

ICWA LETTERS

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Springtime for Nicolae? Part I

By Cristina Merrill

JULY 13, 2005

BUCHAREST, Romania – I'm starting to show my age in Romanian years. I realized this at the end of a play that poked fun at deposed dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena. My approving solemn claps, as with those coming from adults in the audience, were drowned in cheerful outpourings from teen and twenty-something spectators. "Are you mad?" I felt like shouting at the loud admirers. "Would you do the same at a show about Hitler?!"

But a quick look at the innocently ecstatic faces filling the performance space made me reconsider. *My* Ceausescu isn't *their* Ceausescu. To youngsters, especially if they were born shortly before or after the revolution of 1989, he isn't the dreadful, semi-literate man who ruled Romania with an iron fist for half of the 45 years that Communism lasted here. Most of them have not had to sing daily hymns to him, do homework by candlelight because of electricity shortages, have parents or relatives arrested and beaten because they spoke out freely — or be reduced to such a primitive state they would covet the forbidden foreign chocolates and Pepsi bottles the children of Western tourists seemed to consume with abandon back then.

During Communism children sensed the want and fear surrounding them but only later grasped that they were living on borrowed time, a debt Ceausescu had incurred at their expense, without asking for permission. Even if they, and their parents, are still paying the price of the last regime, today's generation understandably cannot feel the strong resentment someone like me has for the late dictator. Considering that this country is still slouching toward democracy 15 years after the end of the authoritarian regime, at least the passing of time is allowing for inevitable progress: the birth of generations with no memory of a recent dark history.

This is an awkward time to be teaching history. Just last December Romanians voted out Ion Iliescu, a former top Communist who served as president for three out of four terms after 1989. Many of the politicians surrounding him had been schooled in the old days. Despite an official change to democracy, the political climate continued to be manipulated by self-serving neo-communists, who, raised on propaganda, promulgated much of the same. Whether gone on purpose or fallen through the cracks of transition, Communism as a subject matter receives little attention in schools. Teachers have been indifferent or ambivalent toward a past when life may have been tougher but salaries significantly higher. The same is true of parents who are too busy adjusting to the new, savage capitalist economy to take time to explain to offspring a painful period that they themselves do not fully comprehend.

In general, Romanian adults are ill prepared to discuss history. For more than four decades Communists fed them inaccuracies and propaganda. Part of the population internalized the lies, while others managed to survive the mechanisms of repression by speaking in riddles, a reflex still ingrained in adult minds today. So young people are left to pick up fragments of information about Ceausescu however they can, spinning them into legends, even humor. In con-

versation, young people follow in their parents' footsteps by referring to him as *Ceasca*, a nickname that translates into "tea cup" in Romanian. Of course, the older generation did it on the sly, whereas adolescents today sing it, write it and draw it freely. His is the face street-artists like to stencil on city walls — a face attached to wings, with the inscription "I'm coming in 5 minutes." It's all been interpreted as a sign of rebellion of the young against adult nostalgia. A postcard bearing a hand-waving Ceausescu welcoming tourists with misspelled greetings (just as he would say them) are all the rage this summer at beach resorts.

Art as cure of hangover from the past

Art may be the best means of teaching recent history here, or at least one way of starting a dialogue about the recent past. Young people need it, in my opinion, as much as adults in order to rid themselves of the "hangover from the past" that Orwell wrote about in "Coming Up for Air."

A recent exhibit at the new National Museum of Contemporary Art attempted to kick-start the conversation. Dubbed "an exploration into the dark side of Romanian painting from the last few decades," the show gathered 160 works by both known and anonymous artists from the myriad objects created during Communism. Nearly all were homage portraits of Ceausescu and his wife, Elena — tributes to dam building and factory-openings, the industrialization of the countryside, or peace-marching.

I saw the exhibit three times. The first was when ICWA Director Peter Martin and his wife Lucretia visited me, mid-fellowship, in May. I hope I didn't show it at the time, but my first reaction was to want to flee the exhibit as quickly as possible. I was uncomfortable with images that recalled the more unpleasant parts of my childhood, in particular the times spent as a student having to idolize the Communist leader through patriotic songs. His eternally youthful portraits had adorned the first page of my textbooks, classroom walls, and virtually all public spaces. At home, the first sight of his face on the news was a cue for my parents to turn off the television. The confused feelings of childish dislike I left behind 22 years ago, when I left Romania with my family, suddenly welled up into full adult revulsion. I was able to keep visceral reactions at bay while viewing the paintings the second time around. On my last visit I was able to finally appreciate the show's significance.

