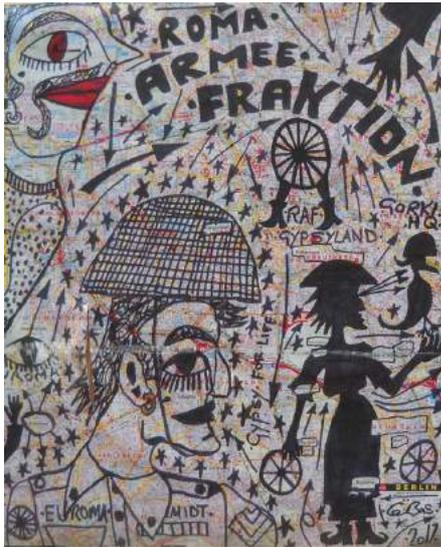


Decolonizing Canonical Roma Representations: The Cartographer with an Army

Huub van Baar *

Setting up a Roma Army



'Roma Armee Fraktion' (detail)

© Damian Le Bas, 2017, Berlin

One of Damian Le Bas's most ludic interventions in modern art history has undoubtedly been his materialized idea of the RAF, short for *Roma Armee Fraktion* or Roma Army Faction. Try to imagine colourful and confrontational images of soldier-like figures on maps of Berlin and Europe, accompanied by the letters 'RAF,' all in the heart of Berlin, at the city's famous boulevard *Unter den Linden*, next to the Humboldt University, one of the city's main centres of knowledge production, and in front of the Maxim Gorki Theatre. Many people who saw these images in the public space between these buildings frowned when they read 'RAF.' RAF? The RAF?! The notorious *Rote Armee Fraktion* (Red Army

Faction), once led by the terrorists Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof, is back in the public space of Berlin, after all the violence, anger and fear that the RAF caused, particularly during the 1970s? What's up? Who's playing with this delicate legacy? Who's playing with fire here? Damian Le Bas was and still is.



'Roma Armee Fraktion' © Damian Le Bas, 2017

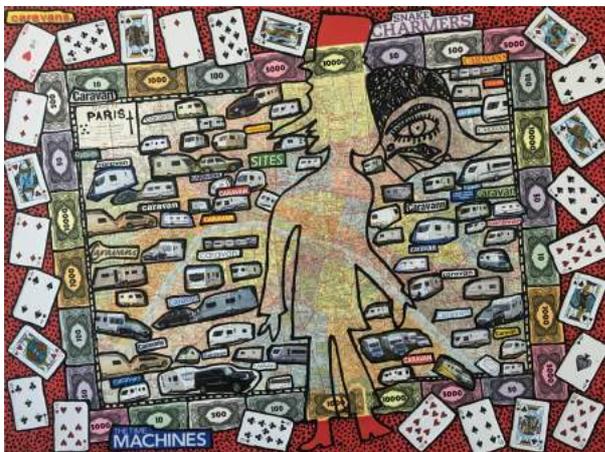
His artworks have attained a kind of semi-permanent status in public space, just next to the *Neue Wache*, the Central Memorial of the Federal Republic of Germany for the Victims of War and Dictatorship. Le Bas created his artworks on the RAF as part of the performance and sceneries he made for *Roma Armee*, a theatre play produced by Yael Ronen & Ensemble after an idea from the Serbian-Austrian Romani sisters Sandra and Simonida Selimović, and performed by mostly Romani actors from different European countries, including the Selimović sisters themselves. *Roma Armee* was performed for the first time on 14 September 2017—and several times since—in Berlin’s Gorki Theatre which, for many years now, has become a kind of headquarter—‘Gorki HQ’ as Damian calls it on some of his paintings—of the European Romani art movement, together with *Kai Dikhas*, the Berlin-based Gallery for Contemporary Art of the Roma and Sinti.



© Maxim Gorki Theatre, Berlin 2017

Damian’s RAF could be considered as a ludic, but also probing and thoughtful play with the idea of a Romani armed force—a militant force—that is not terrorizing other people, but combatting the various ways in which, throughout European and global history, others have terrorized Roma, Gypsies, Travellers and their identities with highly impactful ideas and images of whom they would be. Damian’s RAF is not about taking up guns to fight or plan terrorist attacks to threaten fellow citizens, but about using art, culture and their visual and discursive idioms to fight against a dreadful but often unnoticed history of terrorizing representations and imageries. This is what is in the job description of the virtual but effective Roma Army, and this is how Damian Le Bas, often together with his wife and partner in artistic crime Delaine Le Bas, has tempted and invited us ‘to Gypsyland’.

