

# MEETING AND CONVERSATION WITH MIRIAM CENDRARS, DAUGHTER OF THE AVANT- GARDE FRENCH WRITER BLAISE CENDRARS

COMMISSIONED BY:

**Kornel Šeper**, Association for the Development of Culture (URK)

**In the biographical essay “Life, word, writing”, MiramCendrarsGilou sums up her many years of work on the archives of Blaise Cendrars. Her book is an exhaustive contribution to the analysis of a writer fascinated by savagery and revolution, led by his own personal tensions and unease, an author who in his travels attempted to uproot himself, to free himself by writing from all systems and rules. The ninety-two-year old Miriam Cendrars lives in quiet retirement in Brittany, in a house on the shore of the Atlantic.**

**KornelŠeper, a greater admirer of the work of Blaise Cendrars, enthusiastic at the idea of an encounter with a person close to the writer, wanted to travel to Brittany with Amela Frankl and meet the daughter of the famed writer himself.**

**Artist ŽarkoVijatović agreed to the request of the artist to photograph their meeting with Miriam Cendrars.**

TITLE OF WORK:

# DRUMMER

August 24 – September 11, Extension, Museum of Contemporary Art



PHOTO: Zarko Vujanović

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**February 24, 2011**

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Document: email  
 From: Amela Frankl  
 To: Kornel Šeper

.....

morning, dear kornel,  
 in the attachment I'm sending you some comments about the project.  
 don't think that I have to like your suggestion. think of what you really  
 want  
 me to do by way of task, and from the material gathered I'll then create  
 an artwork.  
 cheers,  
 amela

**We had met in Močvara. Kornel told me he was thinking about a commission related to a favourite writer of his, Blaise Cendrars. To work out the commission, Kornel suggested we meet again and go over together some of Cendrars' books.**

**We met up. He made me a present of the novel *Moravagine*. He told me a personal anecdote from the days of his youth, when he first discovered Cendrars. We leafed over Cendrars' poetry and novels. I imagined Kornel, his youthful soul, experiencing the mood and way of thinking of the adventurous and much-travelled Cendrars. Finally, he suggested I got together with Cendrars' daughter. A few days later, Tomica Bajsić, translator of Cendrars' poetry, sent us the address of Miriam Cendrars.**

**March 24, 2011**

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Document: email  
 From: Amela Frankl  
 To: Kornel Šeper

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Dear kornel,  
 Every client is meant to write a brief account of the reason for the  
 commission, and I would ask you to write about why Cendrars, and why  
 Miriam.  
 are you going to go with me to Paris?  
 I'll be back at the latest by April 20, depending also on Miriam.  
 cheers,  
 amela

April 1, 2011

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Document: email  
From: Amela Frankl  
To: Miriam Cendrars

Madame,

Votre adresse mail m'a été très aimablement transmise par Yannis Livadas et Tomica Bajsic.

Je m'appelle Amela Frankl. Artiste visuel, je travaille actuellement avec le Musée d'Art contemporain de Zagreb et le soutien du Ministère de la Culture de Croatie au projet *Što nosim* (Ce que je porte) dont je souhaiterais vous entretenir.

Dans le cadre de ce projet, quatorze critiques, collectifs artistiques et activistes de la scène culturelle croate me demanderont de me rendre à Paris pour accomplir une tâche ou exaucer un vœu. Dès mon retour à Zagreb, je devrai organiser un micro événement ou créer une situation artistique en utilisant le matériel et la documentation récupérés lors de mon séjour. *Ce que je porte*, c'est pour moi quatorze fois l'occasion d'affirmer ma liberté, de mettre en jeu mes facultés de créer et improviser, dans le respect des instructions parfois inattendues que me donneront mes commanditaires et les limites de moyens du projet.

Kornel Seper, acteur culturel, activiste et défenseur des droits de l'Homme bien connu à Zagreb est l'un de ces quatorze commanditaires. Il y a une vingtaine d'années, Kornel a trouvé par hasard dans l'appartement de sa grand-mère un exemplaire de Moravagine oublié en haut d'une armoire sur laquelle il grimait pour réfléchir aux dilemmes de sa vie. Il est redescendu de l'armoire, lecteur passionné de Cendrars.

