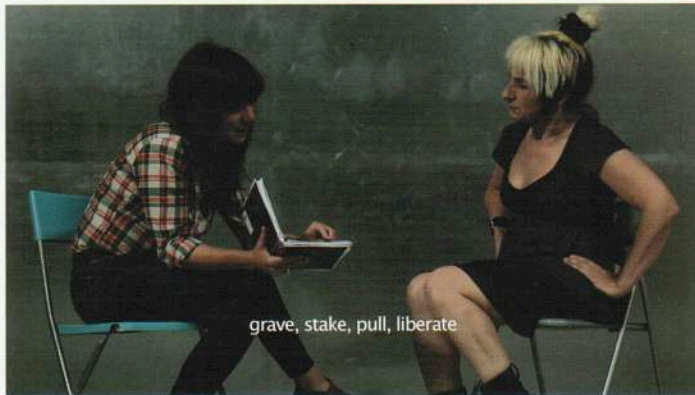
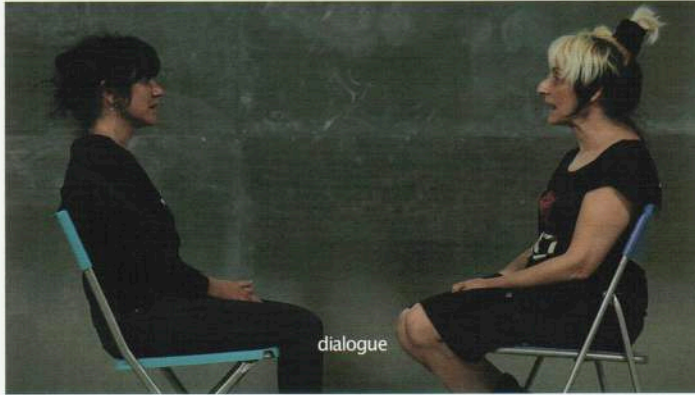


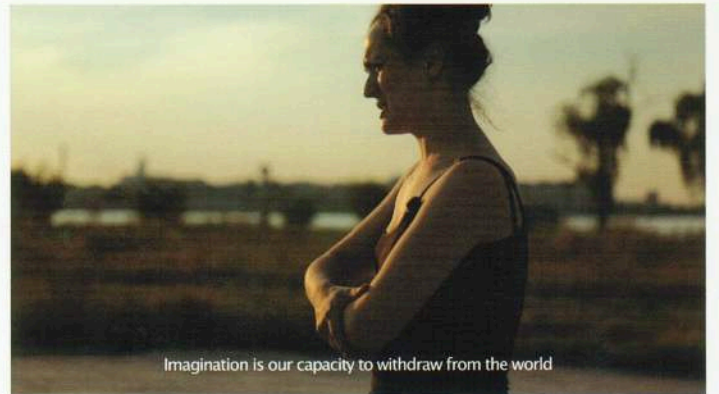
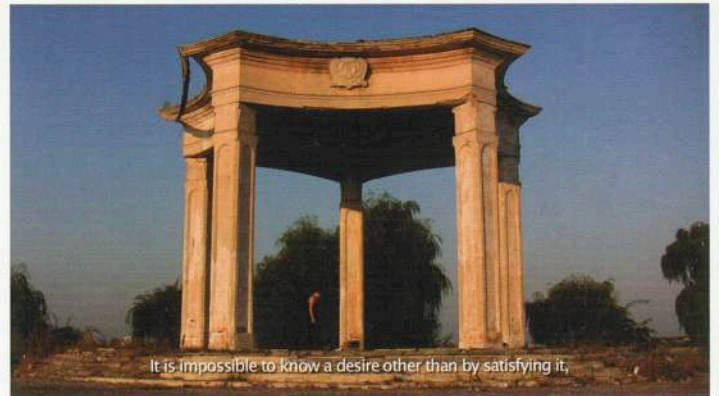


**Irina Botea: It is now a matter
of learning hope**

April 26 – May 31, 2014
Opening reception: April 26, 6-9PM



Irina Botea, Still from *Photocopy/Fotocópia*, HD, 2011



Irina Botea, Still from *It is now a matter of learning hope*, HD, 2013/14

Irina Botea, *It is now a matter of learning hope*

by Julia Marsh

In politics, as in art, we rehearse and recreate, recall and remember the past to make it present. Artists reshape and recast that which is useful and worthy; that which is grand and inspiring; important and meaningful; however, unlike good art, politics far too often refashions what is base and demeaning for corrupt ends. When actors stage a play each performance is an event and a moment, made again for audience and actor alike. In the reenactment of the play something new is exercised. When artists make a work they too are restaging, repositioning, re-contextualizing ideas and materials. In each act of making the artist sends forth, regardless of criticality or ennui, a message of hope, because making, in and of itself, is an act imbued with optimism. At its basis, art relays worth and sharing; narrowing the space between people, moving outward, away, and toward. Political art, since the advent of *l'art pour l'art* and the demise of the religious work, has stood at the crossroads between despair and hope. Representing the social has in the last two centuries placed art in the greater service of people turning artwork, as Lewis Hyde aptly stated, into a gift twice over: one produced of the artist's free labor, as we often toil without pay, and as another for the audience's unlimited fulfillment. Still it is easy to forget that art can and does generate hope when it so often appears, more recently, to be made in the vacuum of specialization.

