

**Acceptance Speech
KAIROS Prize 2008
10 February 2008
Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg**

[written version of the Acceptance Speech]

I would like to thank Mr. Christoph Stolzl and Mr. Ansgar Wimmer for the generous words. I am glad that Roma and Sinti are joining me for the ceremony, and I welcome the Hungarian representatives of the cultural scene.

LASHI RATYI TE DEL O DEL SHAVORAZHENENG E DEVLESA ARAKHAV TUMEN LOSH AV, KE KETHANE SHAJ AVAS KATHE KE KETHANE SHAJ KERDAM BUTYI, MURE DRAGI PRAHLA!

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, my Dear Friends, Colleagues and my Dear Family,

It is an honor to be recognized by the Alfred Toepfer Foundation and a great privilege to be awarded by the KAIROS - European Cultural Prize.

This is a special moment for my professional carrier and personal life, one that I hope to share and celebrate together with the Roma community, Roma women and the Roma and Non-Roma intellectuals of Europe.

I have consciously chosen an almost impossible mission at a very young age: working in the field of Roma culture, and for the recognition of Roma visual art. For a decade I faced suspicion and rejection from the official art scene and extremely high expectations from the Romani artistic producers and creative community. When Mr. Ansgar Wimmer, director of the Toepfer Foundation contacted me, I was much more prepared for some kind of a disaster in my carrier than an award for my activities.

It was not without sacrifices that I have attained a classical education and became an art historian; still I never aimed for a job in the comfortable environment of a library, classroom or the elegant ambience of a museum or gallery space. Instead I decided to explore the terra incognita of Roma visual art.

My first initiatives were outlawed by the contemporary scene: exhibitions on trees and bushes, in candlelight, performance of Roma woman artists at a Music Festival, shows for uneducated creative producers, exhibition for talented Roma orphans, cleaning up the biggest storage of Roma artworks in Hungary...- these all had to be prettied up, to fit my very fancy and European looking Curriculum Vitae.

We experienced first hand, that without the infrastructure for creative production and self representation the culture of Roma People is oppressed, which leads to the cultural and social exclusion of the Roma minority.

We found that even positive views of Roma culture tend to be misguided, and those praising “the amazingly rich culture of the poor,” “ancient handcrafts,” “naïve painters” or “the musicians of the heart” interpret what they encounter under the aegis of orientalism, exoticism and romanticism, an act, -which I daresay - also colonizes Roma culture.

We did not become victims of this oppression.

Together with Roma intellectuals and artists we fought with policy makers, lobbied for efficient policies and strategies for the cultural support of the Roma community.

The “success stories” of culture travel much faster than what acts on the level of the individual or the family, changes having to do with housing, employment, health care or education. The successes of culture receive a much wider publicity than the social services.

After the success of these first efficient projects cultural experts from the Central and Eastern European region joined our efforts, and created successful cultural events with the involvement and recognition of Roma culture.

Looking back now, this was the time when I was hesitant to give up my steady job as a cultural worker to become a Roma consultant at prestigious contemporary art shows. Art has opened up a new World for me...

Around 2000 the cultural turn has affected the way Roma culture was perceived. New academic fields such as Cultural Studies, Romani Studies; and African-American and Chicano analogies provided the context in which Roma culture could be interpreted in a new and contemporary way.

Because of my education, I had access to these sources so without making a conscious effort I have become one of the mediators of the paradigm shift.

The new paradigm had a great impact on the self-confidence of Roma people, and lead to a new Roma consciousness,¹ a state when successful, wealthy and well-educated Roma proudly acknowledge their origin, rather than opt for assimilation and the relinquishment of their cultural heritage.

I joined the team of Open Society Institute Foundation`s Arts and Culture Network Program late 2005. The intention of OSI was to start and maintain the process of Roma (cultural) empowerment.

OSI initiated The First Roma Pavilion at the 52nd Venice Contemporary Art Biennale. The project was also supported by Allianz Kulturstiftung and the European Cultural Foundation.

The erection of the First Roma Pavilion, the exhibition of 16 artists from 8 European countries was a major, almost unbearable logistical challenge.

