

## Revealed

Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva makes work which challenges both the viewer and the organisations commissioning her. Her practice is highly eclectic showing a rich inventiveness, harnessed to incredible hard work which ensures that the work Elpida delivers is always exciting and inspiring. I have memories of assisting the artist in the making of *Ambush*, a highly ambitious project, tunnelling under the New Forest to provide access to tree roots with glazed openings to the surface. It was a delight, moving not just large amounts of earth but also cutting, lifting and manipulating the tree trunks, which formed the walls of the tunnels. It was most certainly worth all the hard work as people stepped down the tunnels, grinning from ear to ear as they fulfilled old childhood dreams of tunnelling and digging, amazed at the opportunity to see trees from beneath the earth. A second, more ambitious, version of this work was presented as Elpida's short-listed proposal for the Jerwood Sculpture prize in London in 2001. This has not to date been realised.

My first experience of Elpida's work was in one of her first solo exhibitions. At ArtSway a wall of Butter (reflecting the farming and building industries in the area) challenged both the gallery staff (with the heat in the building turned off in deep winter) and audiences, with its cartoon character, soft and round edged yellow 'bricks' similar to an animated film, though in three dimensions. In addition large disks of red wood were hung in the smallest gallery at ArtSway, seeming to float in the space, despite their size and weight. These disks were later reinstalled in Bury St Edmunds, high in a tree canopy, almost returning them from where they came. A third element of this exhibition was a carpet made of Fir Cones, each individually and meticulously attached to a net, which was then hung in the glazed ceiling of the main gallery, remarkably reproducing the streamed light through a tree canopy. The effect of all these works in the gallery was to offer another view of the rural world immediately outside the gallery walls, literally a few metres away.

Using locally significant material, personal research, responding to the physical site, utilising scale, repetition and manipulation, Elpida chooses to use both scale and surprise to challenge us to see the locality through different eyes. For the Berwick Fellowship, *Epidermis* (2001) was made after she identified fish as a strong icon for the locality (Berwick is principally a fishing town). Using the marks of the Gymnasium where the work was to be first exhibited, she produced large shapes responding to the game markings, out of fish skin, which were suspended above the floor. Using hanging, again, as a method of installation, these fish skins looked like perfectly choreographed fish in schools of formation. In a later installation, in another building, in another town, (*Resort, Fabrica, Brighton*, 2002) the works were installed to reflect this new site, a gallery within a church, with a new element of fish bones installed in such a manner to mirror a wall text. Here Elpida manages to reinvent the work and transfer the meanings to another coastal city.

More recently in Ireland, Elpida began developing work which investigates other buried things, though rather than physical these are social, historical and steeped in conflict. At the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin, Elpida began to investigate space in a new way. Using a stills camera she photographed the buildings surrounding the courtyard of the Museum, which were then made into a four-screen animation, intended to recreate the space in another space (the gallery), but animated across the corner of the walls. A two-channel version of the work was installed for the New Forest Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2005. The work has a disturbing effect, suggesting movement or the passage of time.

Taking forward this methodology of using still and moving image, Elpida started making work responding to the history of conflict in Ireland (the Irish War of Independence in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century), and addressing the more recent conflicts in her native former Republic of Yugoslavia. This approach of

investigating the resolved conflict In Northern Ireland, with one now again beginning to be of concern as Kosovo elects an independence party, is brave and personal. A journey through the former republic with her father acting as guide was still a risky undertaking some six years after the uneasy resolution of the conflict. Her exhibition at Kilmainham Gaol Museum of images contrasting the history of Kilmainham Gaol, Dublin, where executions were know to take place, with execution sites in the former Yugoslavia, raised important unsettling issues, but also celebrated the fact that new countries can develop, grow and be successful despite their tragic past. Unfortunately the planned exhibition of the same work in her home country of Macedonia is not yet realised, a shame in that the lessons of reconciliation would have been invaluable, through discussions continue.

Elpida is also interested in the effects of climate change on the landscape and is developing proposals for projects on the East and South coast of the UK, which make use of new technology to monitor, map and expose the changes brought about by the changes to our climate. These are very much in development, but I hope to see one if not both realised in the next couple of years.

On her arrival in Valenciennes for the residency Elpida used her usual and highly successful approach of investigating the local history, including both the town and Le Nord Pas de Calais. She is interested in the special, or uniqueness of a place, and discovering Valenciennes lace industry was an ideal start. The intricate and slow production methods of traditional lace making, resonate well with Elpida's previous work where laborious and skilful work is required to make a piece of art. By borrowing, re-working and repeating designs donated by the ladies of the Dentelle de Valenciennes, there is a real connection between the historic lace making and the new works Elpida has made for this exhibition.

Typically, Elpida has also investigated the local food specialities, and became fascinated with the types of meat eaten in France. Here then she can bring

together surprising cohabitants: Lace and Offal. Bringing these two diverse practices together is typical of Elpida's work. Here she has made different shapes and structures, reflecting lace making (and just as intricate), but produced out of Tripe, Caul Fat, Intestines or Omasum. This device of using different materials to that which is expected, encourages a sense of experimentation, a challenge to the orthodox and, strangely, a celebration of craft.

Visitors can journey through a tunnel of Caul fat, coming to an inaccessible exit, requiring them to turn around to repeat the journey and leave. Once again, Elpida is aiming to make the hidden visible, encouraging a sensitive appreciation of a particular place, but acknowledging both skill and craft which is less appreciated in the fast food, mass produced, consumer focused society of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Elpida is an artist deeply engaged with the landscape both urban and rural, fascinated by the rich variety of the world around us. She is unaffected by squeamishness though I understand she is only now getting over an aversion to fish, after skinning over a thousand of them in 2001. I would not be surprised to learn that she is not too interested in offal for some time, after working with it as closely as she has done here. Elpida manages to make work, which is both of and about it's place. Arriving with little more than a small toolkit, Elpida resources both the ideas for, and the medium, of the work locally. All of the works she makes are unique in this way and reflect a real belief in the local and the community. Here she has made work, which reflects special things (which may seem ordinary to some) about the place, but it is this which makes the work so accessible and approachable for a wide range of people.

Mark Segal, November 2007