

The non-implemented vision “Karosta - Culture Port”

Santa Vaļivahina (Mazika), Liepāja University, Art Research Laboratory

Abstract. Founded in 2000, “K@2” was one of the first independent cultural centers in Latvia which after regaining of independence in the second half of the 90s, in the search of an alternative expression of space, was begun to be established by the new artists. Not intentionally but logically these phenomena are included in the innovative context of the institutionalism, new in the cultural space of Latvia but applied since the 70s of the 20th century.

For several years, there worked two artists who invited their colleagues both from Latvia and foreign countries to create exhibitions, run cinema lectures, implement workshops for the youth of Liepāja Karosta and Liepāja in the sound art, photo, video, and other areas. During their operation period, “K@2” filled the niche between the artists, residents, and politicians, as well as worked in the areas which at that time were not even topical – the open access Internet, the book, video, and audio record library and the reading room, as well as the representation of the municipality in the “housing segregations” of the city, free courses of the Latvian language, games room for children, etc..

But the constant “survival conditions” denied a long existence of the center, leading to the closure at the time when its legitimacy was recognized at the national level. But the ideas nursed at Karosta still continue to live and thrive.

Key words: contemporary art, new institutionalism

Introduction

Nowadays, the cultural institutions live in a “gap” between the awareness of the gallery and private space. Here, you can no longer talk about the “contemporary art” as something elitist. Art provokes and creates preconditions for the encounter between artists, local residents, politicians, etc.. Since the 90s of the 20th century, the new cultural organizations were one of the first which not only talked about but in their operation also implemented the strategy of art, education, information exchange, and accessibility among not only the stakeholders and representatives of subcultures but also among national minorities, emphasizing the originality and value of each culture.

One of such institutions was “Cultural and Information Center K@2” (“K @ 2”, 2000–2008) at Liepāja Karosta (Fig. 1). The center was founded in the middle of the former military area when from a closed zone Karosta became the urban social ghetto district, inhabited mainly by non-citizens and socially disadvantaged families but tourists, driving through it by buses, feared to stop and get out and looked at local people and their environment as to something exotic, however dangerous for a closer communication.

The purpose of “K@2” was to promote positive changes in the society with the help of art, culture, education, integration, and cooperation, creating an alternative to the situation that existed in this location before.

The article aims to look at some “K@2” activities and ideas in the context of the social development of Karosta linked to the center's

activities in the field of visual art where the secular art gallery “K. Māksla?” has been operating the longest. In parallel, an issue will be raised on the role of art in the *rehumanization* of the region's social environment and the alternative strategies which it offers. Therefore, within the framework of this article, separate exhibitions in the gallery looking for this strategy are mentioned but given the amount of the material, in this direction, the study has yet to be continued.

1. The searches of an Alternative form and content in Latvia in the 90s of the 20th century and “K2”

The major political changes that have taken place over the Baltic States in the last two decades have also affected art and its manifestations. Alongside, the traditional institutions of art, the young artists create independent alternative premises to be able to work in places with which they want to be linked, without going to the already established centers and not subject to the dictates of the market.

At the national level, outside the focus and attention of the official institutions, for a long time, there have been a string of regional and social structures, practicing a peculiar policy of isolationism. This vacuum is filled with self-organizing creative units, characterized by an inter-disciplinarity, amorphous structure, and flexibility. Often, such own-initiative participants do not identify themselves as artists, perceiving their activities as an organic component of such a lifestyle and freely drift between music, literature, and visual

culture. The examples include the text group *Orbīta*, the RIXC Center for New Media Culture, the Latvian New Theater Institute, etc..

These organizations deal with art and cultural issues, therefore they may be involved in other independent political or social activities. Such groups of artists have often become a springboard of art creating. There, artists have developed alternative strategies to deal with a variety of issues related to building institutionalism to test the relations and interactions of art and the society as well as to reflect on the role of art in relation to globalization, etc..

It is possible that the quest for legitimacy distinguishes this movement from the “underground” culture of the mid 20th century, from extreme alternativism or even the desire to run a marginal position. Strengthening of the legal status is necessary not only to raise funds which is one of the priorities but just as important is to build a formal representation. As demonstrated by practice and the example of “K@2”, then by an active involvement of the organizations of the new institutionalism in the implementation of the purpose of the cultural policy, the national legislation may also be affected in the interests of the non-governmental sector.

