

Literature as a platform for European *Homines Urbani*

Background

Created in 2004, the *Homines Urbani* project provides writers, translators and literary critics from Poland, German speaking countries and other neighbouring, Middle and Eastern European countries with a platform to work together for 3 months at the Villa Decius located in Cracow, Poland.

The *Homines Urbani* project is organised by the Villa Decius Association and the Polish Book Institute in partnership with the Polish Ha!art Corporation and the Deutsches Literaturinstitut Leipzig since 2004. Financial support is given by the Polish-German Co-operation Foundation, the Robert Bosch Foundation and the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia.

The main aims of the programme are to promote:

- young ambitious authors' self development;
- creation of new literary works;
- translation of literature from Polish into languages of neighbouring countries and vice versa;
- authors meetings, scholars' participation in festivals, domestic and foreign literary fairs;
- collective work on turning novels into theatre plays;
- international relations with writers and translators;
- understanding of other cultures.

How it works

Writers, literary critics and translators can hold a residency at the Villa Decius twice a year: in summer (from 1st April to 30th June) and in autumn (from 1st September to 30th November). Participants work on their own creative projects, take part in the cultural life of the city, get to know and (hopefully) inspire each other. During the residency, they initiate and co-organise literary meetings, discussions and workshops, usually they take place in the Kazimierz district in the "Lokator" club. All expenses are covered by the organizer.

There are usually 3 application submission deadlines. Applications can be submitted by authors, literary translators and critics under the age of 35, who are interested in Polish, German, or in general European culture/literature and who want to establish contact with intellectuals, artists, writers from abroad. Applications are sent by email to the Villa Decius and must include a CV, list of publications, covering letter and a description of the project to be realised during their stay.

In addition, the *Homines Urbani* programme offers work scholarships for people from German speaking countries (photographers, filmmakers, journalists, etc.), who realise artistic projects devoted to Poland. There is no age limit. These scholarships are granted for a period of 1 to 3 months and are organised on an individual basis with scholars. Recipients are granted a monthly scholarship of 3 000 PLN (ca. 880 EUR).

Results

Homines Urbani is the largest residency project aimed at European writers in Poland. Since 2004, over 80 authors from Germany, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, Byelorussia and Poland have spent several months working creatively at the Villa Decius. During this time, many significant works were created, such as:

- Dorota Masłowska NIKE 2006 prize winning work *Paw Królowej*/The Queen's Peacock;
- Piotr Czernicki work *Ojciec odchodzi*/Father Leaves (a critical reflection on national mourning following the death of Pope John Paul II);
- Sofija Andruchowycz's collection of stories entitled *Kobiety ich mężczyzn*/Women of their Men;
- Numerous poems by Ukrainian and Belarusian poets were translated by scholars from Poland;
- Brunon Schulz prose was translated into German by Doreen Daume; and
- Stage adaptation of Daniel Odija's book entitled *Tartak*/Sawmill which was then presented at the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre in Cracow.

Authors from different countries, cultures and language groups of East and West Europe come together at the Villa Decius as part of a larger dialogue or communication process. They address questions such as:

- whether or not cultural diversity emerges as a shared project in pursuit of creating a European identity;
- whether there are distinct characteristics in a region of blurring borders; and
- whether Europe can become culturally coherent in addition to economically integrated or whether cultural diversity should prevail in contrast to economic cohesion.

Such questions were not necessarily "pre-programme" but emerged during the residencies, in meetings and personal discussions.

The programme provides Poland with the possibility of inviting artists from EU as well as non-EU countries, providing them with a common platform / forum for exchange based on their literary work. Obtaining visas for authors and translators from non-EU countries poses a great challenge to the organisers.

It is hard to find comparable residential programme for writers in Poland. While the Villa Decius is not the only meeting place for literary authors in Poland, it is the most recognisable among writers.

The Villa Decius Association prepares internal financial and activity reports which are required by those financing the programme.

Sources

Information on the *Homines Urbani* project, its participants and literary events, can be found on the following websites:

Instytut Książki – <http://www.istytutksiazki.pl>

Fundacja Współpracy Polsko-Niemieckiej - <http://www.fwpn.org.pl>

Fundacja Roberta Boscha - <http://www.bosch-stiftung.de>

Korporacji Ha!art - <http://www.ha.art.pl>

<http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl>
<http://www.wydawca.com.pl>
<http://www.labforculture.org/pl/case>
<http://www.dom-norymberski.com>
<http://www.culture.pl>
<http://www.ksiazka.net.pl>
<http://www.de-pl.info/pl>

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