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# Princess Margriet Award

Fifth award

Yoel Gamzou, Dan & Lia Perjovschi



Brussels, 19 March, 2013



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In the Perjovschi's studio and Contemporary Art Archive and Center for Art Analysis, Sibiu.

Still from *ECF Princess Margriet Award portrait film Dan & Lia Perjovschi*, 2013 © Lia Perjovschi

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# The Award Over Time

The ECF Princess Margriet Award dates back to 2008. The jury that year set a precedent – which has been followed since – of splitting the award in two. So the first-ever PMA marked both a lifetime's achievement by a giant of cultural theory and also a single artistic production by two choreographer-dancers. Cultural diversity was to be celebrated in its many discursive forms.

Sadly, the great cultural theorist in question, **Stuart Hall**, passed away in early 2014. His stature remains undiminished in death. As if to drive home this point, his life's work was recently writ large on the screen, in a film fittingly made by another PMA laureate, **John Akomfrah**. *The Stuart Hall Project* consists of Hall's words and documentary footage showing 'the upheavals, struggles and turning points that made the 20th century the century of campaigning, and of global political and cultural change.'

One aim of the award was to demonstrate that the alarming rise of xenophobic populism in Europe was in fact resistible. And dialogue being a chief form of resistance, the Award Jury was captivated by a conversation-piece *Pichet Klunchun & myself* performed by the French choreographer **Jérôme Bel** and the Thai dancer **Pichet Klunchun**. Through humour and curiosity, we see misunderstanding turn to its opposite – a lesson for everyone, all the more effective for not being heavy-handed.

The second Award ceremony honoured another creative artist as well as a cultural influencer. The Swiss-born, Berlin-based documentary theatre-maker **Stefan Kaegi** brings to light the unseen networks of globalisation. *Cargo Sofia-X*, for instance, documents the lives of those perennial crossers of borders, truck drivers. Underlining the collaborative nature of his art, Kaegi chose to share his award with two fellow artists, Juliane Männel and Jörg Karrenbauer. The choice of Kaegi signalled the Award's interest in experimental forms of art-making as well as a determination that there should be no hidden, unexamined lives in an inclusive Europe.

As well as keeping an eye on the new, the Award faces up to age-old problems in Europe. The fault lines in the Balkan political landscape, which led to the eruptions of the Yugoslav Wars, have prompted the cultural activism of Kaegi's fellow laureate, **Borka Pavićević**. A theatre-maker and dramaturge, Pavićević is the Director of Belgrade's Centre for Cultural Decontamination, a meeting place that has allowed minds to remain open to creative and collaborative possibilities in worse-than-trying circumstances.

The visual artist and filmmaker **Šejla Kamerić** knows about such circumstances, having survived the siege of Sarajevo and gone on to tell movingly – in films such as *What Do I Know* (2007) and *Glück* (2009) – how intensely personal memories can persist despite trauma. Kamerić's selection by the Jury shows that the Award's focus is not only on social change but also on the lived reality of individual lives in today's Europe.

Few artists reveal the quirks and contradictions of individual lives so graphically as **Kutluğ Ataman**, the celebrated Turkish filmmaker who was also a recipient of the third ECF Princess Margriet Award. His installation *Küba* (2004) aired the voices of shanty town dwellers outside Istanbul. But Ataman refuses to be pigeonholed as an artist of social concern, as his cycle of works *Mesopotamian Dramaturgies* (2009) reveals. These often humorous, 'unreliable' narratives show how reality can be manipulated in the process of storytelling. Ataman has in the past been incarcerated for his insolent art, but the experience did not embitter him or make him any less witty: a salutary lesson that non-conforming vitality is perhaps the strongest defence against authoritarianism.

Another socially and politically engaged filmmaker, **John Akomfrah**, shared the fourth Award with the curator and writer **Charles Esche**. It is no surprise that Akomfrah should have found inspiration in Stuart Hall's work. After a career devoted to cultural theory within various educational contexts, Hall became involved with the Association of Black Photographers, while Akomfrah was a founding member of the experimental Black Audio Film Collective. However, their interests have not been confined to – though they include – issues of race and post-imperialism. Just as Kaegi has brought present-day 'hidden lives' to the fore, so Akomfrah has rescued from near-oblivion certain narratives and perspectives that are normally excluded from European history. This Ghana-born Londoner showed immense promise with his early politically charged film *Handsworth Songs* (1986), a promise that has been more than fulfilled in subsequent works, such as 2010's *Nine Muses*, a meditation on migration, myth and memory.