What made it worse on the first visit, or rather emblematic of the awkward period this nation finds itself in,

was trying to find our way to the museum, which is housed within the Palace of the Parliament (the monstrous edifice that Ceausescu built to fit his ego and now makes the literally hollow boast of being the second largest building in the world after the Pentagon). No signs mark or point to the entrance of the museum, which is a

long walk from any of the building's street gates open to the public (no public transportation is provided to any of Bucharest's museums). To get there, we walked past vast open spaces to left and right that had been largely uncared for: cement blocks left over from previous construction, rows upon rows of tree-saplings planted too closely to one another, weedy grass that looked as if it had never been mowed. (It's full summer as I'm writing, and wild plants have overtaken the landscape. I used to get upset and ask the bored gendarmes guarding the gates why nothing was done to clear the fields or shovel snow. But I know the generic response: "The Gypsies haven't shown up for work.") Pavement that hadn't been smoothed threatened to trip us at every turn, not to mention a few stray dogs that had luckily been affected by the same up-keep-malaise and thus showed indifference to us. No flowers took the edge off the severity of the palace to our right.

Romanians have a strange relationship with the palace, which Ceausescu built in 1984 on top of the graveyard created when he demolished countless historic churches and aristocratic mansions — an entire city district. Bucharest residents like the fact that it's one of the major tourist attractions in the capital, but they don't bother to care for it. The dictator left the palace unfinished when he was executed in 1989, and the eastern wing, where the modern art museum has been inserted, shows signs of prolonged neglect. To me, the whole country seems engulfed in inertia as far as caring for public spaces is concerned, but that is altogether a complex story that relates to the legacy of a repressive regime that for 45 years told people how to live their lives. Without recourse to a working civil society that would have allowed for expression of individuality and respect for communal rights, people here developed an extreme sense of *self-preservation* that is, ironically, more visible now in the emerging democratic climate. Public space is something Romanians use as dumping ground, as if exacting revenge on a world where they lost individual pride 50 years ago. Self, family and home come first, at the expense of everything else.

Modern, glass-encased elevators rise on both sides of the spruced-up façade of the museum, an oasis in a



(Above) Young graffiti artists stencil Ceausescu's face with the inscription "I'm coming in 5 minutes," as protest against adult remembrance of Communism.

(Below) A postcard carrying Ceausescu's image next to his typical mispronounced words is all the rage at the beach.





Lodged within the confines of Ceausescu's palace stands the new Museum of Modern Contemporary Art, an oasis in a desert of crumbling travertine architectural sterility.

desert of crumbling, travertine architectural sterility. Inside, the museum has been ingeniously designed as a white cube separated from the old walls of the Palace of the Parliament, keeping a distance (and a certain integrity) of one meter on each side from the older structure. Florin Tudor, the curator of the exhibit, made wonderful use of this area, which he refers to as "the space of history," or the interstitial gap separating the museum from "the wall of trauma." He placed many paintings of the Ceausescus inside this 2-story by 1-meter space, on both sides, to create a feeling of what he thinks they deserve to be: "hidden, put underneath the rug." He explained his curatorial strategy as one that "negotiates between showing and hiding the images, describing in a sense the post-revolutionary history: seldom openly discussed, yet always there, in the back of our minds, in the psychic backyard of unexamined recent history."

At 31, Mr. Tudor is at just the age when the name *Ceasca* provokes both laughter and gravity. Because he was 16 when the regime ended, he got a taste of Communism but not enough to make him bitter, and as such is in a perfect position to reconcile past and present. In one breath he recounts the year he had to spend in the Union of Communist Youth before turning to his passion for video art. He and his wife Mona, also a video artist, have exhibited in several European cities and in New York. Not that he is devoid of resentment. When I interviewed him during my third visit, Mr. Tudor said he "hates" the palace for what it stands for and the way

it looks. "But working here I have reached a compromise with myself. One cannot exonerate the past but one can re-discuss it."

