

## Fulbright Commission Activities in 2011

### Message from the Executive Director

**D**ear colleagues and friends,  
We have just entered the year 2012 and before moving forward, let us quickly look back and take stock of what we did so that we could continue on the chosen path fully aware of what we need to further improve our work.

In 2011 all our activities aimed to fulfill the goals of the Fulbright exchange as defined in the 1961 Fulbright-Hays Act and the 2003 agreement between the US Government and the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria. They could be summed up as promoting mutual understanding between the people of Bulgaria and the people of the US through exchange of education, knowledge and cultural values.

#### Grant Activities

In AY 10-11 the number of US grantees was 27: six lecturers, four graduate students, ten English teaching assistants, two Fulbright-Hays researchers, and five senior specialists. The lecturers came from the following fields: law, history, journalism, and painting. They were placed at Sofia University, New Bulgarian University, the American University, and the National



*Prof. Dr. Julia Stefanova  
Executive Director  
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for Educational Exchange*

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Academy of Arts. The senior specialists were experts in the following spheres: ecology, anthropology, U.S. studies, hearing and speech sciences, and endocrinology. They were hosted by Plovdiv University, Sofia University, New Bulgarian University, South-West University, and the Medical University of Sofia. The Commission also hosted four US graduate students in international studies, psychology, theology and religion, and music. They were placed at appropriate institutions, such as the caucus of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms Party at the Bulgarian National Assembly, the *Animus* Foundation, the Bulgar-

ian Helsinki Committee and the National Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts.

With the financial support of *America for Bulgaria* Foundation, the English Teaching Assistantship Program was expanded and proved extremely useful for students and hosts alike. The ETAs were placed in the following schools: *Plovdiv* Foreign Language School, Plovdiv; *St. Kliment Ohridski* Foreign Language High School, Blagoevgrad; *Romain Rolland* Foreign Language High School, Stara Zagora; Foreign Language High School, Pleven; *Ivan Vazov* Foreign Language High School, Smolyan; *Nikola Vapzarov* Foreign Language High School, Shumen; First English Language High School, Sofia; *Exarch Yossif* Foreign Language High School, Lovech; *Professor Assen Zlatarov* Foreign Language High School, Haskovo; *Geo Milev* Foreign Language High School in Dobrich.

The Fulbright Senior Specialist Program made it possible to host five US experts at New Bulgarian University, the South-West University in Blagoevgrad, Sofia University, Plovdiv University, and the Medical Academy in Sofia. Their projects combined lecturing with faculty consulting and participation in conferences.

In April 2011, the Commission hosted an enrichment seminar for US graduate students from Central and Eastern Europe, and Eurasia. The *Seminar entitled Social and Cultural Integration in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Europe* was supported by ECA and IIE and gathered 35 US Fulbright students working on projects in Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Georgia, Greece, Macedonia, Moldova, Slovenia, Romania, and Turkey. They had the unique opportunity to meet each other and form a network, to present their research and hear lectures by prominent Bulgarian and American speakers.

The new group of US grantees attended the annual two-week Fulbright International Summer Institute held in the famous mountain resort of Bansko in August 2011. Fulbright scholars, students, and ETAs were offered a wide variety of interdisciplinary courses, workshops, and two introductory courses in Bulgarian language and Bulgarian culture.

The AY 11-12 competition resulted in the selection of 29 US grantees, most of who are already working in Bulgaria. In the senior scholar category, there are five lecturers in creative writing, business administration, applied linguistics, law and choreography. There are four students in ethnomusicology, filmmaking, art history and music. Thanks to the continuing support of *America for Bulgaria* Foundation the English Teaching Assistantship Program has been doubled and includes 20

students who work in foreign language schools in the towns of Sofia, Vratsa, Vidin, Montana, Blagoevgrad, Kardzhali, Stara Zagora, Pleven, Shumen, Lovech, Haskovo, Sliven, Ruse, Varna, Burgas, and Dobrich.

In AY 2010- 2011 there were 15 Bulgarian grantees in the following categories and fields: six scholars in chemistry, fine art, plant pathology, geography, ethnology and literary theory; six graduate students in social psychology, sociology, political science, communications, law and business administration; two non-degree doctoral researchers in literary theory and finance, one Hubert Humphrey fellow in law.

The scholars were awarded 5-month grants to work in prestigious US universities and research centers: Stanford University, University of Pittsburgh-Bradford, Agricultural Research Service USDA, Ohio State University, Harvard University, and University of Pennsylvania. All of them have returned to Bulgaria. Their final reports express great satisfaction with the Fulbright experience. Of the eight graduate and non-graduate students, four returned to Bulgaria after completing their programs. The others are still studying in the US. Their periodic reports indicate that they are doing well and most probably will complete their degree programs successfully. The recipient of the Hubert Humphrey Fellowship completed his research in the field of law successfully and returned home hoping to be able to contribute to the successful completion of the Bulgarian legal reform.

The publicity campaign for the AY 2011-2012 competition yielded a total of 48 applications: 32 for graduate study grants, 13 in the senior scholar category, and three for Hubert Humphrey fellowships. Five scholars were finally selected in the following fields: philosophy, animal breeding, biogeochemistry, dental medicine, and environmental science. Four of them have already started their projects at prestigious US institutions: UC at Riverside, Rice University, University of Florida, Gainesville, Iowa State University of Science and Technology. One scholar will begin his programs in March, 2012 at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

In the student category six students were approved and are currently enrolled in master's programs in electronic commerce, graphic design, business administration, law, and comparative literature. Our graduate students are strong and highly motivated and it is hardly surprising that they were admitted to top universities with financial support: New York University-Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Savannah College of Art & Design-Graduate School, Emory University - Goizueta Business School, Boston University-School of Law, and University

of Texas at Austin-Graduate School, and the University of Oklahoma at Norman. One six-month non-degree study grant was awarded to a doctoral student at the University of Rochester. The joint scholarship with *Thanks to Scandinavia* Institute was awarded for a fifth consecutive year. The grantee was enrolled in a LLM program at Boston University.

Two research scholarships for the study of civil society were awarded for AY 2011-12. A photographer from National Geographic – Bulgaria was invited to document the traditions and culture of the Crow Tribe at Crow Agency (Baaxuwaaashe), Montana. The second grantee is an expert in media studies and recently started his research on the freedom of speech in the new media at the Center for International Media Assistance in Washington, D.C. The recipient of the AY 2011-12 Hubert Humphrey fellowship is currently working at the University of Maryland, College Park.