In contradistinction to both this perception and the closed system art is usually presented in, Irina Botea has endeavored to connect with a wider audience by engaging society and social concerns directly *in situ*. In bringing people from all walks of life into the space of making, and by casting these

participants as both subjects, and simultaneously agents of the work, Botea has placed the making in their hands. For millennia the ritual object was a source of awe and wonder. Images and objects held the promise and dread inherent in our social compacts. All the same, within these practiced exchanges was the assurance of potential. The promise of creating, for both maker and viewer, remains in Botea's work a catalyst for change and thereby hope. Botea shows meaning in acts, which on the surface may seem mundane, as the actors ruminate, explain, repeat, or respond. Botea's works and the people she works with reveal an urgency to know, to feel, to connect with past events in the present, as well as a need to propel the present into the future. By placing us within someone else's understanding, she recasts knowledge as intimacy. Over her career Botea has maintained a playful and active exchange with those she places before the camera. This has not changed. In her earlier work, Botea let us in on the doubling and directing of repetition, and enactment, but in her current works to some degree she has stepped back and allowed the actors and agents in three of the works to fully possess the replay or reformation of events and language. More precisely, these latest works reveal the unapologetic nature of her inquiry. By removing the self-conscious interruption that showed us that the camera and art is just device and that what is being said or seen is in fact staged Botea here gives the audience a chance to get lost in these works through the mesmerizing chants and prayer-like rehearsals generated by her participants; and consequently transcend the event to be inspired.

Of the four works on view *Impersonation* (2014) may seem the most recognizable as a reenactment, for both the costumes and the subject, yet the play performed is perhaps unfamiliar beyond our knowledge that a president died. Botea's revision and reenactment of Lincoln's last hours show a singular life, and a shared death. The featured Lincoln re-enactors, or presenters as they like to be called, however

much we might giggle at their efforts, reveal society's commitment to such engagement in history and the hope we have embedded in Lincoln's character. The other three works in the exhibit are more familiarly organized according to Botea's methods. Especially, *Art historians—a conversation* (2014) traces the care and earnestness of curators at the Burkenthal Museum Sibiu, Romania with Botea's familiar sense of respect and affection for her subjects' explaining. Botea's always seriously playful approach is more evident in the work *Photocopy/Fotocópia* (2011), where she provides two artists space to dialog, through call and response, the language of protest. In her latest work *It is now a question of learning hope* (2014) set on the Morii Island, in Romania, a young woman rehearses lines, the words of thinkers like Ernst Bloch from whom Botea took the title of this work and the show. In practicing these lines the woman appears to be not just memorizing, but convincing herself, and the audience, by extension, of greater expectations; of becoming.

The rituals of making, now the province of artists, may appear on the surface, like some reenactments, to lack anything of the solemnity of religious services, annual rituals or rites of passage performed throughout the world. Yet art, like such reenactments, is a kind of sacrifice reflecting both

the artists offering and our need for meaning and connection more typically found in the repetition of the religious and historical liturgies, and performative texts of worship. Botea's texts are taken from both the grand acts and the mundane arenas in life. In Botea's work the pastiche of reenactment, whether on a constructed set or in a landscape, belies a sense of purpose that is, in strictly categorized reenactment, often overlooked as mere play or distraction. However in Botea's framing reenactment is a tool for eliciting more than just nostalgic representation or ethnographic investigation or event historical accuracy. In her hands, the action captured is ceremonial, locating her agents in and around places and sites of historical significance—frequently places of grief or failure—these collected efforts become revolutionary.

In reenactment what loss are we staving off by redoing or restaging the past; saying aloud a script repeated more than once before? What hope do we generate by ascribing the past a presence? What do we keep alive in these rehearsals that do not necessarily actualize? Can we stay forever in a loop that propels us up and closer to a utopia? Like the artist in *it is now a question of learning hope*, we too spiral up and down the paths of life, meeting ourselves again and again as we redo, retry, remake. Botea provide us with something more than entertaining diversions or historical revision, she helps us visualize our own reenactments more palpably. In the repetitive action of Botea's work we find the urgency and hope, need and passion of our own renewal. Art may not lead to a better world, but it may help stave off the worst by merely continuing to keep hope alive. Botea, by creating small rituals, and thus acts of fulfillment, offers a chance to learn from the past. Botea leads us to the next stage, to a place that is safe and respected; open and prosperous, even if only in good feelings and happiness—to her own utopia where individuals within the collective have a voice that can be heard and acted upon, recognized and used, valued and realized.



Nicu Ilfoveanu. *Still from Art historians—a conversation*, HD, 2014