



BALAKLAVA ODYSSEY
MEDIA ART AND PERFORMANCE FESTIVAL

Artistic Concept.

The media art and performance festival **Balaklava-Odyssey** is taking place for the first time in August 2006. Balaklava, the site of the event, is situated in Crimea (Ukraine) and has been a European cultural site for over 2500 years. Artists from eight countries – Ukraine, Russia, Romania, Moldova, Poland, Switzerland, Austria and Germany are invited to this pilot project. They have been working on projects connected with the history of this site and located in the fields of video, animation, multi-media and performance art. This site, already mentioned by Homer in his *Odyssey*, is also the location of the *myth of Taurus* and the famous play *Iphigenia in Tauris* (by Euripides, Goethe). On Crushtshov's orders, in 1953, a submarine hangar was built inside the mountain of Tauris, that also served as a storage facility for nuclear weapons. Until 1995, Balaklava was hermetically sealed off and inaccessible for civilians. Now, the aim of the **Balaklava-Odyssey** is to culturally revive this site.

The festival is taking place in the submarine hangar that today is used as a museum. During the exhibition, the submarine hangar with its main channel, the supply tunnels, the dry dock, the officers' rooms and the depots will be divided in thematic areas, each representing certain historical periods of time that have played a decisive role for Balaklava. The topics are meant to provide impulses and encouragement for the artists and are to serve as a guideline for the visitors on their tour through the tunnel.

1. **Main channel / Balaklava Odyssey.** Homer's works *Odyssey* and *Iliad* are considered to be the initial works of the European culture. There is a theory suggesting that the action of the *Odyssey*'s book X takes place in Balaklava. Indeed, there is an astounding similarity between Homer's description and the topology of the port entrance to Balaklava. Here, Odysseus has to fight against the Laistrygons – androphagous monsters that annihilate the majority of the Greek hero's ships' crews. Moreover, Balaklava is connected to the ancient world through the mountain of Tauris which is one of the main locations in the myth of Taurus. Here is where Iphigenia, the daughter of Agamemnon, was banished to. During the festival, the main channel of the tunnel is dedicated to the ancient world; the visitors will sit in boats and, like in the *Odyssey*, "cruise" through times and mythology, moving between the different stations of art.

- 2. Dry dock / Cinema Mon Plaisir.** At the beginning of the last century, shortly after the cinematography was invented, Balaklava was a popular spa. This Black Sea bay was a resort for writers, actors, the military and the members of the royal family. One of the first cinemas ever built on Russian soil opened in Balaklava. Its name was *Mon Plaisir*. The old cinema building is still there; today, its name is *Rodina* – homeland. This ruin is evidence of the many illusions of the cinema that played a great role in the construction of the collective identity in Soviet times. On the opposite side of the shore lies the entrance to the submarine hangar. So, spanning the bay from each side, a contrast is built between the cinematographic vision and the military reality. For the artists, this contrast could serve as an impulse for their work. The dry dock in the hangar will be transformed to represent the cinema *Mon Plaisir*, so the viewers will be able to sit in chairs – like in a real cinema.
- 3. Tunnel / Thin Red Line.** During the Crimean war, Balaklava served the British as headquarters. In Great Britain, the Battle of Balaklava is a well-known historical event. The expression *thin red line* has become habitual language use and stands for an extraordinary fighting spirit. Once, on 24th October 1854, the Times correspondent Russel observed how a superiority of Russian armed forces attacked the British troops stationed in Balaklava. Their commander, Sir Colin Campbell ordered his soldiers, who were wearing red tunics, to face the attackers in a line of defence and not to do a step back even if the losses were great. For the observing journalist this looked like a thin red line – hence the common expression. Literally as well as in transferred meaning the location of this theme is the supply channel. Starting at the entrance of the hangar and leading to the water channel, the supply channel is about 400 meters long and has rail facilities for moving transport carts.
- 4. Officers` rooms / the dream of the German soldier.** On his campaign against the Soviet Union, Hitler also directed his attention to the oil wells in the Caucasus. The strategically crucial Crimea was occupied during this campaign. Under the command of Colonel General Manstein, the capture started in November 1941. The battle continued till summer 1942 and ended with the conquest of Sevastopol. The armed forces and the SS left a scene of destruction: in the Crimea alone, more than half a million people were killed; cities like Kerch and Sevastopol were razed to the ground. Among these atrocities, there were individual soldiers who acted human and barbaric at the same time. During the recapture of the Crimea by the Russian troops in 1944, the armed forces member Erwin Domian wrote down his experiences. His *Taurian diary* contains notes from Fiolent and Balaklava, the southernmost point of the Eastern front. According to them, it was almost impossible to maintain resistance against the Soviet attackers. However, after the battle, the commanding Lieutenant Colonel Sch. attends to his own archaeological studies: "He has never been so close to the myth!" Then, in the evenings, as the diary reveals, he sits by the campfire and reads out of his self-written version of the poem *Iphigenia in Tauris*. The artists will stage various dreams and nightmares of the soldiers in the officers` rooms and other premises situated next to the main channel.

5. Depots / Symbolon Limpe – Bay of the Presentiment. What will Balaklava – a place inaccessible for civilians only 10 years ago – look like in future? In the past, many European countries left their military and historical marks in this bay of the Black Sea. In the ancient world, first the Greeks, then the Genoese built their towns here. Today, the ruins of the temple of Jupiter Dolichenus, built by the Romans, still are the hallmark of the bay. In the Crimean war, the allied Ottoman, British and French troops fought in Balaklava against the Russian troops. In the Second World War, German and Romanian armies occupied Crimea that was to become a German riviera. Balaklava's destiny to serve as a military base continued to the Soviet time as a command of the Black Sea fleet was stationed here and the bay was used as a depot for nuclear weapons. In the ancient world, Balaklava's name was Chembalo, what means presentiment. At the exit of the hangar, as final part of the art installation tour, the artists from the participating countries are required to express their presentiments and ideas about how this place can be used for peaceful coexistence in the future.

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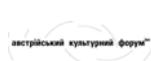
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