## Grantees' Accomplishments

Three English teaching assistants, Dena Fehrenbacher, Kate Maley and Hillary Traugh, developed an original project called "YARN". A number of short audio interviews with Bulgarian high school students created one big story that showcases youth voices and relates the unique experience of being a teenager in Bulgaria. The "YARN" website <http://yarn.fulbright.bg/>, supported by the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission, is a useful resource for current and future ETAs. Laura Mohs, Fulbright English Teaching Assistant at *Romain Rolland* Foreign Language School in Stara Zagora, directed and produced a performance of William Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*. The production included students ranging from ninth to twelfth grade, specializing in English, French and German. After several months of rehearsals, the cast opened the show at the Stara Zagora Theater to the enthusiastic response of the local community and the students. This performance marks the first English language production at *Romain Rolland* in over ten years. All proceeds from the show went to a fund that would help in establishing a continued English theater program at the school. Three US Fulbright Scholars in the fields of art and choreography demonstrated their talent to the Bulgarian audience. Prof. Dian Edison from the University of Georgia and her host Prof. Ekaterina Russinova from New Bulgarian University presented a joint exhibition at Mission Gallery in Sofia. Prof. Janet Gilmore-Bryan from Virginia Commonwealth University exhibited her works at the Art Gallery of the Applied Arts Faculty in her host institution the National Academy of Art, Sofia. Kathryn Olive Posin (Fulbright Scholar for AY 2011-12) visited the National Opera and Ballet in Sofia and staged the dance performance "Stepping Stones" as a part of the *American Ballet for Bulgaria* initiative. Professor Oleg Gotchev, Fulbright visiting

scholar from the National Academy of Art, Sofia, together with his students at the University of Pittsburgh-Bradford, created a collaborative mural painting entitled Human and Science. The mural was exhibited at the central lobby of the university administrative building..

## Non-Grant Activities

During 2011 the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission continued to carry out a variety of non-grant activities: educational advising, language training, computer and paper-based testing, FISL etc. The total number of users of services offered by the Fulbright Commission is 78,363. A good indicator of the rising popularity of the Fulbright program and the Fulbright Commission is the dramatic increase of website visitors: 18 288 in AY 2009-10 and 58 938 in AY 2010-11.

Worth mention is the Commission's regular participation in national and international educational exhibitions and fairs.

The centerpiece of the Commission's non-grant activities in 2011 was the 10<sup>th</sup> Fulbright International Summer Institute.

As mentioned earlier, it took place in the beautiful resort of Bansko on August 8-20. Participating in FISL were 90 students from 15 countries. Lecturers from Bulgaria, the US and Ecuador, most of them Fulbright alumni, conducted 13 interdisciplinary courses. Along with the rigorous study program, FISL offered its participants a rich cultural program.

## Fund-Raising

In 2011 the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission continued its productive cooperation with the *America for Bulgaria* Foundation. Thanks to its generous support of \$ 280,000 the Commission was able to host 20 English teaching assistants and increase the number of FISL participants. We also received \$ 20,000 from *Thanks to Scandinavia* Institute to support one Bulgarian Fulbright graduate student. The *Trust for Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe* provided 10, 400 for two joint scholarships. The grantees completed their projects successfully.

The Bulgarian Fulbright Commission deeply appreciates the support of the above-mentioned institutions and hopes to maintain its fruitful relationship with them for the benefit of the Fulbright program and its participants.

Dear colleagues and friends, another year of hard work is behind us and the balance is good. Of course, there is always room for more and better as long as there is enough time. We have a whole new year ahead of us full of promise, hope but also challenges and surprises. Let us mobilize our creative resources to make it richer, happier and nobler.

## Fulbright Office News

### Fulbright Press Conference

On January 26, 2012, a press conference was held at the Fulbright Commission office. Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director of the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission, informed representa-

tives of Bulgaria media about the upcoming grants competition and other Fulbright events. Participating in the press conference were also U.S. Ambassador James B. Warlick, Jr. and PAO Ken Moskowitz.



From left to right: ED Dr. Julia Stefanova, U.S. Ambassador James B. Warlick, Jr. and PAO Ken Moskowitz



Media representatives during the regular Fulbright press conference

### Fulbright Enrichment Seminar Denver, March 2012

Lyubomir Minkov, graduate student at Emory University-Goizueta Business School in Atlanta, attended the Fulbright Enrichment Seminar entitled "Democracy in Action: The Influence of Growing Minority Populations in Changing Political Landscapes". Lyubomir took part in a mock presidential election with the purpose of learning the inner-workings of the American political system. The seminar was an enriching experience and gave him the opportunity to meet local community leaders and fellow Fulbrighters from all over the world.



## Extended Outreach of the Fulbright Program and EducationUSA in Bulgaria

Since the beginning of 2012 a number of outreach activities have been carried out attracting the interest of students, university faculty, professionals and parents. The EducationUSA adviser Snezhana Teneva visited Sofia University, the University of National and World Economy, New Bulgarian University, D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics and the American Corner of Sofia City Library, giving presentations and engaging in productive discussions about the 2012-2013 Fulbright Grants Competition and educational opportunities in the US with 170 students. Bulgarian alumni of the Fulbright program and American universities, U.S. Embassy officers and

volunteers were actively involved in the activities.

Over 1000 students and professionals visited the Fulbright stand at *Meridian 22* International Education Fair in Sofia and the *JobTiger 2012* National Career Days in Sofia, Varna, Veliko Turnovo and Svishtov.

To sum up, approximately 1200 individuals interested in international education and exchange activities attended the 2012 January-March outreach events and learned about study opportunities in the United States.



*Sofia University: Joint presentation of EducationUSA adviser Snezhana Teneva and Fulbright alumni Mariya Mihaleva, Irina Galabova and Nikolay Bebov*



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*University of National and World Economy: Joint presentation of EducationUSA adviser Snezhana Teneva and Fulbright alumna Gergana Tomova*



*New Bulgarian University: Joint presentation of EducationUSA adviser Snezhana Teneva and Fulbright alumna Dr. Albena Bakratcheva*



*D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics*

*American Corner of Sofia City Library*



*Official opening of Meridian 22 International Education Fair: Richard Damstra, CAO, U.S. Embassy*

*Meridian 22 International Education Fair in Sofia*



*JobTiger 2012 National Career Days in Sofia*



*JobTiger 2012 National Career Days in Varna*

## Cultural Enrichment Activities for U.S. Fulbright Grantees



*Informal party at the Fulbright Language Training Center in Sofia to mark the Bulgarian National Holiday, March 3rd.*



*Trip to Borovets*

## "Martenitsa" class in Rice University



## FULBRIGHT INTERNATIONAL SUMMER INSTITUTE 2012



[www.fisi-bg.info](http://www.fisi-bg.info)

The Fulbright International Summer Institute (FISI) is a two-week academic program organized annually by the Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational exchange. It offers one-week interdisciplinary courses and a rich cultural program. All courses are taught in English by an international team of distinguished lecturers. The FISI courses are addressed to a broad audience of graduate students, junior researchers and university faculty. A limited number of slots will be available for undergraduate students in their third and fourth year of study.

