

In *Irena Lagator Pejovic: The Society of Unlimited Responsibility. Art as Social Strategy*. 2001-2011. Edited by Christa Steinle, Karin Buol-Wischenau, Neue Galerie Graz am Universalmuseum Joanneum. Published by Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Köln.

## Christa Steinle Editorial

In 2006 artist Irena Lagator from Montenegro spent some weeks as Artist-in-Residence at Neue Galerie Graz. During her stay she created a site-specific installation consisting of coloured threads mounted on the barrel-vaulted ceiling of a ground-floor room at Palais Herberstein.<sup>1)</sup>

The striking aspect of Lagator's works is the fact that we encounter selected spaces, e.g. the church of San Zeno in Pisa, an art pavilion in Montenegro's capital Podgorica, a train station in Bari or a gallery in Belgrade. Correspondingly, the titles of her works consistently contain references to space: *Living Room, Near Universe, An Embrace in a Space, Own Space* ... This group of spatial installation works refers to Irena Lagator's multiple approaches to the problem of space. On the one hand she occupies herself with physical architectural space whilst, on the other hand, she focuses on social space and on space as an individual experience. She emphasises physical space as vector space, i.e. the fact that space is constructed out of the three vectors  $x$   $y$   $z$ . Thus she draws lines through rooms, whether in the form of coloured paper or coloured threads, with which the beholder interacts by tactile and visual means. The beholder navigates through a coloured vector space, experiencing space as an anthropomorphic system.

As a consequence, and based on the experience of physical space as an anthropomorphic system, Irena Lagator derives an anthropomorphic social space that represents a society constituted according to human scale and conditions. Literally meaning "living space", the word "Lebensraum" (*Living Room*, 2006) combines these two categories. Living space consists not only of an architectural space but also of social space. Life in a space always also implies living together. Space becomes inhabitable *only* when it can be shared with others. Living room becomes a metaphor for a special human planet. However, Irena Lagator not only creates an allegorical, figurative symbol of human life in social space, but also knows how to express this problem on the level of abstraction

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<sup>1</sup> The Artist-in-Residence-Programme of Neue Galerie Graz (see [www.neuegalerie-archiv.at/air/index.html](http://www.neuegalerie-archiv.at/air/index.html)) ran from 1993 till 2009, a total of 48 artists took part including Madeleine Berkhemer (NL), Jordan Crandall (USA), Peter Fend (USA), Roza El-Hassan (H), Dominique Figarella (F), Eberhard Havekost (D), Susan Hefuna (D/Egyptian), Jeppe Hein (D), Jan Mancuska (CZ), Walter Niedermayr (I), Míla Preslová (CZ), David Reed (USA), Rivka Rinn (ISR/I/D), Nancy Rubins (USA), Sissi (I) or Rudolf Stingel (USA).

and thus in the language of modernism. Just as space must be subdivided for different cultures, different religions, peoples, nations and languages, being therefore a co-habitat, similarly one living space might contain different spaces of nutrition so that, for instance, fish in a coral reef differ in their variety of shapes and colours. Analogously, Irena Lagator subdivides space into multicoloured vertical surfaces in order to demonstrate the co-existence of many forms of life in one space.

Therefore, in her projects, Irena Lagator playfully switches between real space and the graphical space of books. A book reflects the variety of symbols and signs, a book embodies the non-ethical impetus of seeing the light in the space of experience (*Light in Space*, 2006). Human living space is not reduced to mere physical space but requires the symbolic space of signs. Becoming human anyway only happens in the empire of symbols. And in this empire non-ethical impetus is joined by ethical imperative: the invitation to share not only space but also each other's fate, i.e. the demand to love others and take responsibility for them.

The chain of signifiers in the empire of signs makes each human being an echo of others. This explains the overlying title of Irena Lagator's research-based art projects. Instead of a "Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung – GmbH", meaning Limited Liability Company or, translated more literally, Society of Limited Responsibility, she demands a *Society of Unlimited Responsibility*.<sup>2</sup>

The Neue Galerie Graz would like to thank the artist for her outstanding collaboration in 2006 in the context of her stay in Graz as Artist-in-Residence. We particularly thank Elisabeth Fiedler, who accompanied Irena Lagator's work on site as a curator and commented on it in an essay. Also a warm thank you to all those highly expert authors whose contributions presented different aspects of the work of Irena Lagator so convincingly. We would also like to thank the translators and proofreaders as well as Karin Buol-Wischenau for the revision of the texts.

The great care assigned to planning and implementation took a great deal of time, with the happy consequence of an even more remarkable result. We thank everybody involved for their precision and patience and, in particular, Walther König publishers who once more joined Neue Galerie Graz in taking the risk of opening the gates to publicity for a young and not yet internationally established artist. As always I would like to thank Peter Weibel for his intellectual accompaniment of the project.

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<sup>2</sup> See also the texts by Bazon Brock and Elke Krasny.