

# bétonsalon

Centre for art and research

10 years

## THE SECESSION SESSIONS

A PROJECT BY ERIC BAUDELAIRE

WITH MAXIM GVINJIA

January 9 – March 8 2014

Opening: Wednesday, January 8 2014, 6pm – 9pm / Screening *Lost Letters to Max* at 7pm

This exhibition is organised by:

Bétonsalon–Centre for art and research

Bergen Kunsthall / January 17 – February 16 2014

Argos, Centre for Art and Media / 2015

UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAM/PFA) / February 4 – February 22 2015

In partnership with Kadist Art Foundation



Eric Baudelaire, *Imagined States (Geography)*, c-print, 2005

Paris, June 29th 2012

Dear Max,

Are you there?

Eric

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*Abkhazia is something of a paradox: a country that exists, in the physical sense of the word (a territory with borders, a government, a flag and a language), yet it has no legal existence because for almost twenty years it was not recognized by any other nation state. And so Abkhazia exists without existing, caught in a liminal space, a space in between realities. Which is why my letter to Max was something of a message in a bottle thrown at sea.*

*How do you build a new State? Does the State include? Does it exclude? On what criteria can a State be considered to exist? And what forms of representation allow, or prove, this existence to be “real”? If all States are fictional collective constructs, what to make of Abkhazia: a fiction within a fiction?*

*Abkhazia seceded from Georgia, in the Caucasus, during a civil war in 1992–1993. Like all disputed lands, Abkhazia is entangled in a conflicted narrative. To many Georgians, the breakaway State is a rogue nationalist regime, an amputated part of Georgia. To the Abkhaz, independence saved them from cultural extinction after years of Stalinist repression and Georgian domination. To many observers, Abkhazia is simply a pawn in the Great Game Russia and the West have always played in the Caucasus. “The Secession Sessions” acknowledges these competing narratives and does not seek to write an impossible objective historiography. It does not parse, verify or document any competing claims to a land. The project starts with this observation: Abkhazia has had a territorial and human existence for twenty years, and yet it will in all likelihood remain in limbo for the foreseeable future, which makes the self-construction of its narrative something worth exploring. If Abkhazia is a laboratory case for the birth of a nation, then its Garibaldi and George Washingtons are still alive and active. Maxim Gvinjia is one of them.*

*When I dropped an envelope in a mailbox in Paris a year ago, I fully expected that a letter addressed to Maxim Gvinjia, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sukhum, Republic of Abkhazia, would come straight back to my studio with the notice “destination unknown.” But to my surprise, ten weeks later, I got an email from Max telling me he had received my letter, but could not reply on paper since the post office in Abkhazia cannot handle international mail. I have no idea how or why my letter arrived.*

Eric Baudelaire

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*“The Secession Sessions” is conceived as a series of invitations, initiated by French artist Eric Baudelaire, to investigate the question of statehood through the prism of the stateless State of Abkhazia. The exhibition is composed of various elements: regular public office hours at the Anembassy of Abkhazia created at Bétonsalon for the duration of the exhibition, and staffed by Maxim Gvinjia, former Foreign Minister of Abkhazia; daily screenings of a new film by Eric Baudelaire titled *Lost Letters to Max*; and a program of talks, public events and classes with scholars and artists from various backgrounds, exploring the issues at stake in “The Secession Sessions”.*

## LOST LETTERS TO MAX

A film by Eric Baudelaire with Maxim Gvinjia  
Screenings from Tuesdays to Fridays at 3pm and 5pm,  
and on Saturdays at 12 noon

Each day, the film *Lost Letters to Max* will be projected. The methodology of the film came from serendipity: sending the first letter was a kind of joke, a wink to the world of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* that Maxim Gvinjia seemed to inhabit. But fiction has penetrated the real. And so Eric Baudelaire launched on a letter writing campaign, 74 letters sent over 74 days, a script for a voiceover to a film in which Max becomes the narrator. The film will be structured by this exchange: letters that should not have arrived and yet somehow reached Max, his recorded responses, and images that Eric Baudelaire filmed in Abkhazia once their correspondence ended.

