



*tomáš džadoň works 2006/2010*

**the experience is an encounter which changes us**

## Testament to Tradition and Images of Nostalgia

It is an evident paradox of today that although we are surrounded by images from the past as we have never been before our relations to the past are often linked with terms such as a 'disinterest', 'shallowness' and 'loss'. It is suggested that we go through our daily lives without a significant concern about the past or the future. However, it cannot be denied that in a contemporary society with no definite ideological direction we often find ourselves in a rich heritage of reminders and artefacts as well as ideas that our generation inherited from our predecessors. It is often enough that by paying more attention to symbols, concepts and objects around us we realise we live through the past a lot more than we would like to admit to ourselves. When we seek out the 'new' now, it only serves to explain the blindness to the status quo but it cannot sustain it. Questions and contradictions posed for us are there to be re-evaluated and the fact that some events bear some negative connotations of a certain time in history should not stop us, if we are to take the future ahead at least a little bit seriously.

A candid view of the past and most importantly an understanding of it as something that is here to stay led Tomáš Džadoň to pull burnt wood out of ashes and lay it front of our feet, regardless of whether or not we had hoped for its full disappearance. The Slovakian artist living in Prague was influenced by graphic design but his ideas are articulated most eloquently in sculptural space in the form of installation. There he uses visual devices such as bacon, censer, traditional wooden houses and tower blocks, devices which have been in his artistic vocabulary for some time now. To use such easily discernible aesthetics of local folklore may go in two directions; that of cheap kitsch or on the contrary, towards a brave confrontation with nostalgia

that was very poignantly described by Christopher Lasch as an abdication of memory. The finalist of the Jindřich Chalupecký's Prize and the Oskar Čepan Award asks his audience how to deal with personal memory and with the past inherited through the culture of their predecessors. Whether the audience experiences nostalgia or not, they do not leave indifferent.

## The Past Buried Alive

Nowadays nostalgia is everywhere. It is one of the driving forces behind tourism, and principles of its emotional appeal have been adapted by advertising gurus. In addition, it is not something affecting only older generations. Nostalgia and 'retro' is well known to teenagers experiencing a fast change of culture in a short time of only a few years. It takes its 'toll' most powerfully where cultural or national identity is formed. We can see nostalgia is evident everywhere from cinema and literature, idealising not only the history of countries that have undergone in the past two decades a change of political regime but also from imperial history. The first example is an unforgivable ignorance of a political and social persecution suffered in the countries and the latter implies a degenerate sentiment of super power concerning a decline of the original local culture that was irrevocably and insensitively affected by colonisation.

Although nostalgia may seem to be a natural process it is a purely recent phenomena connected to globalisation, geographical mobility and an increasing pace of changes. As a pathological form of homesickness it was first described in the Swiss army during a military expedition faraway from home (lat. nostos-return home, algos - pain, suffering) more as a complaint about physical than mental difficulties. To go too far away from home implied a risk of death. \*2

It had not penetrated a broader cultural imagination until the 18th and 19th centuries when significant change of the world under the influence of the industrial revolution could not be overlooked. Until that time it had been depicted as a difference between ... city (alienation) and country (authenticity) as only a spatial distinction; nostalgia as a time-related entity - in this context to the past - emerges later. Bryan Turner even claims that in the decades around the turn of nineteenth and twentieth century sociology was inseparably bounded with the discourse of structured nostalgias. \*<sup>3</sup> Later, sociological self-reflection recognises the main symptoms of nostalgia as the feeling of historical decline, the feeling of absence or loss of personal unity and moral boundaries, the feeling of loss of personal freedom and autonomy and the feeling of loss of simplicity, authenticity and emotional spontaneity. \*<sup>4</sup>

Nostalgia was an important aspect in Christopher Lasch's discussion on the analysis of progress. <sup>6</sup> According to Lasch hope in progress symbolises an ideological twin of nostalgia, although they may be perceived at first sight to be contradictory positions. An optimistic idea about the constant improvement of the world implies a transition of agents of change into a territory of mysterious and rationally unattainable social forces. Consequently this concept weakens personal responsibility and excludes personal involvement. Equally, nostalgia prevents an intelligent reflection on the past. The barrier separating the past from the present is a disillusioned experience and in this respect, it is the relation of the past to the present that is defined in particular by the contrast between simplicity and complexity. For this reason nostalgia materialises most eloquently in the image of the country idyll with its simple pleasures. The charm of the idyll is not of course ... a truthful depiction of country life, but exists in the dream of simplicity

and safety of one's childhood. 'Nostalgia evokes the past only to bury it alive' writes Lasch. With hope in progress it shares an excitement in declaring the past dead and in the denial of the influence of the past on the future.

