

inhabitants. That is the loss of civil participation.<sup>1</sup> State and municipality bodies keep operating self-constructed images and concepts, while the reality grounds continue to be occupied by surviving grass-roots enthusiasm. If the official guidelines rely on the existence of some general >nation<, then empirical projects by artists uncover segregation and alienation. With their observations artists happen to deconstruct the idea of >easy< democratic consensus essential for the image of >facade democracy<. If power wants to see culture as the mechanism of its promotion then creative research, even unintentionally, rather seems to expose the complex heterogeneity of social groups who are not always identifying with the current state.

<sup>1</sup> Normunds Kozlovs,  
>Façade democracy of  
Latvia< [http://acoustic.  
space.re-lab.net/](http://acoustic.space.re-lab.net/)

Reflection on political issues and social problems are not at all the central themes of contemporary or even media art in Latvia. Prevailing are aesthetic issues, personal subjects and experiments in conceptual narrative. In conversation, most artists would rather stress their distance from the engagement in critical art, and if involved, admit just an interest in some particular aspect, most probably connected to their social life. This, of course, does not only illustrate the depoliticised civil sphere but also the discreditation of a rigid moral discourse in a society where flexibility and irony were the methods of intellectual survival both under the rules of ideology and in the decade of transition. The cause might be also the absence of any credible method which would allow to understand the social process. Concepts of welfare state do not apply to a country where free market capitalism within a decade critically boosted social inequality, while the references to the values of the country's first independence promoted by the government are ridiculously contradicting current social patterns.

Direct nostalgic references, conscious research and integration of historic footage like those present for example in the works of Lithuanian artists Deimantas Narkevicius or Kristina Inciuraite are missing in Latvian art. Sequences of >T-Shroom<, >Me and my family<, >What's in the girls' handbags?< are results of interdisciplinary projects and empiric fieldwork that voyeuristically map the current state of things. And this present appears to flood artists' media with marginalised historical, personal, and [sub]cultural references. A so-called >self-sufficiency of reality< had also been attributed to Latvian documentary cinema: to the influential film on the rebellious punk rock youth of the Glasnost age >Is it easy to be young?< by Juris Podnieks where >the aim of the film is to throw light on the problem, to reveal it without giving methods of its solutions<, to the poetic everyday epics of Laila Pakalniņa, and to Juris Poskus' film >But the hour is near< with its unfolding grotesque of daily religious struggles