This year the Fulbright International Summer Institute will be held at the RIU Pravets Resort, Pravets, on August 13-24.

Participation fee per week: 300 leva for Bulgarian participants; 400 EUR for EU/US participants.

The fee covers accommodation and meals for six days, tuition, study materials, cultural program. Partial financial aid will be available on a competitive basis.

Information about FISI 2012 and application forms can be found at [www.fisi-bg.info](http://www.fisi-bg.info).

You can also visit the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission for Educational Exchange: 1000 Sofia, 17 Al. Stamboliyski Blvd, 1st floor, rooms 9 and 15, tel. (02) 981 6830 and (02) 980 8212.

Visiting hours: 2pm-4pm, Monday- Friday

Please send your applications to: [jstefanova@fulbright.bg](mailto:jstefanova@fulbright.bg).

**Deadline for submitting applications: May 25th 2012.**

### Facts about the Fulbright International Summer Institute

- FISI started in 2002 and since then it has hosted a total of 579 students from 39 countries;
- Since 2002 a total of 81 lecturers from 41 universities in Bulgaria, UK, USA, Canada and Ecuador have taught at FISI;
- In 2010 the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission received the Fulbright Innovator Award of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the US Department of State "in recognition of outstanding innovation in designing and implementing the Fulbright International Summer Institute".

## FULBRIGHT INTERNATIONAL SUMMER INSTITUTE 2012

August 13-24, RIU Pravets Resort

### Courses

**Course 01:** Negotiations and Conflict Resolution

*Lecturer:* Professor George Siedel, Ross School of Business, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA

**Course 02:** Peace and Conflict Resolution in the 21st Century

*Lecturer:* Dr. Syed Hussain Shaheed Soherwordi, University of Peshawar, Peshawar, Pakistan

**Course 03:** International Human Rights

*Lecturer:* Magistrate Judge Robert Levy, New York District Court, NY, USA

**Course 04:** Law, the periphery and the future: legal, non-legal and extra-legal forms of normative regulation

*Lecturers:* Associate Professor Ivo Hristov, Sofia University; Professor Andrei Fursov, Moscow State University

**Course 05:** Dialogues in the Field of International Relations, Security Issues, Human Rights and European Studies

*Lecturers:* Associate Professor Kostadin Grozev and team, Sofia University

**Course 06:** Philosophical and Social Dimensions of Imagination

*Lecturer:* Associate Professor Alexander Gungov, Sofia University

**Course 07:** Gender and Management, Leadership and Entrepreneurship

*Lecturers:* Associate Professor Kathryn Jenson White, Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK, USA; Associate Professor Maria Neikova, Faculty of Journalism, Sofia University

**Course 08:** American Novel into Film

*Lecturers:* Professor Madlen Danova, Department of English and American Studies, Sofia University; Professor Susan Gunter, USA

**Course 09:** World Dance

*Lecturer:* Kathryn Posin, New York University, NY, USA

**Course 10:** Creative writing

*Lecturers:* Professor Vladimir Trendafilov, English Department, Southwest University, Blagoevgrad; Kristin Dimitrova, Sofia University; Lyubomir Terziev, Sofia University

**Course 11:** Writing Bulgaria in English

*Lecturers:* Professor Brenda Tooley, Monmouth College, IL, USA; Associate Professor Ludmilla Kostova, English Department, University of Veliko Turnovo

**Course 12:** Bulgarian Culture: History, Politics, Economy, Media, Education, Art

*Lecturers:* team

**Course 13:** Strategic Foresight: Key Concepts, Methods, Tools – and What's Next?

*Lecturer:* Roumiana Gotseva, Foresight Alliance, Washington, DC, USA

**Course 14:** Creative Leadership

*Lecturer:* Prof. Dr. Frank Prochaska, Colorado Technical University, Colorado Springs, CO, USA

## EducationUSA Success Story

### Edward Pishiyski Freshman, Westminster College, UT AY 2011-2012

A year ago I was very uncertain about my future, unhappy with my education and at odds with my university (AUBG). I will always remember that morning when I was having breakfast in my apartment as I was scrolling down my mailbox and saw the EdUSA Weekly Update from EducationUSA adviser Snezhana Teneva, Fulbright Bulgaria. It was a listing of colleges and universities in the US that offered scholarships to foreign students. The first one on the list was Westminster College, offering one \$26,000 scholarship a year for four years. I just saw that that was my chance and contacted the dear Snezhana that same morning. We scheduled an interview and met a couple of days later. She explained everything to me and helped with all the papers I needed to submit.

Now, one year later I'm standing on my laptop in my residence hall in Westminster College, Salt Lake City, UT writing this letter, my life completely 100% changed.

Ever since I first arrived in Salt Lake, I've met wonderful people and my dearest and "bestest" friends. Warmth and friendliness and support are all around me.

I joined the International Students Organization and got elected for Vice President. Now we're preparing for the 2012 International Student Fest that's going to be on March 31st. The theme is Sports and Games of the World. It will also include foods from a few countries from each continent. Bulgaria will be represented with Mussaka! I'm in charge of the PR and advertising campaign and am currently working on the official poster for the event.

Furthermore, I maintain an excellent cumulative GPA and am on the Dean's List for Fall Semester 2011. The educational level is very high and the studying environment is taken to a whole new level. I adore all of my professors and their classes. Everyone of them is absolutely accessible and open to talk to. I'm motivated to study and achieve.

I also work part-time on campus at Alumni Relations. I'm a phonathon caller and collect donations for the college from our alumni. The bigger number of alumni who contribute to the college ensures a higher ranking in guides like US News & World Report, and those ranking impact the value of the degrees of our students. It's an amazing and highly responsible job.