### **Rabbit hutches**

The previous theoretical excursion would not be necessary if Džadoň's works did not lead to a superficial interpretation suggesting the artist's longing for bygone times, although he has a lot more to offer. 'Ostalgia' is a well established term in Eastern Europe, which similarly to the division between country/city and tradition/modernism denounces the experience of the totalitarian regime and limits confrontation with real historical events in an objective way.

It is no surprise that for Džadoň and many other Czechs and Slovaks the communist regime is symbolized by the tower block. The soulless and inferior architecture of Czechoslovakian tower blocks, which spread from the 1950s to the 1990s across the whole country, were quite justly a target of jokes and contempt. Czech tower blocks, called 'rabbit hutches' by Václav Havel, are inhabited by one third of the population even today. There is even a specialized magazine dedicated purely to reconstructions of tower blocks. We can find similar architecture only in German Plattenbau or Russian Chruschchovce. Some similarities can be found in the notorious American project Pruitt-Igoe by architect Minor Yamasaki (apart from that the architect of the World Trade Centre) in the fifties, which as a result of its social conditions had to be demolished not even twenty years later.

The tower block as an unmissable reminder of the communist past has consequently become a part of a local culture. For younger and middle aged generations who grew up or still live there, the uniformity of living spaces symbolizes an important formative experience. This leads Džadoň to extract the tower block from a shady realm of daily routine and nostalgia. His childhood spent in his tower block 'home' in Poprad overlooking the Tatra mountains stimulated a strong creative impulse materializing in a series of works revolving around that subject matter, carefully executed in juxtaposition to traditional folk architecture.

It could be that in the installation *Neighbourhood Ždiar (2008)* constructed as a scale model of a tower block estate with the buildings covered with a representation of the facade of traditional wooden houses, or in the unrealized *Folk Architecture Monument (2006)* where he proposed to 'top' the tower block with three traditional wooden houses, or the *YTONG piece (2006)* replicating a facade of wooden houses using a contemporary building materials, that the traditional architecture is not used as a mirror to the past but as a key. It is a key that does not function as an exact historical document, but similarly to the poetry of the country idyll is a metaphor for loss. It is most likely that the idea of loss will be always connected to the countryside. \*6 It is even more interesting for Džadoň's to use this key and to place it next to something as problematic as the tower block. It is up to the audience to decide whether they leave merely aware of the ambiguity or will be actually questioning the idea of loss.

There may be some clue in the title of the formidable four metre object *Is it an attraction or is it tumbling down? (2009)*. This discusses another interpretation of the tower block's status in cultural iconography. If the tilted sculpture evokes nostalgia,

it is the audience's response to the artist's question. *Can't Undo (2008)* or the tower block 'sinking' in the moat, or the unmasked sculpture *Block? (2009)* are not merely different interpretations of a single theme but bold extracts from a complex memory to which we may or may not want to return to. In this respect, Džadoň's attempts to discuss the threat of the past hidden under the romantic undertones so poignantly analysed by Christopher Lasch. The reading of the message in Tomáš's works becomes more urgent if the juxtaposition of socialist architecture and the traditional woodhouse results in emotional ambiguity.

When Džadoň in his thesis *Superflat (2007)* demystifies the roots of tradition as a mere simulation, he does not intend to mock and to alienate the most authentic in local culture, but it is a manifestation of the unavoidable artificiality of our relationship to the past. If we cross one side of the facade of the woodhouse to the other and it rotates behind us leaving us always 'outside', in Džadoň's perspective it leads to the enquiry into whether a much hated tower block is really less worthy in comparison to traditional folk architecture. Džadoň, without a hint of irony points out that sooner or later we'll have to accept that the status of tradition is looming over the tower block, too. The tower block is the new wooden house.

According to Lasch, experience of alienation is a common part of the human condition. Similarly, as it is nowadays with 'nature', tradition is considered to be a potent symbol of authenticity, simplicity and purity, even though it is clearly a mere social construct. Everyone holds inside of them the idealized picture of home saturated with human warmth and safety. If a bond is forged with the controversial past, nostalgia becomes understandable but it is not a sustainable defense mechanism.

## Transitions to authenticity

At the heart of Džadoň's oeuvre is a strong focus on the present confirmed by a series of works dealing with the theme of transition and the shift between future and past. The works *Gateway (2008)* and *Portal (2009)* pose as replicas of entry doors to a tower block framed by typical red bricks. In the case of *Gateway* the framing is multiplied and it retreats replicating the form of the frame transforming the banal to the realm of the sacred. The multiplied form is used in the *No man's land (2009)* where a common door frame multiplies to extend and reframe the point of entry.