These subjects can often be found – tackled in new and surprising ways – in the curatorial work of Charles Esche. The Director of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, Esche has transformed our idea of the public space into a place which enacts a vital and challenging conversation between art and society. He has said that it is his task to create 'an environment in which to put prejudices aside'. His style of programming

often does more than that, and indeed actively opposes the prevailing dominant narratives, which is surely one common feature of all of the laureates to date.

Similarly worthy recipients, **Yoel Gamzou** and **Lia and Dan Perjovschi** have shown that, in its fifth year of existence, the ECF Princess Margriet Award still has the power to surprise and affirm.

# On the Day

'Our audience can detect sincerity,' said the conductor Yoel Gamzou on accepting the ECF Princess Margriet Award in Brussels. Not all awards ceremonies demonstrate the 'sincere communication' that Yoel regards as the basis of true art. But, amid the glitz and the glamour, this one tries. And that is because the Award serves a serious purpose, which is to promote culture's role in creating an inclusive Europe. The Dutch cultural philosopher Rob Riemen, in a speech read by the Award Jury member Christian Esch, praised Yoel, remarking: 'Without culture, the EU had to become a



Left to right: Director Katherine Watson, HRH Princess Margriet of the Netherlands, laureates Dan and Lia Perjovschi and laureate Yoel Gamzou.

Europe without a soul. The example of Gamzou shows that a renaissance of the European spirit is possible.'

The fifth Award was also won by Lia and Dan Perjovschi for their longstanding contribution to Romanian culture and community building, which has become influential globally. Duke University Professor of Art, Kristine Stiles, described them as survivors and fighters, recalling them in their early days working from a one-room

studio in a dilapidated Bucharest building: 'Their energy was palpable and even electric,' she said. Lia's conceptual work expressed a hunger to change Romania, and now the world; while the work of Dan – who has single-handedly changed our concept of what drawing can be – exposes social and cultural hypocrisy.

The ceremony took place in the Brussels cultural venue, The Egg, on 19 March 2013, and was hosted by ECF Director Katherine Watson. The Award, she said, 'sends a clear signal that the interplay of cultures is vital to our future – the future of Europe and, indeed, of humanity.' This sentiment was echoed by ECF President, HRH Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands, who remarked that 'Europe is too important to be left to technocrats and politicians alone.'

A film portrait of the Perjovschis made especially for the event showed them deep in conversation about their lives as artists and keepers of the archive that has been known variously as the Centre for Art Analysis, the Contemporary Art Archive, and the Knowledge Museum. The film conveys this artist-couple's serious and humorous sides. Their experiences, both under Ceaușescu's authoritarian regime and in the post-



Wolfgang Petritsch speaks at the Award ceremony





Lia Perjovschi at a presentation preceding the Award ceremony

revolutionary period, taught them that the artist must be stubborn *and* open-minded.

A second film shown at the ceremony followed Yoel at a music workshop in Hamburg, and revealed his democratic approach to conducting an orchestra, encapsulated in his words: 'Those magical moments which reach people don't happen through executing orders, they only happen when people believe in what they do.' Both of these film portraits can be seen at ECF's website, [culturalfoundation.eu/pma5](http://culturalfoundation.eu/pma5).

The audience experienced a magical moment when Bach's Chaconne for Solo Violin was performed by a young musician who works with Yoel, Afonso Fesch. Even the awards themselves had a musical theme, made as they were by the sound artist Nathalie Bruys from a tuning fork and a resonance box to produce each laureate's own personal sound frequency.

A pre-ceremony discussion with the Perjovschis served as a reminder of the power of physical presence in this digital age. As Dan said in an interview with ECF, 'We never send works. We have to be present,' Lia adding: 'It's a pleasure.' We hope that these pages capture some of the power and the pleasure of this celebration of three very fine and challenging artists.