The scholar Nina Mentmane sees an interesting analogy of the new institutionalism within these organizations that have been established in the 90s of the 20th century. Assuming that in relation to the European Center, Latvia has reached separate phenomena and trends with some lagging behind - the said can also be applied to “K@2”. The scholar concludes that the purpose of the “institutions that were established or restructured in the 1990s, was not to establish an independent working or belief pattern. In the creation of their image, the individual or the independent curator, who largely assumed responsibility for their profile, was very important. If the curator changes, the organization itself also changes” [1]. In this context, the role of the personality is actually accentuated rather than the environment in the development of the specific processes. Similarly, “K@2” was based on personalities “from the outside” who were creatively inspired by the environment of Karosta.

“K@2” as any non-governmental organization attracting financial resources on the basis of implementation of projects, operated in the non-profit status [2]. In addition to the independence guaranteed by this status and the inevitable financial insecurity, the liberty of contents came. It was one of the main reasons why “K@2” and the leaders of similar organizations voluntarily accepted and still accept this lifestyle, creating an alternative to the mass culture.

In the middle of the 80s of the 20th century, the sociologist Paul DiMaggio wrote that “the awareness of the cultural differences and mass entertainment appeared only with the establishment of non-profit organizations” [3]. The inclusion of certain art forms in these organizations did not request the indulgence to the market demand and preconditions. This explains the difference between the methods of profit and non-profit activities and why in the field of the Western culture in the spheres of creation and distribution, the non-profit status is lately becoming increasingly common. The scholar stresses that not so much the economic indicators as the diversity of the attracted audience suggests of the significance of the institution.

Within the new institutionalism, a variety of strategies, positions, and objectives encouraged by the institutional critique are tried and tested. The denial of populism is one of the ideas and one of the innovative positions. Instead, experts from different disciplines, organizations, including cultural organizations, call to think about the audience as a heterogeneous entity, its activities focusing not on a wide but as different audience as possible. It was concluded by the sociologist Paul DiMaggio already in 1986 when writing that “only lately the leaders of institutions have begun to seek an audience of social diversity, not so much for profit” [3]. In turn, the cultural theorist Nina Mentmane is absolutely convinced that “it is not the number of visitors but their diversity that is important” [4].

The most common concern for “diversity” is placed under the responsibility of the management of organizations, by it understanding different types of information but the nature of the event itself and the point of reference of the main qualitative indicators, namely, pursuing the increase in the number of visitors, remain the same. This is also determined by the previous tradition (informal rules), from which the contemporary art organizations cannot refuse so quickly. Nina Mentmane calls for being careful of the quest for a greater public attraction as it makes one choose the average denominator, and, thus, to often lower quality of the project. Instead, the diversity of the implemented events is more significant than the increase in the number of visitors.

2. The establishment of the studio “Lokomotīve” and cultural and information center “K @ 2”

In the 90s, the new media also became an important material for activists working in the film sector since with the collapse of the great film industry, several small film studios were established, (“Deviņi”, “Kaupo”, “Juris Podnieks Studio”), including “Lokomotīve” (1995) where Roberts Vinovskis, Carl Bjorshmark worked, but from 1997 – Kristīne Briede as well.



Fig. 1. K@2 first building in Katedrales street 2 (courtyard facade) [Source: from K2 personal archive]



Fig. 2. Work from group exhibition “Korupcija” in Art gallery K. Māksla, 2002 [Source: from K2 personal archive]



Fig. 3. “Pīļu dīķis” from A.Bules exhibition “Kāpēc es?“, in Art gallery K. Māksla, 2003 [Source: from K2 personal archive]



Fig. 4. “Lapšas istaba” from A.Bules exhibition “Kāpēc es?“, in Art gallery K. Māksla, 2003 [Source: from K2 personal archive]

In 1997, creating a cycle of documentary films on Latvian border towns, the directors of the documentary film “Borderland – footprints on the borders” – Kristīne Briede and Carl Bjorshmark came to Karosta. In turn, in the summer of 2000 in Karosta, the project “Subjective/Objective” [5] lasted for three months, organized by Kristīne Briede and the Swedish artist Tove Torbjörnsson with the motto “Look at yourself through foreign, untamed eyes”. Within this project, the local children and young people had the opportunity to participate in the Latvian and foreign cinema artists’ workshops “Camera Obscura”, “Environment and Sound”, “Analog/ Digital” and others, including drawing, modeling, animation, and singing workshops. At the Officers' House, the children’s summer camp “Fabric. Canvas. Screen” was organized, led by the students of the Stockholm Royal Academy of Arts. Children and young people took part with great enthusiasm in the workshops, therefore, with this project a tradition was established that artists who come to work in Karosta in residence, devote some of their time to classes with children.

