

## Chapter 6

### **Archival Absence**

Whenever a new artwork enters a museum collection, it becomes part of a history that is constructed through exhibitions. The object and its creator are inscribed within the realm of value that is defined by museum collections as ‘heritage’. Although several artworks may be shown in the museum, few are bought and granted heritage status. This status reaffirms the significance of an artwork, which is solidified by circulating the works in further exhibitions and retelling the role of its author in different narratives at home and abroad. I have shown in my earlier chapters that this ‘heritage status’ of an artwork implicitly includes the status of national heritage.

In this chapter I investigate the politics of archiving by opening further the relationships between materiality and the discursivity of absence. A Foucauldian understanding of archival objects as *statements* provides an operational model for understanding this relationship. These statements are artworks. Foucault allows us to understand archival absence as an exclusion of the right to speak or state, to modify knowledge and participate in its creation in the archival realm. Accordingly, the archive serves as the threshold of those discourses that have ceased to be ours; they fall out of discursive practice, marking a rupture between us and “what we can no longer say” (Foucault 2008, 147). In this chapter I use four case studies to analyse particular local debates about archiving, in order to foreground four different aspects of this relationship that the objects allow me demonstrate. I have chosen these particular works involving debates about the creation of knowledge, because each of them addresses the mobilisation of memory in temporally and socially specific contexts. My objects challenge museums’ principles of acquisition, or turn them into a subject of public critique. As such these objects help me to visualise the material construction of absence and serve as a means to reconsider the implications of knowledge creation that subaltern artistic positions

involve. The argument that I construct in this chapter through reading the acts of interrogation by these works is that museums consciously and systematically exclude not only particular forms of criticism but also particular artistic positions.

In order to distinguish between the included and excluded objects, I employ the performance theorist Diana Taylor's notions of *repertoire* and *archive* to articulate museum memory politics and its relationship to live knowledge. They exist, according to Taylor, in constant interaction—while the archive becomes the legitimate source for constructing meaning, the repertoire of the past is banished and forgotten over time (Taylor 2003, 21–25). Taylor's division drawn between the *live* immaterial, as opposed to the archived and thus materialised documents, records and texts, is useful for thinking through the presence created by museum exhibition practices and an absence of a growing amount of artworks that remain invisible in the realm of history writing based on national collections.

Taylor's distinction has two starting points: performance studies and Latin/o American studies or, as she calls it, hemispheric studies. By rethinking the boundaries of what is preserved and what vanishes, Taylor simultaneously negotiates discrepancies of power and colonial history that are reflected in the continuities of hierarchical relationships between the two Americas. In the context of museum studies and contemporary art in which I mobilise Taylor's concepts, the notion of *repertoire* helps me reframe the idea of presence by considering specific kinds of absences in museums and to relate them to social discourse and memory practices. Museum collections, as archives, simultaneously demonstrate a history of loss and of rubbish. But the nature of these is largely dependent on historical legacies. Taylor allows negotiation of both discourses as a way of understanding the archive and the *rationale* inherent in it, which the repertoire displays via the constellation of archived artworks. My aim with analysing the material side of museum absence is motivated by understanding its relationship to presencing as a means for theorising the unarticulated part in the museological logic of collecting contemporary artistic practice. Comparing the articulations of knowledge by Foucault, Derrida and Taylor, the spatial character of absence will also receive further attention during the course of my analysis.

### **Policing Memory Acts: Kristina Norman's *After War***

In April 2007, a conflict erupted around the removal of the Second World War memorial, commonly known as the *Bronze Soldier*, from the Tallinn city centre by order of the national

government. The statue was removed from central Tallinn to a military cemetery on the outskirts of the city shortly before the celebration commemorating the end of the Second World War. The transfer of the monument constituted a radical spatial intervention, which fundamentally changed the usage of the surrounding park during what has become known locally as the 'Bronze Night'. This transfer led to several street riots, the exercise of unprecedented police violence towards the people who gathered to protect the monument from removal and the violent death of a local youth. The monument's vibrant presence in the central park adjacent to the Estonian National Library, where the communities celebrated the Soviet era commemorations with accordion tunes and flowers, was replaced with silence. After those turbulent events, the area formerly occupied by the statue was quickly covered by flowerbeds, rendered invisible by the surrounding busy traffic, subjected to regular police surveillance and ignored by the continuous stream of passing commuters.

In the government's discourse the removal of the *Bronze Soldier* was justified by the need to re-establish "the safety of the country". The source of a threat, as defined by the prime minister from the right-wing liberal *Reform party* that had recently gained power, was perceived to lie in the local Russian-speaking community and the existence of cultural traditions that the *Bronze Soldier* symbolised.<sup>1</sup> The same conflict is closely related to the denial of rights to a large part of the Russian-speaking population. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, approximately 30,000 people ceased to hold any citizenship for two decades. Despite numerous warnings from international human rights organisations, this group with restricted rights remains known locally as 'the grey passport holders'. This has continued to encourage a nationalist view that perceives the large number of locals who have lived in Estonia since the 1970s and 1980s as 'Others'. In the early 1990s, thousands of people lost their jobs and housing following the language and real estate reforms adopted after the new political regime established national sovereignty.<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that many of the people who migrated to Estonia during the Soviet era have been granted local citizenship, the existence of a politically administered grey zone has continued to feed the widespread nationalist belief about the Russian-speaking community as holding no right to

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<sup>1</sup> Tali, Margaret. "Our Monuments of Intolerance." *Frameworks. Finnish Art Review*, Issue 8, April 2008. Helsinki: Frame, 48.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, as a part of the real estate reform of 1991 many houses were returned to the legal owners (or descendants) of these houses according to the data from 1940; thus lawfully discriminating against the rights of their long-term users.

'belong'. This sentiment has been fuelled by recurring conflicts with Russia and often manifests in emotional public reactions.

The conflicting memory discourses that the *Bronze Soldier* monument came to embody were based on two radically different interpretations of the Second World War and its consequent effects on the statehood of Estonia. At the heart of this conflict was the question of its relationship to the Soviet Union and whether it belonged to that union of nations on either a voluntary or involuntary basis. This discussion about the maintenance of the Russian-speaking community's traditions and memory thus involved the very legitimacy of Estonian statehood.

My first case that directly builds upon this context is Kristina Norman's installation *After War*, which touches upon the issues of belonging and memory by re-embodying the *Bronze Soldier* statue and challenging the dominant representation of its removal. In order to understand how its absence informs the politics of the Art Museum of Estonia's collection, I will set the artwork into a relationship with the politics of the gallery in the following analysis. Since the installation later became part of Kiasma museum, I further interrogate the changed meaning that its physical move to Finland brought with it.



Figure 6.1 Kristina Norman's public intervention in the former location of the *Bronze Soldier* in Tallinn, May 2009. Photograph by Reimo Võsa-Tangsoo.

*After War* was realised in the public space of Tallinn in the spring of 2009, two years after the Bronze Night. Norman erected a golden replica of the memorial in its original location<sup>3</sup> on 9 May, the day of celebrations that commemorate the end of the Second World War, which in Russia continues to be celebrated as its victory over Nazi Germany. The conflict was played out anew as part of the reaction to its appearance in the former location of the *Bronze Soldier*. The police removed the installation and took the artist to the police station.

Norman's work *After War* generated much discussion locally over belonging, history and memory; it thus enlivened an earlier violent conflict, the recent memory of which was still hauntingly present. In the artist's words, the work's title, *After War*, refers to a state in which although "the war is over, the conflict continues to exist".<sup>4</sup> The work triggered a lot of disagreement in publicly expressed opinions. The media discourse set off by the work touched upon values, positions and rights, while among the professional artistic community it also touched upon the notion of artistic quality. Norman was accused of provocation, working for public money and a lack of responsibility.<sup>5</sup>

National discourse dominated the accusations raised against the artist and the statement that she made in publicly installing the *Golden Soldier* monument. Local intellectuals in particular perceived Norman's work as offensive; its creation was even denounced as "an attack against the Estonian state".<sup>6</sup> Her article titled "What language does the Golden Soldier speak?" was published in the main daily newspaper, *Päevaleht*, and resisted taking sides in the recent conflict around the *Bronze Soldier* monument, justifying this refusal with the argument that "the state of war (where people are urged to choose sides) [was] over" (12.05.2009). As a part of her rationalisation for her artwork she stressed her family background as a child of a mixed-marriage, with parents from Estonian

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<sup>3</sup> The idea for the work originated from Norman's previous intervention, which she had realised in the monument's location at the military cemetery a year earlier. An anonymous person had taken one of the small-sized replicas of the Soldier that the artist distributed for free or for a small sum of money to the original location of the *Bronze Soldier*. It was this act that inspired the artist to realise her project a year later. Conversation with Kristina Norman, Tallinn, 6 Nov 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Norman, Kristina. "Mis keelt räägib kuldsõdur?" *Päevaleht*, 12.5.2009. <http://www.epl.ee/news/arvamus/kristina-norman-mis-keelt-raagib-kuldsodur.d?id=51168272>

<sup>5</sup> Maimik, Andres. "Omadele võõras, võõrastele oma." *Päevaleht* 13.5.2009. <http://www.epl.ee/news/arvamus/andres-maimik-omadele-voorastele-voorastele-voorastele.d?id=51168401>; and Norman, Kristina. "Mis keelt räägib kuldsõdur?" *Päevaleht*, 12.5.2009. These two articles generated the most online discussion about the work, generating respectively 526 and 464 comments. Commenting was possible without having to register.

