

Talking Letters is a collaborative film project of ALTE ARTE (Bucharest), and Contemporary Art Center KSAK (Chisinau), CAC (Vilnius), CCA (Kiev).

Team: Pavel Braila, Angelika Herta, Lilia Braila

Project Summary

The film project "Talking Letters" wants to portrait the Romani language, an extraordinary case of a survival of a language against all social, economic, political and education odds. For centuries, Romani speakers have kept their language as a small minority surrounded by other languages, without a writing system, school system, without media and a state to defend their language, simply through their own tradition and persistence. Showing the individual cases of Roma fighting for the maintenance of the Romani language in Romania, Lithuania, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Austria, the film gives insight to the different realities Romani speakers have to deal with; against every pressure of assimilation, they are inventing their own ways of keeping, transmitting and promoting their language. This persistence and vitality raises hopes that Romani will continue to contribute to the linguistic and cultural diversity of Europe, despite the fact that UNESCO has reported Romani as an endangered language and predicted its disappearance in the near future.

***Pavel Braila** is an artist and film maker from the Republic of Moldova. Since the mid-1990s Pavel has taken part in numerous international art exhibitions and film festivals, with films, videos, installations, photos and performances.*

In the summer of 2003 I was working on my film "Barons' Hill" in Soroca, the Republic of Moldova. I was filming Roma houses, which have a very eclectic design and a crazy mixture of styles. Asking the owners what had inspired them to build such castles, I often discovered that most of them had got their inspiration from magazines, postcards, Bollywood films and from places they had seen while travelling outside Moldova. Another thing I discovered during the shooting was that most of the owners were illiterate and that in many families children don't go to school... Shooting there and listening to their stories made me think of a film that would get deeper in the culture and history of the Romani language, a language that has reached our days being transmitted only orally – which is why it is so unknown and ignored by many. **Contact:** pavelbraila@gmail.com

***Angelika Herta** is currently living in Cologne, Germany and studying at the Academy of Media Arts. Angelika has also studied comparative literature and French at the University of Vienna. Since 2007 she has been involved in film projects.*

Three years ago I came from Austria to teach at the University of Bucharest. Discovering that most of the students didn't like the city, I made them write down what they hated and loved in Bucharest. Some papers turned out to be a pamphlet against "tigani", as the Roma minority is usually called in Romania. I was shocked by the reactions I got within the academic environment. I then met Delia Grigore, herself teaching Romani language and culture at the Faculty, and I made a film portrait about her, called "Professional Roma". The interviews with her made me understand that teaching Romani means much more than just teaching the language. Studying Romani means fighting prejudices and xenophobia, opening the traditional Roma community to modernisation and searching for a new Roma identity.

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***Lilia Braila** is working in film and art projects. She has a MA in Intercultural Management. Lilia comes from Chisinau (Republic of Moldova) and has lived in Bucharest since 2007.*

Even through the Roma community is quite present in Moldova, my awareness of this minority became more evident in Romania, while working in film projects. Once I was training a Roma musician to learn a French monologue. I discovered more about his life and family and about his quite acclaimed musician life, not only in Romania but also abroad. I was fascinated to hear that he never had learned to play the violin by notes, only by ear. There are some similarities between his learning of music and the Romani language: the language was transmitted mainly orally. This has created a very exciting and heterogeneous language situation, which we want to discover through our movie.

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