

MAP Magazine

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Residency: Maria and Natalia Petschatnikov

This Russian-born duo has a joint practice that is inspired and driven by participation in residencies throughout Europe



'Cigarette Pack, Scotland', 2008

Travelling can be tedious. Worries about connecting flights, visas, oversized luggage, materials that might be classified as highly explosive and then confiscated. And then there is always the thought that you aren't going to find that village in the mountains in Spain or in the pine forests in Finland. No, it's not travelling that make residencies so special for us; it's having the privilege to live and work in such a variety of places we find so exciting.

Residency programmes can often be located in a remote areas away from the metropolis, surrounded by spectacular landscape. For a limited period of time a small, international group of strangers live together and worry about nothing but making art. It's liberating to have purpose and objectives within a specified time. In the studio provided much can be achieved. You get to know the place by trying to find out where you can get your materials or print your photos. Often you have to take local trains and odd buses to get to the things you need. Small inconveniences often develop into exciting adventures. Fellow artists and residency staff are always a great source of information.

We began applying to international residency programmes after finishing graduate school in NYC. It seemed a good place to start our joint career, not realising then how much these experiences would affect our work process, not to mention our lives.

For the past eight years we have visited a number of programmes throughout Europe. Each place is unique in its own way. Some are highly structured while others are chaotic. Sometimes you feel that no one is really expecting you, other times you find your name printed on the studio door. Regardless of the comforts offered (even though we do end up giving stars to our residencies) each place has unquestionably affected our practice and given us an invaluable opportunity to grow as artists.

It is important for us not to arrive on residency with preconceived ideas. We allow the place to affect us and our work. First impressions are very powerful and often affect the project we ultimately develop. We work collaboratively. Through endless conversations and shared observations, ideas crystallise *in situ*. As identical twins we possess a shared pool of memories. In a new place we might respond to something we've never seen before or recognise familiar things in unfamiliar circumstances. Particularities of the facilities might inspire us to experiment with new materials and the project can take a totally new turn.

In a Spanish residency outside Barcelona, the rundown nostalgic beauty of the old villa where we lived and worked was inescapable. Daily trips to the village kiosk for a newspaper, in a language we don't speak, made us think about the way communication without language works. 'Paperwork', 2006, the installation developed there is made of Spanish newspaper and is reminiscent of an old garden with forlorn chairs and a fountain. An old-fashioned public telephone, used by artists to call home to myriad different countries, also found its way into this piece.

'Formal Garden', 2004, is an installation we realised in Dublin. It is a direct response to the highly decorative formal garden in the grounds of the Irish Museum of Modern Art. Our piece is an ironic comparison between controlled outdoor spaces and tiled interiors of modern bathrooms.

Our make-believe scientific magazine 'Getting Ready for Mars', 2004, was based on our experience in Norway. We set up a research station to observe the spectacular winter landscape there. An investigation of Mars, broadcast in the media at the same time, struck us as being strangely similar to our own research and led to an ironic comparison between the two stories using the language of popular science publications.



'Formal Garden', 2007, foam, thread, water fountain, installation

Tiled shower rooms and swimming pools of the resort Bad Ems in Germany influenced our piece 'Wellness Fountains'. Our version of the week-long spa treatment with healthy waters plays with the idea of the famous Fountain Hall of the 19th century. Made of ceramic tiles, our table fountains quote the aesthetic of Wellness institutions and comment on the fashionable concept of Wellness.

Scotland, at the end of April this year, with its mohair socks weather, provided a chilly change from the +27 degrees in Hamburg where we live. The tiny village of Lumsden, home of Scottish Sculpture Workshop residencies, is surrounded by heather-covered mountains, fields of highland cows and yellow dandelions. Taking long walks along the country roads, we noticed discordant litter—familiar objects, which at the same time appeared to be so foreign in the landscape—soda cans, candy wrappers, cigarette packs and half-eaten apples.

We decided to collect and use them to make resin casts. The porcelain-like material resulted in them seeming almost precious. We later painted some of the white casts tartan designs, making them even more specific. Did we have to come so far to make a project using these objects? Probably. Now, we intend to continue our collection, painting different local designs on similarly found items, and then photographing them in the places we found them. Global and local, beautiful and ugly, unique and generic, these are the issues that somehow keep occupying us.

In a strange act of fate, residencies became a habit for us. We enjoy the variety and excitement they bring to our lives. Residencies are our research stations.

Often we don't finish our projects while on residency. We work on ideas that are later developed into particular pieces. Often we document our residency projects with the intention of using this documentation in later work. Sometimes a desire not to leave behind a particular project produced during a residency makes us think in advance of foldable structures, lightweight materials, or making moulds for future casts.

Of course there are always risks. The project can become too specific to a particular place and not function elsewhere, and sometimes that fact only comes to light through subsequent exhibitions. This unpredictability sometimes makes our collaboration with art institutions feel like a roller coaster ride. But we believe that this element of surprise and experimentation is part of the journey.

Maria and Natalia Petschatnikov