<sup>6</sup> Arrak, Jüri. "Pronkssõduri koopias ja kunstist." *Päevaleht* 14.5.2009. <http://www.epl.ee/news/arvamus/juri-arrak-pronkssoduri-koopias-ja-kunstist.d?id=51168515>; Pere, Katrin. Kuldsõduri "sotsiaalsus" varjab sisutühjust. *Postimees*, 15.5.2009.

and Russian origins, and positioned herself “in between” the daily operation of these locally separated communities. The acknowledgement of her position as such opened what Homi Bhabha calls liminal space, or an interrogatory space between the acts of representation (Bhabha 2010, 5). This in-between position meant inhabiting contradictions and adopting an active position of *doing* things with them. Adopting an in-between position allowed Norman to set the primordial designations of identity into question through presenting the memory discourse of the Russian-speaking community ‘anew’ and by comparing it with the dominant cultural narrative. One could even talk about turning those contradictions in memory and identity into tools through what appears as a radical act of their re-imagining, coupled with active re-making.

The soldier disappeared after being removed by the authorities, but its brief appearance continued for over two months with an active afterlife in public discussion that complicated the dialectics of presence and absence. In fact, most people gained knowledge about its existence only through the public discussion, in which every article re-created the Soldier figure and mobilised the social relations around it by their mediation. In June 2009 the *Golden Soldier* reappeared as a part of an installation in the Estonian Pavilion of the 52nd Venice Biennale.<sup>7</sup> The Soldier was placed vertically in the pavilion space, as if floating on air and reminding viewers of its overturning by Tallinn police forces. The pavilion installation consisted of four additional elements: archival research made by the artist about the history of the *Bronze Soldier*; her documentation of the street riots in Tallinn in April 2007; the media coverage of the conflict in local and Russian discourse; and finally, the documentation of Norman’s public action in May 2009. All these elements were displayed simultaneously; placing the golden soldier figure in different and parallel contexts that involved present, past, media and live repertoires.

As a part of its reception the news spread in the summer of 2009 about Kiasma’s interest in Norman’s work. There were few reports covering Kumu’s position on the infamous work in the Estonian media and these remained ambiguous. For instance, Kumu’s press officer stated that since the museum already owned another work by the artist on a related topic, acquiring *After War* had not been discussed at Kumu.<sup>8</sup> The response by

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<sup>7</sup> The artwork had been created for the context of the Venice Biennale, although during the taking of the decision little was publicly known about the content of the artwork. The choice of the work for this representative position can be explained by the involvement of an international committee comprised of members of the art world.

<sup>8</sup> “Kumu pole kuldsõdurist huvitatud.” *Eesti Päevaleht Online*, 10.6.2009.  
<http://www.delfi.ee/news/paevauudised/eesti/kumu-pole-kuldsodurist-huvitatud.d?id=23853147>

different museum officials indicated a general disinterest towards Norman's installation, which was repeated in the museum's attestation: "should Kumu want to exhibit the work, then according to international standards the loaning of artworks [from other museums] is always possible".<sup>9</sup> I maintain that this lack of interest on the part of the museum is based on the incompatibility of the narrative that Norman's artwork exposes with the ideological position of the museum within the struggle between local communities.

Kumu's lack of interest towards the installation highlights how institutions handle the "in between" position in the incompatible and continuous local memory conflict. Reading Norman's work as a statement and a Foucauldian moment in the museum's archaeology of knowledge allows me to point out aspects of Kumu's rationale when buying new works, which are not articulated as a part of its collection policy. Jacques Rancière has discussed this kind of exclusion as policing. Rancière proposes replacing what is understood as politics with the notion of policing in order to understand how superiority is established (Rancière 1998, 4). Acts of policing define places and roles in social relations. Policing establishes a configuration of perceptible ways of being and saying, which defines doing (29). While the Russian community, whose memory Norman enlivens, was largely absented from local media and the public sphere, this is also the ideological discourse that the museum adopts through absencing the memory of this large local community. Being cancelled out is, according to Rancière, a complex and telling object that speaks about equality.

The discourse that the *Golden Soldier* installation triggered in the local media entailed the open critique of stable notions of memory, community and citizenship, some of which clearly conflicted with their prevalent understanding. The very same notions are represented and advocated by the museum as stable and their understanding as such forms an important basis for the museum's representation of history. As a large-scale embodiment of recent conflicts between subaltern and dominant groups of present-day Estonia on the streets of Tallinn, *After War* visualised the *presence* of their different understandings of the world around them and its state of affairs. Gazing at the relationships between those communities from "in-between", it acknowledged the existence of two parallel realities and brought forward their conflicting interpretations of the past from a genuinely respectful position. By covering the *Bronze Soldier* replica with gold, however, Norman also attributed symbolic value to the publicly suppressed memories and narratives of the subaltern

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<sup>9</sup> Viljak, Hetlin. "Kumu pole kuldsõduri ostu peale mõelnud." *Eesti Päevaleht*, 10.6.2009. <http://www.epl.ee/news/eesti/kumu-pole-kuldsoduri-ostu-peale-moelnud.d?id=51170909>

community who identified with the memory embodied by the original *Bronze Soldier* statue. Her work functioned as a statement that announced the violent removal of one position of memory and simultaneously questioned the legitimacy of official narratives of history and the mechanisms of their creation. It brought forward the knowledge gap created by systematic absencing of a locally existent community, while simultaneously allowing the viewer to acknowledge the constructed nature of this gap.

In my conversation with the director of the Art Museum of Estonia, Sirje Helme, she reiterated the ambivalent position that the museum chose towards the work. Recognising Norman as an artist who stands “in the realm of the museum’s interest”, she nevertheless asserted that although the installation’s acquisition had briefly been discussed in the museum, “it was never a serious consideration because Kiasma had been interested in it first”.<sup>10</sup> When we continued our conversation, Helme attested that she had no knowledge of the artwork’s further future and whether it was actually bought by Kiasma or not. This ambiguity in rhetoric is the basis of the policing of difference by the museum.

In our conversation, Helme confirmed that the discourse of artistic quality serves as the main consideration for buying new artworks for the museum and that “no special consideration is given to the nationality of its creator”.<sup>11</sup> Norman’s act indicates another rationale in the museum’s reasoning that remains unarticulated in its politics. Contrary to what is mediated, in fact the object of the museum collection proves to be a *combination* of an artistic position and the artwork. The artist’s position is in this case also defined by her identification with a community in the particular artwork.

Norman’s position in *After War* was related to her engagement with both communities based on her personal background. The power of her work, apart from recycling a symbolically charged image, was related to this ambiguous realm. Kumu’s decision to exclude her installation as an identification of this position is based on identifying it as external to the community that it aims to represent. It is too ambivalent to be able to be positioned within a narrative of the nation and by critiquing some of its starting points the work poses a threat that sets its consistency in danger. The mythic nature of quality-discourse clearly comes to the fore. When speaking with museum staff during my study, it was evident that quality is often perceived as ‘documenting’ instead of ‘producing’ heritage. Poignantly, Diana Taylor conceptualises mediation of the archive as a form of social binding (Taylor, 244). In the context of museum narration, exhibition can also

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<sup>10</sup> Conversation with Sirje Helme, director of Kumu, Tallinn, 5 Oct 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

be seen as a form of social binding and a means to establish belonging. Kumu's dismissal of the work, despite its particular interest in "artworks that produce debate", as the collection policy document states,<sup>12</sup> is a symptom of this archival politics of social binding. What is socially unbinding for the dominant community becomes policed and silenced, based on its investment in values that are identified by the museum as external. As an interesting moment where the conflict between the museum rhetoric and practice is articulated, the non-formulated act of absencing the artwork reveals how the museum, instead of documenting, engages with producing a heritage. Policing of alternative positions enables the museum to keep its hierarchies between 'us' and 'them' intact and sustain its logic, which functions as the founding basis of these hierarchies.

In effect, once musealised it would be difficult to limit the influence of the golden statue that provoked a recent memory conflict solely to the artistic sphere. In the Foucauldian conceptualisation, once pronounced, archival statements contribute to the birth of new themes, ideas, concepts and forms of knowledge (Foucault 2008, 145). When displayed in a museum context artistic statements offer a potential for new subjects to be formed and articulated. At Kumu, *After War*, with its renegotiation of the positions between victims and perpetrators and re-visualising their continuities in the present that re-orders the dominant local identities from an alternate perspective, would open up a position of critique of the permanent exhibit narrating the statehood of Estonia. Its absence from the museum archive on the other hand encourages the transmission of an undisturbed and homogeneous position of 'public memory'. This absencing allows the archive to hide the ambivalence related to the politics of nationhood and leave the recent political transformations un-problematised. Avoiding the repertoires of resistance that the installation entailed simultaneously allows the museum to suppress the existence of alternate knowledge and to absence subaltern identities.

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<sup>12</sup> EKM peadirektori käskkirjast Nr. 114 kinnitatud Eesti Kunstimuuseumi ostukomisjoni statuudist ja töökorra [Art Museum of Estonia Statute for work of the Acquisition Committee], 17 Nov 2004. Archive of the Kumu Museum.



Figure 6.2. A view of Norman's installation *After War* in September 2012 at Kiasma. Photo by Pirje Mykkänen. Image courtesy of the Kiasma Museum.