Kornel m'a donc demandé d'organiser une rencontre avec vous.

Je souhaiterais à cette occasion faire notre portrait photographique que j'utiliserai ensuite dans une installation présentée à mon retour à Zagreb. Pour moi, Cendrars c'est surtout Moravagine qui fait écho à un travail que j'ai réalisé dernièrement dans le cadre du Festival des âmes extravagantes, un journal de mes rencontres et de mes échanges avec les schizophrènes internés à l'hôpital psychiatrique de Zagreb.

Je serais très heureuse que nous puissions nous rencontrer bientôt à trois; Kornel et moi nous tenons prêts à venir à Paris dès que possible.

Amela Frankl

Dear Miriam Cendrars,

Your email address was forwarded to me through the kindness of Yannis Livadas and Tomica Bajsić.

My name is Amela Frankl. I am a visual artist and am currently working, with the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, supported by the Croatian Ministry of Culture, on the project *What I Bear* (Ce que je porte) which I would like to talk to you about.

Within this project, fourteen critics, art collectives or activists of the Croatian arts scene will ask me to go to Paris and carry out a certain task, to fulfil their request. On the return to Zagreb, I will have to organise a micro-event or create an artistic situation based on materials and documentation collected during my stay in Paris. *What I Bear*, for me, means fourteen chances for the affirmation of my own freedom, re-examination of my own creativity and ability to improvise, all the while respecting the occasionally unexpected instructions of the clients, and the accessibility and restrictions of the material and how it is to be implemented.

One of the fourteen clients is Kornel Šeper, a figure in the arts world, a known Zagreb activist and human rights defender.

Twenty years ago, Kornel accidentally found in his grandmother's apartment a copy of *Moravagine*, put aside and forgotten on the top of a wardrobe he had climbed up on to think about some of his personal quandaries. He came down from the wardrobe an impassioned reader of Cendrars.

Kornel has requested me to arrange a meeting with you.

I would like at the time to make a photograph of us together to use later for the installation that I shall exhibit on my return to Zagreb. For me, Cendrars is above all *Moravagine*, and connected with the work that I recently put on at the Festival *Extravagant Bodies, Extravagant Minds*, a diary of my encounters with schizophrenic in-patients in a Zagreb psychiatric hospital.

It would be an enormous pleasure if we could all three of us meet fairly soon. Kornel and I are ready to come to Paris as soon as possible.

Amela Frankl

**I asked Žarko Vijatović to go to Brittany with us and take pictures of us and our meeting with Miriam Cendrars. He was particularly happy to accept my suggestion and invitation.**

**April 4, 2011**

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Document: email

From: Miriam Gilou-Cendrars

To: Amela Frankl  
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Madame,

Je suis très intéressée par votre projet. J'espère que Kornel trouvera d'autres œuvres de Cendrars en grimpant sur d'autres armoires !

J'habite actuellement en Bretagne et vous recevrai avec plaisir dans ma maison face à l'océan.

Vous pourrez certainement y réaliser de très belles photos.

Si vous confirmez votre désir de venir jusqu'en Bretagne pour me

rencontrer, faites-moi savoir à quelle époque vous envisageriez ce voyage, afin que je puisse vous réserver suffisamment de temps pour votre travail et nos échanges.

Amicalement.

Miriam Cendrars

Dear Amela Frankl.

Your project is very interesting to me. I hope that Kornel will find some other Cendrars works interesting, climbing up some other wardrobes.

I am now living in Brittany and with pleasure I will receive you in my house with its ocean view.

I am sure you will be able to take some very pretty photographs.

If you confirm your coming to Brittany to meet me, let me know what period you intended to travel in, so I will be able to devote enough time to your work and our talks.

With friendly greetings,

Miriam Cendrars.

**Kornel decided to go with me to Brittany and meet Miriam Cendrars. Although I was already then thinking about my artwork, I knew that it would have a different form because of Kornel's presence. But for love of Kornel and his wish to get to know someone close to the writer, I gave up on my first idea of a final piece of work.**

**April 5, 2011**

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Document: email

From: Amela Frankl

To: Miriam Gilou-Cendrars

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Madame,

Kornel et moi sommes très touchés et nous serions enchantés de venir en Bretagne vous rencontrer. Nous pourrions passer dans la première ou deuxième semaine du mois de mai. Votre emploi du temps le permet-il ?