The biggest thing that has happened to me recently is that I got selected and hired to be a Resident Advisor in the upcoming 2012-2013 school year. I will be living in the newest hall on our beautiful campus called Westminster on the Draw, it's still being built. I'm really excited about that opportunity. I will be responsible for all 35 residents on my floor and will be like their parent on campus. What I'm most looking forward to is getting to know all of them and building a relationship with each of them. As a compensation for my work I will get my room and board for free. The job is certainly going to help me be more organized, responsible and grow as a person.

Lastly, as for the fun part, since I came to the US I've been to 8 states and visited some breathtaking places. New York, Vermont, Connecticut, Utah, Arizona, Nevada, California, Illinois were all different and unique! I've been to New York City 3 times and would love to go a million more, San Francisco, and I'm going to Las Vegas for a week for spring break with my roommates. They look exactly like we all see them in movies but with one exception: they all are enormous (like everything in the US). I also went to London for a day on my way back to Bulgaria for Christmas, a "marvelous" and superb city!

I'd like to thank Snezhana Teneva and Fulbright for the dream come true. I don't think I would be standing where I am now without you! Thank you!

**Disclaimer:**

*The text is published in its original and unedited version.*



## To Chicago and Back

### Marina Semerdjieva

Ph.D. Candidate, Economics

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ochridski", Sofia, Bulgaria

Host institution in the U.S.: University of Rochester,

Simon Graduate School of Business, Rochester, NY

AY 2011-2012

**M**y name is Marina; I am a 29 years old PhD student from the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ochridski" in my last year of research. My work is devoted to interest rates and the information that short- and long-term rates express about future economic activity, consumer behavior and inflation expectations. In 2008 I graduated from Friedrich- Alexander University Erlangen-Nuremberg in Germany. I gathered experience as teaching assistant in microeconomics teaching first-year students parallel to my research work in Bulgaria. My host institution is the Simon School of Business at the University of Rochester.

Arriving in the United States I moved into a house I have never seen before in a town where I knew nobody. Looking out of my window I noticed a small house with a red front door. Not a single family in the whole neighborhood had that color of their front door- it was just that one house, always in front of me. During my first days it was more like a landmark, made it easy for me to find the way back home. What a great relief I felt when after moments of confusion I saw where my place was. Only those who got lost know what happiness it brings to search and find the right way all by yourself.

Time passed, the red door was still there but more like a greeting, a familiar sign that became part of my new life which I began here full of optimistic feelings; it was part of the overall excitement that I felt. I started to ask myself why the house was so different from the surrounding ones. Many streets and neighborhoods looked all the same with their parking lots and front porches, but no - my way brought me exactly here, just opposite to the red door. A light sentiment of anxiety seized me - probably that is the only red door existing here, the only one that I will ever be able to see and it is still closed all the time.

Now, as couples of months after my arrival have passed, I am not scared any more. I just take a minute in the morning to take a



look out of my window and dream a little bit; trying to imagine what could be hidden behind my lovely red door. What people could be living there, what choices they have made in their lives? The door started to open up for me. Now, I am more than sure that many red doors are going to cross my way in my future life. All of them extraordinary in some respect.

The Fulbright program is that red door, first showing that efforts do matter, that we are not all the same and communication makes us richer, it broadens our horizons, it allows us to see the different facets of life. But, the Fulbright program is much more than that, it is not the only landmark that remains by its own- all of us, students and researchers, will continue our work and our conscious lives searching for the red doors all around us. And no, there is no chance any more for me to get anxious about it. Now I want to know what is hidden behind it. Entering into a completely new life, I realized, and moving forward we see many doors open for us just as my red door showed me the way to its

hidden inhabitants. And maybe, some day, I will paint my own door red just to show the way to others.

Being abroad for sufficiently long time I was exposed to so many different cultures that I think myself no more belonging to strictly one country any more. Rather, I began to perceive myself as belonging to my plans and ideas, to my attitudes toward everything around me. Different opinions and styles of life began to struggle in me, to question fundamental understandings previously built.

I am determined to change the place I name "my home" with all the new ideas I collected during my stay in the US of America. It will influence not only the way I will try to reach my perspective students in class. In this respect I will try to establish a more interactive and vivid teaching process with incentives for motivated students to work in groups and to form the learning process in accordance to their current educational needs and difficulties. Giving them more free space to express themselves, to think autonomously and supporting them in their own ways and inquiries will be a great opportunity for me too. Not that I am sure every one step in this direction will be a success. By the same token, not all my endeavors were fully successful from the first time I try them. More realistically, I should openheartedly admit, the contrary turned out to be the case for me in my work and everyday life here. But when I remained closeto the problem I always came closer and closer to the final solution. Yes, it took time and it demanded a lot of strength of will and endurance. All my personal abilities, and strengths, as well as my social intelligence skills, were required to hundred percent if I wanted to succeed at the end. It was not a question of an hour or a day; it was a long-term test whether my actions were consequent and durable.

My attitude changed completely. Before my program started I was excited about what was going to happen in my professional life during those six months, I was trying to figure out all potential threats and to act on time to prevent them. It is not surprising at all that I could not accomplish that difficult task. The surprise in my eyes is that from the very moment it started, the program changed its meaning for me. I stood there, among dozens of other Fulbright students around me, and I realized that my whole life afterwards will be influenced. I was thinking eagerly on the time when I will be back home, the scope of action I saw in front of me made me wonder. It was no more important where I was, I am not a tourist and this is not an amusement journey. I realized that I have responsibilities towards myself in respect of my actions. I became aware that the time after my American experience is the aim of that exchange program, not only the intensive six-month period. Why that- because with so much new ideas one cannot accomplish everything in so short time, good ideas don't become reality overnight. Having this in mind, I understood there is no need at all to be scared of how our journey through life will go on. We will achieve a lot here but we cannot accom-



plish everything we want to or everything we are capable of in that short time.

On the other hand, as soon as we go to our home universities we will start to see the problems and possible solutions there more clearly. Because our way of approaching problems will be changed radically. My views about finance and economic theory were strongly influenced by Professor Jarrell. One of the most acknowledged Professors at the Simon School of Business, he developed through the years a very ingenious way to present the innovative curriculum to his students- together with theoretical foundations he organized a simulation game resembling real life mergers and acquisitions transactions. The different groups of students were standing in front of real investment decisions and shared their excitement with me- they were responsible for their own expenditures and were fully involved in the process of a rational decision- making on that imaginary stock exchange. During the course of the game they not only learned synthesized truths, analyzed from someone else, they asked their own, specific questions and learned how to behave in the business world, realized the importance of legal advice, due diligence and appropriate negotiation behavior. It was a strategic game where unexpected developments occurred and their reactions were wanted, advices were given but still the learning material was to be implemented only with the help of group and personal characteristics of the decision-maker as strong will, endurance, analytical skills. It was not a matter of succeeding or not, not only a question of a better grade, they were fascinated by the spirit of the game, taking part of it, discussing their next step was its magic.

