

Reflection

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Is it necessary to establish a Roma museum and if so what should it exhibit?

Zoltán Fejős, ethnographer, director, Museum of Ethnography: Founding a Roma museum in Hungary is an old story. It is an issue that has been on the agenda more or less intensively at least since the political changes of 1989-1990. Roma professionals and public figures have expressed the need for such an institution, with support from museums in Budapest, Szekszárd and Pécs. Nevertheless a museum has not become a cooperative, integrating, primary goal of the Roma local authorities' cultural policies. As regards museum content there have been two approaches so far. The first represents the ideal, a comprehensive, specific 'national museum'. A Roma museum should have a collection covering history, education, ethnography, arts and literature (an archaeological collection is not difficult to outline with a bit of imagination, though one dealing with technology and natural science is another matter). This type of Roma museum would repeat the practice of 19-20th century nation building. The other approach highlights arts as the primary element. In the beginning it also had an ethnic character – "Roma art" came into being with a strong potential for creating identity. As a Hungarian citizen, to the majority and as a museologist I vote for establishing a Roma museum in Hungary.

Ágnes Daróczy, minority researcher, Hungarian Institute for Culture and Art: What is lacking is a credible national Roma arts centre, which could include a museum displaying the stages and achievements of our co-existence, an exhibition hall and an art collection, a theatre and concert hall, a music and folklore collection and a research institute. It could also involve other tasks and services. In Hungary a law on minorities has ensured the right of minorities to express their cultural identity since 1993. Yet in the case of Roma in Hungary the institutional system of cultural autonomy is still not at the disposal of the community to practise this right. Some Roma artists are known from past times. Otto Müller (1884–1930), a member of the expressionist Die Brücke group or Serge Poliakoff (1900–1997), a prominent representative of 20th-century avant-garde, could both be models for Roma artists today. Yet 'Roma art' as a concept has been spoken of in Europe since the first Roma group exhibition in Hungary, which took place in

¹ Debate in MúzeumCafé 24. 2011/4. august

May 1979. The process was specifically facilitated by the art of Tamás Péli who strove programmatically to create Roma art following his graduation from Amsterdam's National Art Academy and his return to Hungary in 1973. He consciously embraced his origins and a large part of his artistic oeuvre constitutes the creation of mythology in Roma culture. Literature was represented by Menyhért Lakatos and József Choli Daróczi, who translated both foreign and Hungarian literature into Romany. "How many could there be in Hungary who were enraptured by the arts and encouraged to create," I used to ask myself as a community cultural organiser. In Hungary Roma art came into being in May 1979. Thirty-two years have gone by since then. It is time we were noticed again.

László Csorba, historian, director of the Hungarian National Museum: Of course a National Roma Museum is needed. It records memories in words and objects and that's how it transmits them to its new members. Active memory continuously maintains words (in the beginning verbally) and objects are preserved by a museum. Our Roma compatriots form a strong community, thus it is natural that they need a museum of their own. It is unnecessary to specify what such an institution could collect because it could collect everything that can be important from the aspect of learning about the past of the Roma, that illuminates their specific destiny, social relations and rich and diverse culture. Such a museum would be as varied as a national museum – from which, if there is demand, different Roma 'specialised museums' could be established. Perhaps a modern art gallery could be the first and its collection should perhaps be gathered, researched and exhibited separately from the beginning.

Tímea Junghaus, art historian, independent art curator: Hungary has so far not provided the Roma minority with the opportunity to represent itself. It does not recognise their equal opportunities concerning politics and culture. Due to structural, institutional and infrastructural reasons, Roma art could not be represented in its diversity in Hungary; hence it has been forced to show itself in a one-dimensional way, in line with what the majority think Roma art is like. The way out of this conceptual ghetto is not studying the history of naive art in Hungary nor is it the iconographic analysis of Roma works, neither is it the artistic striving of the Roma cultural movement to enter the mainstream of Hungarian art, but it does involve contemporary Roma culture which has a direct connection with current identity policies, where every meaning is contextual. It would not only be valuable for the Roma community but represent a key to resolving ethnic conflicts based on cultural differences.