"Nobody leaves an optimist"

Mr. Tudor set out to do just that with his exhibit on two floors, the first of its kind. He wrote in the introduction to the show catalogue, entitled *The Museum of Painting*: "The project is an attempt to reopen the debate on the subject of Romanian art in the socialist context, and can be considered an intervention, a preamble to an ample critical and theoretical analysis, in the years to come." He said that art critics would hopefully pick up the threads and continue to put into perspective, and explain, the art created during Communism.

"Nobody leaves an optimist" after viewing this exhibit, Mr. Tudor said. Indeed, the works he obtained from collections of various ministries and county districts, and which exemplify the "official" art created during Communism, collectively make an unashamed ode to Ceausescu, his wife, and the "glorious" deeds they accomplished for the "good" of the country. If paintings dating from the 1950's and 60's, before Ceausescu came to power, showed anonymous proletarian workers as heroes in the mode of Soviet-social realism, post-1965 art tribute almost entirely to the dictator and his wife. The couple always take center stage, towering over golden wheat fields, immense water dams, or crowds of people celebrating socialist accomplishments, and taking stands on peace (Ceausescu endlessly hinted — in no subtle terms — that he wanted a Nobel Peace Prize.).

In what looked to me more like socialist *surrealism*,



Florin Tudor, curator of a show of Communist art, next to paintings "hidden" in a space between walls of the new museum and those of Ceausescu's Palace of Parliament.

artists threw in all the elements of what they thought *meant*, and often *were* told was, socialist success: factories, dams, abundant crops, clear skies, young pioneers, and not a few peace doves. Never missing from the merry tableaux were the Ceausescus, rendered younger and younger the older they got. Artists' contrived efforts often backfired, making the two look grotesque instead. "They look embarrassed," Mr. Tudor said as he gave a tour of the works. "Notice how they are always pictured isolated, away from the crowds."

Dozens of his-and-hers homage portraits reinforce the Ceausescu cult of personality, in all its perversion of reality. In them, he is made to look like an illustrious writer (lots of books surround him) and she as science inventor — in reality, he had been a poor shoemaker, a school drop-out who could barely write, while she had been a failed scientist who at the height of her powers took credit for the works created by brilliant minds at her orders. Absolute power distorts absolutely, for in the same section that Mr. Tudor calls "deviant directives," a half-dozen paintings depict Ceausescu as a great hunter of bears and wild boars — exaggerated projections of things that never happened. By all accounts, Ceausescu was a poor shot, and any animals that he supposedly bagged were heavily sedated or trapped beforehand by others (and made to look like fresh kill the day of the slaughter), under orders from the party.

Nearby, another invention of the past: paintings portraying Nicolae and Elena as young Communist revolutionaries — although no proof of them as group leaders exists. Historians say that Ceausescu was indeed imprisoned in the 1930s under accusation of being a Communist (considered an illegal activity at the time), but that his infractions had been minor. He had been allegedly spreading pamphlets. Those who knew him in the early days said he was a loner and not the leader portrayed in later works. One of the reasons he was picked by Soviets as successor to the first Communist leader, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, who died in 1964, was because he could be easily manipulated: low-key, not too bright, and not popular enough to develop a genuine following.

The Soviets were wrong, of course, about Ceausescu's character. In time, he grew to believe the adulation concocted to keep him in power, developing an insatiable thirst for supremacy as well as a following among similarly greedy Communists. To achieve his goals, he and his secret police machinery controlled all possible communication channels, perfecting spin that would have been the pride of any Western washday-wonder. In the exhibit, one painting showed the Communist seal, along with the inscription: "We are Romanian. We come from history. We're going towards communism." Sadly, nationalistic residue still exists, preventing many here from facing the reality of post-Communist penury and gathering energy to rebuild. This distorted notion of greatness (which shatters at the first reality check into shards of negative feelings of entitlement, unfulfilled des-

tiny, and — not least — depression) is, in my opinion, one big obstacle keeping emerging democracies like Romania from embracing real change and an example of the dangers caused by perpetuated ignorance. We see the fruits of such delusion all over the Middle East, and especially now in Iraq, the once-great Mesopotamia.