I also felt the supportive attitude of Professor Jarrell and all the people, working with him. The Bloomberg terminal and the library began to be the main part of my everyday life. He spared neither trouble nor advice to support me in my work. I was astonished to see how interested he was in everything that is happening around me. That is for sure an attitude I would like to

adopt from him. Being informed about everything that happens around me, without being ignorant to bad news, because being involved is what counts, it gives us a chance to find the right path. Being alert of our environment there are a lot of chances to be tried on, a lot of opportunities to be seized. Furthermore, difficulties can be taken care of in a timely manner, new developments can be supported; nothing from that will ever happen if we strictly work in our limited research field. If we only scrutinize the world around us in search for evidence to support our theories. Quite the contrary is helpful- monitor the real world and try to think about what is happening by means of what we learned in classes and from books. Reflecting of what we observed and recognizing complications as part of the game is what I have learned here.

Another important experience in my life in Rochester, NY was argentine tango. Being an enthusiastic social tango dancer I, almost immediately after my arrival, started to search for a dance studio I can go to. I never even expected the full dimensions of what was going to happen to me in the following months. I met a lot of new friends, a lot of different cultures- people from Argentina to Australia, from India to Italy are part of that tango scene. But most importantly, those people allowed me to be part of their everyday lives, to perceive the changes they lived through when they decided to carry on with their lives here. Though, for me, to experience a culture is not only sightseeing, not only traditional cousin (though the pecan pie and turkey with cranberry sauce were delicious). It is more a knowledge of the decisions people make in their ordinary lives- about the school system, health care, job search and retirement. I talked to them about all this, about their plans and fears, we talked and danced. Amazingly, the nature of the argentine tango as a dance coincides fully with my experience. Being traditionally a dance for emigrants in Argentina, people who found their only social support in dancing and otherwise working under extremely hard conditions, it reflects the spirit and thoughts of many people in their first years in the USA. It turned out to be true what they said to me- tango heals everything...

I never believed that my experience here will be an easy one. More than true is that it was a hard challenge. Temporary difficulties and administrative problems were also part of my experience. But I am at the end of my journey not full of bitter feelings but full of self-consciousness because I managed to overcome them with the help of my research advisor and all people at the International Institute of Education in New York City. I learned to ask for help, I learned to plan my next step, to ask for advices and to work for a better outcome. Not to anticipate in advance that something will end up in a good or bad way. I don't say that everything I saw and experienced was good. It wasn't. But I do claim that I was glad to have met some very innovative people that do not hesitate to support change, to share their experience and to try to help young people find their own way. That is what

the name of senator J. William Fulbright stands for according to my opinion- the braveness to allow people to be different and to communicate with one another from the standpoint of their diversity. I was exposed to socially-active people with different occupations and different attitudes which were lively interested in me. It was always the case- the individuals of achievement and potential came first to me from curiosity and the will to experience something new in their lives.

They were interested in me as a social phenomenon. I was part of the politics of their country towards other cultures around the world. Trying to get to know and understand me and my background, they have actually learned something about themselves and the circumstances they lived in their own country. They were able to judge the tolerance in facing new people and ideas. Explaining and showing to me their everyday lives and the values they believed in, it was a chance for them to rethink their position in life. A test in which way the society is evolving.

My limited stay here not only gave them a real feeling that we do not have all the time in the world to accomplish our goals that we should act promptly. And the end of my stay here people around me started do summarize, to analyze and reflect in their thoughts what have happened. The same will happen with me as soon as I reach my home land- with time passing everything I gathered will find its way in my opinions and the way I handle my work and my social responsibilities. It is not only about the way I would like to furnish or decorate my living room, though I loved the way it is done in this part of the world. It is more a story about curiosity towards everything new, the challenge to accept the good things and to neglect what is not worth having. Implementing things, not just copying them- that is what is going to happen.

Some people say that arriving in a new country you miss your home very strongly and departing from it makes you, not surprisingly, miss the new one. No matter where you will go in the future you will miss at least one of them, if not both of them. Accepting and accomplishing in reality our Fulbright programs we are determined to miss something all our lives long. To feel an emptiness in our hearts. We did that choice deliberately. There is nothing bad in missing things that is the way to get out of your comfort zone and to search for answers and possibilities. This experience will not make our lives easier, quite the opposite is true. Our academic and life paths will be more difficult because we have seen and felt, we were part of something new and unknown. But those paths will be more rewarding, they will lead us further. Just like in tango- somebody leads and somebody follows. And we have already chosen to be the leaders, come what may come!

**Disclaimer:**

*The text is published in its original and unedited version.*

## Out of America

### Cascade Tuholske

Fulbright English Teaching Assistant

Zaharii Stoyanov English Language School, Sliven, Bulgaria

AY 2011-2012

From February 29 to March 7, I had the fortune to attend the Commission of Educational Exchange between the United States, Belgium and Luxembourg's *Seminar on the European Union and NATO*. The conference itinerary included meeting with justices and hearing a case at the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg, meetings with European Union officials at the European Commission, European Parliament and the Council of Ministers, along with lectures at NATO Command and Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe. Along with learning about these European and transatlantic institutions, the seminar included a trip to the College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium.

Unfortunately, because of a canceled flight I was unable to attend the first day and half in Luxembourg. But the following six days proved to be a highlight of my Fulbright experience. The depth of each lecture gave me a deeper understanding of how the European Union is not just a global actor, but also an organization that is trying to improve the lives of every European citizen. For example, I learned how the European Regional Development Fund works to promote social cohesion through economic growth in poorer regions in all E.U. member states, from rural Spain to rural Romania.

As the only Fulbright English Teaching Assistant to attend the seminar, and the only Bulgarian grantee, the seminar offered an exceptional opportunity to meet Fulbright scholars researching a range of topics in fifteen European countries. From the effects of environmental regulation on European trade to French maritime history to oncology research in Spain, the range of topics demonstrates the wide impact of the Fulbright program. Chatting in the evenings with the other scholars was



Cascade in Bruges, Belgium

equally as beneficial as the days spent at lectures. Along with discussing research, we swapped stories about living and working in our respective countries. And, while each scholar's experiences differed, it is clear to me that Fulbrighters across Europe facilitate cross-cultural exchange and mutual understanding within the communities they work.