After its installation in the Venice Biennale, *After War* was purchased by Kiasma. It has been displayed in the museum once as a part of the collection exhibition entitled *It's a set up* (2010–11). The wall-text framed Norman's artwork within the discourse of Estonian history, introducing it as a form of addressing "tensions running under the surface of the society that arise from different identities and interpretations of history".<sup>13</sup> As a part of this cultural transfer from Tallinn to Helsinki, geographically an eighty-kilometre distance, the meanings of the work changed radically. Although the work communicates in Finland a representation of the social realities of a neighbouring country, it renders it distant by leaving the conflict at the heart of Norman's installation unarticulated. This is introduced in the later wall-text written for this purpose by the artist, which announces "an existence of an almost separate culture (with the statue of the mourning soldier at its centre) invisible for Estonians".<sup>14</sup> The conflict itself, with the related daily tensions between understanding identities and negotiating belonging that the artwork touches upon, remains distant in the altered physical, geographical and language space that Finland presents. I have argued in my reading of *After War* that the political economy of presence that the installation performs only functions in relation to a narrative absence, which is culturally specific. This

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<sup>13</sup> Documentation on the display of *After War*, 2011. Kiasma Archive. Kiasma, Helsinki.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

absence requires that the viewer would recognise the politics of resistance that the narrative of the work enacts. The presence of a conflictual discourse that the artwork claimed in Estonia remains either distant or missing in Finland. The work that the installation accomplished by claiming a space for subaltern identities loses its acuteness when it is de-contextualised from the original politically loaded context. If we return to Kiasma's collection policy, according to which works from the Baltic States, Scandinavia and Russia constitute its second interest after artistic practice from Finland (Jyrkkiö 2008, 71), then the narrative politics that *After War* pursues at Kiasma is primarily to offer a representative example of an *artwork* from Finland's neighbouring regions.

### **Phantoming an Identity: Kiba Lumberg's *Crazy Artist's Diary***

For my next object, I turn to the work of Helsinki-based activist artist Kiba Lumberg, which helps me to unpack further the interrelations between the politics of national and economic discourses in museum practice through its relationship to a particular local minority group. Lumberg's artwork, realised in different media, often reflects on personal and sometimes very intimate experiences. In her columns and opinion pieces in the Finnish media, Lumberg has called attention to the sensitive questions related to the Finnish Romani community or Kale that consists of about 10,000 people. She sets the hate crimes committed against the local Roma people, in particular violence against Romani women, into the discourse of human rights. She continues to fight against these crimes against the Kale people and insists through her work on their acknowledgement; according to the artist the everyday realities of Kale communities continue to inform her artistic practice.<sup>15</sup>

For Lumberg, art serves as a strategy of resistance against the daily constraints of Finnish society and its increasingly nationalist sentiment that she experiences as a gay Roma artist, a position that she openly proclaims. My main object of inquiry through which I theorise a particular kind of absence that her position enables me to enunciate, is her graphic novel *Crazy Artist's Diary* (2010, in Finnish *Hullun Taitelijan Päiväkirja*). Begun in 2007, *Crazy Artist's Diary* was published by Lumberg herself as a dual-language book in Finnish and English. Scenes from the book have been displayed in an installation format in several galleries. Her work helps me to articulate the particular political positioning of the Finnish National Gallery towards the Romani communities in Finland.

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<sup>15</sup> Conversation with Kiba Lumberg, Aurinkogalleria, Helsinki, 8 Nov 2012.

*Crazy Artist's Diary* could be described as an honest account of an artist's daily life, which brings the realms of professional- and private-life closer together and turns them into a practice of artistic inquiry and research. The protagonist of the book is an artist, who lives in Helsinki and supports an unemployed girlfriend. We learn that the girlfriend is also her closest persecutor. On the pages of Lumberg's book we encounter daily acts of insult, othering and suppression that the protagonist experiences because of her cultural and sexual difference. We bear witness to her failed hopes and the unfulfilled promises given by others. The narrative offers a close insight to her personal journey— the rhythm of her commissions and deadlines, one of which is set for the book that we hold in our hands. We also follow the realisation of her exhibitions in Venice and Rovaniemi. Some of the scenes reveal intimate moments in the artist's life, including her failed attempts to end the relationship with her aggressive girlfriend and the grief caused by the death of her father.

Several unsigned voices appear in scenes in the book. Most of these voices try to put the protagonist down (*You little shit! Damn darkie!* [sic]). Although they are supposedly articulated by her abusive girlfriend, the violence and radical othering in their discourse appears as a combination of the familiar and unknown collective voices in the protagonist's life. These encounters with persecution are mediated with an unusual level of honesty. The self-directed irony and humour with which the narrative of the *Crazy Artist's Diary* is told serves as a reminder of Lumberg's complex personal and artistic position.

Through the visual narration of her story we also engage with the protagonist's health problems, which remain invisible to the viewer of her artwork, and with her fears and constant stress caused by the schizophrenic negotiation of her own identity (see fig. 6.3). The title *Crazy Artist's Diary* refers to the idea of a choice involved in her decision to pursue a career; giving the stereotypes about creative work a self-ironic touch.



Figure 6.3. Images from Kiba Lumberg's book *Crazy Artist's Diary* (2010). Photograph courtesy of Kiba Lumberg.

The format of *Crazy Artist's Diary* is particularly loaded by a specific cultural and personal context. On the one hand, it brings together Lumberg's two realms of activity: writing and visual art. On the other hand, comics are a medium of resistance that has only recently gained currency in Finland, where they had been a marginalised practice. For instance, the catalogue of the comic art exhibition in Kiasma held in 1999 treats comic art as an independent art practice, which, by combining fine arts, cinema and literature, "playfully transgress[es] the boundaries of popular culture" (Hannilainen 1997, 9).<sup>16</sup> By adopting the format of the graphic novel, Lumberg not only combines the two different media of her creative work, but also consciously positions herself between the marginal and mainstream culture in Finland.

Scenes from her book were displayed as a part of the exhibition *Call the Witness* at the International Roma Pavilion of the Venice Biennale during the summer of 2011. The Roma Pavilion is an initiative launched in 2007 by the Open Society Foundation and financed by the businessman George Soros, who has recently made the violation of Roma

<sup>16</sup> This exhibition on comic art entitled *Whom Should I Call Next? New Finnish Comics* was held at Kiasma in 1999. It later continued to tour different venues in Finland. Its curator, Maaretta Jaukkuri, framed comic art as an art form that is "accessible to all". Jaukkuri, Maaretta. Foreword. *Kenelle soittaisin seuraavaksi? Uusi Suomalainen Sarjakuva*. Helsinki: Kiasma Nykyaiteen Museo, 1997, 7.

rights one of the key concerns of his foundation.<sup>17</sup> In her artistic statement published on the pavilion's website ([www.callthewitness.net](http://www.callthewitness.net)), Lumberg identifies questions about human nature, dignity and human rights as the basis of her work. In the same video statement she expresses her disappointment in the work of the Roma Pavilion at the Biennale and its failure to address a public beyond the art world, reflecting, "Sometimes I question the meaning of art, for whom and for what purpose is it made?"<sup>18</sup> In the video, her voice is translated by her colleague and artistic collaborator Kaarina Majander. The translator faces many difficulties in transmitting Lumberg's message about the different status of her artwork. When Lumberg insists that her work is "an expression of personal dignity and human rights", her statement is challenging for the translator to understand within the confines of a national artistic context. This failed attempt to translate the message is a cultural symptom, which departs from the assumption that anybody can practice art and be recognised for it. When articulated from Lumberg's position, the same notion of 'art' is in fact reinvented. Her open resistance to its institutionalised operation invests understanding 'art' with accessibility, dignity and rights that she internalises in her usage of the same term.

During the first Roma Pavilion launch in Venice in 2007, Lumberg criticised nationalist hierarchies and restrictions at work in the Biennale from a subaltern position of an artist with Finnish origins. She declared her preference to be part of the Finnish pavilion instead of the Roma pavilion. This implied impossibility raised discussion in cultural policy-maker's circles.<sup>19</sup> Lumberg's *Aurinkogalleria* in Helsinki has become an activist platform for furthering her cultural involvement, producing debate and new knowledge about Romani communities through exhibition curation and publishing, in which international Romani artists have been involved.

Following the Venice Biennale showing, the installation-version of the *Crazy Artist's Diary* continued to be exhibited in art galleries internationally. In the Kai Tikhas Gallery in Berlin, which specialises in Roma and Sinti artists, Lumberg exhibited her images from the book together with new artwork in which she criticised the restrictions of the art market and the exploitation of artists by curators and other art administrators (Fig. 6.4).

Interestingly, in those display contexts the artworks were presented under the title *Mad Artist's Diary*, with the culturally and historically loaded word 'mad' replacing the previous

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<sup>17</sup> Soros has issued several videos where he calls for attention to the rights of European Roma people. Together with several Romani organisations he is currently also behind the initiative of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.callthewitness.net/Testimonies/CrazyArtistDiary>.

<sup>19</sup> Dragičević-Sešić, Milena. Email to the author. 10 Jan 2013.

title connoting the judgemental idea of the artist's 'craziness'. Lumberg's critical introspection in her book ends with a scene of the protagonist left with a hole in her heart. This subjective allegory of craziness serves as a portrayal of her position in the Finnish and international cultural world, bringing forward the flawed logic behind its seemingly sane reality.



Figure 6.4. Exhibition view of Gallery Kai Dikhas, Berlin. Photograph by Nihad Nino Pušija, courtesy of Gallery Kai Dikhas.