It's as if to emphasize this mass delusion that Mr. Tudor placed works by well-known artists alongside those of anonymous daubers and craftsmen. The curator mixed the images on purpose, crammed frame-to-frame and hanging awkwardly, sometimes too close to the ground to be properly viewed. He used his own artistic license to make sure viewers grew literally uncomfortable watching the art. The exhibit didn't intend to impress. Alongside oil paintings he hung collections of glued rice-grains and band-sawed veneers. It was common practice during Communism to have the Party commission unsigned work on various occasions (the ruler's birthday, the annual Party congress) from each district, factory or collective farm. The exhibit included several such nonmemorable pieces (one was a gift from a ball-bearing factory).

As Mr. Tudor pointed out, it will take a long time for Romanians to understand what these artists really thought at the time they were creating official art. "Evidently, we are still working with fragments," he said. Some probably believed the propaganda, but surely not all. The exhibit included works painted by creative and sophisticated artists who seemed in touch with, and inspired by, a wide range of Western techniques. One por-



Some artists during Communism borrowed from Western techniques to portray Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu as a royal couple.

trait of the reigning couple, by artist Dan Hartman, had all the darkness, richness of color and mystery of a Goya painting. Constantin Balasa, for example, was a well-known “court” artist during Communism who made Elena Ceausescu look stunning (a stretch of anyone’s imagination), using Chagall-like dreamy techniques.

Many artists, in fact, borrowed from fairy tales to exaggerate or distort both reality and history. In some works, the dictator’s wife is seen as a floating Goddess, dressed in a white gown, with doves at her side. One commentator said, when discussing the exhibit, that the visual culture created during Communism had more in common with traditional Romanian iconography and mythology than the industrial modernism it tried to convey. Another work by Hartman, in particular, took artistic liberties to the limits: painted in 1983, it portrayed medieval Romanian leader Stephan the Great reaching out of a painting to toast the couple on their wedding anniversary. “It’s sad,” said Mr. Tudor as he walked by the painting. Mr. Hartman is one of the few surviving artists I was told would be willing to talk, but he declined my repeated requests for an interview, arguing that he was recovering from shingles.

I experienced more sadness on the bottom floor of the exhibit, where Mr. Tudor assembled a reading room. There, art magazines and other publications from the Communist period (textbooks, eulogies written for Communist party assemblies, bound copies of newspapers) sat amid books published after the revolution, as if to set history straight. One publication, “The Flame,” (Communists loved to use burning metaphors), highlighted the accomplishments of three textile workers. One woman received the following praise: “In addition to daily exceeding the production quota by 10 percent, communist Deak Eva also undertakes a line of sustained political activity, in her role as agitator.” Sad indeed.

A last laugh at the tyrant’s expense

At the same time Mr. Tudor’s exhibit was showing at the contemporary-art museum, a happier version of Romania’s rather tragic recent history was taking place across town. “A Day in the Life of Nicolae Ceausescu,” which had opened in February to rave reviews, is the play I mentioned at the beginning.

Written as parody, the play manages to have a last laugh, so to speak, at the expense of the late tyrant and his wife. When asked, in the playbill, about the sentiments that the play evokes, Director Alexandru Tocilescu responded that it allowed him to amuse himself at their expense. “I reserve disgust for those equal to me.” He said he considered the couple characters in a cartoon whom he took great pleasure in manipulating. “[I felt] the characters are mine; they are at the moment my prop-



Communist publication “The Flame” gave special mention to Eva Deak, pictured right, for accomplishments as textile worker and political agitator.

erty, and I do with them whatever I want. Which is satisfying.”

The play condenses the rise, tyranny and end of Ceausescu and his consort into one day. Funny lines and songs delivered by some of Romania’s most accomplished actors, in marvelously gaudy and authentic Communist costumes, create to full amusing effect the farce the couple’s tyranny represented. The author, Theodor Denis Dinulescu, wonderfully exaggerates their lack of education, poor manners, paranoia and overall arrivism.

The action starts with them as paupers, he a shoemaker unable to piece together a proper sentence, she as an aspiring scientist puzzled by the simplest chemical formulas. Their insecurities are also prime material for their ultimate revenge on the country they will soon conquer: “Well, you’ll have to take care of these imbeciles when we come to power,” says Ceausescu when his wife complains that the chemistry manual makes no sense to her. “It’s important to fool them as quickly as possible...So that we can get to power.”

