

## **IN TRANSLATION**

**A three-part ProArte master class** with artist/writer Mariam Ghani

### **Part I: theory & history, discussion of readings & artworks, development & critique of project proposals**

Duration: two weeks

February 22nd – March 10th, 2014

### **Students work independently on their projects**

**March - May 2014**

### **Part II: presentation & critique of projects, installation plan for exhibition**

Duration: one week

May 12th - 20th, 2014

### **Part III: exhibition at the Mayakovsky Library, Nevsky Prospekt, Petersburg**

25th June to 27th July, 2014

### **Languages of instruction: English and Russian**

**Application process:** submit a PDF portfolio with a 1-paragraph artist statement in English **and** up to 20 images, **or** up to 5 images plus 1-3 links for time-based or interactive work (not to exceed 15 minutes in TRT). Please compile statement, images, and (when applicable) links into **one** PDF. Portfolios should be sent to Mariam by January 6th.

### **Description:**

Walter Benjamin describes the "task of the translator" as producing a new text in harmony with the intention of the original - faithful not to its letters, but to its spirit. Translation in this sense is the impulse to produce something new from something old, or to transpose and transplant ideas from one language, culture, medium, or moment to another - communicating across gaps of time and space, context and experience. This impulse can be traced through such phenomena as the literary translation, the cross-medium adaptation, the remake, the homage, the historical re-enactment, the art-historical reference, and the site-responsive installation (which both translates a specific time and place into an artwork, and adapts that artwork to other specific times and places, when re-presented in other venues). Translation can also be an attempt to understand, consume or subsume the other, or to understand the self through another's perception, as seen in the particular case of the 'Russica' collection in Russia's National Library, which has for hundreds of years collected books printed in other languages about Russia, or rather foreign representations of Russia - translations of Russia into other forms and spheres, and refractions of Russia as both notion and fact through a hundred different prisms. Finally, encoding and decoding can also be understood as special cases of

translation, which allows for consideration of traditional cryptography, steganographic imagery, political allegories, the use of poems as passwords in certain movements, and the *converso* tradition in literature.

During this master class, students will read some translation theory and discuss the various manifestations of translation in art. They will develop projects that enact some variant of translation (of content, form and/or site), and they will think through how to present those projects within the context of the final exhibition, which will be installed inside the Mayakovsky library branch gallery. They will also be able but not required to make use of library resources, which include Russica collections and writers' personal papers, in conceiving and/or producing their projects.

## **Course Outline: Part I**

### **Day 1: Introductions**

Please bring one work with you to share with the group; it should have some relationship to the work you are thinking about producing in the class.

### **Day 2: Theory I: Translating Words**

Discussion of foundational texts in translation theory, beginning with texts from linguistics and philosophy. Please read Benjamin's "Task of the Translator," Jakobson's "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation" (both required) and Ortega y Gasset's "The Misery and Splendor of Translation" (recommended) - all in the PDF course reader and the book *The Translation Studies Reader* in English, but feel free to read in Russian instead if you can find them.

### **Day 3: Theory II: Translating Signs & Systems**

Continued discussion of foundational texts in translation theory, proceeding through texts from media theory, and changes in thinking about the meaning and performance of translation over time (including the development of a theory of cultural translation). Please read the excerpt from Mitchell's *The Reconfigured Eye*, Buden's "Cultural Translation" (both required) and Steyerl's "Politics of the Archive: Translations in Film" (recommended).

### **Day 4: Theory III: Translating Objects, Translating Bodies**

Could objects speak, if we only knew how to translate what they say? Is anything 'untranslatable'? How do bodies translate themselves across space (*trans latum*, literally 'carry across'), and (in)to each other? Please read Benjamin's "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," Steyerl's "The Language of Things," and Ivekovic's "On Permanent Translation (We Are Being Translated)" (all required).

### **Day 5: Theory IV: Translating Influences**

How are ideas and movements translated into new contexts? How do artists

remediate their formal influences? How does content (a particular creative or intellectual "property") change as it migrates from form to form, author to author, context to context? We will also discuss the fine distinctions between allusion, adaptation and appropriation; homage, satire, and parody; fair use and trespass. Please read the excerpt from Goldsmith's *Uncreative Writing*, and Lethem's "The Ecstasy of Influence: A Plagiarism" (both required) and Ramirez's "Blueprint Circuits: Conceptual Art & Politics in Latin America" (recommended).

### **Day 6: Theory V: Translating Codes**

All about ciphering and deciphering: cryptography and steganography, the arts of concealing meaning in images, music, objects, and written language. We will discuss the various uses of codes, both historically and in the present day, and the distinction between plainly encrypted messages (decoded through a 'shared secret') and messages that conceal the fact of their encryption ('security through obscurity'). Please read "Information Hiding: An Overview" (required).

### **Day 7: Practice I: Translation in / as Art**

Some examples of recent artworks that thematize or deploy translation. Also, some examination of specialized forms of translation - re-enactment, remake, and site-responsive installation.

### **Day 8: Practice II: Translation in/as Art cont'd**

Some more examples of recent artworks that thematize or deploy translation. We will begin to think about which strategies and ideas discussed so far may be most useful for your own work.

### **Day 9: Practice III: Proposals**

Please prepare a preliminary proposal for the project you will produce for this class. You may prepare several alternative proposals if you prefer. We will discuss all proposals as a group.

### **Day 10: Practice IV: Plans**

Please prepare a second proposal for your project, incorporating feedback from the previous day's critique. Use the format discussed in class and include a rough sketch of form, content, and timeline for the next few months of work. In class, we will discuss your revised proposals, focusing on timelines and thinking through together what resources each of you may need and how we can collectively facilitate each other's work over the next few months.

## **Course Outline: Part II**

### **Days 1-3: Peer critique**

### **Days 4-5: Collaborative development of exhibition plan**