The project ended with an exhibition which exhibited photographs, objects, video, and sound installations and which was then housed in a five-story uninhabited building at Ģenerāļa Baloža ielā 1. One of its walls (300 m²) was coated with a screen fabric woven at the factory “Lauma” and stitched by the inhabitants of Karosta, on which films previously footaged at Karosta were projected through a number of antique projectors, where artists and people of Karosta expressed their views on the local reality. The exhibition was opened parallel to the ambitious event “Tranzit Zero”, dedicated to the documentary films which was attended by film producers, directors, and other film-related professionals from all over the world.

For the project “Tranzit Zero”, the creative group “Lokomotīve” won the Latvian Artists Union’s 2000 “Year Award“, recognizing it the most successful project in one of the regions of Latvia which was welcome as a successful example of the public art process within which it was managed to activate and involve the local community in collaborating on the project.

After the projects, implemented in August 2000, Kristīne and Calle decided to stay at Karosta to further not only “use” the environment for their creative work but to “invest” the creative ideas back in it. The “Cultural and Information Center K@2” was created - the cultural infrastructure which actively cooperated with other similar centers and creative personalities in Latvia and abroad. The situation is reflected by the fact that not even once in the next years of the existence of “K@2”, various satellite events were held there within the framework

of the projects, organized by the RIXC Center for New Media Culture, the events organized by the Arts Office "Open" (the workshop "Communes after Communism" in 2004, within the framework of the interdisciplinary, international arts, and culture project "re_public art) of the "Latvian Center for Contemporary Art", exhibitions, cinema lessons, and other developments, the initiative of which came from the independent institutions. The lure of the peculiar environment of Karosta (not to say exotic) and relatively cheap costs contributed to it.

The public organization "Cultural and Information Center K2" was officially established on December 07, 2000, by 17 private persons united in a common accord. The organization's objectives were defined "to create the center for culture, education, information, and cooperation, for the existing situation to create alternative conditions at Karosta, to transform the center into a place of international importance for the exchange of culture and information to promote a comprehensive development of Karosta" [6]. Later, on May 24, 2005, due to changes in legislation, it was required to reregister the public organization as a union. In this document, the objectives of "K@2" already from a local instance are rerouted to global one as one of the objectives of the future "to encourage a comprehensive development of the city of Liepāja, the Republic of Latvia, and other European countries" [7]. It was also noticed and positively assessed by the local press. Trying to dispel the stereotypical perception of Karosta as a "malignant boil" on Liepāja, at that time, the journalist Indra Imbovica writing about the cultural life in Liepāja concludes, "In this desolate region seemingly left by all the good spirits, neither the good intentions of bosses nor money but two "crazy" freelancer artists, so to say, aliens from the sidelines, came, saw, and set to motion this "inert", "apathic wheel", the alien matter of Liepāja called Karosta" [8].

As the objective of their operation, the leaders of the Cultural and Information Center "K@2" considered the creation of an alternative environment to the existing one," We are not trying to impose anything on anyone, but to offer, to show that there is another alternative that it is possible that one may think differently. Currently, we offer information to citizens of Karosta what here comes in a natural way, during the visit of people from different parts of the world. This way we strive to present some options" [9]. A question always remains open how willing the inhabitants of Karosta and the city of Liepāja are to accept this choice themselves.

In an interview shortly after the founding of the center, Kristīne Briede said, "Our original objective was to create life in these ruins with the aid of culture. But soon we realized that this environment

in terms of the social responsibility is not yet ready. Examples include the fact that we are constantly robbed. This is the main reason why up to this moment "K@2" has not become such as we have wanted it to be created. It would be good if young people come with their own initiatives. I hope we'll succeed in getting people of Karosta involved and become a socially active part of the society" [10].

Also, we were faced with the fact that the continued unequal movement of information related to the developments in culture, in the periphery (this is not only about Karosta) created a large gap in the understanding of the contemporary art, even in several generations. If since the Art Days 1984, the citizens of Riga are gradually being "domesticated" to the contemporary art, then in the periphery this "domestication" has to be started from the initial positions in a number of places, doing so not because it would be vitally necessary for the survival but to get to know the cultural diversity. Kristīne also admitted that "a large part of those things that we do are unusual in this environment. Therefore, we have "to raise" our own audience, a different generation. The audience which is now in Andrejsala is "raised" within twenty years, thanks to "Kinogalerija" and the Cinema Festival "Arsenāls". So far, nothing of the like has happened in Liepāja. Hence, the contemporary culture is alien to the general public" [11].

3. "K@2" open space - the secular art gallery "K. Māksla?"