"The entrance door is an emphasis of the particular zone of transition. In folk architecture the entry door is highly symbolic: a tall threshold that had to be stepped over, the head had to be lowered, bent or humbled when crossing the entrance. It is very important as a division and transition zone', says the artist. \* 7

The dynamic combination of personal and collective memory, memories of the artist's experience and the influence of his surroundings, are one of the key aspects of Džadoň's work. His objects and installations are the common ground between a testament to tradition and the urge to forget, disabling a longing after the idealized past with the actual circumstances of the present. Longing for safety and security, the need to return to the mother's womb – in psychoanalytical terms - is the most powerful symbolic metaphor of home. In his most recent works Džadoň's focus on the tower block positions this question right in the centre of the allegory.

The attempts to find and to backtrack authenticity in his works in the present is even more exciting as their materialization is always to be found itself in the axes of Euklides's geometry: clean, precise, absolute forms with strong outlines. They are really more present than reality ever would be. It doesn't es-

cape the simulation to which it responds and this is in itself a valid comment in a world where nothing is more artificial than denial of artificiality as a permanent condition of human nature.

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\*1 Rosaldo, Renato. "Imperialist Nostalgia" Pp. 107-122 in *Representations*, 26. Spring 1989.

\*2 Ibid.

\*3 Cit. podle Frow, John. 1991. "Tourism and the Semiotics of Nostalgia" Pp. 123-151 in *October*, 57.

\*4 Ibid.

\*5 Lasch, Christopher. *True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics*. London - New York : W. W. Norton & Company 1991.

\*6 Kelly, Ursula A. 2009. "Learning to Lose: Rurality, Transcience, and Belonging (A Companion to Michael Corbett)" *Int'Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 24 (11).

\*7 Stavba, magazine , 05/2009

# glowing archetypes

## \_2010

CCEA - center for centraleuropean architecture, st. K. Světlé, Prague  
180 x 100 x 50 cm / 145 x 100 x 80 cm / 200 x 100 x 60 cm

The “Glowing archetypes” were made for a new CCEA location (center for centraleuropean architecture) in the very city center of Prague old town. I proposed to grasp the space gently and the same time let the space in its original condition. „Glowing archetypes“, heated objects conceptually based on old ovens from the traditional Slovak wooden architecture. I withdrew my inspiration not only from their formal shapes but from their location in the old houses as well. Usually they were located in the corners opposite the windows. Warm, a symbol of domesticated place fulfilled rough space and commented the goal of the CCEA, to find a support for the reconstruction.

From long time ago, I was fascinated by the traditional ovens, especially by their apparently illogical shapes. During work on „Glowing archetypes“ I realized how clever they are designed. That parts I perceived as illogical give them interactive value. The ledges and out shots, which I call now „interspaces“ are place to sit, to rest, to lay. The man became a „shem“ of the structure.

The objects were made of steel plates, welded by hand what corresponded with handmade style of the traditional ovens. There were a contrast between roughness of the object and the friendly warm they were spreading around. I let visible the gas bomb, so typical element in the villages before a gas conduit was booted in former Czechoslovakia.





# dead concrete \*? - † 1993

\_2010

gallery F43/ Olšanský cementary / Prague  
fake bucket of Violet/old diary/

I exhibited a poem I wrote when I was 12 years old without knowing anything about my future as an artist...

*dead concrete*  
*\*? - † 1993*

*Yesterday I found the dead concrete*  
*immediately I gave him a first aid*  
*I called the doctor*  
*and He said:*  
*“heart attack”*  
*and I started to cry.*



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# i have lost the instructions...

## \_2009

DOX Center for contemporary art / Prague  
CETRIS boards / tripple-wood / wood/ video projection  
/20000 x 7500 x 8000 cm/

The exhibition took place in the time of 20th anniversary of revolution. The whole society pondered this passed time. I did it as well, but from personal point of view. The title of the installation „I have lost the instructions...” may mean desperation as well as euphoria of its loss. I am glad „I have lost the instruction...“, maybe I threw it away. The model of „birth place“ I had tried to reconstruct and put aside as a remarkable unveiled space opened for reinterpretation. It waits for its redefinition. The video loop of bidirectional river, a river which flows there and back at the same time is installed within this space.

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a small, rectangular white card. The card has two lines of text printed on it. The background is a blurred interior space with dark grey or blue walls and a wooden railing, suggesting a modern architectural setting.

ztratil jsem návod..

/ i have lost the instruction..





# is it an attraction or it is thumbling down? \_2009

House of Golding ring /City gallery Prague  
CETRIS boards / tripple-wood / wood  
/500 x 230 x 230 cm

I am asking ourselves: Are we going to accept the ugly past, or are we going to let it fall? 20th anniversary of Velvet revolution is the right time to stop and rethink it. Our surrounding is changing rapidly, and we have to answer this question before it will change forever.