Amela

Dear Miriam Cendrars,

Kornel and I were very touched by your invitation and are looking forward to meeting you in Brittany. We could come in the first or second week of May. Would that fit in with your timetable of engagements?

Amela

.....  
Document: email  
From: Kornel Šeper  
To: Amela Frankl  
.....

Hey,  
ok, I hope she's going to reply ASAP so I can buy my plane ticket. well, I have been thinking a bit about your idea of making an artwork related to Cendrars and my commission.

as far as I understand it, the plan is for you to make some photographs with photo-montage or some intervention where you would be, but in some way physically deformed, and that in the background there would be sounds from your project at the hospital. The link of the two ideas is the book *Moravagine* that speaks about a lunatic who in some way is physically deformed and is a link with the writer, who was disabled. since you said we should work together on the project, then I would like to put in my comments. because, I am not sure it is appropriate, thinking it doesn't present Cendrars in a proper way. For, madness is not his regular theme, which he is identified with, and in this book I think that madness is just a trigger for some other story, about freedom, adventure, crossing the borders of the commonly accepted, and not exactly the main theme , as in let's say Flight over the Cuckoo's Nest. another thing is that Cendrars is not known here enough for it to be possible to go in detail into his sub-strata, which could well be perceived in a quality way. It seems to me it would be a cool thing in some way to present him in some general way or via some strong factors that appear in his work – multiculturalism, the spirit of uninhibitedness, travel, joy, the documentary and reportage manner of writing, or that flickering that you observed well... his disability is particular to him, but I think it is not enough to address just that. at least, so I see it.

I don't know if I have given you here some constructive comments, or perhaps I didn't understand your intention.

in any case, I hope we'll soon meet in Brittany!:)

cheers  
kornel

.....  
Document: email  
From: Amela Frankl  
To: Kornel Šeper  
.....

I totally agree with you that neither madness nor disability is the main theme of Cendrars' work and that it would be wrong to reduce it all just to these two elements.

in this project I am not representing Cendrars. it would be pretentious of me to speak in someone's name or work up some kind of para-scholarly discourse. this is an artistic and not a scholarly project. It is true that Moravagine is a trigger, a link for a beginning. it would be also creative to construct a story of why one would ring on Miriam's door and what to do with her, and what's more in addition make it interesting not only to me and you but to some third person in Zagreb. Another fact around which there is interesting material woven is our possible trip to Brittany. I did not speak of some other links, e.g., about Cendrars; egomania. all o f these are elements that are gradually incorporated in the work. It is important too for you to write down your motivation about Cendrars and the commission, for that is part of the work and your taking part in it, and it is some guideline for me. there now, a few hints for understanding the working process. before going to Brittany, let's meet at the Goribor concert next week I'll be in Zagreb.  
Cheers

**April 12, 2011**

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Document: email  
From: Amela Frankl  
To: Miram Gilou-Cendrars  
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Madame,  
Pourrions-nous passer vous voir la première ou deuxième semaine de mai ? Cette période serait optimale pour notre projet Cendrars. Kornel et moi attendons que vous nous indiquiez si cela vous convient pour prendre nos billets d'avion et nous organiser un peu.  
Bien à vous,  
AmelaFrankl

Dear Miram Cendrars  
Could we meet you in the first or second week of May? This would be an ideal period in which to implement the Cendrars project. Kornel and I will, after you confirm the time, buy tickets and get ready for the journey.  
Sincerely,  
Amela Frankl



**April 14, 2011**

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 Document: email  
 From: Miriam Gilou-Cendrars  
 To: Amela Frankl  
 .....

vous avez du courage d'entreprendre un aussi long voyage! Et cela simplement pour faire des photos...  
 La semaine du 9 au 15 mai pourrait convenir. De combien de jours envisagez-vous votre séjour en Bretagne. Chez moi 2 ou 3 jours est parfait. Si plus longtemps, très sympathique hôtel près de chez moi.  
 J'attends réponse  
 amicalement  
 Miriam Cendrars

You're brave to set out on such a long journey. Just for the photographs...  
 The week of May 9 to 15 would suit me. How many days do you intend to stay in Brittany? I could put you up two or three days. If you stay longer, there's a pleasant hotel close to my house.  
 I look forward to hearing from you.  
 Cordially yours  
 Miriam Cendrars

**April 17, 2011**

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 Document: email  
 From: Amela Frankl  
 To: Miram Gilou-Cendrars  
 .....

