

DONDIS, GODINE, & WARNER—Travel Awards

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| Submission Date | [REDACTED] |
| Student ID | [REDACTED] |
| Full Name | Emily Watlington |
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| Daytime Phone | [REDACTED] |
| Major | Art History |
| Undergraduate Status | Senior |
| Synopsis | Emily Watlington will be researching public art in Croatia. Her study includes three parts: abandoned, non-representational Yugoslav monuments; recently erected monuments to Western pop-culture figures such as Tupac and Johnny Depp; and current temporary public interventions by young Croatian artists. This project asks the question “How can a nation publicize complex histories while telling multiple sides of its story?”. After completing the research, Emily will produce an experimental publication featuring interviews with locals and local artists, essays, and photographs. |

Complete Proposal

Croatia has seen its national identities shift throughout its long history, and I am interested in studying ways in which the nation has publicized its complex story through public art. My proposed research seeks to study three forms of recent public art in Croatia: abandoned Yugoslavian monuments at World War II sites, monuments to Western pop-culture heroes, and non-permanent works by Croatian artists in the collection at Lauba – a Croatian gallery, and an institution that has agreed to host my project. While many nations publicize their history through figurative monuments commemorating national heroes, Croatia's approach has been more nuanced. As did my research on public art in the former Confederate States, this project asks the question "How can a nation publicize complex histories while telling multiple sides of its story?"

In rural Croatia lie several abandoned monuments commissioned by the Yugoslavian government to commemorate World War II sites – concentration camps and battles. Commissioned in the 1960s-70s by the Yugoslavian President, these massive, majestic yet domineering sculptures were built to convey the confidence and strength of the Socialist republic. While their abstract forms are based on Socialist principles, they do not outright promote Yugoslavian rule, especially to a public not versed in Socialist visual language. Sculpturally, they are simply phenomenal, beautiful feats of engineering. Many of these works are covered in graffiti and overgrown with weeds. This suggests that the consensus among the public and the current government finds these works neither so offensive they merit dismantling, nor so flawless they merit pristine preservation. Tomislav Brajnović, an artist whose work I will study at Lauba, asks the question "If an 'artwork' was made to serve a wrong idea or supported a bad regime, can it still be seen as cultural heritage, and would its destruction be a loss or a gain?" (brajnovic.com, "Annulée/ Geannuleerd I"). The good history versus bad history and preserve versus dismantle binaries are too simplistic, and these monuments propose one method of publicly discussing difficult parts of history without promoting them.

Cultural historians have remarked that the difficult history of the Western Balkans has caused an identity crisis. An often-cited example is the recent erection of public monuments to Western pop-culture figures in the region. This phenomenon is described by Aleksandra Domanović as 'turbo-sculpture,' in reference to the musical genre turbo-folk, which combines traditional regional styles with Western pop. Tupac Shakur, Bob Marley, and Johnny Depp are notable commemorated figures in the region. Some, such as Serbian artist Milica Tomic, see this phenomenon as a "dangerous joke," a threat to national identity, and an avoidance of the problem at hand (Art Wednesday, "Aleksandra Domanović: The Future was at her Fingertips"). But actually, few nations are building new figurative public sculptures to national heroes; rather, old ones have been preserved for centuries and are still on display. These sculptures can also be seen as a new approach to public art and national identity, and to the notion of 'heroes' in an era of Globalism. Because Croatia is newly rethinking its national identity (formed as a nation in 1991 and granted membership to the European Union in 2013), its explorations in public art are revealing as contributions to new approaches and theories.

The extensive collection at Lauba will be extremely valuable to my project. Of particular interest is ephemera from non-permanent work that deals with Croatian history or identity – that is, work that is not a traditional public monument, but is a performance or temporary installation in the public sphere, not a gallery. One such artist is Tomislav Brajnović. His work deals with themes such as the history of flags that have ruled the region now known as the Croatian nation-state. Another Croatian collective represented by Lauba – Studio Žižić / Kožul – mocks the inauthenticity of touristic constructions of Croatia, while noting the irony that tourism revenue is used by the government for 'authentic' nation building. Their works include a classic Croatian souvenir – a cornuta shell – that ironically does not come from the Adriatic Sea, but the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Instead of hearing the hum of the sea in the shell, viewers hear techno beats common to coastal Croatian parties in their installation. Public sculptures are built in – and thus reflect the views of – a specific moment in history. While their physical structures are rarely updatable, their meanings change with time. Impermanent works embody meaning differently, reflecting individual, current, and temporal views; they intervene in public space as opposed to becoming part of it. While these are the artists and works that have prompted my initial interest, my research will surely evolve as I'm exposed to more Croatian artists and culture.

This proposed project has been selected as a semi-finalist for a 2016-2017 Fulbright research grant. Should I receive the Fulbright, funds from MassArt would allow me to enroll in Croatian language courses so as to better conduct research and interact with locals. It would also allow me to travel outside of Zagreb, and would provide me with a book allowance to further my research. If I receive only the Dondis, Godine, or Warner Award, I will travel to Croatia for two summer months and produce a small publication. If I receive funding from both MassArt and Fulbright, I will complete a research for a book manuscript over nine months and submit it for publication.

Total Expense

\$5,000

| | Explanation | Amount |
|-----------------------|--|--------|
| Lodging | an apartment on airbnb in Zagreb goes for about \$800/mo, plus I would like to travel within Croatia, totaling about eight weeks | 2,000 |
| Food | | 500 |
| Equipment | I already have a DSLR and a laptop | 0 |
| Supplies | For printing/ self-publishing | 1,000 |
| Transportation | a roundtrip flight is about \$1,000, plus \$500 for bus/ train fare within Croatia | 1,500 |
| Other | | |
| Other | | |
| Other | | |
| Other | | |
| Other | | |

Additional Information

The budget proposed above is for if I do not receive the Fulbright. Below is the budget as it would supplement the Fulbright, should I receive it.

Book allowance: \$800 *it can be very difficult [though important!] accessing books in English while abroad

Travel throughout the Balkans: \$2,200 *many sculptures are located around the Balkans, and this grant would allow me to not limit my study to Croatia – especially important in a region fraught with ethnic and national division

Croatian Language courses: \$2,000 *Croatian language courses will allow me to reference Croatian texts and to interact with locals

Note that the Fulbright covers airfare and lodging

Link to web media

<http://cargocollective.com/emilywatlington>

Title

Na Muss Ja Irgendwie

Dimensions

5 in x 5 in

Date

April 2015

Medium

Performance documented on twitter published as an artist book

Title

Vacuum a Vacuum

Dimensions

Variable

Date

December 2014

Medium

3-Channel Video Installation

Title

Notes to Slef

Dimensions

Variable

Date

March 2015

Medium

e-book

Title

Zany, Cute and Interseting

Dimensions

Variable