In Finland, *Crazy Artist's Diary* was launched in book format by the Aurinkogalleria in 2010. The work remained absent from Kiasma's second exhibition on comic art, held in 2012, entitled *Eyeballing! The New Modes of Comics*. Held thirteen years after the first exhibition, the aim was to bring Finnish comic art that had acquired an international acclaim into the local cultural consciousness in Finland.<sup>20</sup> The exhibition served as the basis for negotiating Kiasma's practices of collecting and opening the collection further to the comic art format with a particular interest towards the related installation practice. Lumberg's scenes from the *Crazy Artist's Diary* in their installation format would seem to be a perfect fit for this theme, but one cannot find them among the exhibited artworks, despite the international recognition that her work has received. Although there might be other reasons, an important part of excluding Lumberg's artwork from the exhibition and Kiasma's collection owes to its troubling depiction of everyday racism and her pointed

<sup>20</sup> *Eyeballing! The New Modes of Comics*. <http://www.kiasma.fi/ohjelmisto/pain-nakoa>

criticism of the art market that poses uncomfortable questions about the Finnish National Gallery's modes of participation in the system and the ways that the national cultural elite are complicit with this practice.

The questions that the *Crazy Artist's Diary* exclusion provokes remind us of what Gayatri Spivak calls "epistemic violence"—something that is in effect done every time that the Other is being constructed in its absence (Spivak 1988, 25). Several scenes in Lumberg's book do not conform to the positivist identity politics pursued by Kiasma. Her work not only forms radical resistance towards the museum's operational logic, but also visualises her active stance of resisting her exploitation by this system.

In her discourse Lumberg openly positions herself in relation to the Romani community, pronouncing the crucial problems from a position of a witness and "native informant", which in Spivak's articulation is particularly dangerous because she, as opposed to a migrant, informs, mediates and has an ability to speak out (Bal 2000, 7). In fact, migrant identity is an ill fit with her position. Having lived in Finland throughout her life—she was born in Lappenranta and worked as an artist in Helsinki—Lumberg speaks from a position that is locally embedded. Her images that document her everyday life visualise a radically different reality compared to that of the dominant local community who constitute Kiasma's main audience. The threat that the inclusion of her position brings is bound up with her ability to speak on behalf of the local Romani community in relation to this dominant majority and to articulate her experience of otherness towards it. While in an international art gallery context particular social problems framed into a visual image can easily serve as a means of generating curiosity towards cultural difference and can sometimes act as a form of fetishisation by the art market, locally this becomes more complicated. Lumberg's position resists an easy definition of belonging and thereby poses a problem for the nature of identities as a fixable and progressive self-image that national museum narratives too often enhance.

In his work on the traumatic past, Dominick LaCapra distinguishes between the concepts of absence and loss (LaCapra 1999). His distinction is based on a suggestion that one cannot lose something, the existence of which one has not admitted; in this case it remains an absence (701). LaCapra's distinction can help us to understand the positions of artists and artworks that are consciously neglected from national narratives and archives. An absent position is not the same as a position of loss. In my third chapter I described the way that museum practices of framing, visualising and comparing can insert positions of

belonging that favour culturally dominant groups. The question, however, is not only about visualising, but about who is entitled to visualise in the representative realm of the Finnish National Gallery. Juxtaposing Joakim Eskildensen's artistic position with that of Lumberg's, whose significant absence from Kiasma's collection I discussed, we find that the Berlin-based artist/photographer, born in Copenhagen and educated in the Helsinki University of Art and Design, is preferred over the self-educated Roma cultural activist Lumberg, who is based in Helsinki and is notable for her articulate social criticism. Her contribution is rendered an absent one because the gaze, voice and position of her portrayal of Romani identity and daily life is perceived as not conforming to the dominant image politics of the museum. The act of expelling Lumberg's perspective from the museum is not perceived as a loss, but an absence, particularly because it does not contribute to the memory position of the dominant cultural collective.

By policing cultural practices and identities that are socially neglected, the status of heritage in Kiasma's collection enacts symbolically the real violence perpetrated against the local Romani community. It is through Lumberg's absence from local established institutions such as Kiasma that artworks become a human right for her; a human right in the sense of the right to speak and express one's self through visual images and voice. Art museums attribute the image with the status of a recognised gaze. The exclusion of Lumberg as a gazing subject enables the maintenance of a conscious ignorance and upholds the image of the Romani community as exotic or distant. Through this practice of policing a particular subaltern gaze the museum participates in neo-colonial forms of state politics and exercises epistemological violence motivated by the exclusion of the Other. With respect to the museum's narrative, the artist's work is turned into a particular phantom gaze. Despite involving positions of living people, phantom gazes are ones that are unauthorised to see, void of the potential to express, witness and thus remember their lives publicly.



Figure 6.5. Window display of the Aurinkogalleria in November 2012, Kallio, Helsinki. Photograph by the author.

The artist herself does not consider Kiasma as a context for her work.<sup>21</sup> As the international circuits of her work show, she continues to challenge the divisions between art and life, archive and social reality, visualising criticism that directly relates to human rights, xenophobia and the continuing racism experienced by the Romani community in Finland. In the winter of 2011, a wooden suitcase with the message “National Museum of Finland” was displayed in the window of the Aurinkogalleria, which Lumberg ran at the time.

During my visit to the gallery, I asked the artist about its origin. She told me that some of her work was loaned for an exhibition at the National Museum. Although the mocking message of displaying the suitcase in her gallery window is undoubtedly an act of resistance, her decision to display it together with her books mediating alternate knowledge re-appropriates the message, but simultaneously continues to announce her position as an artist. Indeed, in the midst of the Kallio neighbourhood, which is primarily populated by refugee communities and working class people, its message continues to build Lumberg’s authority as an artist for an unknowing viewer of her window display.

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<sup>21</sup> Conversation with Kiba Lumberg, Aurinkogalleria, Helsinki, 8 Nov 2012.

### **Absencing Critique: *Close the Flick Collection* and *The Art of Collecting***

The works to which I now turn stretch the criticism of market discourse further through their active participation in a particular local struggle around the privatisation of heritage. Both works, Andrea Geyer's video *Close the Flick Collection* (2004) and the book *The Art of Collecting* (2004) by Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock, functioned as clear statements of critique towards the archival politics of the Hamburger Bahnhof. Although they have different ends, their positions combine political with artistic resistance and they share the aim of creating counter-images to the museum politics. I understand these works as the repertoire that participates in archival discourse, while remaining physically excluded from it. In order to understand the positions of critique that the two works introduce I return to the "museum war" that broke out after the news that the Hamburger Bahnhof was collaborating with collector Flick was made public in 2003. I have briefly touched upon the background of the deal in chapter 5.

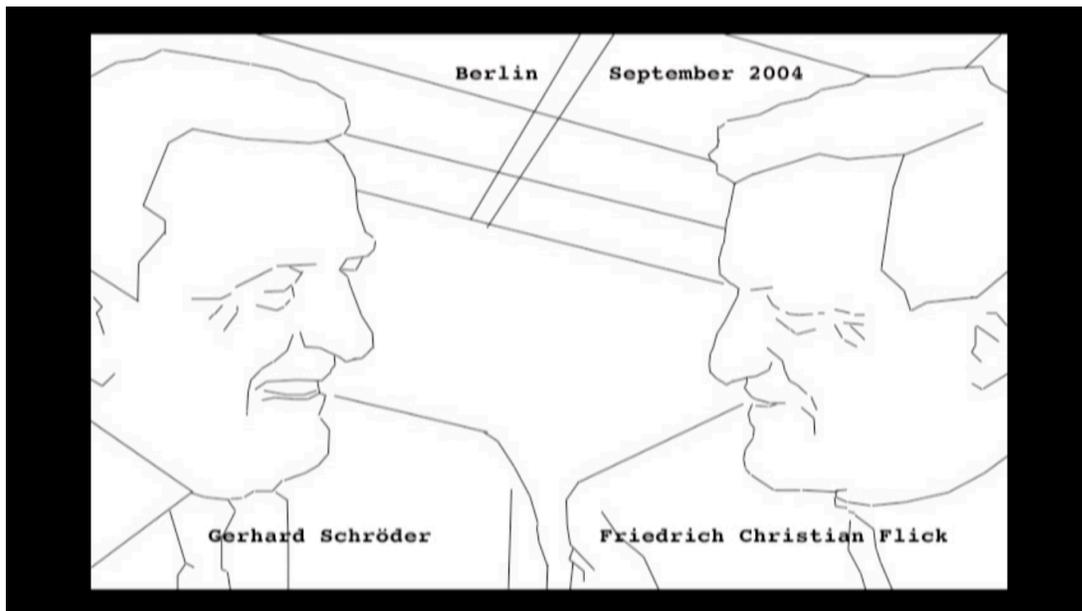


Figure 6.6. Video still from Andrea Geyer's video *Close the Flick Collection* (2004). Image courtesy of Andrea Geyer.

Gerhard Schröder famously opened the Rieckhallen wing of the Hamburger Bahnhof, where the private collection of Flick is exhibited, on 22 September 2004; Flick's 60th birthday. The then Chancellor of Germany was reported to have adopted several ideas

from the collector in his speech,<sup>22</sup> pointing to the sympathetic relationship between the two men. In an editorial, *Der Spiegel* magazine called this deal between the National Gallery and Flick “the perfect coup” (13.01.2003), alluding to the fierce debates over the Hamburger Bahnhof’s decision to temporarily exhibit Flick’s collection in its building. Public criticism of this deal targeted three main points: first, the origin of Flick’s fortune used for building his collection came from his grandfather Friedrich Flick’s steel plants, in which he had used slave labour during the Second World War and which had provided weapons to Hitler’s government. Second, Flick’s refusal to contribute to the reparations fund for the surviving victims that had been established by the German government further heated the dispute and fuelled the feeling of public mistrust towards the collector. And third, Flick’s avoidance of paying taxes to Germany by registering his collection in the tax haven Guernsey. As a consequence of this criticism numerous artists, intellectuals and Jewish community members called for the cancellation of the exhibition of his collection in a publicly funded institution. The presence of Flick’s collection in the national gallery was often considered offensive and illegitimate in respect to his family legacy. Furthermore, at a late stage even Flick’s sister Dagmar Ottmann urged the authorities to postpone the exhibition because of the absence of sufficient research into the family history.<sup>23</sup> Ottman’s concerns regarding the name ‘Flick collection’ in its communication of the deal led the museum to rename it the ‘Friedrich Christian Flick Collection’.