Yet, 'Gypsyland'—a phrase often used in the couple's artworks—is never what it seems or expected to be. 'Gypsyland' is not something marginal out there, a fringe phenomenon, but fundamental to what our places of living, our Europe and our world constitute. 'Gypsyland' is where London changes into 'Romeville' and where the London Underground System changes into the 'Romany Underground System' in Damian Le Bas's artwork *Romeville* (2007). 'Gypsyland' is where, in his paintings *Paris I* and *Paris II* (2009), Paris changes into an urban landscape where, at each and every street corner, is a caravan.



'Paris I' © Damian Le Bas, 2009



'Gypsyland. The Atlantic Side of the Pyrenees'

© Damian Le Bas, 2007

'Gypsyland' is where entire cities or regions—Berlin, Freiburg, Fenland, Munich, Venice, Kirkby Stephen and Appleby, Basque Country, New Forest National Park, Scandinavia, Newfoundland, East Central Europe, the Balkans, the Alpine countries—turn into colourfully mapped landscapes where we meet, in Dada-like collages, all kinds of objects and figures, and most of all, faces and eyes that look and do not look at you at the same time. 'Gypsyland' is where, on the impressive opening scenery for *Roma Armea*, the map of Europe changes into 'Gypsyland Europa,' where, in one of Damian Le Bas's 1995 artworks, the 'New Commercial Map of the World' changes into a Magical Gypsy World, and where, last but not least, on the various globes he used as the basis for some of his 2016 pieces, three-dimensional worlds change into multiple planet earths with 'No Man's Lands,' 'Motherlands of All of Us' and 'Frontiers de Luxe.' This imagining of 'Gypsyland' is not to

suggest that Roma, Gypsies and Travellers are ‘everywhere’—though they virtually are—but to unambiguously enact a regime of visibility that is clear about one thing: ‘we are here.’ As in the famous activist slogan related to contemporary struggles of migrants and refugees—‘We are here, because you were there’—Damian has created a visual regime that clearly states ‘we are here, although you have overlooked us.’ The invitations ‘to Gypsyland’ are not



'Frontier De Luxe' © Damian Le Bas, 2016

a kind of pedagogical tour in which someone takes you by the hand to introduce you to Romani culture and traditions, or to teach you how stereotypes should be debunked or how the Roma ‘really are.’ Rather, they are invitations that encourage you to look at the world differently and to think about the powerful impact of representation, identification and identities more generally, and in dialogue with whom you would like to meet to seriously reconsider this impact.

An Epistemological Testing Ground for the European Imaginary

In her important 1992 essay ‘The Time of the Gypsies: a “People without History” in the Narratives of the West,’ Katie Trumpener argues that in the past—in the ages of Enlightenment, Romanticism and literary modernism in particular—chroniclers, scholars and various kinds of artists primarily considered ‘the Gypsies’ as a people or group of wandering clans who were at odds with the modern structures of temporality, and with the paradigms of modernity more generally. They were often seen as a people that stood outside modern life, and the formation of the nation (state) in particular. This people was consequently relegated to the domain of pre-modern, traditional, natural and ‘history-less’ societies. Particularly since the end of the eighteenth century, Trumpener argues, the

'Gypsies' also started to function as a trope for various kinds of escape routes, which led away from the modern socioeconomic, political and cultural order towards a mythical or mystical realm of freedom and dissipation. In the long history of Gypsy-related narratives and imageries, Gypsies were generally portrayed as representing either an escape from the order of modernity and its troubles, or a serious threat to its maintenance, stability and further development.

