

***Nonument* – a Research-Based, Curatorial and Performative Approach to Controversial Memorabilia of the Recent Past**

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Nonument is a neologism, a hybrid word that means a monument that has lost or changed its original meaning or value as a result of political, economic and cultural changes. From a place of honour and praise in the past, the *nonument* turns into an abandoned object, sinking into ruin and oblivion. Similar examples from Eastern and Central Europe are presented on the online platform www.nonument.org, which collects a freely accessible and constantly updated archive. It also includes a database of scholarly publications, journalistic texts, excerpts from historically significant documents, visual materials, drawings, photographs, and more.

On 13 September 2019, a thematic exhibition entitled *Nonument* opened at the Museum of Humor and Satire in Gabrovo. Special attention was paid to the monument on Mount Buzludzha, conceived as the House of the Bulgarian Communist Party, also referred to as the BKP, whose architectural plan was created by a team led by Architect Georgi Stoilov. A day later, on 14 September, an unusual performance took place around the Buzludzha Monument, organized by the group LIGNA (Germany) and Stefan A. Shterev. The event, a co-production of the Museum of Humor and the Informburo Association, involving the audience as a performer, was accompanied by the music of Emilian Gatsov – “Elbi”.

The exhibition includes documentary materials, photographs and films from the design to the closing of the BKP Memorial House. Among the exhibits are also cartoons and jokes with familiar metaphors and political events illustrating the processes of looting and the ruin of the monument. In the exhibition hall, besides the curatorial narrative, the public can also study the complete research material the exhibition is based on, including all archival source documents.

The *Nonument* performance is an audio piece that is played by the audience itself during a walk around the monument. Participants “experience” and rethink architecture and history while being instructed to perform common, everyday gestures. In their discretion, they resemble the protest performances in Prague from 1976 by Czech conceptual artist Jiri Kovanda or the “standing man” in Gezi Park in Istanbul from 2013 by choreographer Erdem Gündüz.

The *Nonument* exhibition and performance are realized within the framework of a partnership project supported by the Creative Europe Program of the European Commission. The leading organizations in the project are M.A.P.S. (Mapping and Archiving Public Spaces) and MoTA (Museum of Transitory Art). MoTA is the brainchild of the creative collective Neja Tomšić and Martin Baraga, who are doing a research project on the McKeldin Fountain in Baltimore, USA, which turns out to be the number one *nonument* in



Fig. 1 Buzludzha made of chocolate, a souvenir from the Museum of Humor and Satire, created within the framework of the Nonument project

the history of our project. The fountain was eventually destroyed, despite the advocacy of local activists. All that remains of it are the memories, the video recordings, the documentation of the protests, and the 3D model made by Tomšić and Baraga, in which one can now walk virtually.

In 2016 MoTA approached the Museum of Humor in Gabrovo with a proposal to jointly develop a project aimed at mapping such controversial, abandoned, and forgotten monuments, one in which Buzludzha would be an object with a special focus, a case study. On the one hand, Buzludzha is perfectly visible from almost every point in Gabrovo, and on the other hand, the partners consider that we have become too serious in the polarized conversation about these ideological *nonuments*. A little humor is always helpful in dealing with the traumas of history.

The activities in the project are divided into four groups – research, documentation and archiving, production, and presentation.

First of all, the researcher with whom the Museum works on the project, Ani Ivanova, selected and presented 20 objects to be included in the www.nonument.org platform.

After that, an international team led by the Austrian partner and including specialists from the Cyprus Institute of Science carried out laser and photogrammetric surveying of Buzludzha, resulting in a 3D point cloud-based model that represents the Memorial House of BKP as it was captured and archived by the machines in the beginning of April 2019.

After that, detailed documentary research was carried out on Buzludzha’s “saucer” – both in archives and through in-



Fig. 2 *The Nonument* performance is a co-production of the Museum of Humor and Satire and the Informburo Association

interviews with various people. As a result of the research and of the list of *nonuments*, the exhibition *Nonument* came into being and was presented at the Museum until the end of January 2020. And last, but by no means least, all this research activity is further complemented by another study, this time with the means of art – this is the performance *Nonument* by the group LIGNA (Germany), Stefan A. Shterev and with the music of Emilian Gatsov – “Elbi”. It is a dramatic text, recorded as a radio play and performed up on the mountain top, in front of the “saucer”. The format is characteristic of the LIGNA group, who calls it “radio ballet”. Each of the participants listens alone, through headphones, at the same time yet to different instructions, so that a group choreography of movements and gestures arises, which the participants perform according to the instructions they hear. It is a very special and very strong experience – both collective and extremely personal.

The best way to deal with the past is to destroy the myths it is shrouded in. *Nonument* achieves this in a two-fold way: first of all, by clarifying and presenting the facts through the study and the exhibition, and second, through the extremely powerful impact of art. Only in this way can we free ourselves from the ghosts of past ideologies.

NONUMENT is part of the M.A.P.S. project (Mapping & Archiving Public Spaces) and is implemented in partnership between the Museum of Humor and Satire, Association Informburo, MoTA (Slovenia), WHMEDIA (Austria), Tačka komunikacije (Serbia), Center for Central European Architecture (Czech Republic), ArtOS Foundation (Cyprus), and with the support of the Creative Europe program, the National Culture Fund and the assistance of the Stara Zagora District Administration.

Photographs of the performance can be downloaded here:
<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1hwrzbZ-10NW-tOVq-XHj1O9QfKY1oaHyI?usp=sharing>

Photographs of the exhibition can be downloaded here:
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1bHO9y_mark-TIZpsl6yHclnLijajOrD4j?usp=sharing
 All photographs by Rosina Pencheva

Credits

Figs. 1 and 2: photos by Rosina Pencheva