In the context of the new institutionalism, the space or the "open space" concept gets more and more important. Space limits become more labile, harder to fix, and defined. Trying not to accept the consumer society's rules of the game, since the 90s, the contemporary art institutions sought a way out in the new concept of the public space which offered a democratic space for the diversity of the creative activity, contributed to the application of different models of collaboration to allow experimenting with interactions between different disciplines, stimulate teamwork, and try to involve viewers in their activities. The space of the creative expression within the new institutionalism should not be understood to include the local or a narrow spatial sense. Quite often, electronic resources (the Internet), printed matter, audio, and video recordings, and other media less frequently used in the sphere of art become the space for the creative expression and communication which have now become an integral part of the cultural institutions. Within the framework of the new institutionalism, "space" becomes a communication environment, regardless what physical or virtual substance it takes.

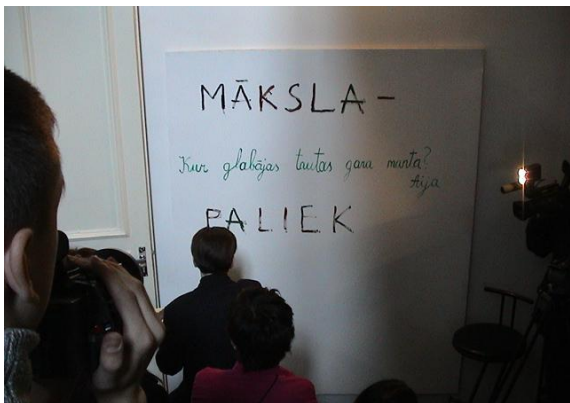


Fig. 5. Aijas Zariņas and Einara Repšes opening exhibition, in Art gallery “K. Māksla?”, 2004
[Source: from K2 personal archive]



Fig. 6. Exhibition “Nevainīguma prezumpcija” postcard, in Art gallery “K. Māksla?”, 2005
[Source: from K2 personal archive]



Fig. 7. Mushrooms growing process in project “LabiChampi” in Art gallery “K. Māksla?”, 2007
[Source: from K2 personal archive]

Hence, for a long time, the art institution is not only a place to exhibit or store works of art. It is an active part of the creative process [12]. With such beliefs, “K@2” was created and worked. In the practice of the Cultural and Information Center “K@2”, all of the above aspects of space were essential. It is evidenced by the referenced below structures of the organization which have not arisen as a result of a long or targeted planning but arisen spontaneously, following the need encouraged by the idea.

In total, it is possible to record eleven projects which at different times and with different intensity and duration were implemented within the framework of “K@2”: the creative children's room, the Latvian language courses (Katedrāles iela 2, since 2001), the secular art gallery “K. Māksla?” (Atmodas bulvāris 6, from 2001), and the adjacent to it “Skatītava – Lasītava” (since 2004, a publicly available book and video storage place), “Dzejnieku namiņš” (Studentu rotas 3, since 2004, a meeting place of the new literaries), “Kinoosta” (Atmodas bulvāris 6a, since 2003, for the cinema and cinema lessons) and “Klubene” (Ģenerāļa Dankera iela 1, from 2003, with theatrical, circus performances, etc., concerts, festivals, and festivities), the analytical culture edition “K. Kultūra” (since 2004), “Kandidātes zāle” (since 2005, a meeting room for potential deputies and people), artists' residences and workshops. With the time, “K@2” also began to domesticate the so-called “Gaismas māja” (Cēsu rotas ielā 2) (Fig. 10) which until then had consisted only of the external facade for several years – without a roof, ceiling, windows, etc.. It was meant to be an exhibition center which remained at the stage of a project.

From 2000, “K@2” regularly organized cultural projects of the national and international scale – photo and video workshops (“Fotovirtuve”, 2001), workshops (“Communes after Communism”, 2004; “Photo Culture”, 2005), exhibitions were held in the gallery (“Presumption of Innocence”, 2004), a press edition was issued and publications were placed on the Internet.

In the gallery name, “secular” meant to timely, effectively, quickly respond to events while they were topical. As claimed by the authors of the idea of the gallery, they were not so much interested in contemporary as in temporary, transient processes and their reflection, [13] in addition, still with a question mark, asking whether what was being exposed in the gallery was really art.

The gallery became a public stage from which it was possible to speak through the language of art. It hadn't a strict time limit of holding the exhibitions or plans drawn up several years before. These open,

flexible limits allowed to talk about topical, often allowing to implement a spontaneous but a crucial idea. Therefore, the curators of the gallery paid attention not to art as a complete result but emphasized the importance of art as a process. Therefore, “secular” exhibitions were held there almost all the time, one replacing the other, often bringing together people of different ethnic origin and of various social layers. The whole time of existence of the gallery, it was open every day from 14:00 till 19:00. It became the first house in Karosta where the first-floor windows were without bars.

