



A Virtual Memorial | **RIGA**
Commemorative Interventions | 1-8 June 2012



A Virtual Memorial Riga 2012 – Commemorative Interventions

featuring Shoah Film Collection –1-8 June 2012 (prolonged until 30 June)

A Virtual Memorial Riga 2012 - a media art project context created by the Cologne based media artist and curator Wilfried Agricola de Cologne for presenting SFC – *Shoah Film Collection* in the context of complementary interventions – was realized in the framework of the European Cultural Program context “The A Team – Artists for Change” and the associated instances (Transeurope Halles, Engine Room Europe, European Culture program- Education & Culture DG, Ministry of Culture Latvia and project partners in Latvia, Sweden, Slovakia and Bulgaria) and in partnership between Riga Ghetto and Latvian Holocaust Museum, the Jewish association SHAMIR Riga, Culture and Arts Project NOASS Riga and artvideoKOELN – the international curatorial initiative “art & moving images” , Cologne, directed by Wilfried Agricola de Cologne.

The presentation of SFC - *Shoah Film Collection* in Riga is standing under the **Patronage of the European Parliament**, which is honouring SFC – *Shoah Film Collection* as a worldwide unique initiative by Wilfried Agricola de Cologne addressed to young artists generations to deal with the topic of *Shoah* and related fields, like the collective trauma caused by totalitarianism, by using new technologies and contemporary approaches in art in order keep vivid the memory and sensitize and activate the artists, film- and videomakers.

For presenting SFC – *Shoah Film Collection* to an audience, Agricola de Cologne created a special event project - *A Virtual Memorial – Commemorative Interventions* - which is placing SFC in the context of complementary interventions like lectures, workshops, courses, exhibitions, artists talks, discussions and much more, in order to sensitize and activate the audience, as well.

Presenting SFC *Shoah Film Collection* in Riga under the *Patronage of the European Parliament* had four components, i.e. during the main intervention days 1-3 June 2012 - the screening of the entire collection, the artists presentations including artists talks and discussions on, on 4-5 June 2012 the presentation of SFC as an initiative on 1st International Conference of Holocaust Museums, organized by Riga Ghetto and Latvian Holocaust Museum, and the exhibition of SFC installed on flatscreen monitors on the floating art gallery NOASS 1-30 June 2012 (after prolongation).

As a project, *A Virtual Memorial Riga 2012* had a kind of pioneer character in most different ways. It is the first of a series of events to take place during the coming months and years at many places around the globe.

Riga as a venue has a special conceptual relevance due to his history in Nazi times, the Riga Ghetto and above all, the fact, that Latvia is refurbishing its memory only these days, for instance by establishing the Latvian Holocaust Museum on initiative of Rabbi Menachem Barkahan, chairman of Riga Ghetto and Latvian Holocaust Museum, who is one of the most influencing persons in the context of the project realisation, besides the NOASS chairman Dzintars Zilgalvis. In this way, *A Virtual Memorial Riga 2012* has a strong supportive and encouraging character directed to the Latvian initiatives, as well as to the local and international audience.

Although in the beginning, the project realisation has some starting problems, in sequence it became evident how magnificent the project realisation has been.



Due to the support by the embassies of Israel, USA, Sweden and Austria, it was possible to invite in total 8 artists, representing SFC Shoah Film Collection via their personal film contributions, artists talks and discussions, i.e. Doron Polak & Eitan Vitkon (both Israel), Cristiano Berti (Italy), Doris Neidl (Austria), Felice Hapetzeder (Sweden) and Jay Needham, Ben Neufeld and Shelley Jordon (all USA),

It needs to be mentioned, that to the category “interventions” also the “private” reception at the apartment of the Cultural Attaché of Israeli Embassy in Riga was belonging, since not only staff members of the Israeli Embassy were present, but also cultural attachés from divers embassies in Riga, so that one can speak of an inofficial “private view” on 31 May 2012 before the official “private view” on 1 June 2012, 12h a.m.

So, all these circumstances made this “private view” on 1 June 2012, and this way also the entire project, really spectacular, which was taking place at one the most unique locations in Riga, the floating art galleries NOASS and BETANOVUSS situated at the Daugava river in front of the beautiful panorama of Riga.

