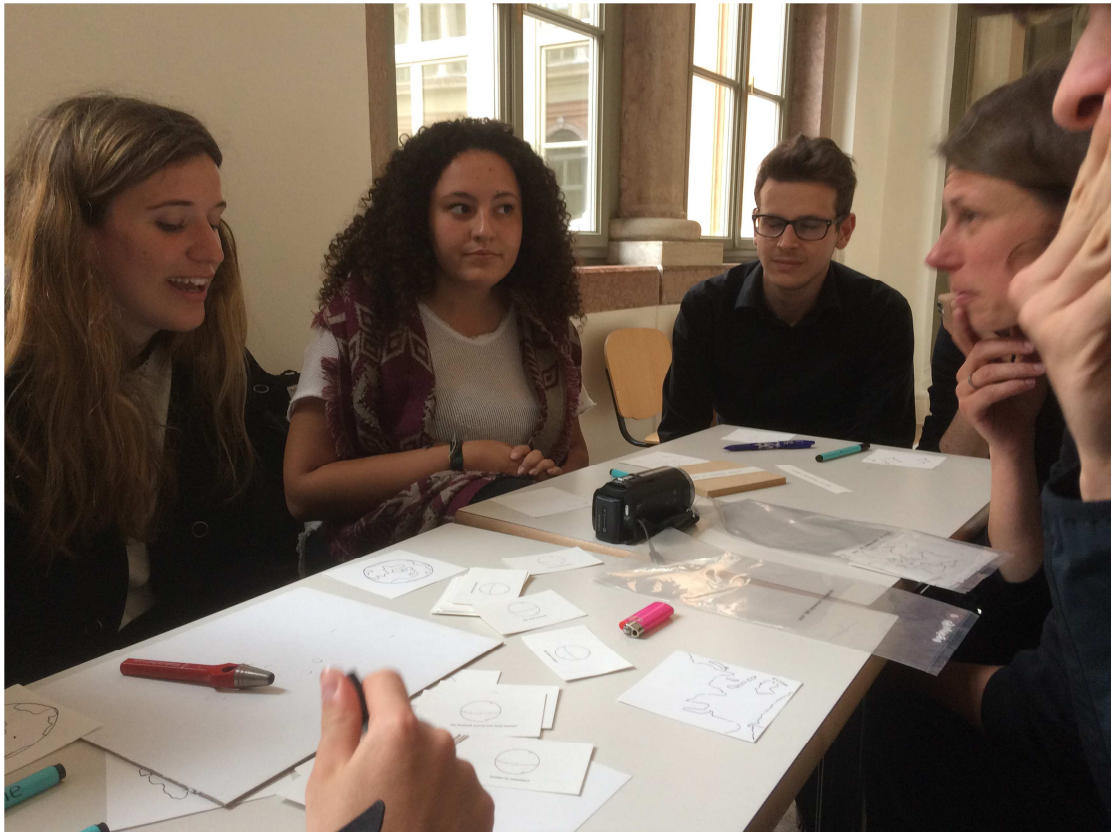


Homing Project
Interview with Janetka Platun
By Luis Eduardo Perez Murcia

‘I lived here for 53 years but I have never felt at home’.
‘Here Be Dragons’.



Janetka's photo in action during the workshop in Trento

Hi Janetka, thank you very much for making time for this interview. I want to start asking you, **who is Janetka Platun?**

JP: I'm an artist, I make sculptures, films and installations. I'm interested in people's perceptions of home and ideas of belonging and not belonging, both collectively and individually and also about how people cope with loss of home and experiences of migration.

LE: What do you mean by the term home?

JP: One of the reasons I'm interested in exploring concepts of home is because it feels personally relevant. Both my parents were post-war migrants who came to the UK, home has always been complicated for me. There's the country my parents were born and the home where I grew up. Feeling connected to more than one place in my own mind is why I'm interested in exploring home as a concept as an artist. The more I explore the idea of home the more confused it becomes in my mind.

LE: Where is home for you now?

JP: Oh ...home... geographically speaking it's very much London but I also really relate home to feeling European and being on this planet. Experiencing different parts of the globe makes me feel more connected to the world and feel more at home in the world. I have a little oasis of people and friends and a house I share with my partner which makes my life in London home. I equally feel motivated to experience the world as home.

LE: Do you have any particular object you carry with you that makes you feel at home when travelling?

JP: I am the lightest traveller ever. I'd like to meet the person who travels lighter than me. The most important things are really my senses when I travel, you know, to see the world, to experience it. I tend to not take photographs when I travel. I like to just leave my laptop behind and my phone switched off and get back to basics.

LE: How did you engage with the idea of home and why did you link it with migration?

JP: Globe takes its starting point from my parents' journey to the UK and east London, a place that has been my home as an adult, and then opens up other people's histories. It is very much about multiple voices and our relationship to the world.

For example we rolled Globe down a street where my mother lived in the 1960's. In a couple of hours we met 20 different nationalities. It really demonstrated this idea that home is as much about the local as it is about the global. And I think Globe really explores intimate ideas on a micro and macro scale.