In a total of 6 years, around 65 exhibitions were arranged. Most often they were expositions where their creative experiments allowed themselves to sign up more than one new artist, art school, and university students, curators, researchers, etc.. Mushrooms were grown in the gallery (“Good Champi”, 2007), visitors were confused by the graffiti artists’ (“Wan Dog is dead, 2006) and documentary photos of the Fridrihshof Commune (“Commune after Communism”, 2005). The LAA sculptors have repeatedly exhibited their works here (“Čuguns Jāņi” in 2004 and 2005), also painters (“U25”, 2007) and photo plein-air (“ZZZ”, 2007) participants, LAA Department of Painting and Graphics alumni - the new artists (Laura Šulca, Kārlis Vītols, Anda Lāce, Laura Feldberga, etc.), artists who only with the time have got national and international assessment in the field of the visual art (sound artist JVLAM Master Degree graduate Voldemārs Johansons, LAA Design Department Master Degree graduate Kristaps Grundšteins) and naivists (Modris Sapuns, Olga Doreska, etc.), sound artists (Derek Holcer and Sara Kolster (NL) “bzzzzzzzz (0aaa0090z988z0zz100100 * (x) * (8901111010110’ 2003), etc., evaluated the opportunity provided by this place to experiment. Many new curators have signed up for their first parkstics “school” here, starting to understand and try different strategies in organizing exhibitions (from the new media to the naive art, from painting to installation) and gained the skills of teamwork in the gallery. Each time, the gallery space was adjusted to the needs of the exhibitions – they were repeatedly recolored, glued with the wallpaper, water canals were fitted in them, heavy glass aquariums were hooked, sand, sawdust – heaped and bricks were placed on the floor, etc. – and much more that not everywhere could be dared to do.

Another finding of the gallery was the fact that it was open every day and enthusiasm-full guides regularly stayed there. From the first day of work, in the gallery worked the gallerist Ludmila Antoņenko, who by then, along with the activist of Karaosta Brigita Maksimova was one of the most energetic picketers of the city.

In addition, thanks to the location of the gallery, every day it was visited by the local children after school who gradually “absorbed” art there, starting in the way of having warm tea.

The secular art gallery “K. Māksla?” was opened on September 01, 2002, with a group exhibition “Corruption” (Fig. 2) (Kristīne Briede, Agnese Bule, etc., in total, 16 authors, including citizens of Karosta and foreign visiting artists). The exhibition was arranged in the context of the Saeima pre-election scene.

The first exhibition was soon followed by the other two parts of the trilogy “Eldorado” and “Conscience” (curators Kristīne Briede and Carl Bjorshmark) that, when assessing the targeted messianism of ‘K@2’ at Liepāja Karosta, in 2002, became the Latvian Artists’ Union of the Year Award winners, as a professionally compellingly addressed project in one of the municipalities of Latvia.

The ironical exhibition “Eldorado” was supplemented by milk rivers and the shores of kisiele made by the cook Inta Leimante working in the cafe “K@2”. Among other objects, it exposed porridge gates and a fir-tree with voblas “Vobļin”. But with the pseudonym Timmy Snip, the artist Kristaps Ģelzis took part in the exhibition.

In the exhibition “Conscience”, jointly arranged by the creative team of the “K@2”, a number of installations were exposed. One of them consisted of the composition of Maksims Borisovs (*String*, also Max), a young man from Karosta - an improvisation with manipulated objects and x-rays by Carls Bjorshmark “Hello, oldy!” and “Farewell, the new one!”. The second installation included improvised noise “machines” and the Soviet-time synthesizers. At its creation, in the collaboration worked Aleksejs Emsis, Aleksandrs Ganza, and Romāns (Well No. 11), young men from Karosta but Maksis helped with the keyboard instruments and with vocals and noise Handjah. The works were implemented in collaboration with the video artist Sara Kolster (NL) and the sound artist Derek Holcer (USA, NL). In this exhibition, Sara Kolster exposed a photo series of Šķēde Dunes but the sculptor Kārlis Alainis – an unexploded shell which he found on the beach in Karosta and placed in a fixture cage, by this addressing conscience of the organizers of the exhibition who put in danger visitors of the exhibition.