The animated video *Close the Flick Collection* by Andrea Geyer refers to this particular “museum war” in the recent history of the institution. In her video image we see the profiles of two figures gradually appearing on the white surface. At the end of the video two men exchange smiles. Geyer visualises the relationship between Chancellor Schröder and Flick by capturing an image that brings forward their proximity and exposes the striking similarity of their profiles. The title of Geyer’s video *Close the Flick Collection* brings across the artist’s statement, her act of resistance that participates in the discourses of criticism that arose against the controversial deal.

Several artists and cultural community members either accepted or chose to resist the collaboration silently. As a New York-based artist originally from Germany, Geyer created the video that is displayed on her website.<sup>24</sup> The image that she re-enacts as part of

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<sup>22</sup> Bahners, Patrick. “Der Midas Effect.” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23.9.2004.

<sup>23</sup> Ottmann, Dagmar. Postpone the exhibition! An open letter. *Die Zeit, Feuilleton*, 5 Aug 2004.

<sup>24</sup> Available at: [www.andreageyer.info](http://www.andreageyer.info)

her animation was originally published in the article “Schröder nimmt Flick gegen Kritiker in Schutz” (“Schröder Guards Flick from Criticism”) in the daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine*.

Geyer combines this visual re-enactment in her video with a gradually scrolling text that originates from Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on the Concept of History” (1940):

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realise that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism. One reason why Fascism has a chance is that in the name of progress its opponents treat it as a historical norm. The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are ‘still’ possible in the twentieth century is not philosophical. This amazement is not the beginning of knowledge—unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable.<sup>25</sup>

By combining Benjamin’s critical reflection on the writing and making of history under Fascism with the image depicting Flick’s and Schröder’s proximity, the video in fact simultaneously visualises the mechanisms of writing the past in the present. Geyer revives Benjamin’s notion of “the state of emergency” in order to apply it to the political deal with Flick. The scene of the two men exchanging smiles that gradually appear on the white screen surface occurs in her video in silence. In the background of the image we gradually come to see the Rieckhallen wing, which I previously suggested can be understood as a particularly clear form of a collector’s space. The lack of sound and a context other than the museum redeeming the image of the two men provokes the idea of the history of winners. Criticism is effectively silenced in favour of those two powerful agents, the state with the figure of Schröder and the collector Flick. The appearance of those two agents on the white surface in her video functions as an apparent reference to the white cube museum space and its operation in the process of art history writing. While Geyer’s resistance is related to

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<sup>25</sup> The original video displays the text in German as follows: “Die Tradition der Unterdrückten belehren uns darüber dass der Ausnahmezustand in dem wir leben die Regel ist. Wir müssen zu einem Begriff der Geschichte kommen, die Herbeiführung des wirklichen Ausnahmezustands vor Augen stehen; und dadurch wird unsere Position im Kampf gegen den Faschismus sich verbessern. Dessen Chance besteht nicht zuletzt darin, dass die Gegner ihm im Namen des Fortschritts als einer historischer Norm begegen. - Das Staunen darüber dass di Dinge, wie erleben, im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert <noch> möglich sind. Ist kein philosophisches. Es steht nicht um Anfang einer Erkenntnis, es sei denn der, dass die Vorstellung von Geschichte, aus der es stammt, nicht zu halten ist.”

stopping the flow of media images by zooming in on a telling image, which she attributes with alternate meaning, the artist couple of Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock chose a different approach with their critique of the same subject.

The book *Die Kunst des Sammelns/The Art of Collecting* (2004), which serves as my second object, aimed to collectivise different critical positions that the artists gathered and produced a socially visible effect.<sup>26</sup> Adopting an activist position, the authors identify the book as part of an artistic intervention that scrutinised the Flick collection's exhibition at the Hamburger Bahnhof from different perspectives. The actions of the artists took place on multiple levels. Prior to the Flick collection's opening, they held a poster campaign calling for critical attention among the public to the controversial aspects of the collaboration. During the two weeks preceding the opening of the Rieckhallen, a car traversed Berlin everyday with a double-sided advertisement taking their critique to public spaces. One of their messages called to eliminate the entrance fee to the Hamburger Bahnhof for former slave labourers ("Wir fordern: Freier Eintritt für ehemalige Zwangsarbeiterinnen"); the other elicited tax evaders to show their treasures ("Steuerflüchtlinge zeigt eure Schätze"). Both of the messages reclaim the publicness of art and stress the need to rethink the conditions of emergency in which the publicness was being created through the temporary display of Flick's large-scale collection. At the opening of the Flick wing in autumn 2004 the messages of the two advertisements were displayed on two billboards next to the museum entrance, issuing the controversies to the public entering the building.

Stih and Schnock used simple metaphors. The cover of their book was produced in parallel with the public space program and features an image of a Red Light District window display. Their powerful metaphor of prostitution refers to the hierarchical dynamics behind the privatisation of the public museum realm. Sexualising human trafficking and exploitation transfers the unequal positions that the collector and the museum hold in this market transaction. A reference to "an art lover" clearly defines Flick and his expertise as a collector and sympathiser with sexual subjects as a part of his collected artworks.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Conversation with Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock, Berlin, 21 June 2013.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

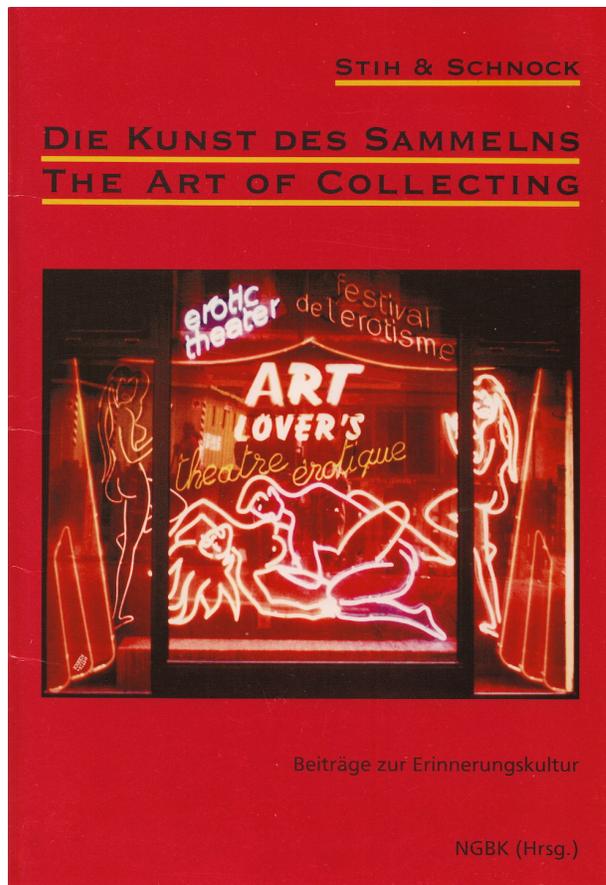


Figure 6.7. The cover of *The Art of Collecting* (2004) by Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock. Image courtesy of the authors. © Renata Stih & Frieder Schnock, Berlin; VG Bild- Kunst, Bonn and ARS, New York City.

The strength of the book compiled by Stih and Schnock lies in bringing together a range of different positions.<sup>28</sup> The perspectives of journalists, artists, writers, politicians and researchers that *The Art of Collecting* gathers are articulated through essays, fact lists and performance documentations. As such it gave a collective voice to criticism targeting the plan of the Flick collection display at the museum, giving it an international currency. Schuster and Blume had previously advocated the opposite, maintaining that the opposition was fuelled by only a few critics and that the truth was to be established by the museum.

Different issues related to ethics, exclusion and lack of political transparency were touched upon in the articles that were gathered for the book. In her essay the Green Party member Elvira Pichler questioned the political and moral grounds underpinning Berlin's

<sup>28</sup> The book project was funded by the Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, the public space actions were supported by an anonymous NGO, who according to Stih and Schnock stand for the interests of the local Jewish community.

bid to gain a “standing in the process of (art) metropolises”.<sup>29</sup> Pichler highlights the questionable means through which public discussion was suppressed and the interested public, the parliament and responsible committees were circumvented. According to her, the negotiations held by the National Gallery and the city could be held behind closed doors by declaring the collaboration with Flick a “top-priority issue”.

The collector’s position is included through reprinting an interview with him from 2001, in which Flick discusses his position towards his family history with a surprising openness. He explains his unwillingness to support the still-living former forced labourers (through the Slave and Forced Labour Fund established by the German Government in 2000) by asserting his affiliation “with the future rather than the past”. Flick justifies this with guilt “being inheritable”, a position often repeated in the German media. On his website Flick paradoxically acknowledges the rootedness of his collecting practice in the discourses of family history. He considers his collection to be “a statement—precisely as a result of its conceptual, political orientation—about my family history”.<sup>30</sup>

Another contribution by art historian and museum professional Tom Freudenheim contextualises the debate over the Flick collection in Germany within the paradoxical moral relationships between the philanthropic market and musealisation. Freudenheim concludes his critique with a pessimistic image: one of Pontius Pilate washing his hands. He cynically proposes this be adopted as the new corporate logo for art museums. Other striking visual and textual images included in *The Art of Collecting* show obscure collections of dolls, Nazi-era stamps, Socialist Realist busts tucked into statue-cemeteries, a large variety of sex shop accessories such as whips, straps and masks, figures of Donald Duck and metal signs with logos of various corporate brands. Provoking a wide repertoire of memory discourses from capitalist, socialist and the Nazi regimes, those images articulate the ambiguous relationships between present and history, rubbish and value, pain and pleasure, usage and ownership, exploitation and work; all of which are bound into a meaningful transcultural contextualisation of the Flick collection’s history and its politics of entering Berlin.