# Absolutely Not There

## Yoel Gamzou

In an interview with ECF in the lead-up to the award ceremony, Yoel Gamzou tells the story of his initiation into the world of music-making. Fleeing a class of ‘forty little kids scratching the violin,’ he was drawn instead to the empty cello class, finding there the instrument he would end up playing – all because he liked the room’s silence. It is, in a sense, a story told against himself which actually speaks well of him. Whatever his musical path was to be, it clearly wasn’t going to be a conventional one.

Encountering music through silence is not really so paradoxical, since for Yoel music is not a collection of sounds, but represents ‘our experiences, our emotions, what we go through in our life.’ This Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the International Mahler Orchestra – as well as 1st Kapellmeister and Vice Music Director of the Staatstheater Kassel – doesn’t stand on ceremony. He has dedicated himself to banishing hierarchy from the orchestra and uncovering its democratic potential, to breaking down the wall between orchestra and audience, to rediscovering the popular appeal of classical music without shirking its need to challenge the listener. ‘You have to find this very fine balance between challenging and pleasing your audience,’ he says. ‘Life isn’t always pretty. And as music has to represent life, in all aspects, it is not always pretty.’

### Values and Sincerity

What underpins his practice as a conductor is his conviction that an orchestra is not a collective but is made up of unique individuals, all of whom must ‘stand behind what they are playing.’ The various wishes and identities must be taken into account if the musicians are to unite behind the idea of how to play a particular piece. ‘Every single decision we make and take together,’ he says. Nor is he interested in having ‘specialists of a craft’ in his orchestra so much as ‘people of culture’. Narrowness is out. It has to be if an orchestra is to represent society.

This society is, in vision at least, one without passports. Yoel refuses to be defined nationally or geographically, insisting that he has ‘never felt at home anywhere in any country,’ but feels ‘at home everywhere at the same time.’ Nonetheless, he hankers after the Europe of ‘values and sincerity’ that he believes existed before the war, especially in the 19th century – even while acknowledging that ‘coming from a person of Jewish heritage, it might sound a bit absurd.’ But this hankering stops short



Yoel Gamzou  
Photo © Oran Greier

of reactionary sentiment. Yoel insists that 'any culture is only real and relevant and of substance when it constantly evolves.'

## Being Human

Yoel's democratic, non-specialist instincts are evident in the influences he cites. He maintains that these have nothing directly to do with classical music: they include Woody Allen, Paul McCartney, friends or strangers met briefly at a train station – whoever is able to 'open something in your vision.' Even his great musical idol, Gustav Mahler, is cherished for his human qualities: 'I don't see in his music anything beyond humanness. For me it is purely human.' And finding a way to 'reconnect to being human' he considers our most important task.

One of Yoel's most acclaimed achievements to date is his completion of Mahler's Tenth Symphony. The work left unfinished at Mahler's premature death was, Yoel claims, so monumentally important musically and culturally that 'somebody had to finish that piece.' That he volunteered to do so might seem self-admiring to some, but for Yoel it was a chance to extinguish his own ego in the service of something greater. This lack of ego he regards as a precondition of music's ability to communicate. The music must 'flow through' the conductor. 'Then you are capable of transmitting something to your musicians and, in turn, to the public.' Asked if this means that he needs to be absolutely present in order to channel the music, he replies astringently: 'I think you have to be absolutely *not* there.' It is clear that Yoel wants to avoid getting between the music and the audience's appreciation of the music – to remove his personality from the equation. It is a viewpoint expressed perhaps most famously – and at its most extreme – by T.S. Eliot when he remarked: 'The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.'

## A Shared Adventure

The ECF Princess Margriet Award meant most to him, he said, because it hadn't come from a large music institution but from a foundation with as broad a cultural remit as ECF's. Five months after the award ceremony in Brussels, Yoel and the International Mahler Orchestra put on two concerts that ECF helped to coordinate in Amsterdam, one at the Portuguese Synagogue and the other at the Amsterdam Music Theatre. Once again, the musicians of this innovative orchestra set up by Yoel in 2006 demonstrated that they are, as ECF Director Katherine Watson said, 'a dynamic assembly of different voices, on a shared adventure.'

This shared adventure starts from the very basic principle of being alive: the existence of a pulse. 'I believe that the most important aspect in music-making is pulse,' Yoel says. 'Because when you're excited, when you're sad, worried, your pulse changes, just as much as music which represents your life has a changing pulse.' Yoel has no time for music that maintains a steady, unvarying pulse.