In Heinrich von Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas*, for instance, a Gypsy fortune-teller appears as a figure that lives outside of history to introduce 'magical timelessness' (Trumpener 1992: 869) into the main narrative. And in Virginia Woolf's novel *Orlando*, Gypsy men and women appear as indistinguishable, 'genderless' people during Orlando's gender transition from man into woman and liberation from a patriarchal world (Bardi 2006). 'Gypsies' are required to make Orlando aware of her gender transition, and when she is fully conscious about her new status, she leaves them again as if she no longer needed them. In both these narratives, as well as in many others, Trumpener argues, 'the Gypsies are ... reduced to a textual effect' (1992: 869). Everywhere they appear in these narratives, they seemingly 'begin to hold up ordinary life, inducing local amnesias or retrievals of cultural memory and causing blackouts or flash-backs in textual, historical and genre memory as well' (ibid.). Trumpener contends that the Gypsies appear not only along a kind of timeless escape route from the order of modernity, but also as magical figures who ambivalently *disrupt* the structure of temporality of this modern order itself, as those whose main discursive job seems to be what she calls 'time-banditry' (ibid.).

The reduction of the 'Gypsies' to textual effects is not limited to pre-Second World War narratives. As various authors have analysed, in many ways, the Gypsies have continued to play this role in various postwar and contemporary works, including film, exhibitions and popular culture. In postwar policy documents, the Gypsies and those who are usually associated with them also pop up as a people that has another sense of time and place and that apparently belongs to another social order than that of the European majorities. A 1984 document of the European Parliament on 'education for children with parents who have no fixed abode,' for instance, represents caravan dwellers as follows:

[They] have a relatively casual attitude towards space and time. They live in the present and give little or no thought to the future. They do not live according to a fixed scheme of hours, days and weeks, etc. Work is integrated into the normal rhythm of the day so that there is no difference between work and leisure as such. (European Parliament 1984 cited Simhandl 2006: 106)

Back in 1984, the European Parliament suggested that the fact that the Gypsies live 'in the present and give little or no thought to the future' resulted in their suffering from 'educational backwardness' (cited Danbakli 2001: 30). Living in an eternal here and now and making no difference between work and leisure had apparently led to a situation in which their children were not 'integrated in normal education' (ibid.).

The 'historylessness' of the Gypsies has also been represented in academic writing, popularized or not. Some authors have claimed that Gypsy or Romani cultures could be characterized by an 'art of forgetting.' For instance, in a chapter on the Holocaust in her bestseller *Bury Me Standing: The Gypsies and their Journey*, Isabel Fonseca states that 'the Jews have responded to persecution and dispersal with a monumental industry of remembrance. The Gypsies—with their peculiar mixture of fatalism and the spirit, or wit, to seize the day—have made an art of forgetting' (1995: 276). Fonseca's theory of the Roma's 'art of forgetting' has been rephrased more authoritatively by Inge Clendinnen who, in *Reading the Holocaust*, claims that the European Roma are 'an example' of a people who have chosen 'not to bother with history at all' and who 'seek no meanings beyond those relevant to immediate survival' (1999: 8).

A similar, though perhaps somewhat more subtle point of view returns in the works of the anthropologists Michael Stewart and Paloma Gay y Blasco. The latter, for instance, claims that 'all Gypsies ... elaborate on the contrast between themselves and the non-Gypsies and also share ... a lack of an elaborate social memory' (Gay y Blasco 1999: 4). In her research on Spanish *Gitanos*, to which this lack of memory would apply, she suggests that, 'unlike many other minorities, the *Gitanos* do not look to a historical or mythical past for explanations of their way of life or of their difference from the dominant majority' (ibid. 14). Both Stewart and Gay y Blasco relate this lack of an 'elaborate social memory' to a

preoccupation with temporality that would be characteristic of the Roma. The former, for instance, concludes his much-read study *The Time of the Gypsies* with the remark that 'they live with *their gaze fixed on a permanent present that is always becoming, a timeless now* in which their continued existence as Rom is *all that counts*' (Stewart 1997: 246, emphasis added). Similarly, Gay y Blasco claims that the *Gitanos* 'lack an elaborate social memory and have no myths of origin in which their common identity could find its roots: they are intent on separating the past from the present, and on denying that the "before" ... may hold the blueprint for the "now"' (1999: 174). The way in which the *Gitanos* allegedly deal with temporality leads Gay y Blasco to conclude that they 'seem to be permanently engaged in the "celebration of impermanence"' (ibid. 173). This implies that 'the identity of the group is not objectified outside the group itself' (ibid. 174).