As part of the abovementioned interview with the collector, Flick boasts how he considered Dresden, Venice and Monte Carlo as possible destinations for his collection.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> In 2001 Flick had failed to establish a private museum in Zurich. As an outcome of widespread public protests, the Zurich city government refused to grant him building permission.

<sup>30</sup> [www.friedrichchristianflick-collection.de](http://www.friedrichchristianflick-collection.de). Accessed: 3 February 2010.

<sup>31</sup> Frechner, Matthias and Urs Steiner. “Conversation with F. C. Flick.” *Die Kunst des Sammelns. The Art of Collecting. Beiträge zur Erinnerungskultur*. Berlin: NGBK, 2004. N.pag. Print. Reprint. *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. 27 April 2001.

The interview was carried out shortly after his plan to build a private museum in his hometown Zurich failed, due to the vocal popular protests. As a result, he was refused building permission by the city.

The concluding short story in *The Art of Collecting* is written by the Berlin-based writer Jutta Raulwing. Its narrative places the reader in the midst of a busy urban scene: a queue in Berlin. Although we never discover the purpose of the queue, we are situated among people standing in a row and occasionally blinded by the advertising billboards and shop displays. When gossip-magazine figures pass by their lives are turned into the subject of common knowledge, causing an occasional fuss and waves of energy among the people. A reporter, who feeds the news industry with polls about politics, also joins the queue to gather opinions about the Flick collection. Raulwing writes that:

A lot of us don't know anything about it, most of us, in fact. What Flick? Flick Collection? Frick Collection? French Collection? What kind of paintings, what artwork? What was the grandfather's name? Morals? Blood money? Blood money – what kind of word is that anyway? Come on! Is that true? Whose blood? Is it Aryanized art? No! Is this some kind of PISA Study for adults? We Germans are going to fare poorly again. Just what exactly is a slave and forced labour fund? Are you even allowed to say Third Reich nowadays? somebody asks. Here we go again.

Media-criticism, a mixture of confusion and negotiation between what is allowed and what is not, are at the heart of Raulwing's narrative. By bringing together the complex set of questions related to the contemporary media debates in Germany and translating them into the scene of a Berlin queue, she eloquently points to the impossibility of talking about public opinion of Flick and the complex conditions of the collection loan. Continuing to consider the bewildering details of the affair, she writes:

All of these sums, figures and dates! I've forgotten again already how many forced laborers Flick employs, who gave how much to whom and when, the last person in our line says, who was never very good at math anyway. Numbers, he mutters ... aren't they just fictitious? ...We have to add, subtract and multiply ... a billion plus fifty percent profit, times twenty years of paying no taxes equals less than what Siemens, Ikea, Michael Schumacher, Vodafone and Boris Becker haven't paid either. We have

Mick Flick's Foundation against Xenophobia, Racism and Intolerance in mind. And the 1,4 billion still missing in the forced labour fund Flick doesn't pay into because he's busy with his private travels around the world, which some of us can understand, because who, as a human being, wants to be a concern that doesn't belong to him anymore? But others shout, can you calculate like that? We don't know.

Raulwing's essay problematises the neoliberal context of the news in which the profit-minded media participates through producing and mediating knowledge. Brands mingle with news items, opinion stories compete with advertising—in 2004 there were still few alternatives to participating in the discussion and getting the facts right in other ways than through using the print media. Raulwing's story entitled "Stepping Out of Line" (in German "Flickwerk") skilfully brings forward the human side of the challenge of following the debates around the Flick deal by pointing to the possibility of resistance even without direct engagement in this closed affair.

These two examples of artistic critique, *Close the Flick Collection* and *The Art of Collecting*, visualise a range of critical discourses towards the presence of Flick in the Berlin National Gallery. Both works constitute the repertoire of knowledge that is dismissed from the Hamburger Bahnhof's collection and display. Although the Rieckhallen hosts a reading corner with publications about the Flick collection and artists who are presented in the collection, one should not expect to find the book by Stih and Schnock there; external criticism is absent and the majority of publications present in the corner are produced by Hamburger Bahnhof. Prior to the opening of the Rieckhallen, the museum issued a newspaper that gathered some of the criticism and included a long interview with the collector by Blume; however, this publication too remains missing from the museum's reading corner. According to the artist duo their book had been available at the Walter König bookshop at the entrance of the museum for a short while after its launch, but it subsequently disappeared.<sup>32</sup> It was due to this reason that the artists released the book online. Both of these works continue to exist online, presenting a counter-image to the dominant museum discourse about the Flick collection, which is controversially "freeing art" from its financial and political contexts, as well as contexts of silenced exploitation and corruption masked under the conditions of emergency. The two works continue to announce resistance and tensions that although being banished from the National Gallery's

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<sup>32</sup> Conversation with Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock, Berlin, 21 June 2013.

archive, the repertoire enabled me to remap as the vital positions of critique related to the public debate prior to the extension of the museum. They equally continue to transmit a counter-image to the museum discourse from which the source of Flick's money and accusations of tax evasion remain missing more than a decade after the controversial deal.

### **The Appearance of Peter and Irene Ludwig Portraits in Budapest**

With my next object I return to the role of exhibitions and elaborate further on the dialectics of absence and presence in relation to this. In 2009, Budapest's Ludwig Museum exhibited two portrait busts of Peter and Irene Ludwig. The museum received the artworks from the Ludwig couple in 1991 as a part of the loan that added to the earlier foundation transfer. However, these works remained in collection storage and were never shown publicly. They were exhibited for the first time as a part of the collection display *New Acquisitions, Rarely Seen Works* (2009), which was framed as "the launch of a new tradition" by director Bencsik (Bencsik 2009, 3). According to Bencsik, this exhibition format was intended to revive a form of show that had been neglected in recent decades (3). It presented a combination of sharing the Ludwig Museum's new politics of collecting with the audiences and a critical insight into the museum's history. The latter included showing artworks from the collection that were either rarely displayed or remained absent from the public realm altogether. Bencsik explained the reasons behind the Ludwig portraits remaining one of "the skeletons in the museum's closet",<sup>33</sup> along with their sculptor, Arno Breker, who was one of Hitler's favoured artists.

Breker (1900–91) had served as the 'official state sculptor' under the Nazi regime. After the war the artist was formally de-Nazified, based on arguments that he had protected colleagues (for further details see Petropoulos 1996 and 2000). However, his position remained ambiguous: despite continuing to work as a sculptor, Breker was neglected by most art institutions. Denied publicity on the basis of public resistance, he lived away from audiences and carried out private commissions in his Düsseldorf atelier. His figure remained taboo in Germany for a long time and his existence, as with many others who had held important roles under the Nazi regime, was rendered practically invisible.

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<sup>33</sup> Hamvay, Péter. "Hitler szobrászának művei kerültek elő a raktárból". *NÉPSZAVA online*, 29.3.2009. <http://www.nepszava.hu/articles/article.php?id=75713>

Ludwig's decision to commission a family portrait from Breker in 1986 brought the artist back into the public eye. The sculptures themselves were never exhibited.<sup>34</sup> The main trace that those artworks had been realised were a series of black-and-white photographs of Ludwig and Breker reviewing the two portraits that appeared in different German media publications including *Der Spiegel* and the *Rheinische Post* in September 1986. The appearance of this news caused a public uproar. In the photograph we see Ludwig judging Breker's work, for which he had previously posed in the artist's atelier. Breker has reached the final stages and is ready to cast the statues in bronze. Ludwig, standing side by side with the artist, is visibly pleased: both his posture and facial expression in the photograph suggest he is content with the portraits. The two larger than life-sized busts are set at the eye level of the sculptor. Wolfgang Becker later problematised their size, referring back to Breker's historical legacy, when he pointed out that:

Breker has set his model in a role-play situation, which is alarmingly *not* characteristic of the time. It contains a formula of pathos and reflects typologies of power, which are inappropriate of a collector from the Rheinland ... [who] appears to extend over and beyond himself. (Becker 1995, 72)

Although Becker also referred to the style ("not characteristic of the time"), his main criticism remains targeted at the size of the busts, which he calls "inappropriate". The image in its temporal context establishes not only continuity with the Nazi era and the present, but a visible connection between Breker and the local economic elite, here embodied by Ludwig. Compared to Ludwig, Breker appears old, but another bronze statue in the background of the photograph indicates his continued vitality and productivity as an artist. What is further significant about the photograph is the fact that it exists. It attests that Ludwig had brought a professional photographer with him to the artist's atelier in order to record their meeting and later made the images available through the photographic archive intended for media.

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<sup>34</sup> Ludwig commissioned two versions of the portraits, the second version of the work remained in the collector couple's Aachen home. See for instance, Galloway, David. "Report from Germany. Peter Ludwig: Appetite for Art". *Art in America*, Summer Issue, 1983.



Figure 6.8. Peter Ludwig with Arno Breker. Image courtesy by Sven Simon Fotoagentur.