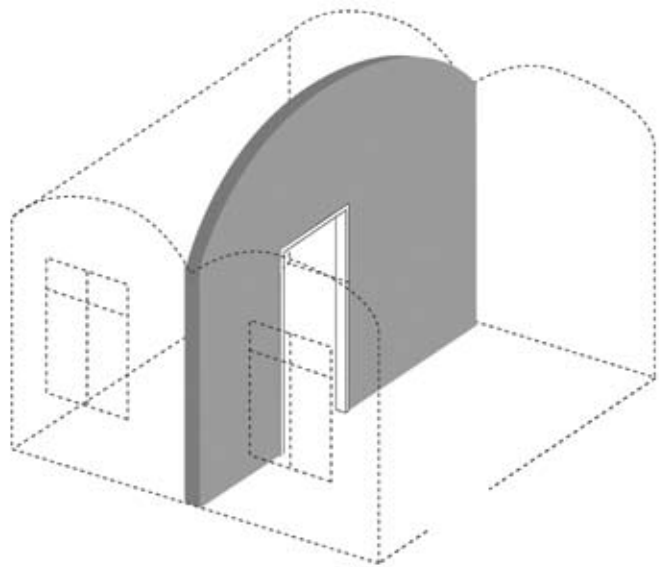
# no man`s land \_2009

Jelení gallery/ Prague  
steel doorframes / plywood /  
/in total 600 x 500 x 300 cm

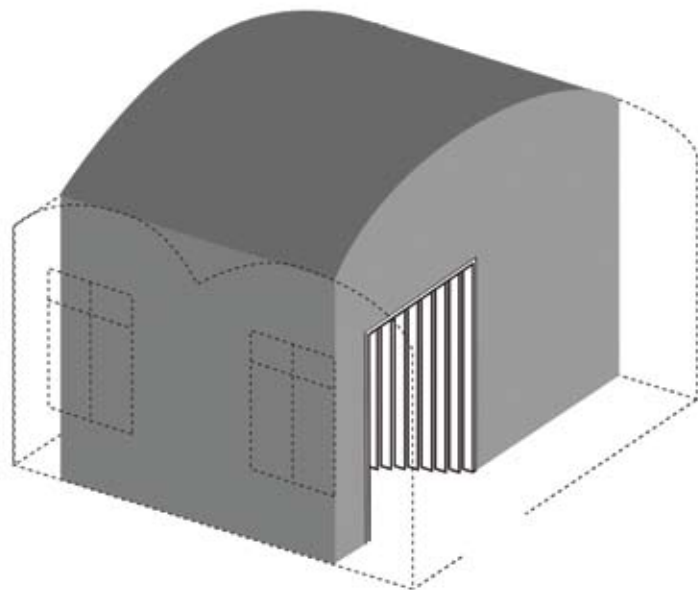
I enlarged the wall, which divides the gallery space in two, to fill in almost the whole remaining space. The door-frames were gradually repeated on both sides, so that visitors could only walk through. Retreated portal highlighted the interspace. The gallery has been filled with a “walkthrough” indeed. How can we define a sudden change (transformation)? What is the interspace we use to move through?



/before



/after





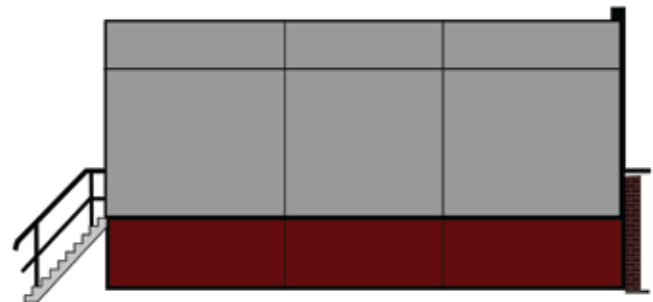
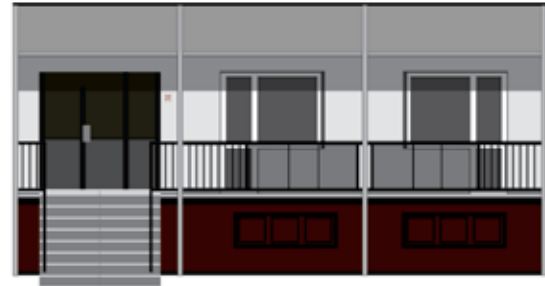
# tamed apartment block \_2009