## THE ABKHAZIAN ANEMBASSY

With Maxim Gvinjia, former Foreign Minister and Anambassador of the Abkhazian Republic in Paris.  
Open from January 9 to February 8, from Tuesday to Friday 11am to 3pm and on Saturdays from 11am to 12 noon

Every day, Maxim Gvinjia, the Anambassador, will hold regular office hours at Bétonsalon. He will make use of the space as he pleases. He may host events, greet visitors, hold discussions and invite guests. The Anembassy is a performance (can it be called anything else?); it is not official and it has no function in an operational sense. It will operate as a ritual that is at once real (after all, Max was Foreign Minister) and a fiction, but a fiction meant in a very political sense: fiction as a territory of resistance for those who are given no space in the real.

## THE SATURDAY SESSIONS

On Saturday at 3pm

A program of weekly Saturday afternoon talks, public events and workshops, with scholars and artists exploring the issues at stake in "The Secession Sessions" beyond the question of Abkhazia *per se*.



*Paris, September 24th 2012*

*Dear Max,*

*How does it feel to be talking into a recorder?*

*It's strange to ask questions without hearing your answers... I guess I won't know until we're finished, will I?*

*Eric*

# THE SATURDAY SESSIONS / PROGRAM

## Session 1

January 18 2014

*Improbable Abkhazia*

A conversation between Maxim Gvinjia & Leon Colm

## Session 2

January 25 2014

*Identity Ploy and Dangerous Fictions*

A workshop hosted by the journal Vacarme

## Session 3

February 1st 2014

*State Desire*

A seminar by Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez & Elena Sorokina

## Session 4

February 8 2014

*The Nitty Gritty of the State*

A lecture by Fabien Jobard

## Session 5

February 15 2014

*The Bergen Sessions*

Live broadcast from Bergen Kunsthall

## Session 6

February 22 2014

*The Secession Sessions is WithOut Wall*

An intervention of the WithOut Wall collective (Georgia)

## Session 7

March 3 2014

*An Epistolary Secession*

Morad Montazami & Eric Baudelaire

## Session 8

March 8 2014

*Reinventing the State?*

A conversation between Alain Badiou & Pierre Zaoui

# ERIC BAUDELAIRE

Eric Baudelaire is a French visual artist and filmmaker. He participated in “La Triennale, Intense Proximity”, Paris (cur. Okwui Enwezor), “A Blind Spot, Documentary Forum II”, Berlin (cur. Catherine David), “The Taipei Biennial” (cur. Anselm Franke). Recent solo exhibitions include the Beirut Art Center, Lebanon, Gasworks, London, and The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. His work is present in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Centre Pompidou, Paris, the Fond National d’Art Contemporain, Paris, and the Kadist Art Foundation. His film *The Anabasis of May and Fusako Shigenobu, Masao Adachi and 27 Years Without Images* premiered at FID Marseille and received the jury prize at DocLisboa. His second feature, *The Ugly One*, was in competition at the Locarno Film Festival. “The Secession Sessions” at Bétonsalon is his first solo show in a parisian institution.

# MAXIM GVINJIA

Maxim Gvinjia is the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Abkhazia. Before he was appointed on February 26, 2010 by the government of Sergueï Bagapsh, Maxim Gvinjia had served as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs since March 1, 2004. Maxim Gvinjia was born on March 13, 1976 in Sukhumi, USSR. In 1998, he graduated from the Gorlovsky State Institute for Foreign Languages in Ukraine.

Eric Baudelaire, *Imagined States (Parade Ground)*, e-print, 2005



# ABOUT BÉTONSALON

Bétonsalon - Centre for art and research strives to develop a space of reflection and confrontation at the confluence of art and university research by giving form to discourses from the realms of the aesthetic, cultural, political, social and economic. Integrated into the site of the University Paris Diderot - Paris 7 at the heart of a neighbourhood undergoing reconstruction, the ZAC Paris Rive Gauche in the 13th district of Paris, Bétonsalon aims to ally theory and practice, with the objective of rearticulating the position of research and artistic creation in society.