The inevitable happens, of course, thanks in large part to “The Boy,” a character who represents the secret-police machinery that played even in real life a large part in keeping them, and the system they stood for, at the top. He organizes their whole life, coordinates public events complete with carefully selected cheering crowds (where he gives the cues for cheering and singing), and constantly shouts their praise. With his help, the Ceausescus create and recreate their own revolutionary past. “It doesn’t matter [if it doesn’t] work chronologically,” says The Boy, when introducing as fact an event in their past that couldn’t have happened at the time.

Romanians aren’t the only ones tricked by the impostors. It happened in real life as well that the Queen of England (“the old hag,” as Ceausescu refers to her in the

play, before taking a ride in her regal carriage) fell for the “maverick” from the Carpathians who had supposedly taken a stand against the Soviets on several occasions, especially after the Russians invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968. In actual fact, the Russians never bothered to inform Ceausescu of their intentions to invade — to them he didn’t much matter anyway. President Richard Nixon gave him credit as well, rewarding Romania with Most-Favored-Nation Status after Ceausescu gave him a red-carpet welcome to Bucharest. In their manic desire to impress at any costs, Communists searched the country high and low for food to display for Mr. Nixon’s visit in order to show abundance — an immense grossery, since food by then was scarce and rationed.

Having crowned themselves omnipotent rulers of the country, they pause briefly on royal thrones, then end up killed without a proper trial. As the couple discusses their accomplishments in the afterlife, Ceausescu muses that “this was to be the nation’s fate...I mean, to have the two of us...the most they could do...” They grow content knowing that their Communist apparatus is still strong. The anonymous man who succeeds them and heads the country wears the same suit and carries the same briefcase as The Boy — he is none other, of course, than Ion Iliescu (who in real life served as Romania’s president for most of the post-revolutionary transition period).

Mr. Dinulescu wanted to give a larger role to Mr. Iliescu, a top Communist in the old regime who turned against Ceausescu in later years. He first thought of writing the play in the early 1990s, by which time the Moscow-educated successor, who some say helped stage a coup that became the uprising of 1989, proved that he was made of the same stuff as the former ruler. Mr. Dinulescu also wanted to center the play around the Communist secret-police apparatus that used fear and deceit to infiltrate the nation. In his view, the couple wouldn’t have survived without the help of the *Securitate*, as the Communist thought police were known. In turn, Romanians’ own vulnerabilities allowed the system to exist. In the play, Ceausescu asks rhetorically: “They wanted a strong secret police? I gave it to them...After all, who forced them to send off their children to enroll in *Securitate* forces? ...A nation that sends her children off to the *Securitate* is conscious of her role on this planet...in history...”

In the collective brainwashing that followed the Communists’ coming to power, Romanians were conditioned to content themselves with little. “People gladly joined the *Securitate*. They were given a chicken here and there, potatoes, meaningless material goods,” Mr. Dinulescu told me in an interview. “It was a matter of pride to have your son in the *Securitate* because as parents it was easier approval to get a Dacia 1300 [the Romanian car made in small batches, and whose purchase came only after a stay on a long waiting list], you could get a trip to a Black Sea resort...All of them little noth-

ings, if we really stop and think. Imagine, a car that you could buy only with the comrades’ approval?!”

A big fan of the U.S., where he intends to live and have the play produced, Mr. Dinulescu ponders the difficulty of explaining “The Boy” to the average American. “How can you explain to the American reader what this Communist-Party secretary meant? He wouldn’t believe you. He’d say, ‘What do you mean, the party secretary told you what to sing, whether you could drink cola or what quota you had to meet at work? Are you crazy?!’”

Ceausescu is Romania’s brand

Mr. Dinulescu set out to make The Boy the main character in the play, but his friend Mr. Tocilescu, who later became the play’s director, convinced him that Ceausescu was the better choice. “Ceausescu continues to be a *brand*,” said Mr. Dinulescu. “He is known because he made sure not to promote anything else. Not a rock band, not a car, not a mountain, not even a river. He represented the Carpathian product who came from a nation about whom nobody knew anything else. The Revolution of 1989 caught us with the Ceausescu brand.”

Writing the play, in 1994, took six months but bringing it to the stage took a decade. “Ten years we walked around with the script under our arms,” Mr. Dinulescu said. “Everybody said ‘It’s not the right time, come back later.’ We later understood that some theaters continue to be led by people who pay tribute to interests and friendships dating back to before 1989. Many of them lack any sense of humor.”