After the official opening speech held by her Excellence, the Ambassador of Israel, Hamit Ben-Jaakov, the initiator and curator of A Virtual Memorial Riga 2012 and SFC – Shoah Film Collection, Agricola de Cologne, was explaining in his introduction the concepts of both projects and the realization in Riga, while the ambassadors of Austria, Sweden, Belgium, the Netherlands, representatives of Latvian Ministeries and Riga City Council, as well as local cultural institutions were forming the audience.

Agricola de Cologne had the honour to guide her Excellency the Israeli Ambassador through the exhibition “How Memories Survive”, consisting of three individual exhibitions located at different levels of the floating art galleries NOASS and BETANOVUSS., i.e “Mortale”, a selection from 10000 handmade drawings Paolo Bonfiglio (Italy) was creating for his animated film, entitled “Mortale”, which is part of Shoah Film Collection, exhibited at the lower level on NOASS, while the upper level was presenting experimental photographs by Eitan Vitkon, who was visualizing the performance, the invited Israeli artist Doron Polak was preparing for Riga, the city of his ancestors, and the third exhibition, presenting *Shoah Film Collection* as an installation. The final highlight of this private view was the performance by Doron Polak on BETANOVUSS. The conceptual background was his father’s diary from Riga Ghetto, which he survived. The main goal of the exhibitions is to give the visitors background information about the making of the films of *Shoah Film Collection* and dealing artistically with the Holocaust, and in this way, a better and deeper understanding about the subject matter, as such.

The next “private view” and intervention took place directly afterwards, at 15h, when Rabbi Menachem Barkahan was guiding himself the visiting artists through Riga Ghetto and Latvian Holocaust Museum, which can currently considered to be a kind of open air museum, while the indoor museum is currently under construction, yet.

The opening day continued on 19h when the exhibitions, the artists’ presentations and talks and the screenings were opened to the public moderated by Agricola de Cologne.



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Probably, the most influence taking happened, however, during the artists' talks and presentations on 1, 2 and 3 June, since there was such a substantial exchange, deep and far-reaching discussion about how memory can be transported to the future via art, that all participants were surprised what actually was happening in this rather intimate circle of the project interventions. Each attending artist had sufficient time to present his/her work participating in Shoah Film Collection and talk about the motivations and goals to deal with Shoah as an artistic topic. The atmosphere of these talks and discussion was really unique and cannot be described in words or visuals, and it became clear, this event in Riga could represent just a starting point of something really new in the discussions around how art can be a medium for dealing with the collective traumas of mankind.

A special site related intervention took place, when Doron Polak and Eitan Vitkon were realising during the morning of 2 June 2012 their particular contribution to A Virtual Memorial Riga 2012 at the memorial site of Rumbula forest (near Riga), the filmic and photographic shooting of Doron Polak's tribute to his father's roots in Riga which was including the attending artists in person, a symbolical action of an intense artistic power.

One of the next highlights was on 4 June 2012, when SFC – Shoah Film Collection was presented as an initiative on 1st International Conference of Holocaust Museums, organised by Riga Ghetto and Latvian Holocaust Museum.

It was the most spectacular of all conference sessions, consisting of the ambassadors of Austria, The Netherlands, Czech Republic, Belarus and Agricola de Cologne, who started the session by introducing SFC – Shoah Film Collection, followed by a discussion with the ambassadors and their blunt confessions, how the respective nations deal nowadays with the memory of Holocaust.

A Virtual Memorial Riga 2012 can be considered as a really successful event in many ways including so many unexpected interventions, which cannot be mentioned all just in a few words. All aims connected to the initiatives and the project concept for Riga were much more than fulfilled, resulting even far-reaching perspectives for the future, in terms of discussing art and Holocaust and finding new forms of commemoration via art, the continuation of collaborating in Latvia and, above all, future events, since Agricola de Cologne has been invited to present Shoah Film Collection in Phnom Penh in July 2012, dedicated to the victims of the Cambodian genocide, to Warsaw Jewish Film Festival in October 2012 and A Virtual Memorial Vilnius 2013 – a collaboration with the Jewish Cultural Center Vilnius, among others.

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Project partners



**Riga Ghetto
 and Latvian
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Culture Programme

Engine Room Europe is a three-year programme (April 2011-May 2014) of activities dedicated to independent cultural workers and their creative processes. It is initiated by Trans Europe Halles (TEH) and co-ordinated by Melkweg (Amsterdam, The Netherlands) in association with 10 co-organizing TEH members. Engine Room Europe has been funded with the support from the European Commission. This publication [communication] reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein".



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