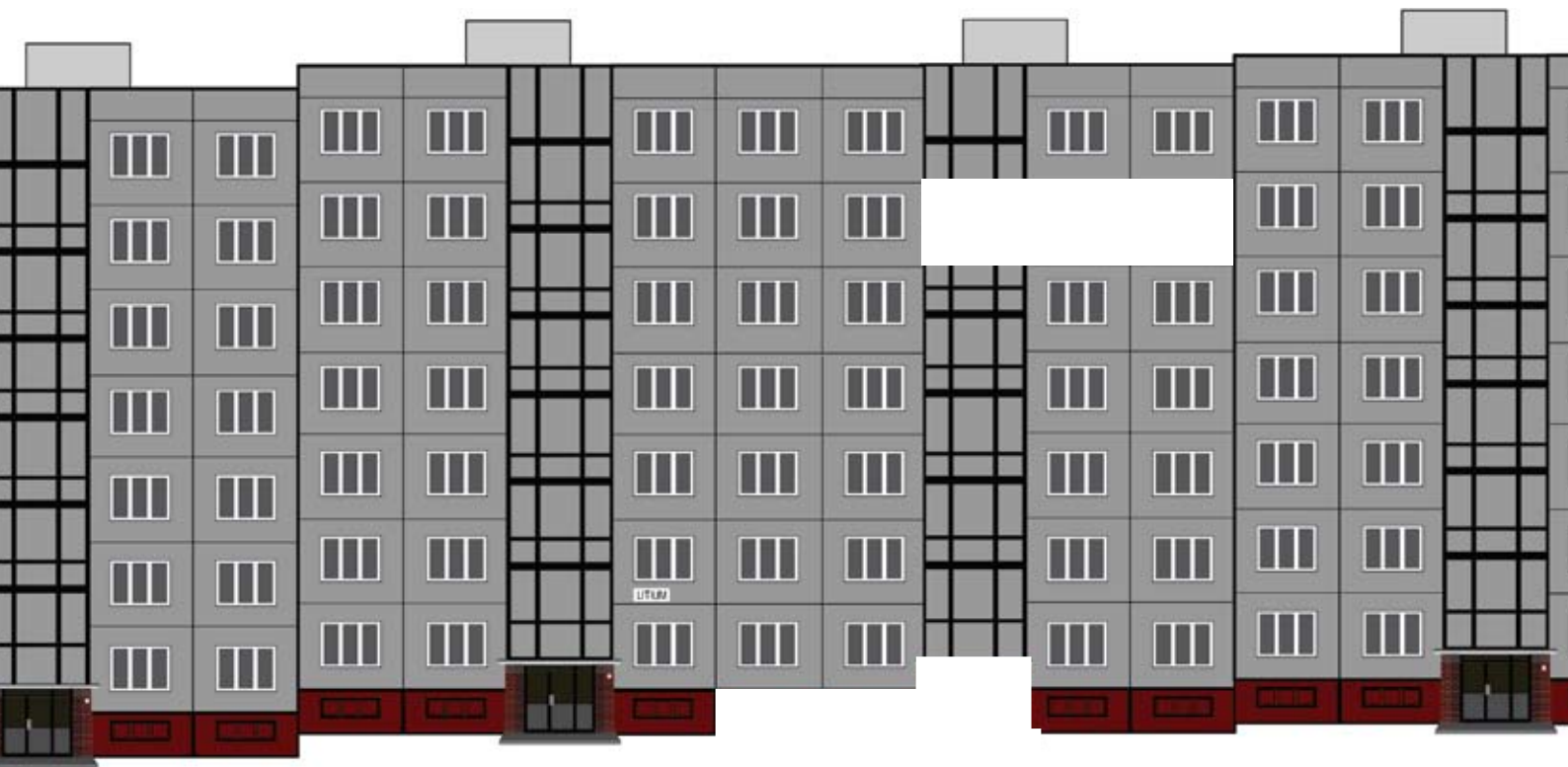
visualization  
/800 x 900 x 350 cm

My generation keeps a specific affiliation to former regime. We have been the last generation born in socialism; later, there was nobody to either sort our options or limit our perspectives. This bipolar experience has left visible trace on us. My parents had had their family houses and I used to envy them. I wanted to have such a place, too. What is my family house?

I chose an apartment block, a typical symbol of progressive socialism. Being ideologically depleted it has become an ordinary house. Looking back at the history of my country I came to realize that apartment blocks “tamed” my parents’ generation. This was not my case; I became enamoured with them.

I decided to cut out a parents flat from it and built a „family block“. It got back a human dimension again.





# block? \_2009

Futura gallery/ Prague  
CETRIS boards / variable size



## MOVE ON

VYSTAVŮVÍ UMĚLCI / PARTICIPATING ARTISTS:  
SILVINA ARRAÑAZO " ", LUISA ARTAMENDI " ", ALEJY KLUYBEZ " ",  
MATEJ BUDNÁR " ", ZDROJ BUDY " ", VALENTIN DREŠ " ", TOMÁŠ DŽALOV " ",  
DANĚL N. " ", EVA ŠTOKA " ", JAROSLAV KYSA " ", ZDANKA LANG " ",  
ANNA OKUKIWSKA " ", TERESA SEJČENOVÁ " ", ALJA VEČNÍ " ", LIANG YUE " "

17. 12. 2009 - 9. 2. 2010

CELOROČNÍ VYSTAVNÍ PROGRAM FAKULTY  
/ YEAR-ROUND PROGRAMME OF FACULTY  
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# portal \_2009

Jakubská st. 7/ Brno  
CETRIS / wood/ 400 x 400 x 70 cm

I installed model of typical entrance from block where I was born on a gothic house. The socialism changed radically our surrounding and I wanted to simulate a “gently change”.