The body of criticism generated in Germany after Ludwig's commission in 1986 was collected in the book *Nazi-Kunst ins Museum?* (1988). The editor of the publication, Klaus Staeck, took an active part in these disputes and mentions in the foreword of the volume that it contains "only an extract of the intensive debates" (Staeck 1988, 7). The book gathered opinion pieces, public letters and important contributions centring on the discussion. The cover image appropriated from *Zeit* magazine (Nr 44, 24.10.1982), gives away its intention to provoke by creating continuities with the past. On this image we see the portrait busts of the Ludwig couple placed in the interior of a concentration camp together with Breker's bust of Adolf Hitler placed in the middle (Fig. 6.10). The sculptures are joined by the slogan "Heim ins museum, Komraden!" that adopts the language of Nazi propaganda.<sup>35</sup> The discussion in the *Zeit* special issue framed the dispute over Ludwig's commission from Breker in the context of the broader question of what is to be done with Nazi-era art in museum depots. It brought museum professionals and scholars together to debate this subject in a context in which a large amount of confiscated artworks had recently been returned to museums in Germany from the United States.

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<sup>35</sup> This slogan is an adapted version of Hitler's foreign policy agenda "Heim ins Reich", as a part of which the German community living outside the borders of Germany was called to return and bring those regions "home".

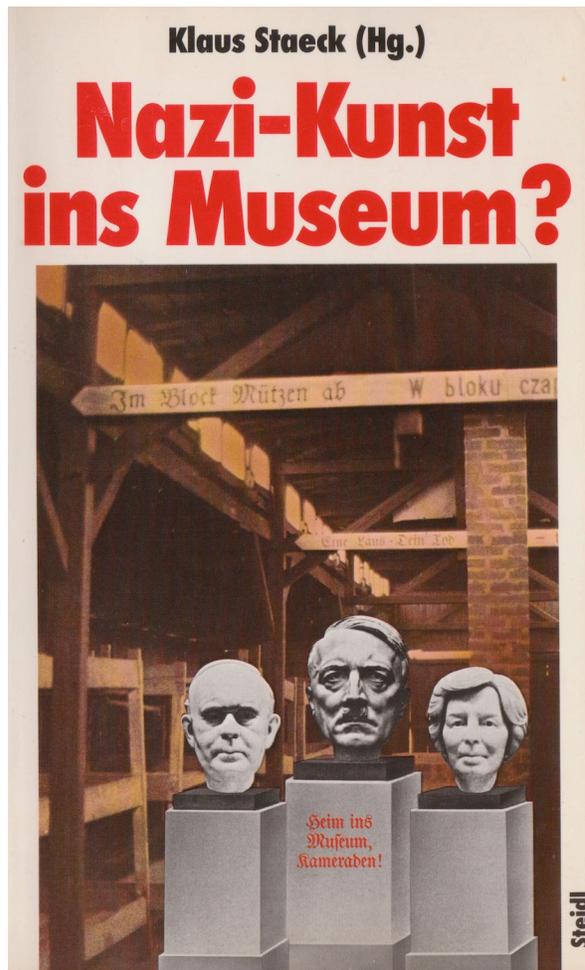


Figure 6.9. The provocative cover page of *Nazi-Kunst ins Museum?* (1988), edited by Klaus Staeck.

In the book there is an interview reprinted from *Der Spiegel* in which Ludwig justifies commissioning Breker by paying tribute to the artist whom he considers to be “outstanding as a portraitist” and an “interesting artist” (1.9.1986; Staeck 1988, 13). Ludwig justifies his stance of showing the artist with the fact that other forms of culture that were realised during the Nazi regime continue to be publicly valued in Germany, such as the work of composers Richard Strauss and Carl Orff (Staeck 1988, 17).<sup>36</sup> In answer to Ludwig’s position, a public letter entitled “Keine Nazi-Kunst in unsere Museen” was composed by Staeck that argued against the appearance of Breker’s artwork in the public realm. The letter was signed by intellectuals and artists, including well-known figures such as Hans Haacke, Valie Export, Isa Genzken, Dieter Honisch, Elfriede Jelinek, Rudi Fuchs, Anselm

<sup>36</sup> “Ludwig will die Nazi-Kunst nicht ins Museum bringen.” *Kölner Stadtanzeiger*, 19.9.1986 (Staeck 1988, 17–18).

Kiefer, Kasper König, Endre Tót, Wolf Vostell and many others; accumulating altogether more than 390 signatures.<sup>37</sup> The publication *Nazi-Kunst ins Museum* echoes the starting-points of this letter. Ludwig took a position in favour of displaying the Nazi-era art, in order to avoid it being turned into “a contemporary form of degenerate art by the public institutions”.<sup>38</sup> Although his argumentation is oppositional and at times contradictory, he was not the only one to stand in support of the position of disputing the problematic artistic positions and allowing encounters with their artwork and the public. There were also other members of the cultural community who openly fought for displaying the so-called ‘Nazi art’ in public.<sup>39</sup> What appears interesting from the contemporary perspective is the way that a past position is being transferred to the present through the identification of Breker’s sculpture cast in 1986 as a form of ‘Nazi art’. Similar to the debates that surrounded the Flick collection display almost two decades later, this position touches upon a consensual sense of ethics and moral positioning towards history that public museums are seen to represent and transmit.

Walter Grasskamp, who was one of the contributors to the abovementioned book, insists in his later article “The De-Nazification of Nazi Art” that Breker’s sculptures cannot be separated from the political ideology of the National Socialist regime because of their usage in the promotion and endorsement of a racist policy that divided people into superior and worthless groups (Grasskamp 1990, 241). Using an example of a sculpture in Breker’s garden that the artist had once planned to dedicate to Benito Mussolini, he points out that displaying the remodelled version in a public museum would stand for the amputation of historical awareness (242). I agree with one of Grasskamp’s conclusions, that what was perceived as problematic in Ludwig’s wish to give Breker a place of honour in his museum, was his demand, which in itself implies that art museums should be required to meet the demands of the collector (237). Following Ludwig’s rhetoric this would have meant the establishment of an elaborate form of collector’s space, one in which the museum politics follow the collector’s commission not only in a specific art museum for which he has provided a collection, but public art museums in Germany as a whole.

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<sup>37</sup> For the complete list see Staeck, 150–53.

<sup>38</sup> “Peter Ludwig Pro, Armin Zweite Contra”, *PAN*, 26.9.1986 (Staeck, 45).

<sup>39</sup> In the same discussion Hans Albert Peters argues that ‘Nazi art’ has come to signify a particular non-art in Germany that nobody is interested in or wants to have, which Peters perceives as problematic. See: Sager, Peter; Reinartz, Dirk. “Comeback der Nazi-kunst?” *Zeit magazine*. 24.10.1986. Another collective public letter was written roughly a year after the first one that argued, among other things, that collected art should also be seen as an historical and psychological reflection of society. Poley, Stefanie. “Ja: Für Nazi-Kunst im (Kunst-)Museum”, (Staeck, 20).

Although Ludwig repeatedly stated his disagreement with any form of public display of the two busts after commissioning them,<sup>40</sup> exhibiting them was part of an original plan in 1991 for the exhibition *Ludwig's Lust: Die Sammlung Irene and Peter Ludwig* (1993) in the German National Museum in Nuremberg. *Ludwig's Lust* was the largest exhibition of the Ludwig Collection in Germany, which was accompanied by the thickest catalogues ever published about their private collection. Hans Haacke has noted that the curator of the exhibition withdrew the artworks, fearing that the debate that their presentation could have triggered might have diverted attention away from the rest of the display (Haacke 1995, 137; see also Blühm 1993, 514). The non-exhibition and absencing of Breker served as a way of confining the critique, in a context where critical revision of the Nazi regime had not yet made its way into public consciousness.

Ludwig's position with respect to Breker remains complex. According to Wolfgang Becker, for Ludwig, Breker was "a kind of testimony to the stupidity of the artist".<sup>41</sup> For Ludwig, the months spent posing in the artist's studio in Düsseldorf represented an opportunity to understand Breker's role in political power and to learn about his involvement (Becker 1995, 70). At the same time, his wife Irene never agreed to visit the artist and her bust was made on the basis of a photograph (70).

The significance of the artworks for Ludwig is attested by the fact that after the collector died in 1996 the busts were the only artwork at his grave at Sankt Adelgung village, on the Mosel River.<sup>42</sup> Why would Ludwig, from the thousands of artworks that he owned, want to be buried with Breker's sculptures? It seems to be a virulent and communicative act by the collector. If we consider Ludwig's complex position of seeking provocation and attention, then it seems almost too easy to read it as an act motivated by a nationalist sentiment. Could we understand Ludwig's gesture of supporting Breker as a self-critical reference, as a part of which he recognised a similarity between his own position and that of the artist? What both men shared was a relentless ambition to establish a monument to themselves, despite the different means of collaboration with political regimes of their time. They pursued their own interests by blinding their eyes to the victims and those exploited by these regimes and externalised their existence in relation to their own. In both cases, it was the externalisation of social and economic realities from art they

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<sup>40</sup> "Breker wird zur Seite gedrückt. Spiegel Interview mit dem Kunstsammler Peter Ludwig." (Staeck 1988, 13-15). Ludwig confirmed this position later: Bosetti, Annette. "Ludwig: Ich bin dagegen, die Breker-buste auszustellen." *Nachrichten*, n.d.1995.

<sup>41</sup> Conversation with Wolfgang Becker, Aachen, 10 Dec 2012.

<sup>42</sup> Peine, Sibylle. "Ehrgeiziger Künstler." *Aachener Nachrichten. Stadt Magazin*, 17.12.2011, 42.

either realised, in the case of Breker, or owned, in the case of Ludwig, that allowed them each to pursue their careers despite public resistance to their beliefs.