Although most of the mentioned authors implicitly or explicitly suggest that the Roma's endurance as a people relates to how others have treated them throughout European history, they nevertheless strongly tend to reify Romani cultures and their external boundaries. Their cultures are represented as having 'timeless' characteristics, even though the Roma's relationships with others and among themselves may change in due course. This reification manifests itself most clearly in the case of Stewart's and Gay y Blasco's representation of the Gypsies as those who would live in a 'permanent present' or 'timeless now.' Elsewhere, I have discussed how the political status of the Roma as citizens, refugees and migrants has often been 'irregularized' (van Baar 2015, 2017). On the basis of the examples I have discussed here, we could add that 'the time of the Roma' has also been irregularized and, since 'their gaze' would be 'fixed on a permanent present,' considerably reified, if not racialized. These kinds of reifications tend to obscure how these Roma representations relate to the dynamic interrelationships between Roma and others, to internal variations across ethnic difference and space, and to how particular socio-cultural mechanisms 'majoritize' some groups while at the same time 'minoritizing' or even inferiorizing others.

The ways in which timelessness has been repeatedly projected onto the figures of the Gypsies has led Trumpener to a general contemplation on the relationship between the

continuous Western fascination with the Gypsies and the formative moments of cultural traditions themselves:

If in the course of the nineteenth century the Gypsies became increasingly stylized, exoticized, 'generic' figures of mystery, adventure and romance, they also became intimately identified, on several different levels, with the formation of literary tradition itself, acting as figurative keys to an array of literary genres and to the relations between them ... If at the end of the nineteenth century, apparently disparate branches of literary production are thus peculiarly connected by their common fascination with Gypsies' 'primitive magic,' the longer list of authors and literary forms preoccupied with Gypsy life is ... virtually synonymous with the modern European literary canon—and is synonymous as well, if the many thousands of popular novels, poems, songs, operettas, paintings and films featuring Gypsies are added to it, with European and American cultural literacy more generally. Over the last two hundred years, European literary and cultural mythology has repeatedly posed the Gypsy question as the key to the origin, the nature, the strength of cultural tradition itself. It could be argued, indeed, that as the Gypsies become bearers, par excellence, of the European memory problem in its many manifestations, they simultaneously become a *major epistemological testing ground for the European imaginary*, black box or limit case for successive literary styles, genres and intellectual movements. (Trumpener 1992: 873–74, emphasis added)

Trumpener argues that the very formation and celebration of successive Western artistic traditions and intellectual movements as innovative, progressive and radically and irreducibly other have been made possible by the construction of the Gypsies as the ultimate and universal representatives of a pre-modern, traditional, natural and timeless order. Thus, the teleological time of modern, 'civilized' history could only have been set in motion by *immobilizing* and bringing to a stop 'the time of the Gypsies'—which is similar to suggesting that they live in a 'timeless now'—and by continually instrumentalizing related stereotypical representations. According to Trumpener, the cultural uses of such Gypsy or Roma representations can be considered as a crucial condition for the possibility of the temporal structures of modernity. This leads her to inherently relate the European memory problem to the silent erasure of Romani memory from western canons, and the

impossibility for the Roma to effectively claim a representative space for their own memories and histories.¹ Finally, this brings her to the conclusion that ‘those peoples who do not claim a history, are relegated to nature, without a voice in any political process, represented only in the glass case of the diorama, the dehumanizing legend of the photograph, the tableaux of the open-air museum’ [Trumpener 1992: 884].

Over the last decade, particularly but not exclusively in the German-speaking academic world, thorough and ground-breaking studies have been published on the various uses and abuses of Gypsy figures in European societies, cultures and artistic traditions (see, for instance, Solms 2008, 2018; Von Hagen 2009; Bogdal 2011; Brittnacher 2012; Patrut 2014; Reuter 2014). To some extent, these studies could be read as crucial elaborations and required refinements of Trumpener’s analysis of the early 1990s, and of how ‘Europe has invented the Gypsies’ in a complex and variable ‘history of contempt and fascination,’ as Klaus-Michael Bogdal (2011) put it in the title of his seminal study. Yet what is striking about this important recent historiography is that Roma self-representations and their histories have been largely if not entirely neglected, or only been dealt with at the level of footnotes or epilogues. This is all the more remarkable since much has gone on at the level of self-representation over the decade in which these studies were written in particular, and in which Romani art movements intensely developed (see, for instance, Junghaus and Székely 2007; Bahlmann and Reichelt 2011; Galerie Kai Dikhas 2011, 2012, 2013; Baker and Hlavajova 2013; Pankok 2019).

