

Faculty of Art and Design at Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem
Emil Filla Gallery in Ústí nad Labem
Lidé výtvarnému umění – výtvarné umění lidem o. p. s., Ústí nad Labem

Na okraji zájmu / *On the Periphery of Concern*

10/09 – 16/10 2009

Emil Filla Gallery, SCHIFR-AC, s. r. o. building, (premises of Severočeská armaturka),
Jateční 1588/49, Ústí nad Labem.

Curator: Vendula Fremlová

Participating artists and projects: Rafani / Kateřina Šedá / Andreas Wegner / a case study of the Faculty of Art and Design at Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem for Karko Ústí nad Labem, a cooperative for the blind.

Opening hours of the Emil Filla Gallery:

Tue – Fri 10 a. m. – 1 p. m., 2 p. m. – 6 p. m., Sat 10 a. m. – 2 p. m. Free admission every Wednesday.

For more information see: www.fud.ujep.cz, www.gef.cz, www.legrandmagasin.coopseurope.coop

The Faculty of Art and Design at Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem organizes the exhibition *On the Periphery of Concern* as a part of an international artistic project *Le Grand Magasin*.

Le Grand Magasin project is organized by Department of Culture Neukölln / Berlin, Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem / Ústí nad Labem, Trafó Gallery / Budapest, Institute of Contemporary Art / Dunaújváros in cooperation with Cooperatives Europe / Brussels, CECOP / Brussels.

Le Grand Magasin project is supported by the following institutions and programmes: Culture Programme of the European Union, German Federal Cultural Foundation – Funds “Arbeit in Zukunft”, Department of Culture Neukölln / Berlin, Cooperatives Europe / Brussels.

The realization of *Le Grand Magasin* project is in the Czech Republic supported by the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, and Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem.

The exhibition **Na okraji zájmu/On the Periphery of Concern** presents outputs of the Czech part of an international artistic project called **Le Grand Magasin**. This project deals with issues of the non-profit, or non-for-profit sector and social economy in Europe, and views it from the perspective of contemporary visual art. The project gives attention to cooperatives, which are usually considered to be the pillar of social economy. The function of a cooperative is connecting (associating) people to ensure their common interest, such as performing a certain trade, job opportunities of socially and else handicapped people, etc. The concept of social economy includes a key criterion of "intention to provide space for self-realization to disadvantaged people, to provide services to members or to the local community, to contribute to sustainable development, rather than to profit accumulation". A common feature is the requirement to "socialize" the economic surplus - that is to reinvest it in development of activities, or use it to the benefit of people different from those who manage the organization (see <http://www.semvd.cz/socpodnik.html>). And just these qualities, like solidarity, democratism, and participation representing the fundamental principles of cooperative business are reflected by the artistic project **Le Grand Magasin**.

This way, two diverse areas are interconnected within the **Le Grand Magasin** project – cooperative business and contemporary art. In Czech milieu, these areas are still outsiders as regards the interest of the majority society – they are on the periphery. The government and public support to these areas in the form of funding, knowledgeability of citizens, and also good quality of legislation refers to the condition of the civil society in the respective country

In her new project called "Nedá se svítit" (There's no light), **Kateřina Šedá** deals with the disastrous condition of Nošovice, a small community famous for its Nošovice sauerkraut produced by the local farmers' cooperative. Under the new investor's pressure, after a thorough massage by media followed by fellow-citizens' constrain, owners of land, which had been farmed by the cooperative for a symbolic price, sold their property to the automotive producer Hyundai. Although the farmers' cooperative continues growing cabbage on other fields, the very fragile balance of the country coexistence has been drastically impaired. Roads leading nowhere and permanently drawn blinds in people's houses are a mere syndrome of the community devastation.

Kateřina Šedá presents just a preliminary stage of her research, not the final output. She herself calls things she creates "waste"; and she often disposes of them this way. At the moment, her work is in the middle of this process, which she now lets us peep into.