As one of the most brilliant of the projects of 2003 can be mentioned the personal exhibition trilogy of the artist Agnese Bule “Kāpēc ES?”. The first of them was “The Latvians before?”. The exhibition was deliberately held before taking



Fig. 8. Projection to “Gaismas mājas” in project “LabiChampi” ietvaros, in Art gallery “K. Māksla?”, 2007
[Source: from K2 personal archive]



Fig. 9. Voldemāra Johansona exhibition “Gaisa straumes. Aero Torrent” in Art gallery “K. Māksla?”, 2007
[Source: from K2 personal archive]

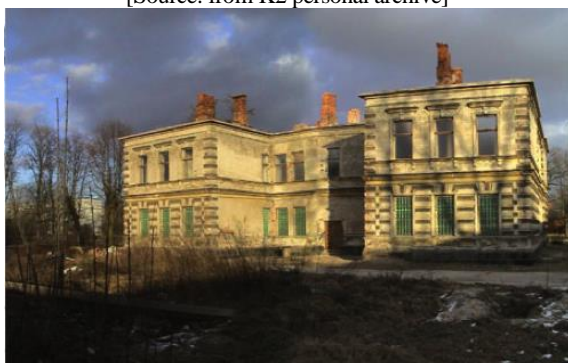


Fig. 10. “Gaismas māja” in Česu Rotas street 2
[Source: from K2 personal archive]



Fig. 11. The proposed exhibition centre project in Česu Rotas street 2 [Source: from K2 personal archive]

the decision on September 20, 2003, when the citizens of Latvia participated in the referendum on Latvia's EU membership. The exhibition compiled and ironically interpreted the artist's research and knowledge about the Latvian vision of the world, the Latvian posture, and the special place of Latvians in the world space. A. Bule had accumulated these insights in the previous ten years. It was followed by the exhibition “Latvians blow little ducks” about the campaign of codswallop (Fig. 3) and “Kāpēc ES” with the pasta room” (Fig. 4), etc., fine irony permeated works. For the exhibitions, Agnese Bule was nominated for the Annual Awards of the Latvian Hunters' Association nominations for “A significant personal exhibition in one of the galleries of Latvia in 2003”. But Kristīne Briede, Calle Borsmark, Agnese Bule, the gallery “K.Māksla?” – for the project “Kāpēc ES?”, and the exhibition “Latvians blowing little ducks” got a nomination as a professionally convincing addressed project in one of the municipalities of Latvia.

In 2004, the widest publicity for the media buzz garnered in the gallery and in “Skatītava - Lasītava” exposed a double exhibition of the painter Aija Zariņa and already the former Prime Minister Einars Repše (curator A. Druvaskalne-Urdze). The central painting of the exposition of Aija Zariņa “Conversations on Art” was a painting with the crucified ex-minister but Einars Repše in his first public exhibition “Unfinished Studies” exposed nudes, landscapes, and still-life painted under the guidance of N. Naumovs (LAA). Originally, the double exhibition was intended as a communication but the result was a confrontation. But one of the climax moments of the opening became the question asked by A. Zariņa “Where does the national sentiment is kept?” and the proof of E. Repše “Art remains in memories” (Fig. 5).

In the same year, Karosta Gallery was the first that ten years after the death of Jānis Viņķelis exposed the collection of the great artist “Guards and Riflemen”. Once, the Liepāja Museum had refused to do so. Assessing the originality of the artist in the context of art in Latvia, which also was underlined by the monograph issued by the art scientist Inga Šteimane, after the exhibition, a large part of the collection was stored at the Latvian Museum of Contemporary Art. After the exhibition of paintings of Jānis Viņķelis, the exhibition “Salon” was held by the Karosta photographer Vasiļijs Borjajevs in the same gallery which documented the people of their time at Karosta but a short time later, in the gallery the photographer's works of the late sixties were also exposed there, depicting a great social and anthropological material on the daily life of the marine city.

Watching how with Latvia's accession to the European Union, it arrived at Karaosta, in 2005, the project "Eurowatchers" was developed as Kristīne Briede's, "RIXC", "K@2" Media Lab, Karosta's children, their parents, and visiting artists joint venture – "European celebration". The idea of the project and the name arose as an analogy with birdwatchers who observe birds, sitting lying in wait, and as a fixation of observations creates popular science stories. Artists, journalists, and tourists, etc., going to watch, fixate, and get to know the new Europe, were counter-watched, counter-interviewed, and documented by the local Eurowatchers on the go.

Not always, the secular should be a loud and topical event at the moment. It can also involve lingering issues not addressed as necessary as in the case with the documentary exhibition "Presumption of Innocence" (Fig. 6). For the first time, with the help of documents and the film, the exhibition allowed a wider audience to get to know Herberts Cukurs, the first aviator of the Latvian free state and later for the crime of genocide accused and murdered in South America. Calle and Kristīne, collecting and studying the materials, went to Brazil to study what until then was kept in the archives of the aviator's family and in Latvia was not known. As a result, the exposition does not accuse, not vindicate, it only shows that there are too many unanswered facts to declare any guilty as the "Presumption of Innocence" provides that a person is not considered to be guilty if the court has not recognized him as such. These facts, the filmed interviews, copies of documents, and letters were passed to the Public Prosecutor's Office for further investigation but so far the case has also remained unfinished.