So, the question is what is happening now that, very clearly, the long and highly ambiguous history of Gypsy representations in ‘the glass case of the diorama,’ in ‘the dehumanizing legend of the photograph’ and in ‘the tableaux of the open-air museum’ has been challenged by Romani artists themselves, and now that they have actually unambiguously claimed a history or, better, diverse histories.

Setting Time in Motion: When Carmen Starts Bleeding

In Delaine and Damian Le Bas’s artwork ‘The World of Gypsy Romance’ (2012), we see a classical stereotypical portrait of the beautiful Gypsy woman. It is the canonical figure that

traverses European visual and discursive histories of Gypsy representations in which the Carmen-like character has both erotic and demonic power: she seduces men while simultaneously and ambiguously disrupting the spatiotemporal order in which these men



'The World of Gypsy Romance' (detail)

© Delaine and Damian Le Bas, 2012 (photo © Delaine Le Bas)

and their likes are living. Yet the Carmen-like figure that Delaine portrayed bleeds heavily from her mouth. What is more, the painting bleeds as well, or is stained with blood, and is damaged with a sharp object close to the face of the no longer so beautiful Gypsy woman. The millions of Carmens who have catalysed virtual, and therefore not yet unreal escapes from bourgeois worlds do so no longer. Here, in this artwork, the tradition of the 'beautiful Gypsy girl' is bleeding to death. Full stop. However, the piece is not a mutilation or visual assassination of the 'beautiful Gypsy girl,' but rather a critical artistic intervention in a still continuing tradition of violent, terrorizing Gypsy clichés and their impact on those associated with them. This artwork claims history by critically intervening in a long and often-undisputed history of artistic and stereotypical representations.



'Table for a Romani Embassy' (detail)

© Damian Le Bas, 2017

Elsewhere, Delaine and Damian Le Bas have gone a step further. Imagine, for instance, the following design: a rectangular table of about 70 times 120 centimetres, with one chair at each side. The upper part of the table is decorated in the middle, with eyes, wheels, arrows and some inscriptions. The primarily white chairs are painted in different colours and with

black letters. On the table is written 'Table for a Romani Embassy'; on one of the chairs we read 'Welcome to Romanistan,' on other chairs 'Lackademic fat cats hands off our Romani Embassy' and 'Time for a Romani Embassy.' Damian Le Bas created the table and the four chairs for an art exhibition in Graz, Austria, in 2017, in what would be the final year of his life. His table with chairs for a Romani Embassy is at one with various performances by Delaine on the same theme and at places as diverse as London (2015), Malmö (2015), Thessaloniki (2015), the University of Essex (2016), Bradford (2017), Czarna Góra, Szczurowa (Poland, 2017), Graz (2017) and, last but not least, Berlin (2017, 2018). On the website that is part of the embassy project, Delaine Le Bas explains it as follows:

Romani Embassy is an information point, a living archive, an embodiment of reclaiming the stolen artefact that we have become. It can morph in size, change its appearance, appear and disappear. It is not contained within one building, it is a moving, flexible structure. It is cardboard sign made on the move. It exists within real and virtual space and time. It can be one person, it can possibly be more. It can be a distribution point to question majority societies opinion and ongoing mistreatment of us. It can be a silent act of resistance. Romani Embassy is an ongoing performance, artwork, activism.²

If philosophically informed studies, from Trumpener's to more recent texts, have primarily *interpreted* the history of Gypsy and Roma representations, then artists such as Damian and Delaine Le Bas want to *change* it by keenly intervening in it through their 'artivism.' In the Berlin version of the Romani Embassy performance, Delaine was in a completely white, long Victorian dress, with black hair and sitting in a guard house-like construction made out of bare wood, its inside decorated with Damian's 'This is Gypsyland 2014' mirror and, on the outside, with images and texts that refer to, for instance, the Egyptian Act of 1530, an article about 'Counterfeit Egyptians' and the construction of criminal identity in early modern England, a book about the Winchester Confessions of 1615–1616, an historical image of a fortune teller and an image of the girl Maria who was found in a Greek Romani neighbourhood and taken away by the police for further investigation concerning 'the Gypsies' who had 'stolen' her in 2013.³ During the performance, Delaine reads parts from

