

Insights on MOCAD's new neon: Sislej Xhafa's *Nothing Will Be Alright*:

As MOCAD prides itself on being an institution that promotes critical dialog within the Detroit community, one of the major goals of Sislej Xhafa's *Nothing Will Be Alright* neon installation was to open a discussion inspired by this important, but certainly controversial work of art. Xhafa's work may prompt us to consider the role that art and artists are asked to play in society. Is the function of art to "make everything alright" by providing pleasure, or does its value lie in art's capacity to raise questions (sometimes difficult ones) about the world around it? Or a bit of both? The difficulty of this question is mirrored in the semantic ambiguity of Xhafa's work.

If this work is perceived as a response to social conditions, one might have a variety of interpretations. Xhafa is Kosovar Albanian, and grew up in Kosovo during the war-torn era of the Kosovo Conflict*, so one may consider the impact that witnessing constant upheaval but no real change may have on the artist's world view.

Both this sign, and Martin Creed's *Everything is going to be alright* are traveling works of art that have been exhibited all over the world (HYPERLINK "<http://www.martincreed.com/works/index.html>")<http://www.martincreed.com/works/index.html>) Xhafa, like many other artists, uses his work to respond not only to social issues, but also to the work of other artists. In Rome (above the Belgian [Xhafa] and British [Creed] Academies in 2003), the two pieces were installed simultaneously, but in different locations. Here in Detroit, the opposite is true: they are installed in the same location, but in temporal sequence. This change means that the viewer's memory of the earlier installation becomes a crucial element of the work.

The sign is an integral part of *Business as Usual* (one of our current exhibitions), because it offers an anti-materialist sentiment expressed in the idea that we can survive on very little, even "nothing." For creative people, like the thousands in Detroit creating urban agricultural environments (for example), this may be taken as a reflection on living on a lot less than the "average consumer," and still not only surviving but thriving. Detroit is, in fact, full of many people who find inspiration in looking beyond the perceived decay of the city and finding beauty in its regeneration. (HYPERLINK "<http://metrotimes.com/arts/story.asp?id=13268>")<http://metrotimes.com/arts/story.asp?id=13268>)

While it is not our intention to ignore the negative interpretations of its semantic meaning, because after all, it is a bold sentence on the facade of our building, we would be amiss if we were to ignore the more positive and thought-provoking potential that it possesses, as well. Please feel free to stop in, call or email should you have any questions, or if you wish to discuss the sign further with any of our staff!

*between Serbian and Yugoslav armies and the Kosovo Liberation Army, an Albanian guerrilla group seeking secession from the former Yugoslavia (1996-1999). In 1999, NATO attacked Yugoslav military and civilian targets, while Albanian guerrillas continued battles with Yugoslav forces, amidst a massive displacement of population in Kosovo.