It was also really interesting to work with geographers who approached the project from very different perspectives. I started by thinking about home instinctively and making artistic decisions that were often unconscious to begin with. When you make the work, you begin to understand what might lie behind some of the decisions. It's been interesting for me to realise that some of the things I've been exploring fit with current research. For example research into being a second or third generation child of a migrant. These ideas inform and help me to shape a bigger picture of home.

LE: Have you ever asked your parents where is home to them?

JP: Yes, Globe's film begins with my mum's voice: 'I lived here for 53 years but I never felt at home.' It creates the context for the film, she goes on to say 'home, home, home, what is home?'

LE: Where do your parents come from?

JP: They both come from Belorussia, but when they were born it was Poland, their homeland has been renamed and reshaped.

LE: Why did they move to the UK?

JP: My dad came to London in 1946 as part of the Polish resettlement. He was in the Polish army and there was an agreement with the British government that Polish soldiers who fought with allied forces could resettle in the UK. And, my mum fled communist Poland in 1962.

LE: Do you speak Polish?

JP: Polish was my first language as a child but having Polish parents in the 1970's in middle England was not a good place to be. Sadly I rejected the language. Neither I nor my siblings wanted to speak Polish because it was a problem. Sadly, we chose to reject our parents language than be rejected. I think part of my interest in using my parent's history of home is maybe addressing a part of my identity and revisiting something I rejected as a child. It was an important motivation in making the film.

LE: Do your parents communicate in Polish or in English?

JP: My father is no longer alive, but they used to communicate in Polish and a little Russian.

LE: Could you explain to our Homing Project's readers what is the potential of art for understanding home and migration?

JP: I think the power of art is that it has the potential to say something that cannot be said in any other way, to reveal original ideas about people's histories and narratives.

Art also has a transformative quality. It can allow us to step from multiple perspectives and viewpoints. When Globe is rolling down a street people instinctively react to this big copper sphere and make the connection that we are all human beings living on the same planet.

LE: What are the most relevant empirical and methodological challenges that you identify in researching issues about home and migration from an artistic perspective?

JP: Working with academics has revealed a lot of shared interests. When we have rolled Globe in East London, India or middle England our starting point is about seeing what happens. It's an organic process.

I have learned a huge amount from the scholars I've work with on this project. As well as researchers such as Peggy Levitt and Denis Cosgrove and ideas around public spaces and representations of spheres have helped to inform the project.

LE: In one of your blogs, you mentioned that Globe has been inspired by Doreen Massey's notion of 'a global sense of place'. Could you share with us how Massey's work has inspired your project?

JP: Her writing on Kilburn High Road certainly inspired me to think about our lives on a local and global scale. These two aspects, local and global are constantly referencing each other, they are coexisting and, I think that when I roll Globe through

the street regardless of the location, it is constantly making a reference to the local and the global at the same time.

Whilst editing all the footage from Globe's cameras, we developed a motif where day turns into night and then rotates back to day, referencing the world as a whole across time zones. Your body might be in one place at a time but emotionally we are connected with multiple locations with people we love around the globe, with places we feel connected to. Also playing with time as not fixed or rigid and exploring migrant histories in a non-linear way is something that we have tried to do with Globe, to create films that disrupt time.

LE: I realised you use the concepts of 'insider' and 'outsider' in one of your presentation cards. Could you tell us how you are using these concepts?

JP: I really like the idea that everybody at some point in their lives has felt an insider or outsider.

Unlike conventional Globe's representing the world, Globe started off life without any defined territory or borders. As it's been rolled each journey has left its impression on its surface, Globe challenges the idea of home territory and insiders and outsiders.

LE: While rolling in India you encountered a woman who highlighted the absence of countries on Globe, and then after a conversation about the possibility to draw the countries just stated "No, no that's the beauty of it". I really want to hear more about your engagement with ordinary people reflecting on the need to think about us beyond the idea of borders?

JP: They are hugely complex ideas, and there are people who can address them in so many different ways. Rolling a big heavy 50 kg copper Globe attracts people, it has a magnetic pull, they see you struggling with this heavy sphere and they know it means something intrinsic and that it matters. The conversation with this woman was incredibly intimate and personal. Her voice is really gentle and the exchange felt really profound. When she realised it had no countries we asked 'do we want to make countries?' to which she replied "No, no that's the beauty of it". That's the power of art to imagine a different way of being and living.

LE: The Homing Project aspires to make an art exhibition linking ideas of home and migration. Can you give us some advice of how to capture the struggle migrants and refugees often deal with to transform a place into a home?

JP: I think you can do something creative individually and collectively and experiment with different approaches that allow for different perspectives. I think trying to communicate with visual languages that might differ from your own discipline is an experimental process that can reveal new ideas. It might be as simple as starting the research with a photograph or a piece of music. At the same time I suggest you consider the differences between being creative and creating a piece of art.

Thanks Janetka, it has been a pleasure to hearing your thoughts.