¹ I introduce the term in the wake of Gloria Anzaldúa, one of the greatest theoreticians of Chicano studies. In her writing, “La conciencia de la Mestica: Towards a new consciousness” denotes the state when instead of revolt, resistance and anger, the Chicano’s consciousness is characterized by pride and peace, evoked by the esteem and respect of the majority society.

My role again, was not to be a curator, in the traditional sense, but to be the connection between the artists and the art canon, the commissioner and the artistic producers, the scientists and the field workers, the Pavilion and the Biennale Office, and most importantly the Roma and the non-Roma.

This major cultural-political-intellectual intervention could not have been delivered successfully without efficient team work and empowering supports of the OSI-Allianz and ECF teams.

The Roma Pavilion became the first significant step toward giving Roma contemporary art the audience it deserves. As well as allowing contemporary Roma artists to present their work and ideas on a world stage, the Pavilion at the premier international art forum sent a message of inclusion that has so far eluded the Roma community: Roma have a vital role to play in the political and cultural landscape of Europe.

Ladies and Gentleman,

It is with pride and gratitude that I accept the KAIROS Prize.

It is a privilege to be the first Roma and the first Hungarian woman who receives this prestigious award. I celebrate the perspectives the KAIROS Prize will open and the possibilities it will offer at the zenith of my carrier.

The God Kairos has taken me under his wings and will be my secret guardian from now on.

I would like to use the endowment to establish a permanent art collection of European Roma art and make it available for future exhibitions, ensuring visibility for Roma contemporary art and continuous support for contemporary Roma Culture, which works against the existing stereotypes and prejudices.

The God Kairos will give me the strength to start – what I call the ROMA-MOMA project. The name ROMA MOMA stands for Roma Museum of Modern Art, an institution that should have been set up by European cultural authorities decades ago. I hope the collection I will build can serve as the basis of this professional institution of invention and creativity for the representation the Roma identity.

With the God Kairos looking over me this initiative is not just a bright idea any more, as it was in 2004 when I first started a petition in Hungary.

Time in the Greek mythology is defined by the dualistic coexistence of the moment – entitled to Kairos- and the continuously running time – symbolized by the God Kronos.

While I am focusing on the special occasion, the Award, and the qualities Kairos is bringing into my life, the sustainability and continuity of the ideas and projects I worked for, remain on the top of my agenda.

Being a Roma intellectual is not an easy lifestyle. The community expects its representatives to become generalists: fight for human rights, organize cultural events, and be the experts of Romani traditions and Romani language at the same time. I would like to continue specializing

in art history, start a PHD research and become competitive in the academic discussion while serving the Roma cause.

There are about 10 million Roma believed to live in the European Union. Anti-gypsyism as a distinct and long-established species of racism, remains prevalent across Europe, and has always been broad and polymorphous in its manifestations. The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe describes the Roma as *“the poorest, least healthy, least educated and most discriminated sector of... society.”*²

Listening to my speech, and understanding my educational and professional background the audience might think that I am not “even” or not “enough” of a Roma. I do not wear the traditional long skirt and I do not speak the Romani language fluently.

My mother, who was the daughter of a Gypsy musician, raised me alone, after divorcing my father in the 8th district of Budapest. My father was a Sinti, and became a famous boxer in the early 70s in Hungary. We did have financial difficulties, and I had a very difficult time performing in the education system, completing a university education and becoming the first intellectual in my family.

I know, where I come from. I`m still Timea from the block.³

I would like to continue my mission secretly hoping that I will one day serve as a role model to my children as an active and independent woman, and for the youth of the Roma community, demonstrating the power of education, perseverance and innovation.

I will feel obliged to work for the fulfillment of the Toepfer Foundation’s objectives, and to serve as an advocate for the “promotion of peace, cultural development and European Unity.”

Timea Junghaus
Hamburg, 2008. February 10.

² Tom Giles, *“Gypsies: Tramps and Thieves?”*, School of International & Public Affairs. An article at: <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/sipa/PUBS/SLANT/SPRING/>

³ JLo: Jenny from the Block. Pop Music CD. Released in 2005.