The Award Jury praised Yoel for 're-thinking classical music, giving it new vitality relevant to contemporary times.' Relevance does not equate with conformity, however. Yoel encourages his colleagues 'to dig within themselves for what they really believe in,' as society only encourages a 'search for belief in that which serves society.' His music is as much an existential as a cultural phenomenon. If this is art – and it is – then it is art that is solidly based on conviction.



Yoel Gamzou and the International Mahler Orchestra.

Still from *ECF Princess Margriet Award portrait film Yoel Gamzou, 2013* © Sebastian Krüger

# Art as a Sensor, Not a Censor

## Lia & Dan Perjovschi

'We are your past, but we've been in your future,' says Dan Perjovschi, in an interview with ECF that featured in a short film shown at the ECF Princess Margriet Awards. It's a telling, teasing comment – not unlike his 'permanently temporary' drawings which are at once serious and playful. The comment refers to Romania's Iron Curtain-identity, the anti-Communist background of Romania's artists, and the seeming paradox that the West they found so alluring as a kind of paradise is intellectually and artistically so left-leaning.

For many, paradise evaporated as soon as it was reached. It isn't a question of either capitalism or communism, Dan says: both systems 'deny certain things'. Freedom may be increased through the sharing of information, but having too much information is like having none at all. Art remains alert to the liveliness that exists independently of systems: a sensor, Lia Perjovschi says, rather than a censor.

### The Archive

The primary information-gatherer of the Perjovschi artist-couple is Lia. She has been assiduously compiling an archive of art criticism and knowledge – called the Centre for Art Analysis at first, then the Contemporary Art Archive – ever since she realised, when international travel became possible in 1990, that the black hole of no-information stretching from the 1950s meant that she didn't have the words to answer the questions posed by journalists and historians in the West. Escape prior to 1990 was a possibility they both discounted. As Lia explains, 'I said it's a pity we lose so many good people – why don't the bad guys go? And I said: OK, I will stay.'

The impressive archive grew from modest beginnings. Though she respects those who 'discover a whole universe in their fields,' Lia had no intention of staying within the confines of art, and began by simply asking people from different disciplines how they worked. Their studio soon became an open space for meeting and for learning. Catalogues (including their own) were accumulated and workshops run. And as the street increasingly invaded their home, so too did they travel more and more widely, picking up information from those in the know.





Lia & Dan Perjovschi

Photo © Angel Sanchez / El Pais



Dan Perjovschi, National Technical Library of Prague (NTK), 2009

If they have stayed in Romania, they have also remained international in outlook, without making the common mistake whereby 'outside is always rated better'. Dan reflects that 'locally, and I don't say this critically, they don't get it, they don't have the history to get it.' Here is where the archive and the art converge. In a sense, the Perjovschis are doing in their homeland what was once said of the English Romantic poet William Wordsworth – creating the taste by which they are understood.

### 'LiaDan'

Yet this artist-couple, self-dubbed 'LiaDan', is made up of two very distinct individuals. The differences are a source of humour in their almost double-act routine. 'Lia is with the content and I'm with the PR department,' jokes Dan, while Lia adds: 'And the fundraising. He is very good with money.' More seriously, Dan admits to being much more adaptable to prevailing systems, whereas Lia says she 'cannot accept any kind of system.' Yet it is Lia who is keen on responsibility and Dan on freedom. Their temporal perspectives also differ, Lia claiming to have a 'bird view on time', while Dan asserts that 'Today is me!'



It is with this 'bird view' that Lia opened and closed her part of the Perjovschis' pre-award-ceremony presentation. Using a low-tech projection, she showed an image of the first moon landing to illustrate her long-term and large-scale perspective, following this up with the minuscule image of the Earth as viewed by the Voyager 1 spacecraft in 1990 – a pivotal year for her, in which she began the archive following the Romanian Revolution that ousted Ceaușescu. It was a time of hope for the country, but even before then she had refused to be despondent. 'I didn't want to wait and I didn't want to complain,' she says. The bird view helped her through those years, and helps her now, when it is the vastness of the unknown universe which still spurs her on.