the Egyptian Act of 1530 which was passed by the Parliament of England in 1531 to expel the 'outlandish people calling themselves Egyptians,' meaning Gypsies, who 'using no craft nor feat of merchandise ... have come into this realm and gone from shire to shire, and place to place, in great company; and used great subtlety and crafty means to deceive the people.' While she performs and brings in various episodes from more distant and more recent Roma-related histories—including the one of the Romani girl Maria—Delaine claws her dress to shreds, thereby symbolically getting rid of her Victorian armour. Theory has become theatre here, as Gayatri Spivak (2012) has said of Delaine and Damian Le Bas's art, and the various elements and artefacts from past and present—stories, laws, signs, images and the like—are turned into what Delaine calls 'a living archive.'



'Romani Embassy' (Berlin)

© Delaine Le Bas, 2018

Consequently, the Romani embassy is neither the group of people who represent the Roma in a foreign place, nor the material structure—the building—in which these people work or live. The 'Romani embassy' escapes these two canonical meanings of embassy, because it is the site and the activity in which a new (hi-)story emerges through the re-appropriation and reassembling of known and unknown elements from present pasts, and their strategic and active positioning within the politics of the present. Romani Embassy turns the imaginary yet highly tangible 'waiting room of history' to which the Roma have historically and until now been relegated so frequently (Chakrabarty 2000: 8) into the most important outpost of the Roma Army, which has no aim other than to both expose and challenge how canonical histories of Gypsy and Roma representations are fully complicit in violating life worlds and maintaining mechanisms of exclusion. 'Do not be an active partici-

part' of these dominant histories, 'so history does not repeat itself,' we read on one of the panels of Delaine and Damian Le Bas's public art installation *Safe European Home?*. 'Don't tell us who we are,' we read in red letters on the inside of one of its main art objects, 'We have a history.' This is meant as a disruption of the structure of temporality of the current European order, not to rearticulate, but to radically question it. This is no 'time-banditry,' but sabotaging the continued production, distribution and circulation of terrorizing Roma/Gypsy representations in European cultures and societies.

Maps as Mobile Engines: Moving and Reclaiming the World

'We are claiming this space for ourselves. We, the constrained, limited and defined by those who want to control, name and silence us. Here we are.' Damian Le Bas (*Romani History X*, November 2017)

Damian Le Bas is and will be remembered for how he mapped the world or, better, for how he mapped it *anew*. 'Maps are not mirrors of reality, but rather "mobile engines" that distort and co-constitute the outside world' (Loughan et al. 2015: 23). In Damain's provocative distortion of the world, he has confronted his audience with the bothersome truth that the world is often not moved at all by the violence implied in the highly intimidating representations of whom Gypsies, Roma, Travellers or other 'outsiders' would be according to many mainstream views. Therefore, on his own and together with Delaine, he has turned the world upside down, not to simply replace images with counter-images, but to put representation and its impact at the eye of the storm—the eye that Damian has multiplied so frequently without reproducing it. His maps do not simply create alternative geographies of the spaces he mapped and the worlds he was critical of, since his way of doing art challenges both mapping in its classical mimetic understanding and familiar frameworks by which representational thinking tends to 'geo-graph' our worlds, fully populated with borders and other obstacles that actively produce insiders and outsiders and hamper mutual understanding and respect.



© Damian Le Bas, 2017, Berlin (fragment)

However, Damian's maps are also not about projecting desirable spaces or utopias onto the world, as if he were just dealing with topography or, for that matter, with 'utopography.' If mapping 'domesticates the unknown and the invisible, making them known and visible, making them available for use,' as John Pickles (2004: 7) states, then Damian Le Bas has tried to domesticate the invisibilization of Roma, Gypsies and Travellers and the exclusion mechanisms that have affected them throughout history, in

order to visibilize how these mechanisms could be countered. In his artworks, Damian Le Bas is a cartographer who is fully aware of the geopolitics of identity and representation and who has turned maps into places of experimentation into how diverse tracings could be combined and set in motion to see things differently. The way in which Damian has worked as a ludic, inspiring, inventive and—not to forget—hardworking, highly productive cartographer 'leads the viewer of the "map" to realize how problematic it is to think in terms of outside/inside ... but at the same time [how] our inclination to do so is permanently there' (Loughan et al. 2015: 36).