The small interventions presented by the artistic group **Rafani** in the form of untitled video projections take place in the premises of the Union of Czech and Moravian Production Cooperatives, and of KARKO, a production cooperative for the blind in Ústí nad Labem. Rafani adopt a confrontational attitude, which represents their own way of penetrating the issue. This way, they above all demonstrate their relation to terms such as work, cooperatives, fellowship, self help, equality, money, art, socially engaged art, altruism of artists, and intervention as a commodity.

The video with mirrors, in which Rafani interview a representative of the Union of Czech and Moravian Production Cooperatives, can be understood as a very complicated kind of communication reflecting hierarchies of the cooperative umbrella organizations. A series of questions concerning the organization, its goals, specialization, mission, and principles of cooperatives is followed by questions of a personal character, a kind of a meta-interview, an interview about interview. This is best characterized by one of the questions: "How would you describe the relationship of power between the interviewer and the interviewee? Do you feel that we are advantaged in comparison with you?" In spite of the fact that we only can see the interviewee in the mirror reflections throughout the interview, we can continue asking questions in this way: Who in fact is the interviewer, and who is the interviewee? Those who ask questions, or those who know the answers? And who listens to whom? Rafani give up the role of listeners to the viewers.

Case study of the Faculty of Art and Design at Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem for KARKO Ústí nad Labem, a production cooperative for the blind

The production cooperative for the blind Karko was established in 1953. Karko runs three protected workshops in Ústí nad Labem, Děčín, and Mstišov near Teplice. It employs 280 disabled people. The organization also provides accommodation for 60 people, first of all for its mentally affected and blind employees. The cooperative focuses especially on woodworking, and production of wooden, cork, wicker, and straw products.

The study of the Faculty of Art and Design tries to draw the attention to existence of such businesses endeavouring to integrate disadvantaged groups of citizens into the public life. Contemporary high-quality design may be an active agent in such a process. By means of design, it is possible not only to promote the cooperative, but also to provide it with a new image emphasizing its social role being reflected in a new and fresh appearance of its products.

The effort of the Faculty of Art and Design to improve the quality of design and presentation of the cooperative has been teamwork – designers Michaela Spružinová and Jan Pavézka created a series of products innovating and extending the existing KARKO product range. Due to the production possibilities of the members and employees of the cooperative, the designs had to

accept simple technologies and work operations. Radek Jandera, a photographer, then made a series of study photos of these products to guarantee a top-quality presentation. Pavel Frič, Veronika Hendrychová, and Dušan Pohanka designed a new visual identity of the cooperative. In their designs, they confront the functions of touch and sight. The resulting logo is letter "K", which due to its shape deformation and blurriness is supposed to refer to visual impairment and weak-sightedness. The intended embossed shape should enable haptic perception of dozens of interpretations of the letter "K" shape. The new visual identity of the cooperative thus emphasizes its social orientation.

The proposed design and visual identity of the cooperative represent an attitude, which is entirely new and different from the existing KARKO style. Therefore, the cooperative for the blind cannot be expected to fully adopt the designed concept. The case study is first of all a model, pilot activity to improve the situation of social businesses in general.

The case study is also presented in the form of a billboard campaign in the centre of Ústí nad Labem – on the building of the Institute of Health Studies at Velká Hradební 13, and also at the Main Railway Station.

The projects of Czech artists and designers at the exhibition On the Periphery of Concern are presented together with works by an artist from Berlin, **Andreas Wegner**. Andreas Wegner, the initiator of the whole project, has been engaged in the relation between economy and cotemporary art or artistic production on a long-term basis. In the Emil Filla Gallery, he presents a large object called "Heavens on Earth" visualizing both cooperative networks and structures, and the structure of the Le Grand Magasin project. His object is an abstracted model of a shop in Berlin of the same name, which was established as part of the project to distribute products of European cooperatives.