## Truth Telling

The Perjovschis' information-sharing hasn't been confined to their living quarters or their travels. For three months in 2000, Romanian TVR1 broadcast their weekly arts programme. This short-lived but radical experiment helped them reach people they couldn't have hoped to reach before. As for their home-conducted dissemination, that was interrupted when the electricity in their apartment was cut off, forcing a move



Dan Perjovschi, Venice Biennial, Romania Pavilion (installation view), 1999



Lia Perjovschi, Mind-maps (detail), 1999–today

from Bucharest to Sibiu. Here, in their native city, the group discussions persist and the archive continues to grow.

Dan's take on life for an artist under Ceaușescu was that it involved 'telling the truth in the middle of the biggest lie'. Artistic responsibility doesn't end when dictatorship does. In freer conditions, self-censorship becomes a risk. Yet: 'If you are not afraid to lose your fee, then you are free.'

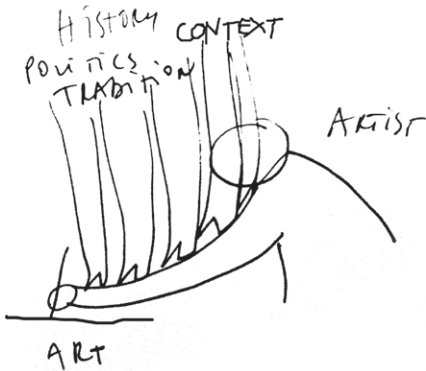
A directional change in his own development occurred when he saw a way to become 'unstuck' from the idea of creating a masterpiece. Rejecting perfection and permanence, he began to draw directly onto the surfaces of exhibition spaces – powerful and influential drawings, often wittily political, which would be erased by the tread of viewers (as in his 1999 Venice Biennale show) or perhaps cut out and handed to them, in the spirit that 'Disappearance is a sign of success.'

## Analogue

Questioned by the moderator, Ann Demeester (Director of Amsterdam's de Appel), the Perjovschis began to speak with greater seriousness about the dynamics of their artist-couple relationship. Their 'parallel discourse' had continued over the decades at the cost of a normal family life. The archive was born out of compulsion, an inner drive, and Dan's drawing out of a need to understand.

In this digitised information age, their work remains stubbornly 'analogue'. Books and newspapers and cost-free conversation are their raw material. The one thing that's always required of them is their physical presence.

Dan Perjovschi, Art-artist, 2009



## Two Fronts

The value of information is less the speed at which it is received than the extent to which it serves truth. For Dan, the concept of truth is less fundamental than it is for Lia, who cannot conceive of working without its guiding light. 'We are not the holders of truth,' Dan says of artists generally: 'we are just the researchers of it.'

No artist is an island: a chain of ideas leads to each new advance.

In the educational field, artists mustn't let scarcity of resources limit achievement: if there is only green paint left, says Dan, then paint green! And when you progress to being a teacher yourself, there should be no fear of students surpassing your own achievement: as Lia says, the main thing is to be 'the teacher you never had but you wanted to have'.

The Perjovschis were singled out by the ECF Princess Margriet Award Jury for 'the active role that their art has played in Romanian culture and community building since the late 1980s, as well as its wider European relevance and global impact.' The domestic and the international are the two fronts on which Lia and Dan operate. And international recognition is vital in rebutting domestic hostility from the authorities. Asked if there is a danger inherent in receiving such international acclaim, Lia replies: 'No. It will save us.'



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The European Cultural Foundation believes that culture connects people as Europeans and helps to build a shared future. We initiate and support cultural exchange and creative expression across wider Europe. We do this because culture inspires, empowers and engages people to create democratic societies. We achieve our aims through our wide-ranging activities, advocacy, grants and co-publish and create new content both online and offline, building tools for the cultural sector.

The Award is presented by ECF's former President, HRH Princess Margriet of the Netherlands, in whose honour it was established, by the ECF, with the support of the Dutch Ministries for Foreign Affairs and Education, Culture and Science. The annual prize money is € 50,000.

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ECF is grateful for the longstanding partnership with the Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds. As a result of this partnership ECF acknowledges the annual financial contribution – via the Cultuurfonds – from the BankGiro Loterij, the Lotto and the Nationale Instant-Loterij.