The gallery also had an important role in the creative work of artists for whom it often became the first public communication with the viewer. For instance, the personal exhibition "Zhuangzi and Butterfly" (2004, curator Aija Druvaskalne – Urdze) of the philosopher and cultural historian, naivist Olga Dorenska was noticed at the exhibition of 2003 "Autumn. Private Space" (curator Ieva Kalniņa).

But in March 2007, introducing the main event of the year – the International Festival of Mushrooms "LabiChampi" (June 01-03), at the gallery, the artist and architect group "EXYZ" exposed bags with mycelium and began to grow mushrooms (Fig. 7). This process could be watched on the Internet with a network camera. By the time, the exposition transformed and changed – grew. The idea of the fungi dates back to 2005 when, despite the freezing temperatures in February, the architect Nicolas (*Nicolas Henninger*, FR) arrived at Karosta and observed a peculiar natural phenomenon here – a road highlighted by the heating main in the snow-

capped landscape. In order not to lose this valuable energy, he got an idea that by building small greenhouses above the heating mains, the locals could grow mushrooms in them and pick them, which is also less common but a matter-of-course cultural tradition for us. Once, JSC "Liepājas Siltums" had not given such permission but the germ of the idea had already been delivered. Next, it transformed into the study of mushroom cultivation, offering the uninhabited houses at Karosta to adapt to the urban mushroom cultivation in the ambitious "Mushroom Roof" above "Light House" and at the "Mushroom Festival" (Fig. 8).

In December 2007, the artist Voldemārs Johansons just returned from studying at the Institute of Sonology of the Hague – at that time a rising talent who made his latest work at the gallery – the aesthetically refined but technically and research-intensive – "Air Currents. Aero Torrent" (Fig. 9) (which was announced a nominee for 2009 Swedbank Art Award). At the turn of 2008/09, Voldemārs Johansons was the last artist who with the work "Rainbow" closed the activities of the gallery.

Whether it is an exhibition of traditionally exposed paintings or caring for the growing culture, "screaming" (the exhibition of Aija Zariņa "Conversations on Art" and the exhibition of Einars Repše "Unfinished Studies"), or on the contrary - contemplative, interpreting of the environment of Karosta (Laura Feldberga "Inner Vision"), almost every exhibition of the secular art gallery "K. Māksla?" reflected its unified concept, manifested in a variety of artistic representations.

Epilog

One of the last, largest, and most ambitious projects of "K@2" was to create "Campus Karosta" ("Karosta - Culture Port", 2008) – an art education center, opposite the military center (Fig. 11). It also raises the idea of creating the academic educational program "New Media Art" in the Liepāja University (until 2007-Liepāja Academy of Pedagogy) which grew on the material, technical, and human resources of "K@2". The philosophy and all of the structure of the new education program was also based on the checked for years' independent cultural initiatives [14] and the used cooperation and flexibility policy.

Without the mentioned program, "K@2" experience directly and indirectly served as inspiration for the future cultural and political activities. Only after liquidation of "K @ 2", the Association of NGOs in the field of the contemporary culture (founded in 2009) was founded, launching a concern for the rights of non-governmental cultural organizations, taking the

rights to representation. Only later, the National Library of Latvia launches the project "Trešais tēva dēls" (from 2006), providing the high-speed wireless Internet in the regional libraries. Only since the end of the first decade of the 21st century, we can talk about gentrification as an economically sound and politically patronaged strategy which after several decades of proven practices is also introduced in Latvia for "rehumanization" of economically and socially declining post-industrial

areas ("Andrejsala", "Spīķeri", "Tabakas fabrika", etc.) and the term "creative industries" becomes a national priority. There are more and more such examples. Many activities and insights recognized as good today have come directly from the non-governmental sector in which they are glimpsed and highlighted but only later validated by the State institutions and clothed in forms understood by the consumer culture.

