



BOSNIAN TRIPTYCH 2005

Introduction to the project by the Borderland Foundation.

10 years have passed since from the massacre in Srebrenica, the symbol of tragedy of collapse of former Yugoslavia. In summer 2004, the Old Bridge in Mostar was rebuilt, the one whose destruction became the symbol of the collapse of the idea of multiculturalism, a pillar of European heritage. In Europe we have become accustomed to believe that the tragedy of Bosnia – the country of many religions and nations, which on the threshold of 21st century was defeated in its fight against nationalism and fundamentalism – happened on the outskirts of our world, far from issues common to us. We swiftly forgot about the siege of Sarajevo by the fanatic supporters of national segregation and ethnic cleansings, which left us passive and helpless for three long years. Today, facing the new wave of nationalisms, separatisms, xenophobia and religious fundamentalism growing in every corner of Europe, it is high time to revalue conceptions we have held so far. It is time to return to Bosnia in order to find ourselves at the source of European conflict which expands in ever-widening circles.

Particularly significant and far-reaching in its consequences is the cultural dimension of this process. We hardly ever realise that killing of the bridge (in Mostar they refer to the *Old Chuprija* as a living creature, not a thing) or entire cities, like Sarajevo, struck the very heart of European culture. We are now facing a grave multiculturalism crisis in the culturally ever-diversified European society.

Bosnian Triptych is a project which examines Bosnia as a critical experience for the entire European context; above all it tries to find ways out of the crisis, drawing up a new map of practices and ideas in the face of the challenges posed by a modern Europe of many cultures.

The triptych consists of artistic and educational work with young people, a literary gathering and finally a symposium. The first stage of the project brought together artists and young people from Sandwell in the West Midlands of England, Sejny in North-Eastern Poland with artists and young people from Mostar in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The work related to learning the archetypes of a bridge in culture, its symbolism, history, folk tradition, literary tradition, and also the secret of its construction (the Balkan-Ottoman tradition of *neimars*). In a broader aspect this work is a searching for new forms of practicing intercultural dialogue among the younger generation. Mostar was chosen as the place for the realisation of the first stage of the project, since the destruction of the bridge became a symbol of 'a world broken apart', a metaphor of the crisis of the most vital European values associated with its multicultural heritage - and its reconstruction has become a symbol of their revival.

In the Balkans and beyond, in the entire Ottoman Empire, bridge builders were called *neimars*. Since river banks were not easily accessible, their slopes steep and the people living on both sides of the river were often of different religion, language or nationality, the masters of bridge-work were especially esteemed here. It required no mean masterly skill to build a solid bridge, one that would enable the exchange of material and spiritual goods, joining people and cultures, creation of a community based on diversity, building of a common space of place and values.

The Borderland Foundation

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Artists and workshop coordinators

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Seminar Speakers

Tihomir Rozi - Chronology of the reconstruction of the Old Bridge in Mostar
Zlatko Serdarevi - Myths and legends about building of the Old Bridge in the 17th century
Erna Cipra - Jews of Mostar and life with others
Jusa Niksi – Multi-ethnicity and good neighbourhood in the city
Mile Babi - Interreligious dialogue in Bosnia and Hercegovina
Alija Dilberovi – Blagaj: The Tekija of Dervishes