The activities of Bétonsalon develop in a process-based, collaborative and discursive manner, following different time spans, in cooperation with various local, national and international organizations, and present themselves under different forms:

- Three large-scale exhibitions with an average duration of three months each are organized every year, and are enriched by different associated events (workshops, conferences, performances, round table discussions...).
- Seminars and workshops take place over the span of the university semester in collaboration with teachers from the University Paris Diderot - Paris 7.
- Off-site research projects in partnership with other institutions are now in development, with the goal of offering residency possibilities open to researchers, artists and curators.



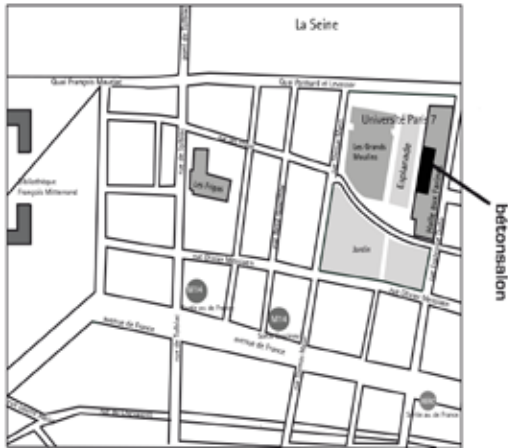
# PRACTICAL INFORMATION

## TEAM

Mélanie Bouteloup, director  
Marie Bechetoille, project's coordinator  
Garance Malivel, project's coordinator  
Louise Le Moan, intern  
Agnès Werly, civic service  
Ségolène Thuillart, assistant  
Jennifer Caubet, technician

## ADVISORY BOARD

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Jérôme Coumet, Mayor of the 13th district of Paris  
Véronique Chatenay-Dolto, director of Île-de-France  
Regional Board of Cultural Affairs - Ministry of Culture and  
Communication



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Rez-de-chaussée de la Halle aux Farines  
Paris 75013 - France  
Postal address: Bétonsalon BP 90415  
F-75626 Paris Cedex 13

Opening times: Tuesday-Saturday, 11am-7pm  
Free entrance  
Access: metro line 14 or RER C  
Exit 3, Rue Goscinny  
Stop Bibliothèque François Mitterrand  
Website: [www.betonsalon.net](http://www.betonsalon.net)  
Contact: [info@betonsalon.net](mailto:info@betonsalon.net)

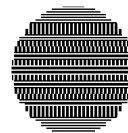
# OUR PARTNERS

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Bétonsalon is supported by the City of Paris, the Department of Paris, the Paris Diderot University, the Île-de-France Regional Board of Cultural Affairs - Ministry of Culture and Communication, Île-de-France Regional Council and Leroy Merlin (quai d'Ivry).



Bétonsalon is a member of TRAM, contemporary art network in Paris/Ile-de-France and d.c.a / the French association for the development of centres d'art



d.c.a

This exhibition is organised by:



*Lost Letters to Max* has received support from the Image/Movement grant from Centre national des arts plastiques.



This exhibition is realised in partnership with Kadist Art Foundation, Paris

*Bétonsalon - Centre for art and research recommends the exhibition presented by Kadist Art Foundation, Paris:*

*« M.I.R.: New paths to the objects », an exhibition of Arseniy Zhilyaev*

*January 18 - March 30, 2014*

*Opening reception: Friday, January 17, from 6pm to 9pm*

*For his exhibition at Kadist Art Foundation, Arseniy Zhilyaev creates an anti-utopian museum of contemporary Russian history. The title of the exhibition plays with the polysemous word "mir" which means both "peace" and "world" in Russian, and could be the acronym of "Museum of Russian History". Arseniy Zhilyaev pursues his reflection on the Museum as an institution, a legitimizing one, whose mission is to spread knowledge among a wide audience, as well as to express an official policy. The artist appropriates the discursive mode of a Museum of History to represent how Russian society could change during the next years.*