The exhibition of the portrait busts of Ludwig in Budapest's Ludwig Museum in 2009 was the first public display of these fiercely disputed artworks in Hungary. In Germany they figured in occasional reports or interviews made with the collector at his Aachen-home, where a second version was located. The only public appearance of one of the busts occurred in the exhibition dedicated to Ludwig on his 70th birthday under the title *Ein Deutscher Sammler – Ein Deutsches Auto* (1995). As a part of this exhibition, Breker's bust of Ludwig was juxtaposed with the one realised by Soviet sculptor Lew Kerbel (Lev Kerbel). In the exhibition catalogue Wolfgang Becker framed Breker's work as "a gesture of an extremely conservative attitude", adding that "something that the works have in common is that both were created by commissioned artists who lived under dictatorial regimes" (Becker 1995, 67).

What is significant in my context of the dialectics of absence and presence is that the entire scandal, which divided the cultural arena in mid-1980s Germany and led to many of Ludwig's former supporters turning against him, occurred without the sculptures being publicly shown. When Ludwig's bust by Breker was finally displayed in 1995 in Aachen, its reception represented only a distant echo of the conflict that attended the publication of the photographs.

Art historian Andreas Blühm has suggested that the inclusion of those artworks in the collection donated to the Hungarian National Gallery meant, for Ludwig, a proof of "the true artistic significance of Breker" (Blühm 1993, 520–21). Although the artwork was perceived as 'unwanted' by the Hungarian National Museum, as director Loránd Bereczky attested, it was accepted as a part of the larger constellation of Ludwig's loan to the museum including many outstanding artists' works.<sup>43</sup> This proves that the contents of Ludwig's loan were indeed non-negotiable. However, the power that the National Gallery and Ludwig Museum did hold and exercised was to leave these works hidden in their storage, which in effect meant rendering them non-existent to the local public.

The exhibition of Breker's artworks in Budapest in 2009 by Barnábas Bencsik produced much criticism at the local level. Although Breker's death in 1991 had distanced the presence of his figure, I noticed a recurrent feeling of a threat in the discourses of articles covering the exhibition. For instance, the portrait busts of the Ludwig couple were

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<sup>43</sup> Conversation with Loránd Bereczky, director of Hungarian National Gallery, 14 July 2009, Budapest.

contextualised in the growing neo-Nazi movement, which had recently held a march in the centre of Budapest, manifesting its increasing presence for the first time. Despite provoking this comparison, the critic József Mélyi estimated that displaying Breker in public would probably not inspire the search for an artistic figure of Breker's scope among these groups in Hungary.<sup>44</sup> A Berlin-based journalist was commissioned to write an article that contextualised Breker's figure and the related recent disputes in Germany; however, her article "Hitler's Favourite Sculptor" in the Hungarian media remained the only connection between the two disputes that evolved around Breker's work.<sup>45</sup> Crimes committed during the Nazi regime in Hungary were not touched upon in relation to Breker, and to a great extent they have remained taboo in the Hungarian public sphere under the memory politics of the Orbán government.<sup>46</sup>

Another critic saw the sculpture's exhibition at the Ludwig Museum as a marketing trick adopted by the museum to fight the economic recession in Hungary, which had recently hit the museum landscape. According to that critic, the exhibition could therefore not be taken seriously as a form of the museum's self-positioning towards either the National Socialist regime or Hitler himself.<sup>47</sup> Orbán's second government stepped into position half a year after the exhibition.

The voice of the museum remained absent in these disputes after the opening of the exhibition and the museum staff did not respond to this criticism. I posit that this perceived threat that the exhibition of Breker's work enacted was related, in the context of Hungary, with the locally felt presence of nationalist politics. It was the political context that made the exhibition of this work a political statement about local continuities of history in the present that it embodied. Mélyi concluded by writing that:

This story is in fact about then and now, about consciousness and our ignorance, about our positions and their usage, about borders and borderlessness between the

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<sup>44</sup> Mélyi, József. "Mihez kezdünk a Breker-szobrokkal?" *tranzit.blog.hu*, 21.3.2009. Web.

[http://tranzit.blog.hu/2009/03/21/mihez\\_kezdzunk\\_a\\_breker\\_szobrokkal](http://tranzit.blog.hu/2009/03/21/mihez_kezdzunk_a_breker_szobrokkal)

<sup>45</sup> Inotai, Edit. "Hitler kedvenc szobrása volt. Tárlat nyílt Arno Breker műveiből." *Népszabadság*, 26.7.2009.

Web. <http://www.nol.hu/archivum/archiv-411858>

<sup>46</sup> For instance, no reference is made to the Nazi past of Hungary at the local Terror Museum that opened in Budapest in 2002, despite the building serving as a local Stasi headquarters before being used to carry out the same function for the Soviet Secret Service. Orbán's government has spurred international debate by setting up several public monuments to the local collaborators of the Nazi regime.

<sup>47</sup> Földes, András. "A Ludwig hadüzenetet küld a múzeumoknak." *kepgyar.blog.hu*, 12.3.2009. Web.

[http://kepgyar.blog.hu/2009/03/12/a\\_ludwig\\_haduzenetet\\_kuld\\_a\\_muzeumoknak](http://kepgyar.blog.hu/2009/03/12/a_ludwig_haduzenetet_kuld_a_muzeumoknak)

private and the public, and above all, about the lack of memory and self-consciousness about it.<sup>48</sup>

The consciousness and ignorance to which Mélyi refers touches upon the interrelated positions of Breker, Ludwig and the museum. They interact with each other and come together in the public presence of these artworks with a particular clarity. Because of limited information exchange the criticism of Ludwig's deeds, power position, his poor treatment of migrant workers in his factories and practices of collecting in West Germany throughout the 1970s and 80s never reached the broader public in Hungary where he continued to be proclaimed as the generous donor and cultural ambassador between Eastern and Western Europe that the collector himself had argued he was. Very few critical voices questioned his position in the early phases of the museum. The display of Breker's busts brokered the possibility of this uncritical attitude. Bringing the larger than life-sized busts of the collector couple into the public spotlight meant opening up new questions about archival knowledge, the legacy of Ludwig as its source, and the self-critical positioning that the museum adopted towards its own institutional history. Bencsik's aim of presenting these artworks served to open the museum to potential criticism, but it was also an act of disrupting the celebratory and solely positive museum discourse that is often coupled with nationalist pursuits. Their presence signalled the rationale of the museum in which the politics of exhibition, rather than solely the politics of collecting, functions as a threshold between the relationships of the archive and the repertoire. The application of Taylor's notions adopted from performance studies needs to be further complicated in reference to the way museums operate. Paraphrasing memory scholar Aleida Assman, we could think of museum depots not only as closets but also as "lost and found offices" (Assmann 2008, 106) that operate between the paradigms of presence and absence by simultaneously storing and disseminating knowledge in support of particular identity creation pursuits. Remaining inaccessible to the public gaze, museum depots, as closets for neglected memories and unfavoured identities, embody a potential for absencing that does not support the creation of a desired group identity. To the contrary, it underlines that the central role of exhibitions as presence is created through acts of exhibiting that involve narratives and articulations of memory positions that serve as premises for public involvement, discussion and negotiation about new knowledge.

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<sup>48</sup> Melyi, Jozsef. "Mihez kezdjünk a Breker-szobrokkal?" *tranzit.blog.hu*, 21.3.2009. [http://tranzit.blog.hu/2009/03/21/mihez\\_kezdzunk\\_a\\_breker\\_szobrokkal](http://tranzit.blog.hu/2009/03/21/mihez_kezdzunk_a_breker_szobrokkal)

## Conclusion

There are material and immaterial sides to absence. In this chapter I aimed to connect these sides by discussing different forms of absence and complicating its operations between collecting and exhibiting. By closely reading five artworks, I brought forward how their material absence and non-exhibition express policing, phantoming and absencing. Policing ambiguous or unwanted objects means absencing information without having to give further justification, it is a means for a conscious creation of voids and holes in the knowledge that museums distribute. Acts of policing subjects on the other hand may be based on their relationship to particular local communities, whose gazes present incompatible memory positions that do not support a progressive national narrative and thus become an unwanted heritage. The materiality of this absence testifies to epistemological violence and social injustice that is enacted by museums through both deliberate and unconscious acts of creating subaltern identities that are left without a voice.

Understanding artworks as statements enabled me to create a link between particular artworks, their respective artistic positions and the ideological nature of museum inclusion that is not espoused in the policies of collecting and can only be identified through particular moments of exclusion. The example of Lumberg indicated how museum collections embody a mechanism of phantoming in order to maintain positions of memory and identity that are coherent and not threatened by outspoken activist Others. Following the narrative registers defined by the nation state and collectors, absence enabled the museum to stay within the progressive confines of knowledge production. The concept of 'national heritage' hardly ever occurs in the museum discourse in relation to contemporary art and the four museums that I analysed often prefer to advocate international or global art practices instead of announcing 'the national'. I argued through different readings that the incorporation of objects and the positions of their authors to the archival realm follows the rationale of dominant political and economic agents. In the previous chapter I have shown that the legacies of these forces in the official archival politics are often passed to institutions by accepting private collections. My last example of Breker's sculptures allowed me to theorise further the way that the relationship between depots and exhibitions can service the dialectics of presences and absences in enacting artworks.

The debates revived by the artworks I analysed often touched upon historical matters that have continued to haunt public memory, such as the role of the economic elite in the Holocaust and the continuation of Second World War legacies in Estonia and Hungary towards community formation practices. These heated debates centring on artworks are primarily about the conflicting memories and the unsettled social nature of narratives that museums create, transfer and legitimate.