

PRESS RELEASE
2 MAY 2011

CALL THE WITNESS, ROMA PAVILION
COLLATERAL EVENT, 54TH INTERNATIONAL ART
EXHIBITION – LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA 2011
1 JUNE–9 OCTOBER 2011, LIVE TESTIMONIES: 1–3 JUNE 2011, 13.00–18.00 HRS
PALAZZO ZORZI, UNESCO VENICE OFFICE, 4930 CASTELLO, VENICE

Open Society Foundations and BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht proudly present the project *Call the Witness*, the Roma Pavilion, which takes place as a Collateral Event in the framework of the 54th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia 2011. A makeshift exhibition evolving over the course of the Venice Biennale preview days through the flux of live “testimonies”—works of art, performances, talks, and conversations by and with artists, thinkers, and politicians—*Call the Witness* considers the situation of the Roma and Roma art as emblematic for the world today, and in solidarity speculates about more hopeful futures.

The project calls on Roma artists to bear witness, through works of art, to their communities’ struggles as they are caught in the paradox of being at once assigned to the edges of mainstream society and at the center of this society’s discriminatory order of control. One needs only to think of recent political events that have specifically targeted the Roma, such as deportations, forcible repatriation, and ethnic registration in many nations in Europe. Recognizing that this very condition is emblematic of the state of the world we all find ourselves in, over the course of the preview days of the Venice Biennale other artists, thinkers, and activists of Roma and non-Roma origin contribute to the accumulation of testimonies (performances, lectures, readings, and dialogues). Works of art, filmed testimonies, and material ephemera are “left behind” in a spatial intervention, itself an interpretation of a proposal by the artist Constant Nieuwenhuys (1920–2005) for a site to accommodate the nomadic Roma community. This constellation forms a makeshift exhibition on view till 9 October 2011, merging with the daily activities and conferences of the host UNESCO Venice Office.

As an extra-national Pavilion in the context of the national representations at the Venice Biennale, *Call the Witness* comes to life through contributions by remarkable artists, thinkers, and activists from various parts of the world: **THOMAS ACTON** (Professor of Romani Studies, United Kingdom); **DANIEL BAKER & PAUL RYAN** (artists, United Kingdom); **MAUD DE BOER-BUQUICCHIO** (Deputy Secretary General, Council of Europe, Strasbourg); **LYNN HUTCHINSON LEE** (artist, Canada) & **HEDINA TAHIROVIĆ SIJERČIĆ** (artist and author, Bosnia and Herzegovina/Germany); **CRISTINELA IONESCU** (journalist and activist, Romania); **MILUTIN JOVANOVIĆ** (film director/producer, Serbia); **FERDINANT KOČI** (artist, United Kingdom); **ROBERT KUSHEN** (Roma rights activist, United States); **KIBA LUMBERG** (artist, Finland); **TOM MCDONOUGH** (art historian, United States); **ROSEANNA T. MCPHEE** (educator and activist, United Kingdom); **SHAMUS MCPHEE** (artist, United Kingdom); **AERMOUT MIK** (artist, The Netherlands); **BORIS ONDRIEČKA** (artist, Slovakia); **TANJA OSTOJIĆ** (artist, Serbia/Germany); **NIHAD NINO PUŠIJA** (artist, Bosnia and Herzegovina/Germany); **SALMAN RUSHDIE** (author, United Kingdom); **MARIKA SCHMIEDT** (artist, Austria); **GEORGE SOROS** (financier and philanthropist, United States); **STALKER/ON** (art and architecture collective, Italy); **ALFRED ULLRICH** (artist, Germany); **MONA VĂTĂMANU** (artist, Romania) & **FLORIN TUDOR** (artist, Romania); **ŽELIMIR ŽILNIK** (film director, Serbia); and others.

All testimonies become available as they evolve during the Venice Biennale preview days, and can be accessed via the project’s digital platform: www.callthewitness.net.

Call the Witness builds upon the legacy of *Paradise Lost*, the First Roma Pavilion (Collateral Event, 52nd Venice Biennale, 2007), which was commissioned by the Open Society Foundations, and recognizes the growing dynamics in discussing and presenting Roma art in relation to the cultural and political urgencies in Europe, not only in regards to its Roma communities, but also in view of the larger issues of the nation and the national, mobility and migration, majority and minority, hospitality and solidarity.

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COLLATERAL EVENT

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WWW.CALLTHEWITNESS.NET

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 Venice Office
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la Biennale di Venezia

**54. Esposizione
Internazionale
d’Arte**
Eventi collaterali



la Biennale di Venezia

54. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte

Eventi collaterali

ORGANIZER: Open Society Foundations (www.soros.org)

PROJECT REALIZATION: BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht, the Netherlands (www.bak-utrecht.nl)

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR: Maria Hlavajova, artistic director of BAK, Utrecht, the Netherlands

COLLABORATORS:

Daniel Baker, artist, theorist, and activist, London, United Kingdom

Tom McDonough, art historian, Binghamton University, Binghamton (NY), United States

Suzana Milevska, theorist and curator, Skopje, Macedonia (initial idea and title *Call the Witness*)

ADVISORS:

Rosi Braidotti, director, Centre for the Humanities, Utrecht University, Utrecht, the Netherlands

Cosmin Costinaş, curator BAK, Utrecht, the Netherlands

Josef Dabernig, artist, Vienna, Austria

Charles Esche, director Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, the Netherlands

Kathrin Rhomberg, curator, Vienna, Austria

PROJECT PARTNERS:

European Commission, Brussels; Council of Europe, Strasbourg; European Cultural Foundation, Amsterdam; Swiss Cultural Programme in the Western Balkans, Sarajevo; Sigrid Rausing Trust, London; HIVOS, The Hague; Decade Trust Fund, Washington, D.C.; and Mondriaan Foundation, Amsterdam.

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