Fortunately, Florin Calinescu (who plays the dictator’s role in the play), director of a popular experimental theater in Bucharest, liked the script and commissioned the play. It has been booked solid since opening. What has helped, Mr. Dinulescu said, is the enthusiastic response from young viewers to the amusing tone of his work, which he calls a “pill of humor.”

And humor is what Mr. Dinulescu insisted on keeping in his play, in order to make it more palatable for younger audiences. “I chose to make it a [vaudevillian] pamphlet, first because after 15 years, we shan’t sit around and moan,” said the 50-year-old with an adolescent’s buoyancy. “Also, if I hadn’t made it as amusing, what would young people have understood? The great majority who go see it are young adults. They were probably eight years old when the Revolution happened. I’d rather have an audience who leaves the show feeling happy and satisfied than a mature crowd who claps half-heartily and mutters that it wasn’t all that bad [under Communism] — bread could be had sometimes — which is far from the truth. It’s too late to create a dour show. Those people who would have appreciated it are no longer young.” Indeed, today’s new generation of people prefers laughter over their parents’ tears. □

Current Fellows and their Activities

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Alexander Brenner (June 2003 - 2005) • CHINA

With a B.A. in History from Yale and an M.A. in China Studies from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Alex is in China examining how the country is adapting to economic and cultural globalization following its accession to the World Trade Organization.

Richard D. Connerney (January 2005 - 2007) • INDIA

A lecturer in Philosophy, Asian Religions and Logic at Rutgers University, Rick Connerney is spending two years as a Phillips Talbot Fellow studying and writing about the intertwining of religion, culture and politics in India, once described by former U.S. Ambassador John Kenneth Galbraith as "a functioning anarchy." Rick has a B.A. and an M.A. in religion from Wheaton College and the University of Hawaii, respectively.

Kay Dilday (October 2005-2007) • FRANCE/MOROCCO

An editor for the *New York Times*' Op-Ed page for the past five years, Kay holds an M.A. in Comparative International Politics and Theory from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, a Bachelor's degree in English Literature from Tufts University, and has done graduate work at the *Universiteit van Amsterdam* in the Netherlands and the *Cours de Civilisation de la Sorbonne*. She has traveled in and written from Haiti and began her journalistic life as city-council reporter for *Somerville This Week*, in Somerville, MA.

Cristina Merrill (June 2004-2006) • ROMANIA

Born in Bucharest, Cristina moved from Romania to the United States with her mother and father when she was 14. Learning English (but retaining her Romanian), she majored in American History at Harvard College and there became captain of the women's tennis team. She received a Master's degree in Journalism from New York University in 1994, worked for several U.S. publications from *Adweek* to the *New York Times*, and is spending two years in Romania watching it emerge from the darkness of the Ceausescu regime into the presumed light of membership in the European Union and NATO.

Nicholas Schmidle (October 2005-2007) • IRAN

A journalist and researcher for the Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life, Nick is finishing a Master's program in Comparative and Regional Studies (Middle East/Central Asia) at American University in Washington DC. He is studying intensive Persian — as is his fiancée, Rikki Bohan — in anticipation of his departure for Iran after his marriage in autumn 2005.

Andrew J. Tabler (February 2005 - 2007) • SYRIA/LEBANON

Andrew has lived, studied and worked in the Middle East since a Rotary Foundation Ambassadorial Fellowship enabled him to begin Arabic-language studies and work toward a Master's degree at the American University in Cairo in 1994. Following the Master's, he held editorships with the *Middle East Times* and *Cairo Times* before moving to Turkey, Lebanon and Syria and working as a Senior Editor with the Oxford Business Group and a correspondent for the *Economist* Intelligence Unit. His two-year ICWA fellowship bases him in Beirut and Damascus, where he will report on Lebanese affairs and Syrian reform.

Jill Winder (July 2004 - 2006) • GERMANY

With a B.A. in politics from Whitman College in Walla Walla, WA and a Master's degree in Art Curating from Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, Jill is an ICWA Donors' Fellow looking at Germany through the work, ideas and viewpoints of its contemporary artists. Before six months of intensive study of the German language in Berlin, she was a Thomas J. Watson Fellow looking at post-communist art practice and the cultural politics of transition in the former Soviet bloc (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Croatia, Hungary, Latvia, Romania, Slovenia and Ukraine).

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