This double confrontation—problematizing the common view and alienating the viewer from the familiar—is connected with what could perhaps be considered as the topological quality of his work. Topology is that discipline of mathematics that focuses on all kinds of possible deformations of objects through stretching or folding, but never through tearing and then gluing them together again. The topological quality of Damian Le Bas's work 'deconstructs our cartographic imagination based on clear borders and immutable positioning systems, while still allowing for a spatialized, albeit moving representation of social reality' (Loughan et al. 2015: 36). Damian did not cut the original, geographic maps that he used as the starting points for many of his artworks; rather, he treated their

original two-dimensional parameters with care, respecting their plain realities, but he stretched these parameters as much as possible to turn land into borderless oceans filled with faces and eyes that look at the viewer to encourage her to travel the world anew, allowing her, most importantly, to introduce both perspective and introspection.



'Österreich-Ungarn 1914' © Damian Le Bas, 2008



'Safe European Home 1938' © Damian Le Bas, 2013

Particularly in the course of the last decade, Damian Le Bas had mobilized his cartography to visibilize the politics of past mappings. In 2008, he used a map of *Österreich – Ungarn 1914* ('Austria – Hungary 1914') as the basis for one of his artworks, while, in 2013, he used a 1938 political map of Europe to create his 'Back to the Future! Safe European Home 1938.' Critically focusing on the ways in which Europe had been mapped on the eve of the two main catastrophes in its modern history and linking past, present and future in the redirected *Safe European Home?* art project, Damian had given his work its fundamental signature. Then and now, Europe has been densely populated by his characteristic faces, eyes and lips, to give the continent and its cartographic history a new look, a novel taste which, most of all, allows us to see Europe anew with and through other eyes.

In the unforgettable scene in *The Great Dictator* (1940) in which a caricature of Hitler plays with the world as a huge balloon that finally suddenly bursts in his own face, Charlie Chaplin had invented a new cinematic language to movingly and ironically cross-examine

minority.’ The ‘truth’ is neither laid in vast territorialization nor in radical dispersion. Having neither Roman excavations nor a country to call their own does not imply that the true foundations are still somewhere else or somewhere underneath. ‘There are no maps that show the infrastructure of the underground world of the Gypsy,’ Damian once stated,⁵ thereby demythologizing the myth of whatever kind of the ‘true origins’ of the Roma. Damian Le Bas’s conquests for the Romani Empire have taken place where the Roma Army has wholeheartedly started to exhaust the tyranny of established, stereotypical representation. Ultimately, this is how what Damian and Delaine Le Bas called ‘the Gypsy revolution’ has made a firm and impressive start.

Notes

I very much thank Delaine Le Bas and Damian James Le Bas for taking such great care over Damian’s work and legacy, now that they have been confronted with the incredible loss of his enjoyable, friendly, lovely and humorous company. I thank Moritz Pankok of Gallery *Kai Dikhas* in Berlin for our discussions about Damian’s work and for his hospitality and generosity during my visits to the gallery’s archives and exhibitions.

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1. Elsewhere, I have extensively discussed what Trumpener calls ‘the European memory problem’ in the context of Romani memorial cultures and the simultaneous, ambiguous trend to governmentalize Holocaust remembrance for pedagogical reasons of Roma inclusion (van Baar 2011: 271–313).

2. Retrieved 22 November 2018 from the site ‘Romani.embassy.com’, see http://romani-embassy.com/?page_id=45

3. The ‘blonde, blue-eyed angel Maria’—as she was portrayed in international media—is a Romani girl who lived in a Romani shantytown in Greece, when, in October 2013, she was taken away from

her adoptive parents by the Greek police because they suspected that she was a non-Romani child 'stolen' by those who claimed—rightfully, it turned out—to be her adoptive parents. For more on this story and its wider context, see van Baar (2014).

4. Retrieved 22 November 2018 from <http://damianlebasartbrut.com/category/shows-exhibitions/gypsyland/>

5. See the previous note.

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