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2. The reconstruction of the first building of the organization at Katedrāles ielā 2 was made possible, thanks to the support provided by the United Foundation of the Netherlands (LVL 36 000). By the support of the Daniel Langlois Foundation and the Embassy of Canada, *the Media Laboratory, the so-called "digital kitchen"* was equipped. During further operation, the organization has attracted funding with various projects from the European Cultural Foundation, the Soros Foundation for Contemporary Art, the State Culture Capital Foundation (SCCF) and the Culture Department of Liepāja City Council, the European Social Fund, and other projects' competitions.
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4. **Möntmann, N.** Art and its Institutions. **In:** *Art and its Institutions. Current Conflicts, Critique, and Collaborations.* Möntmann, Nina. (ed.). London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006, p. 11.
5. The participants of the project were the Swedish artists Filipa Arrias, Jesper Nordal, Javier Garsia and the Latvian artists Ivars Grāvlis, Andrejs Grants with his students, Elizabete Melbārde, Mārcis Bendiks, Andrejs Ivanovs, Vasilis Borjajevs, Viesturs Graždanovičs and others.
6. The Articles of Association of the public organization Cultural and Information Center K2. Approved in November, 2000. Registered on December 07, 2000. The founding general meeting was attended by: Kristīne Briede, Santa Simsons, Gaiga Korņilko, Gunārs Kazask, Iveta Ansons, Lāsma Eversone, Agnese Mackēviča, Aija Saldovere, Aiga Braša, Carl Bjorshmark, Ineta Statgale, Juris Āboliņš, Arturs Pērkons, Ārijs Orlovskis, Velga Jansone, Valdis Skujiņš, Jose Javier Manzur Garsia.
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11. From the conversation with Kristīne Briede on April 26, 2007, at Karosta. Recording of the conversation is kept in the author's archive.
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14. The academic program "New Media Art" was developed on the basis of the three-tier cooperation between the Liepāja University, Cultural and Information Center "K @ 2" and the RIXC Center for New Media Culture. Additionally, a significant support in the development and initiation was also rendered by the City Council of Liepāja.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Santa Vaļivahina (Mazika) (1979) Mg. art (LMA, 2007) is an art scholar, critic, and curator. She is working at the Art Research Laboratory of the Liepāja University and is writing her doctoral thesis at the Art Academy of Latvia about new forms of cultural institutions and their development in Latvia. She has published reviews about art events, she has also been a co-curator in the temporary art gallery "K. Māksla?" (2005-2009) Karosta, Liepāja, and elsewhere, a co-curator of the exhibition "Autumn 2006" in Riga, the Latvian Railway History Museum. E-mail: santa.mazika@liepu.lv

Kopsavilkums. Dibināts 2000. gadā kultūras un informācijas centrs "K@2" bija viens no pirmajiem neatkarīgajiem kultūras centriem Latvijā, kurus pēc neatkarības atgūšanas 90. gadu otrajā pusē, meklējot alternatīvu izpausmes telpu, pamazām sāka dibināt jaunie mākslinieki. Neapzināti, bet likumsakarīgi šis parādības iekļaujas jau kopš 20. gadsimta 70. gadiem sevi pieteikušā, bet Latvijas kultūrtelpai novatoriskajā "jaunā institucionālisma" kontekstā.

Vairākus gadus te strādāja divi mākslinieki Karls Bjoršmarks un Kristīne Briede, pieaicinot savus kolēģus gan no Latvijas gan ārvalstīm: veidot izstādes, vadīt kino lektorijus, īstenot radošās darbnīcas Karostas un Liepājas jauniešiem skaņu mākslas, foto, video un citās jomās. “K@2” savā darbības laikā aizpildīja nišu starp māksliniekiem, iedzīvotājiem un politiķiem, kā arī darbojās jomās, kuras tajā laikā vēl pat nebija kļuvušas aktuālas – brīvpieejas internets, grāmatu, video un audio ierakstu bibliotēka un lasītava, kā arī pašvaldības pārstāvniecība pilsētas “mikrorajonos”, bezmaksas latviešu valodas kursi, spēļu istaba bērniem u.c.

Taču nemitīgie “izdzīvošanas apstākļi” centram liedza ilgstošu pastāvēšanu, novedot pie slēgšanas 2008. gadā – brīdī, kad tika atzīta tā leģitimitāte valstiskā līmenī. Taču Karostā izauklētās idejas turpina dzīvot joprojām.

Raksta mērķis ir apskatīt dažas “K@2” aktivitātes un idejas Karostas sociālās attīstības kontekstā, kas saistītas ar centra darbību vizuālās mākslas jomā, kurā visilgāk darbojās laicīgās mākslas galerija “K. Māksla?”. Paralēli tam tiks skarts jautājums par mākslas lomu reģiona sociālās vides *rehumanizācijā* un alternatīvajām stratēģijām, kuras tā piedāvā. Tādēļ raksta ietvaros minētas atsevišķas galerijā notikušajās izstādes, kuras šīs stratēģijas meklēja, taču, ņemot vērā materiāla apjomu, šajā virzienā pētījums vēl jāturpina.