Nous proposons de passer vous voir mercredi et jeudi 11 et 12 mai. Nous serons à trois, Kornel, un ami photographe et moi.  
 Nous vous remercions beaucoup pour votre proposition de nous héberger 2 ou 3 jours mais ne pouvons pas être un embêtement pour vous. A cette saison, je suis certaine que nous trouverons sans difficulté à nous loger.  
 Dans votre dernière réponse, vous m'avez indiqué votre adresse postale que je note : XXXXX.  
 Je pense arriver en France le 9 mai et pourrai être jointe au XXXXX  
 Je me réjouis de bientôt vous voir,  
 Amela

We suggest that we meet on Wednesday 11 and Thursday 12 May. There will be the three of us, Kornel, our friend the photographer and I.  
 Thank you for your kind offer of hospitality for two to three days, but we would not like to be a burden on you. I am sure that at this time of the

year it will not be difficult to find accommodation.  
In your last answer you mentioned the address that I wrote down:  
xxxxx I intend to arrive in France on May 9, and can be contacted on  
telephone number: xxxxx  
I'm looking forward to meeting you soon.



«Je t'attends» • PHOTO: Amela Frankl

Document: email  
From: Miriam Gillou-Cendrars  
To: Amela Frankl

Chère Madame,  
Comme convenu, je vous fais parvenir l'itinéraire pour arriver à ma maison à partir du bourg de Névez.  
Je vous attendrai à partir de 15h, le 11 mai. Veuillez me confirmer votre arrivée.  
Cordialement.  
Miriam Cendrars

Dear Amela Frankl,  
As agreed, I am sending you the directions from the town of Névez to my house.  
I shall expect you on May 11 from 3 pm. Please confirm your arrival.  
Sincerely, Miriam Cendrars.

ITINÉRAIRE

pour arriver sain et sauf chez :  
Miriam GILOU - CENDRARS 18 KERLIOU 29920 NEVEZ  
Téléphone et fax : 02 98 06 84 44

En sortant de la place de Névez prendre la direction de Port-Manech.  
À environ 600 m bifurcation fleurie avec panneaux indicateurs.  
Quitter la direction Port-Manech, prendre à droite direction Chaumières de Kerascoët et Raguénès.  
La route traverse les fermes de Kerambellec.  
Puis, vous arrivez à une bifurcation : quitter la direction Kerascoët - Rospico et prendre à droite direction Raguénès, traverser Trémorvezzen voyez devant vous la chapelle stop.  
Tournez à gauche ( vous quittez la direction Raguénès )

Environ 60 m plus loin, à droite, panneau KERLIOU  
Environ 60 m plus loin, vous voyez devant vous une grande maison couleur beige clair et sur la droite un emplacement poubelles.  
À droite, entre l'emplacement poubelles et la maison, une petite route indiquée par un panneau "sans issue".

Prendre cette petite route asphaltée. À la bifurcation, ne pas aller tout droit mais tourner à gauche. La route descend vers la mer.  
En bas de la pente, vous voyez le portail d'une grande maison en pierre ( Mentheour) et vous tournez à 90° vers la gauche, longez un mur de pierre, puis vous passez devant deux maisons blanches ( n°14 et 16 = Le Bris et Paugame) et vous arrivez à la fin de la petite route asphaltée.  
À droite, au coin, immédiatement après l'entrée du jardin de la maison n°16, prenez le chemin de pierres et de terre, à 60 m, au portail blanc de ma maison, c'est le numéro 18.

Il est ouvert. Entrez. Vous êtes arrivé  
Bienvenu!