# gateway \_2008

La Frische belle de Mai/ Marseille/ France  
MDF/ wood/ 700 x 300 x 250 cm

Gateway is real-size model of a block entrance I was born in. Blocks of flats are module-based architecture. The module is repeated both in the structure of one block and in other buildings of its kind. The serial nature corresponds with former regime. Everybody was meant to be the same. But the entrance, where I was born can not be the same as the others!

I utilised the concept of module-based architecture and repeated columns, roof, light and descriptive number to modify the entrance. It was functional so the visitors could walk through.





# can`t undo \_2008

chateau Trebešice/ Kutná Hora  
CETRIS / 110 x 100 x 90 cm

I let overflow the model of the typical block of flats from 1970s in front of the renaissance castle, as a symbol of utopia of the comunist regime.





# neighbourhood Ždiar \_2008

Czech center/ Viena/ Austria  
paper model/ 700 x 650 x 40 cm

“The installation that has been located in the Czech Center is an accurate model of the concrete housing developments so typical of the Socialist era and emblematic of its ideology. (Among other things, housings of this kind now probably constitute more than a half of the Czech and Slovak republic’s state housing.) This model is depleted and exhausted the same way as is traditional log house architecture. Džadoň dared to expose once again the salient conflict of both latter and former and crossed the traditional technology of folk architecture with prefabricated buildings. The model of settlement covered in wallpaper resembling wood construction points to the unsettled relationship of modernism and tradition in contemporary post-socialist era..”

Jiří Ševčík



# thurible \_2008

01.11.2008

Studio/ Budapest/ Hungary

used pots, homemade bacon, coals/ 70 cm height

I am a believer, but I do not visit a church. The faith is for me a very private thing. I believe privately. From the used pots I made a thurible and filled it with bacon roasting inside. By swinging the thurible I consecrated the gallery space the same way it is done in Santiago de Compostela.



# super flat

## \_2007

interactive instalation / steel, polyuretan/ wooden beams,  
sensor, electromotor/ 400 x 300 x 70 cm

“Super flat is one side of a wall made out of polyurethane imitation wood log beams, the kind you often find the large home depot stores such as Bauhaus, Baumax, or Obi. As you walk through the open door in the wall, each of the fake wood log beams mechanically rotates 180 degrees, so that you never have a chance to see the other side of the false facade. The dialectic between the outside and inside has been annulled - there no longer is an interior. The viewer finds themselves caught up in race to see if they can glimpse what the opposite side of the wall actually looks like. This elimination of the distinction between the real image of

things and their false exterior is radically condensed. It's not about traditional values or a worn out modernistic utopia of the avant-garde, but a situation where we continually find ourselves caught between false props and entering into empty space. Super Flat is a metaphor for the disappearance of concrete places; in effect the disappearing world of post-socialistic state of affairs. SUPER FLAT is change and time happening simultaneously. We don't experience it as a transitional process or gradual metamorphoses, but rather as an immediate turnaround, similar to the revolving news stories in the mass media.”

Jiří Sevcík



M



M



# folk architecture monument \_2007

proposal for my birth-town Poprad, north-east Slovakia

The mistake is made. The socialist urban projects destroyed the marvellous countryside. I grew up in such an utopic project. I was lucky to be able to watch the Tatra mountains from my window. After all the blocks weren't so bad. The proportion changed. From family houses to 13-floor blocks. From houses built by their owners to flats built by the regime. I believe, that my generation is able to overcome these old traumas positively.