Along with connecting me with new colleagues and friends, the seminar inspired me to begin research in Bulgaria. Over the next few months, I will analyze young Bulgarians' perceptions of the E.U. As the future leaders of Bulgaria, and the E.U., it is important to understand young Bulgarians' attitudes and perceptions of the E.U. in order to gauge how they think the E.U. influences their lives. Hopefully, my research will contribute to ongoing dialogue regarding European identity.

My experiences at the seminar reveal why I am proud to be a part of such a fantastic organization. As I wrote above, the week stands out as a highlight of my grant and I am glad that I can use what I learnt at the seminar to enhance my work in Bulgaria. Indeed, I am honored that the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission selected me to attend.

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The Council of Ministers



Brussel's Town Hall at Night

## Out of America

### Izabel Galliera

Ph.D. Candidate, History of Art and Architecture, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA, USA

Host institutions in Bulgaria: Institute of Contemporary Art and

The Red House for Culture and Debate

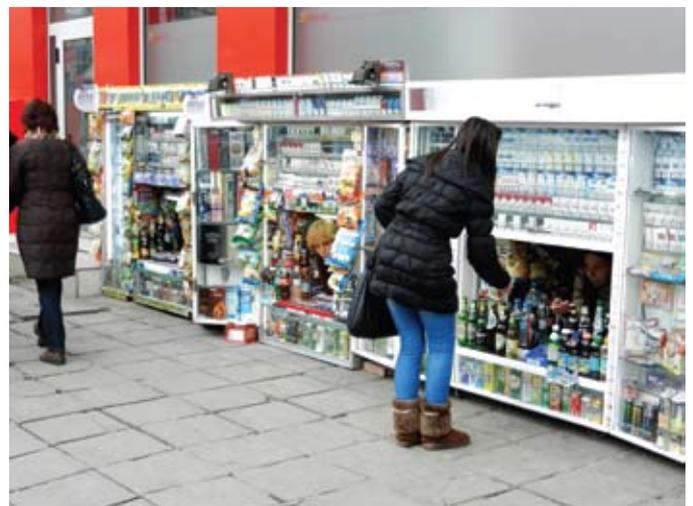
AY 2011-2012

## Encountering Bulgarian Culture and People in Conversations

**I**n numerous occasions since arriving in Sofia, I have encountered the warm hospitality of Bulgarian people and not surprisingly the first word I learnt in Bulgarian was *blagodarya* (meaning thank you). Engaging with people, walking the city and exploring the countryside has greatly expanded my experiences and views of the Bulgarian life, culture and history. My frequent meetings and conversations with artists, curators, directors and professors in the field of contemporary art has provided me with valuable knowledge and material for my doctoral dissertation, which I pursue in the History of Art and Architecture Department at the University of Pittsburgh.

I first learned of the wonderful Bulgarian hospitality from my host and landlady, Kristina who has made sure that I can find my way in the city especially in the first few weeks of my stay in Sofia. She had since become a good friend and has also remained the person I call for suggestions and advice whenever I have questions. Every so often at dinners and lunches I've met several wonderful people: architects who shared stories of the rapidly changing architectural landscape of the city; a sculptor who does beautiful wood-carvings spoke about the still nonexistent local art market that would be welcomed by many artists, such as himself;

a lawyer commenting on the long and complex process of privatization of the formerly state-owned property. From the stories that I've been told and the conversations that I've had, I especially realized how much the vivid memories of life under the recent communist past has greatly shaped the contemporary choices, behavior and political beliefs especially of the older generation of Bulgarians.



Basement convenient stores along a central boulevard in Sofia

In my daily shopping at small mom and pop stores near my apartment I have been able to interact with shopkeepers – who already know me, as I always get a tuna fish can for the stray cats – which is also a wonderful way to practice my Bulgarian and learn new vocabulary. Of particular interest for me has been the sight of convenient stores and shops located in the basement of buildings that require you to crouch down in order to make your purchase. I never fail to smile when I happen to see two shopkeepers sticking their heads out of two adjacent basement windows to make conversation when business is slow. It is an interesting sight! During my morning walks to and from the gym – about 25 minute-walk from my apartment, without fail I have noticed sale persons in front of their retail stores with a cup of coffee in one hand and a cigarette in the other chatting with their neighboring shop-owner. Such conversations, interactions and communication among friends and neighbors, visible on streets and the numerous coffee shops, make up the city's active and dynamic social fabric.

On the city boulevards, major retail shops carrying expensive brand-name items mingle with boutiques or open air stands that showcase used books, vegetables and an array of clothing at low costs that range from socks to hats and scarfs fluttering in the breeze as you pass by. The presence of such small private enterprises next to multi-story western style-malls, for instance, are proof I believe not only to the entrepreneurial spirit of many Bulgarians, revealing the country's mixed-economy but also to the presence of a large part of the population who can afford mostly lower-priced products rather than the brand names one finds in the several malls around the city. Not entirely taken over by the global big-box chain-retail stores, Sofia is also a space where many local family-owned stores still survive, at least for now.

Walking around the city has offered me several opportunities to both engage with various locals in conversations and experience the local culture in various contexts, such as: visiting museums, art galleries and churches; frequenting the same coffee shops and restaurants for lunch; shopping for roasted chestnuts and baked pumpkin at the open market in the center of Sofia on Graf Ignatiev street while conversing with Roma salesman; and browsing through stands set up by elderly Bulgarian ladies near Saint Sophia church displaying their traditional hand sewn wares. One particular gesture that even now, after several months in



*Lyubomir Dalchev, "Returning Soldiers", Sofia, 1981*

Sofia, becomes at times confusing is the way Bulgarians nod their heads to express "no" and shake their heads from side-to-side to say "yes."

## The Absent Presence of Public Art in Sofia and the Bulgarian Countryside

Sofia is a beautiful and welcoming city. Unlike other major Eastern European capital cities, it does not feel overwhelming or difficult to navigate in terms of crowd, pollution and traffic congestion. I love my city strolls in the weekends. During one such stroll, I paid particular attention to the various forms of public art throughout the city that stand witness to distant and recent past events, which I thought it would be interesting to talk about. Although, here I am only going to briefly present a few examples that particularly captured my attention for various reasons, such instances echo many other sculptures and monuments throughout the cities and countryside of Bulgaria.

