiring and lasting friendship. When I invited Gisela one year later to teach in the art department of my university we had the opportunity to start our project in reality. We could try out whether we can collaborate and test our mutual acceptance, flexibility and adaptability.



Image 2. *The artists at work in Cluj-Napoca and Berlin, 2015*
(Photos: Andor Kömives, Renate Altenrath)

Gisela Weimann: The basic idea of the project is that of a creative dialogue between two European artists who are not only of different nationality and cultural backgrounds but received their formation under two different political systems. By exchanging scraps of drawings and paintings from our work tables and drawers we entrust each other with fragmented visual material that is the starting point for new works. Each of us is free to complete and change these ‘fragments of the other’ in whatever way we want.

Andor Kömives: That it worked out from the beginning without distrust and envy was a pleasant surprise for both of us. During the process we discovered our common European traditions as well as the inspiring differences of our cultural roots and personal habits. The artistic dialogue that was established by this exchange has since become a perpetual source of inspiration and opened up new perspectives in our work that would not have occurred otherwise.

Gisela Weimann: If these fragments were produced by an artist who works in a defined personal way they have an aura. If one looks and listens carefully they tell the beginning of a story. What shall I do with this frightening dragon's head? Or with a devil? Does the black brushstroke on faded yellow paper not look like the winged silhouette of a human vampire? Your fragments often evoke strange narratives in my mind and intuitive, subconscious reactions, enriched by our shared sense of irony and humor.



Image 3. Left: GW, "Don Diego el Magico" – right: AK, "Sfânt Gheorghe misogin", both 1999



Image 4. Left: AK, "Judecata celui tare" – right: GW, "Die Engel konnten nicht helfen", both 2003

ABOUT OTHERNESS

Andor Kömives: Who is Gisela Weimann, seen from my point of view? She looks fragile but she is very dynamic and has a lot of energy. She is disciplined – Ordnung und Disziplin! – with a developed sense for the daily duties. Her mind is clear and practical – a German mind! – but she is also a dreamer, with her head in the clouds. I would say about her that she is a mixture of precision – like Carl Zeiss lenses – and poetry. Above all she is very honest and says what is on her mind – whether you like to hear it or not!

Gisela Weimann: What can I say about Andor Kömives? The mixture of his Dacian, Thracian, Roman, Hungarian and Transilvanian heritage – he is distantly related to Dracula – makes him multicultural, mysterious and difficult to assess. He is also a dreamer, in so far as we both follow our ideas without thinking about time and profit. Ordnung! is not one of his most developed characteristics but we have peculiarities in common, otherwise our project would not have lasted so long. The strongest bond of our artistic cooperation is our shared sense of poetry and humor: even if I tell Andor in all honesty what I really think, he does not take it too serious!



Image 5. Left: GW, "Batman" – right: AK, "Vampir Transilvan", both 2003

Andor Kömives: The images of dragons and vampires in my work are inspired by traditional Romanian glass paintings. They reappear in bloody scenes in Gisela's collages with dragons ripping up human bodies and pictures of dragon killers. When I received black figures, faces or feet from her it influenced my collages in a dramatic way. At a certain point I was interested in painting birds and the little birds flew at once to Berlin and invaded your collages.

Gisela Weimann: Sometimes, in a process of constructive destruction we tear up water colors and sketches in order to offer each other fresh material of our work for completion. This work process and the chosen small format of 29,7x21 cm allows for continuation even if we do not meet very often. Our fragments and the collages can reach Berlin and Cluj by post and bring with them tiny pieces of the different artistic worlds we live in. It may only be a shade of blue or a different color sound that inspires a certain work, or a German or Romanian expression that gives us clues and titles, like: "Oh, mein Gott!" and "Mergem la spatir."



Image 6. Left: AK, "Heaven and Hell", 2000 - right: GW, "Im Paradies", 2002



Image 7. Left: GW, "Herr Idee" - right: AK, "La menina de Andor", both 1999

Andor Kömives: Sometimes I ask myself whether there is a limit to the proportion of your fragments in order to call it my own work? Every collage I make with your fragments is signed by me and is mine and yet not quite mine. Is it important to dominate the other's presence, to listen to one's own voice in order not to lose one's identity? Is it like a little corruption of one's personal vision?

Gisela Weimann: Unlike the frequently known corruption in the political and business world artistic corruption is not harmful. If you lose your identity as an artist from time to time it only leads to new insights and extension. Even if I am just using a small piece of your work, I am immersed in another atmosphere that changes the outcome. This working method touches the basic question of copyright. We have succeeded in overcoming the anxious insistence on our own distinctive style and are taking delight in the other's inventions that emerge from our playful visual dialogue.

Andor Kömives: Our project contains all the collage principles and many other specific aspects. It is more complex and difficult, because sometimes the fragment of the other artist is willful and resistant like a foreign body that has to be accepted and metamorphosed into one's personal imagery and vision in a process of poetic alchemy. It is like following work instructions for surrealists who claimed in their manifestos that everything is possible, even "the encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table".

Gisela Weimann: Time and individual development are an interesting aspect of a collaboration that runs over a long period of time. If one would see the nearly 400 collages we have produced so far one could read from them in which artistic projects we were each involved at a certain period. If particular fragments resist fitting into a specific creative moment their day will come when we look at them in a different mood and find an unexpected visual response for their integration.



Image 9. Left: GW, "Planets", 2005 – right: AK, "Viva la Revolución!", 2007

Andor Kömives: The titles and the appearances of the large amount of collages that we created during the past 15 years are suited to make an archaeological research about the evolution of our artistic production and themes. Like in the theory of contemporary quantum physics, each image fragment of one of us evokes an artistic reaction in the collage work of the other. When I worked on images of angels for my doctorate they appear in mine and your images. When you started with your Cosmos project in 2005 planets began wandering through both our collages.



Image 8. Left: AK, "Diva", Ifitry/Marocco – right: GW, "ensanglantée, Ifitry/Marocco, 2013

A EUROPEAN TALE OF 1001 COLLAGES

Gisela Weimann: Our ongoing picture story resembles the oriental tales of 1001 nights, where an unjust sultan took revenge on all women, because his wife had been unfaithful to him. He demanded his vizier to bring him a virgin every night and had her killed the next morning. Schehezerade, the vizier's daughter, saved the lives of many women and her own by starting to narrate an exciting continued story to the sultan that made him so curious about the next chapter that he kept her alive.

Andor Kömives: The considerable amount of finished works presented in six exhibitions since 1999 in Cluj-Napoca, Berlin, Sibiu, Kassel and Regensburg with a growing number of collages produced by us during the evolving process of our project reveals the gratifying capacity of creative co-operation. We have developed a common way of feeling and perceiving things and images and wish to maintain and amplify this intuitive state of understanding in the future. Together we have decided to enjoy the pleasure of working on our pictorial tale by only putting an end to our collaboration when the magic number of 1001 collages is reached – and then organize a large exhibition in the place where everything started: in Cluj-Napoca!



Image 9. *Finale: The artists tear up one of their sketches and present new fragments to each other*
(Photos: Sandor Francisc&Manuela Ghenghea)

Epilogue

There should be more artists and Schehezerades in the world who tell the many brutal and corrupt potentates different stories about equal rights, cooperation, sharing, tolerance and the unending pleasure of art.

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