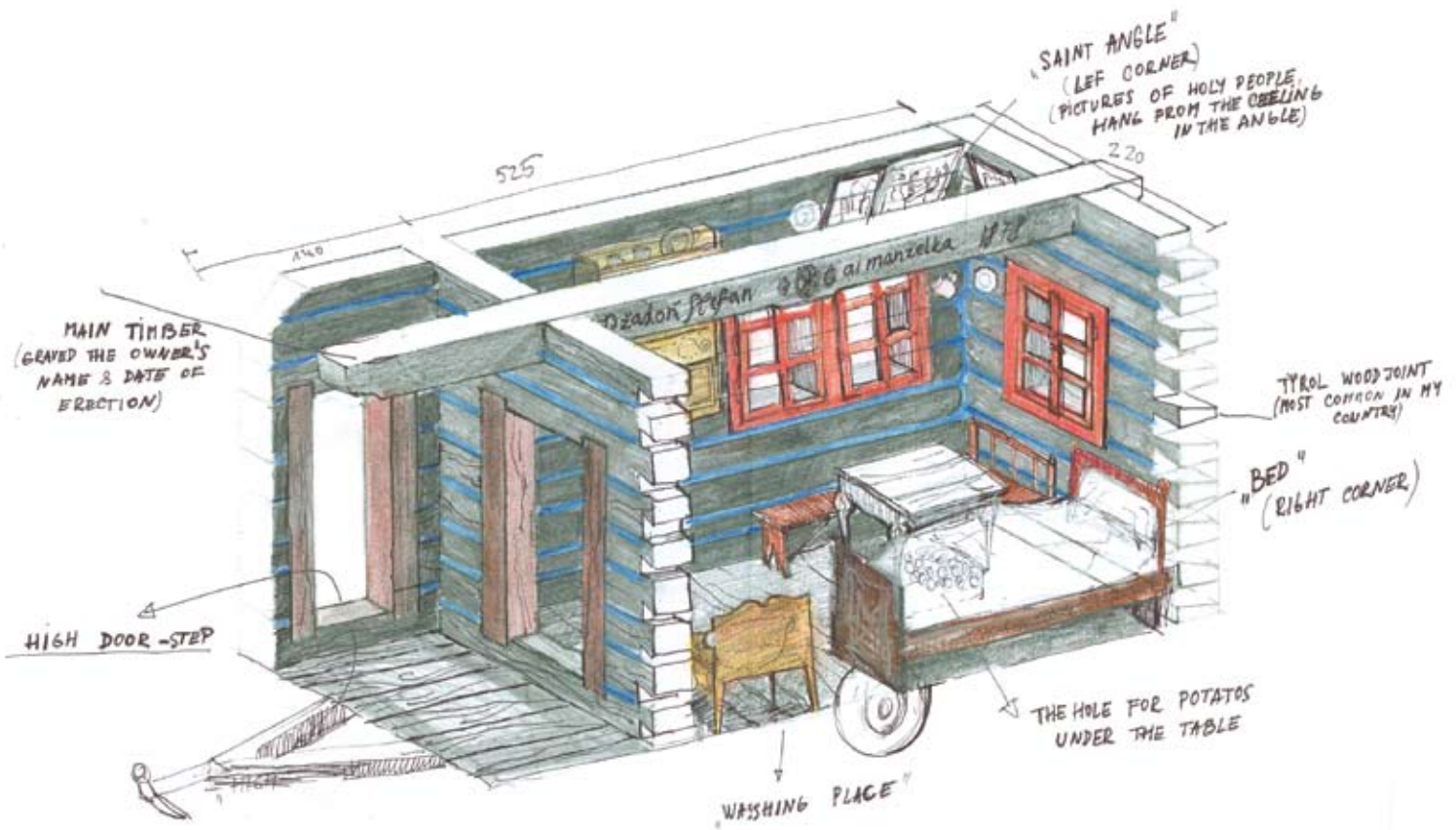


# traditional caravan \_2006

visualization/ original wooden house/ 500 x 220 x210 cm

What does the tradition mean in our post-communistic society? We are still aware of it, but how do we relate? Is the re-establishment possible?.





"SAINT ANGLE"  
(LEFT CORNER)  
(PICTURES OF HOLY PEOPLE  
HANG FROM THE CEILING  
IN THE ANGLE)

MAIN TIMBER  
(GRAVED THE OWNER'S  
NAME & DATE OF  
ERECTION)

TYROL WOOD JOINT  
(MOST COMMON IN MY  
COUNTRY)

"BED"  
(RIGHT CORNER)

THE HOLE FOR POTATOS  
UNDER THE TABLE

WASHING PLACE

HIGH DOOR-STEP

525

440

220

Dzadon Stefan 6.6.1878

# traditional caravan \_2006

chipboard/ el.fan/ grandma`s home-made bacon  
/140 x 90 x 70 cm

Object was designed to address the neo-minimalistic impersonal trends in art and architecture. There was grandma`s home-made bacon roasted inside and its strong aroma was exhausted through the hole on top.



**\*scape**  
**\_2006**

gallery AVU/ Prague  
homemade grandma`s bacon/ 12 m long

I created a horizon with home-made bacon my grandmother made and installed it on the window to cover the real horizon.