In a small park near the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral and across from St. Sophia church, a group of nine life-size statues stand on low plinths. Created in 1981 by the Bulgarian sculptor Lyubomir Dalchev, the sculptures commemorate the Bulgarian soldiers who returned blinded by order of the Byzantine Emperor Basil II after their defeat at Belasitsa or the Battle of Kleidion (near the modern Bulgarian village of Klyuch) in 1014. Although created during the



*House-monument of the Bulgarian Communist Party (1981) on top of mount Buzludzha in the Balkan Mountains*

communist period, the sculptures are not in what one may think of as a socialist realist style. In contrast to a celebratory depiction of young and masculine human figures, Dalchev conferred upon each of them, individual expression that conveys human despair in the aftermath of their cruel experience. One soldier looks up to the sky, yet another carries a stick, which he brandishes blindly in the air, two embrace, while the leading figure (the only one speared from blindness) walks in front of the group with staff in hand guiding the blinded soldiers home. While the group of statues commemorates a distant historical event, in their expressive qualities and life-size dimensions, the figures become a symbol of universal human suffering transcending time and space.

This type of public art contrasts greatly with the virile portrayals of the kind one finds, for instance, in the sculptures of the *Monument to the Soviet Army*, located in the park across from the Sofia University. Built in 1954, the monument commemorates the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bulgaria's liberation by the Soviet Army. A group of monumental sized sculptures featuring a Soviet soldier, a woman with an infant in her arms and a Bulgarian man are displayed on top of the tall column. The most prominent, is the leading figure with one hand holding a rifle, extended upwards into the air towards the sky. Although quite distant from the viewer gazing up from the foot of the column, the soldier's flexed arm appears as if in motion, captured in cast iron just seconds before he would make a step forward.

The same animated impression is further communicated when one encounters each of the four bas-relief sculptural tableaux forming four different panels at the base of the monument. The scenes depict at equal size young soldiers and woman in action, with guns in hands and capes and flags fluttering as they collectively and courageously advance forward. Similar to a snapshot photograph, the scenes have an overall freeze-frame effect. An immediacy and sonority envelops the sculptures. Several soldiers are portrayed with their mouths open as if one would almost hear their passionate calls to arms. On the day that I visited, a row of fresh cut red flowers was laid at the base of the monument.

Located in a park in the center of Sofia, the *Monument to the Soviet Army* does not only stand witness to a past event that many perhaps might want to forget, but becomes part of the lives of contemporary inhabitants of the city. A skateboard half-pipe sits to one side of the monument with young people practicing their bike and skateboard tricks. Moreover, not only a passive background for a rapidly changing city, the monument has recently been playfully and skillfully appropriated to resemble the interests of contemporary youth. In June 2011 a group of anonymous artists painted one of the panels of the monument, transforming each of the soldiers into different characters, such as Superman, Santa Claus and Ronald McDonald. Is this action mere vandalism, an ingenious form of politically charged artistic expression or a playful activity by a bored group of youth? This anonymous gesture keeps open the national public art debate that has been on going in Bulgaria with varying intensity since 1989. Namely, should the Communist-era monuments be entirely removed from the city's landscape or should they stand and be protected as part of the country's history and cultural heritage? Who should make this decision? In fact, several socialist realist style sculptures, exhibiting a range of stylistic expressions, from the 1950s through the 1980s have been removed from around the city and placed in the open-air grounds of the recently opened Museum of Socialist Art, a branch of the National Art Gallery and housed in a building owned by the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture.

During a weekend road trip around Bulgaria I was fascinated to discover the *House-monument of the Bulgarian Communist Party* on top of mount Buzludzha (1441 m) in the beautiful and misty Balkan Mountains, in Central Bulgaria. Ah,

the view from the top is breathtaking! Miles away from any town or village, standing solitary on top of the mountain, surrounded by lower laying mountain tops and fog-filled valleys, it is an impressive building that closely resembles a space ship as if awaiting the signal for take off. On a sunny November Sunday, my husband and I parked our rental car at the bottom of the hill and hiked the thirty or so minutes up to the top on a slowly steeping cobble stone path. As I was steadily walking upward with the wind gradually increasing in intensity, I was thinking how much this very walk could be seen as a symbol of the treacherous and difficult road towards communist utopia. Socialism was considered as a transitional phase that would eventually lead to communism where full equality among people would become a reality. Certainly, this notion has been and remains a utopian dream; only the longing had been real. At 70 meters tall it is among the largest monuments in Bulgaria. It was built in 1981 to commemorate the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Buzludzha congress, the founding place of the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Workers' Party, later renamed the Bulgarian Communist Party. It took almost seven years to complete and close to six thousands workers helped in the construction. The entrance to the monument features excerpts from the "The International" and "The Workers' March." The structure's dome was covered with thirty tones of copper and a pair of twelve-meter stars made of ruby-glass was placed on the tall pylon. When the Communist Party fell in 1989 with Todor Zhivkov as its leader, the monument became property of the state, and since then it has been looted and stands abandoned.

## How Can Contemporary Public Art Be a Catalyst for Social Change in post-1989 Bulgaria?

This has been one of the main questions that have triggered not only my personal interest in studying contemporary art and the topic for my doctoral dissertation, but also my interest in Bulgaria. In my doctoral dissertation I trace major developments in socially engaged contemporary art in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of communism in 1989, a topic which to date has received limited critical attention. Drawing upon theories from sociology and political science of social capital, civil societies and public sphere, I closely examine specific contemporary

art projects and exhibitions in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania in terms of their potential to contribute to inclusive public spheres and democratic forms of civil society in the post-1989 period.

Similar to other Central and Eastern European countries in the last twenty years, Bulgaria has been going through a multi-layered transitional period from a centrally governed country during socialism to a democratic form of government. While one may argue that at the political level the post-communist transitional period has achieved its goal with the official entrance of Bulgaria into the European Union in 2007, the country remains one of the poorest nations in Europe with high levels of unemployment and with numerous talented young people leaving the country in search for better futures. How can contemporary art and artists survive in such a context and how can they provide a catalyst for change?