Description of the way

How to arrive hale and hearty at:

Miriam Gilour Cendrars xxxxxxxx

Telephone and fax: xxxxx

From the main square, xxxx, go in the .... direction.

About 600 m later a flowery crossing with traffic signs.

Leave the .... direction and go right in the direction of... and ....

The road goes between farms.....

Then you'll come to a crossroads: leave the .... direction and go right towards ....., go through....., as soon as you see a little church in front of you, stop. Go left (leave the .... direction)

60 m later, right, a signpost for....

In front of you after another 60 m is a large light beige house, on the right there is a place to deposit trash. On the right, between the dump and the house, there is a small road signed cul-de-sac.

Go along this small asphalted road. At the crossing, don't go straight on, but turn left. The road drops down to the sea.

At the bottom of the slope you will see the yard gates of a large stone house (xxxx), here you turn 90 degrees to the left, go along by the stone wall, and pass between two white houses (nos. 14 and 16=xxxx) and you will come to the end of the little asphalted road.

Right, in the corner, immediately after the entry in the garden of house no. 16, turn onto the stony-muddy path, after 60 m on the white entry door of my house you will see number 18

The door is open. Come in. You have arrived!

Welcome.

**The instructions of Miriam Cendrars were extremely useful. We were fascinated by the accuracy of her description of the way to her house, the tiny details, negligible to the ordinary eye.**

**As I had suspected, the work in the Museum of Contemporary Art was ultimately very different from what was planned, less poetic, factual in the description of our moods while we were with Miriam Cendrars in Brittany. As well as a short note about the journey, I exhibited a few details from the journey: a photograph of us together, photos of the impressive landscape on the seashore and acoustic notations of the nature. The seemingly idyllic set up was disturbed by the disruptive sound of drumming.**



— DAY ONE

In the morning, on May 10, we set out for Brittany from Paris. On the way Kornel wants to stop at the village of Tremblay-sur-Mauldre, to visit the grave of Blaise Cendrars. Kornel very much wants to have a photo of himself at the graveside.

We arrive in Brittany late in the afternoon. We walk along the coast. I am surprised by the mild, pleasant maritime setting. Žarko shows his delight by quietly photographing us and the sea. Kornel splits off from us and walks on his own to another bay.

— DAY TWO

By the shore, not far from the house of MiramCendrars, we wait for the appointed meeting. I see that Žarko is relishing photographing the pine-needles, the open ocean, Kornel and me.

At 3 p.m. MiramCendrars welcomes us cordially. I feel that she is paying us a lot of attention. At the beginning, Kornel addresses her in English, but the conversation becomes complicated. I record the conversation. The recorder registers the interference with Kornel's mobile messages. The recording is now just a memo of the encounter. Kornel has a prepared list of fifteen questions about Blaise Cendrars, while Miriam Cendrars says it is time for her to learn something about Blaise. She tells us that a few days before she experienced a storm over the sea. She describes with great vivacity three lightning flashes over

her house, ending at the bottom of the garden. She gives off a lot of quiet energy. Why does Kornel ask her if she is tired? Žarko suggests we have a photograph all together. When we are leaving, Kornel wants to have a photo with Miriam Cendrars by himself. He asks me if we should suggest another meeting for tomorrow, saying it is a chance of a lifetime. I don't think there is any need.

— DAY THREE

Before we went back to Paris, we take another walk along the shore. For Extension, Žarko wants to shoot for me a few more maritime motifs. I didn't ask why he is shooting, and he doesn't take any photos. But I know. He has got into the flow of nature.

And Miriam Cendrars, in her house on the shore of the ocean, I decide.

In writing, video and sound, I construct a portrait of the Drummer, the main character of this work.

The Drummer brings in agitation, gives rhythm, covers the voice of the other and is organically opposed to everything.

Carried along by impulse, the Drummer follows a rule in which there is neither harmony nor dialogue.

The portrait of the Drummer is a portrait of a situation. Observing the atmosphere in which I found myself, with the completion of this commission, I suggest a collective portrait through a short encounter full of expectations, tensions and disharmonies, differentiating two sensibilities, two existential forces that are mutually exclusive.

Photography and video by ŽarkoVijatović



PHOTO: Amda Frankl