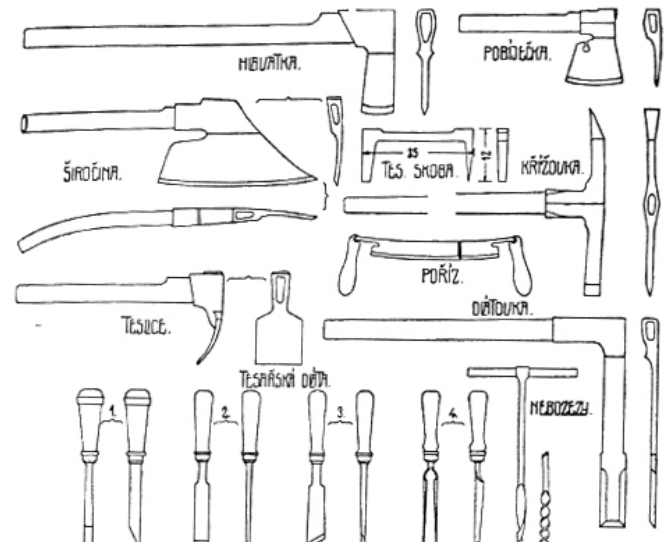




# carpenter joints/ 2 comunist cabinets joined with flat overlap joint \_2006

old cabinets/ 140 x 120 x 120 cm

I reduced sturdy, still functional wooden furniture, elegant in its craftsmanship yet treated by contemporary society as a castaway material because of its associations with the socialist era.





# Tomáš Džadoň

\_2. 3. 1981 Poprad, Slovakia  
lives and works in Prague, Czech rep.

+420 731 577 153/ [www.tomasdzadon.com/](http://www.tomasdzadon.com/) [tomasdzadon@gmail.com](mailto:tomasdzadon@gmail.com)

## Awards:

2009 - Jindřich Chalupecký award, finalist  
2009 - Oskar Čepan award, finalist  
2009 - Cyprián Award, Young art bienalle, Trnava, Slovakia  
2007 - Essl Award First prize

## Education:

from 2008 PHD at AFA in Bratislava  
2006 - Art Institute in Kankaanpää, Finland  
2002- 2007 Academy of Fine arts, Prague  
1999- 2001 Technical university, Koszalin, Poland

## Residencies:

2009 – Visegrad artist in residence at Center for Central European architecture , Prague Cz  
2009 - Neue galerie, Graz, Austria  
2008 - Otto residency, La Friche Belle-de-Mai, Marseille, France  
2008 - Futura residence at Trebešice chateau, Kutná hora

## Solo exhibitions:

2009 – It is an attraction, or it is thumbing down?/City gallery Prague, Cz  
2009 – No man`s land, gallery Jelení, Prague  
2008 - Thurible, gallery by night (with István Csákany), Budapest, H  
2008 - Gateway , La Friche belle de Mai, Marseille, France  
2005 - SCAPE\* /with Silvina Arismendi/, gallery AFA , Prague  
2004 - My private galaxy, café Hned vedle, Prague  
2001 - Painted with paint-roller, gallery SCHODY, Koszalin, Pl  
2000 - Space experience, gallery SCHODY, Koszalin, Poland

## Group exhibitions:

2009 – Formats of transformation, House of Arts, Brno, Cz  
2009 – Jindřich Chalupecký award final, DOX Prague, Cz  
2009 – Something of myself, HuntKastner gallery, Prague, Cz  
2009 - Atlantis, Open gallery, Bratislava, Sk  
2009 – Oskar Čepan award final, Medium gallery, Bratislava, Cz  
2009 - “Culture Industry”, Folklore and Clichés, VOX, Athens, Gr  
2009 - Brno Art Open 09, House of Arts, Brno, Cz  
2008 - Move on, Futura gallery, Prague, Cz  
2008 - Illusion of space / attempt at a new reading, gallery of Nitra, SK  
2008 - “Wie du mir”, Graz, Austria  
2008 - Cargo, workshop, Bukarest, Romania  
2008 - Crazycurators bienalle, Bratislava, SK  
2008 - ViennaFair `08, Messe zentrum, Wien, Austria  
2008 - Essl Award, Kunstforumstdeutsche, galerie Regensburg, G  
2007 - Essl Award 2007, Klosterneuburg, Austria  
2007 - When risk becomes form..., Futura gallery Prague, Slovak national gallery, Bratislava, Slovak rep.  
2007 - ESSL Award, Czech final exhibition, Prague, Czech rep.  
2006 - PROCES / curated by Marc Divo, River town Prague, Czech rep.

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„Jindřich Chalupecký award“, exhibition catalog, text Palo Fabuš  
ERA 21- 5/09 /”Neoconceptual artist is building a catalog house”, text Eva Červinková  
FLASH ART- Czech&Slovak ed. num12/09, text Terézie Nekvindová  
Illusion of space / attempt at a new reading / exhibition catalogue, text by Barbora Geržová, 2008  
VENTILO no.230, Entre deux portes, text by M. Nanquette- Querette (in French)  
ARCHITEKT 04/08 Tomáš Džadoň, text by Jiří Ševčík  
Essl Award 2007, exhibition catalogue