



Photo: Borderland's Documentation Centre

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HISTORY & CULTURE

Invisible Bridge, “A Tale of Coexistence”

By Krzysztof Czyżewski
*Founder of the Borderland
Foundation and the Borderland
Centre of Arts, Cultures,
and Nations*

“A Tale of Coexistence” is an ongoing program of the International Centre of Dialogue in Krasnogruda, on the Polish-Lithuanian border, and the Borderland Centre in Sejny. Its concept and philosophy grow from the idea of deep culture, embedded in the social and natural environments and oriented toward the long process that leads to social transformation. Developed by the Borderland Centre, the program seeks a new, more extensive form of art and education based on dialogue and human coexistence. “A Tale of Coexistence” was launched in 2013-14 with “Medea: Other – Different – Own,” which included an art and education workshop, two symposiums, a dramatic happening, and a concert.

The next phase of the program is “Invisible Bridge,” which opened on the 25th anniversary of the Borderland Foundation (founded 1990) and will run until May 2016.



Village of Bridge Builders, International Centre of Dialogue in Krasnogruda, August 13-23, 2015. Photo: Borderland's Documentation Centre

Its title refers to one of the biggest challenges facing the contemporary world – the art of building bridges in diverse multicultural urban and regional communities. Taking inspiration from Italo Calvino's book *Invisible Cities*, “Invisible Bridge” emphasizes the value of immateriality in the art of building that which is human, that which constitutes the connective tissue of social value and solidarity.

“Invisible Bridge” will be a permanent artistic installation-sculpture in Krasnogruda Park that will serve as the core for the art of building bridges in the contemporary world. It will never be closed or completed. Two towers symbolizing art and knowledge – and also separate identities, cultures, and individuals – frame the bridge's structure. Travelers seeking to cross need to obtain the “access code” by

deciphering a rich system of signs and symbols within the structure.

History is full of broken bridges on religious, national, and social frontiers. Today's multicultural world faces the challenge of learning the art of building bridges that lead to dialogue, reconciliation, and the strengthening of social bonds. "Invisible Bridge" is a journey deep into the memory of the borderlands, a place where people transcend themselves, encounter others, and try to build a community of dialogue. Whether construction of the bridge turns out to be cleansing or destructive will depend on the knowledge gained of the secrets of its construction.

How can we use heritage and historical experience to build a culture of solidarity in a world of growing divisions, inequality, and exclusion? "Invisible Bridge" confronts us with questions about the art of coexisting

"Invisible Bridge" is a journey deep into the memory of the borderlands, a place where people transcend themselves, encounter others, and try to build a community of dialogue.

with others and the risk of transgression, but also with the blurring of borders, the clash of traditional values with innovation and globalization, and the endangered community and the ethos of dialogue.

The bridge-building is done through local memory and the creativity of the inhabitants, through arts and education workshops attended by the residents of Sejny and the fifteen villages within the region of Krasnogruda, among whom are Poles, Lithuanians, and Russians. The names of the workshops hint at their content: "Bridge," "Word and Story," "Deep Song,"

"Music of Place," "Childhood Secrets," "Art-Mask," "Nature," "Weaving," "Image and Modern Media," "Bridge Library," and "Pantry." The workshops are hosted by renowned artists, cultural animators, and teachers experienced in teaching art in multicultural communities.

"Bridge Academy" is a series of seminars based on books, movies, texts, and other activities that provide a basis for discussion. The invited participants and guests include animators of intercultural dialogue through art, social activity, and science from various parts of the world, including the Caucasus, the Balkans, the United States, Uganda, Colombia, Israel, Ukraine, Norway, and Lithuania.

Adaptable as a space for meetings, workshops, and educational events, the bridge will also be available as a gallery space for exhibits and multimedia presentations.

Invisible Bridge, continued

Most importantly, the bridge will be the scene of theatrical spectacles, symbolically connecting the shore of Krasnogruda – a specific local community contributing to its construction – with the shore of “Others,” a partner community representing global factors such as innovation, painful memories, minorities, and the natural environment.

Although the bridge in Krasnogruda is fixed and permanent, the bridge-building concept is portable and mobile. Plans are therefore underway to build invisible bridges in other regions and countries, including Norway, Israel-Galilee, and Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The International Centre for Dialogue in Krasnogruda was opened in 2011 in the former mansion of the family of Nobel Prize winner Czesław Miłosz. Its activities, including workshops, courses, scholarships, and

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publishing, are related to the multicultural heritage of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. ■

<http://pogranicze.sejny.pl/?lang=en>

Krzysztof Czyżewski, a social activist, scholar, and pioneer in multicultural engagement in Poland, is the founding director of the Borderland Foundation (Fundacja

Pogranicze) in Sejny. The Foundation, established in 1990, combines hands-on cultural activism with literary and intellectual endeavors to recover the East European borderlands’ diverse and multilingual heritage. Mr. Czyżewski also established the Borderland Centre of Arts, Cultures, and Nations in 1991 and Borderland Publishing House (Wydawnictwo Pogranicze), as well as the magazine Krasnogruda, in 1993. His publishing house was the first to print Jan T. Gross’s transformative historical account Neighbors (Sąsiedzi) in 2000. In 2014 he received Israel’s prestigious Dan David Prize. In 2015, he was the co-recipient of the Irena Sendler Memorial Award, given annually by Taube Philanthropies to Polish citizens who have been exemplary in preserving and revitalizing their country’s Jewish heritage.