The nine-month long two-country based Fulbright Fellowship that is split between the first five months in Bulgaria and the last four in Romania has given me the wonderful opportunity to conduct extensive on-site research. It has allowed me to see, interact and meet several artists and art professionals in the field of contemporary art in Bulgaria. These on-going conversations have greatly broadened my knowledge of both the local context and art scene, further informing my overall project. While it would certainly take up considerably much more space than such a short article would allow, I will present a few of the projects and people that I had a chance to meet and who generously took time from their busy schedules to meet with me.

The art critic, Diana Popova who is also a gallery associate at the Institute of Contemporary Art – Sofia (ICA) has met with me several times since I arrived in Sofia in October sharing her wealth of experiences and knowledge on the contemporary art scene in Bulgaria. The first attempts of contemporary art appeared in the late 1980s as experimental and non-conventional forms of art showcased for instance, in such seminal exhibitions, as *Earth and Sky* in October 1989, only a few short weeks before the fall of socialism. It was staged on the rooftop of the Shipka 6 Gallery, standing literally on top of the building of the official Union of Bulgarian Artists. Such manifestations were among the first to offer alternatives to the official art styles predominant during socialism. During this time and con-



Art critic Diana Popova (right) and Izabel in front of the Institute of Contemporary Art – Sofia

tinuing in the first years of the 1990s contemporary art happened in public spaces on city streets and squares in the form of performances, actions, happenings and installations activating and manifesting the changing socio-political environment. For instance, Lyuben Kostov's *Downfall of the Article 1* in 1989 took place in a busy Sofia square and consisted in a winding arrangement of dominos. Stage in a public place with passersby observing the work's creation, the artist's action was part of the heated societal discussions during December 1989 regarding the dissolution of Article 1 of the Socialist Constitution that stated that the Bulgarian Communist Party has the sole ruling authority in the country.

More recently, Luchezar Boyadjiev, an older generation artist, in his 2003 work *Stephan's Brigade* employed the language of advertisement to draw attention to the marginalization of both small family businesses and the Roma ethnic minority in Sofia, a city has been changing rapidly under the increasing presence of corporate investment in Bulgaria. In my conversation with Luchezar he had told me about his work and how he engaged Stefan Metodiev, a Roma in his 50s (whom he had known for fifteen years) and Stefan's three brother-in laws (who all worked as handy men in their family business) in order to make a large-scale colorful billboard featuring a full portrait of the four Roma men. The billboard was placed for several days on the façade of the National Art Gallery, located in a central square where the Georgi Dimitroff Mausoleum had been constructed and also where Roma people often look for work. Although adopting the economic language of the advertisement, Boyadjiev's art project provoked political reactions from both the mayoral candidates running in the 2003 election as well as the press, which dedicated full-page articles on other Roma individuals, thus bringing to public light and debate the contempo-

rary complex situation of the Roma in Bulgaria.

Making creative use of PR strategies in order to trick the media, and most importantly to call attention to the (then) non-existent museum for contemporary art in Bulgaria, contemporary young artist Ivan Moudov's 2005 participatory art project MUSIZ (Museum for Contemporary Art – Sofia) stirred up public debate on a national scale. Ivan shared with me images as he talked about his work. At ICA I was also able to view a video documentation of the opening event. Similar to Luchezar's work created two years earlier, Ivan's project was conceived as part of his participation in the Visual Seminar, a program implemented by the ICA, the Center of Advanced Studies in Sofia, Bulgaria and relations, a project initiated by the Federal Foundation for Culture in Germany. The art project MUSIZ consisted in an advertising campaign that included several large billboards placed in the center of Sofia, hundreds of posters plastered all around the city, invitation cards distributed in coffee shops, universities, art galleries and museums, press, embassies, city officials and international contacts, and a website and an email address; all announcing the opening of the Museum for Contemporary Art – Sofia on April 26, 2005 at 7pm at the Podujane railway station in Sofia. Hundreds of people showed up at the location and time indicated for the opening of the museum only to find an empty railway station. Reading though the published articles, some people were confused, some felt betrayed, others amused and yet others applauded the artist's intervention. Debates in internet chatrooms and numerous articles in the press about the art project and implicitly about the lack of a museum of contemporary art in Bulgaria indicate the potential for specific forms of contemporary art to catalyze change at a much broader level than the oftentimes limited circles of art professionals. One could argue that Ivan's call for a contemporary art museum has been answered with the official opening of a Contemporary Art Museum in Sofia in the summer of 2011. However, it remains to be seen whether its collection, exhibition and educational programs offer a platform for contemporary artists working in a variety of media as well as for engaging the public at large.

Participatory art projects such as Luchezar's and Ivan's are part of an international contemporary socially engaged art discourse that has been developing in various forms since the early 1990s throughout the world. While contingent upon a particular locality, some of the common charac-



Izabel in front of the Red House for Culture and Debate, Sofia

teristics include: the challenging of the traditional divide between artists and public, the artworks' contents emerge from the participations, interactions and collaborations with various people either over long periods of time or within a pre-determined spatial-temporal parameters, the artists' projects often function as catalysts for change or as platforms for collective representations, thus implicitly challenging traditional methods for evaluating art and creating social value.

I would also like to briefly mention one other artistic approach that I encountered during my research. Taka Visual Art Company, a group of young female artists, has done several projects between 2000-2004 with children-

at-risk within the framework of *Art for Social Change Program* implemented in Bulgaria by the Red House for Culture and Debate and initiated and funded as an international program by the European Cultural Foundation. The program grouped together teams of artists that included actors, musicians and visual artists, with social-work professionals, such as psychologists, educators, social workers and psychiatrists. The latter provided training and supervisions for the artists who applied artistic means to engage children and young people at risk. Taka worked with children from the comprehensive High Schools 10, 39 and 81 in the housing district of Mladost. The artists communicated with the children (ages 10-16) through various artistic means that ranged from drawing each other's portraits, creating assemblages in pizza boxes from found scraps of paper to making clay sculptures based on their portrait drawings. In 2003 after several years of working with the children Taka also organized road trips that included activities such as rose picking and drawings of rose petals near the village of Shipka. The aim of these interactions has essentially been to aid in the children's self-expression and social integration. Ultimately, the program as a whole intended to influence policy change so that effective care and instruction for children living in state institutions will be implemented on a national level.

Because of the Fulbright Fellowship, I was able to reside in Sofia for several months, offering me the invaluable opportunity to meet and speak with these artists. These conversations, which helped me better understand and contextualize their work and activities within the broader socio-political context, have been tremendous to my dissertation research. Additionally, the Fulbright Fellowship enabled me to immerse myself within the local context and culture and directly encounter some of the sites at the core of these artistic projects.

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