

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

CENTRAL EUROPEAN VIDEO ART

(from the Czech and Slovak Republics, Poland and Hungary)

JAN 24 – FEB 10, 2008

Guest curated by Viera Levitt

MAIN GALLERY

Fine Arts Center Galleries
University of Rhode Island

JAN 24 – FEB 10, 2008

Please visit the satellite part of
CLOSE ENCOUNTERS
at the Kingston Train Station's
Amtrak Waiting Room

JAN 16 - FEB 10, 2008



EXHIBITION CONTEXT

This special video art exhibition epitomizes the spirit of global inclusiveness valued by our State's own art gallery complex. It is thoughtfully guest-curated by Independent Curator Viera Levitt, a native Slovak who moved to Rhode Island. From 1997-2005 Levitt was director/curator of the contemporary art showcase, Jan Koniarek Gallery, located in the historic town of Trnava (see map). She was the youngest director ever in a public art museum in the Slovak Republic and has been tremendously active as a curator and writer internationally.

Contemporary videos by 5 leading Central European artists selected by Levitt are presented at several monitor stations throughout the Gallery, allowing visitors to process them at their own pace. Taken together, the videos delve into universal human themes of character and conduct that diminish any perceived cultural divide between the USA and Central Europe.

Perhaps particularly resonant with Rhode Islanders will be the "New Europe" persona that Central European countries have attained. Rhode Island has shifted away from older forms of production and has assimilated several waves of immigration. We have become outward looking in having securely joined a now-modernized New England region. Our State's application of and participation in new technologies, along with the assimilation of new immigrant

groups, affects many interrelated systems in society and helps define the shifting socio-economic course of the State. Against this mobile backdrop – circumstances that spawn experimentation and collaborative problem-solving – Rhode Island's kinship with an emergent "New" Central Europe is an interesting and timely matter to ponder. The content of the CLOSE ENCOUNTERS videos, while never strictly documentary, shows people grappling with being in society, whether family, group or even military units.

Presented off-site in the Historic Kingston Train Station's Amtrak Waiting Room is the recent video by Pavel Mrkus called Seagull, with music composed and played by Aziza Sadikova. This "town and gown" initiative, we hope, augurs an ongoing collaboration between the Galleries and the Station, a promising site for viewing contemporary art, up close. With the help of project partners in the Friends of the Historic Train Station and with Amtrak's generous approval, the public space of the Train Station reaches out to communicate with ever-new audiences.

The Galleries are always open to the public without charge and are handicapped accessible. See reverse for Main Gallery hours and map for orientation to the Historic Train Station a mere mile away.

J. Tolnick Champa, Director, Fine Arts Center Galleries

CURATOR'S STATEMENT

After moving to the USA from Slovakia two years ago, it seemed that I was always asked the same questions: Where is Slovakia? Where is Central Europe? What are people there like? What do they think about?

By organizing this show I wanted to answer some of these questions and in the process, make art from Central Europe more familiar to visitors and residents of Rhode Island. In this exhibition I am including artists from the Czech and Slovak Republics, Hungary and Poland. These are countries that have shared similar pasts since the end of WWII: communism, the wave of revolutions at the end of 1980's and an entrance into the European Union in 2004, as democratic countries. Now, these countries are part of the so-called 'New Europe.' In selecting the work for this exhibition, I chose not to show 'popular' or stereotypical, post-communist images. Even though these 'blocks of flats' and 'deadened industrial landscapes' still exists, they are now joined by images that would be quite familiar to those in Western Europe and in the United States.

For Close Encounters in the Main Gallery on the URI campus I selected video works that concentrate on human stories, of vulnerability and fragility, emotions I believe we all share and stories that will hopefully resonate with the American public.

Viera Levitt, Guest Curator

For more information visit

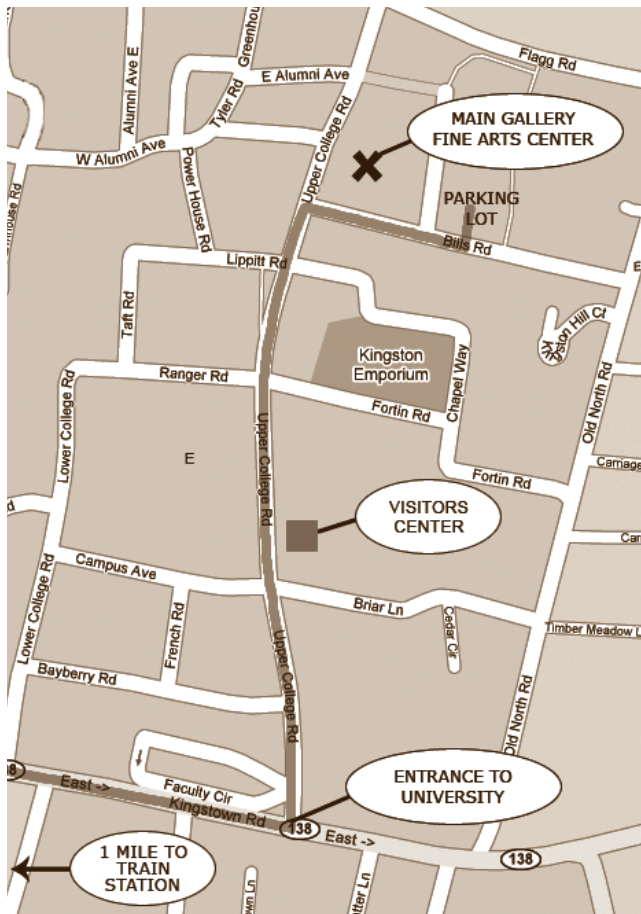
www.uri.edu/artgalleries & www.vieralevitt.org/uri.htm

Special thanks

In New York: Apexart, Czech Center, Hungarian Cultural Institute, Anne Arden McDonald, Polish Institute, and Steven Rand;
in Rhode Island: Department of Communication Studies, URI; Jo-Ann Conklin, David Winton Bell Gallery, Brown University, Courthouse Center for the Arts, West Kingston, Friends of Kingston Station, Kingston.

Fidelity Investments is the Galleries' primary Season Sponsor, 2007/08.

Photo credit: Milena Dopitova: Green Plateaus 1, 2003, videostill © the artist, Courtesy Jiri Svestka Gallery, Prague



Please visit the satellite part of
CLOSE ENCOUNTERS
at the Kingston Train Station's Amtrak Waiting Room

Directions to Kingston Train Station

Turn left out of Bills Rd. Follow Upper College Rd. to traffic light. Turn right out of University onto Kingstown Rd/RI-138 West. Turn right onto Railroad Ave. and follow to Kingston Train Station.

Phone (401) 874-2775

Main Gallery Hours Tues - Fri 12 – 4 pm & Sat - Sun 1– 4 pm

Train Station Hours Open to public during normal service hours.

Join us for a Public Closing Reception with Remarks by the Curator

Main Gallery, Sunday, Feb 10, 2 – 4 pm

This project has been made possible by a grant from **The Rhode Island Foundation**, a charitable community foundation serving the people of Rhode Island.

