

*Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Center unites a selection of artists, writers, academicians and journalists to create an atmosphere of discussion within the frame of René Block's In the Gorges of the Balkans exhibition in Kunsthalle Fridericianum Kassel, between the dates December 14-16, 2003.*

Including Migjen Kelmendi (writer and editor of *Gazeta Java*), curator Suzana Milevska, Shkelzen Maliqi (director of the Gani Bobi Centre for Humanistic Studies), and Palestinian curator Jack Persekian, ten participants from different countries will focus upon rethinking the artistic production, cultural geography and possible future collaborations in the region of the Balkans and the Middle East.

The general perception is that the Balkans and the Middle East belong to different systems of values and cultures as well democratic traditions and economies. There is however a shared, and often painful history of mutual influence, domination and interdependence. The presence of large communities originating from North Africa and Turkey binds the two continents more than any kind of political agreement. The religions, cultures and languages of Arab countries and Turkey are now part of the European landscape.

As the talks of Turkey's possible entry to the European Union is discussed, one critical issue turns out to be the religion, and how Turkey's entry has an effect to its bordering countries to its north and east and southeast. The underlying issue is not in and of itself—a knot that binds together the Muslim populations in the Balkans to the Muslim populations of the Middle East—but as well a different kind of historical framework that is possible to negotiate from within the lineage of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire had occupied and governed both of these regions for centuries and left a deep imprint on them. The Ottoman lineage is experienced in different ways, and functions as a depository for many contemporary problems. Within the borders of Istanbul, the conferences are also aiming to evaluate all the different voices in a platform and create supportive a ground for collaborations.

Since Platform wishes to offer a common and shared base for the artists from the region as well as artists from any other countries, together with the Istanbul Residency Program, an atmosphere of discussion is to be constituted. The conferences take place in accordance to the policy of the institution, which is based on the guiding principle that it is more important to bring positions together than break them apart, are supported by Förderung aus Mitteln der Kulturstiftung des Bundes and co-organized with Kunsthalle Fridericianum Kassel.