



In Tirana, Politics Is Just Another Medium

If California can elect Arnold Schwarzenegger governor, why can't New York have Matthew Barney as its mayor? If that sounds farfetched, consider Edi Rama, the artist-turned-mayor whose ambitious leadership has turned Tirana, Albania, into the Williamsburg of the Balkans.

Seven years ago, Rama was living the painter's life in Paris. But after receiving word that his father, a well-known sculptor, had died, Rama returned to his native Tirana and, subsequently, was offered the job of Albania's minister of culture. In 2000, having seen enough of Tirana's corrupt status quo, he ran for mayor on the Socialist ticket, and won with 54 percent of the vote.

Today, in the midst of his second term, the symbolic centerpiece of Rama's effort to clean up the city has been something he calls "Colors"—an ambitious and, by necessity, inexpensive project wherein young artists and architects paint the city's gray, dilapidated buildings in bright designs that suggest a hybrid of Japanese pop art and Atari 2600 graphics.

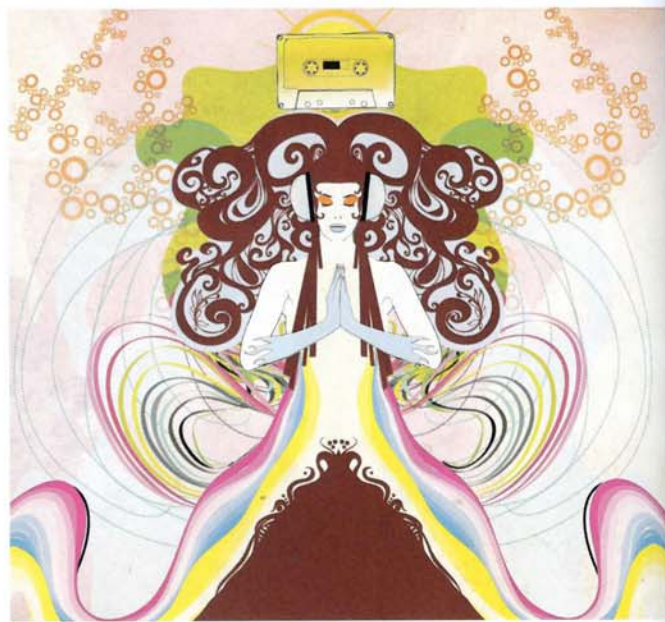
"Colors," and Rama's other arts-related initiatives—including an annual film festival and a *biennale* that's currently enjoying its third incarnation (running through November)—have led some to fantasize about what a better world it would be if all mayors were "tormented painters." Rama, however, isn't so sure: "I feel that I am more useful as a mayor than as an artist. And I feel that I am more useful as an artist-mayor than the other mayors I saw. [But] I'm not a model."

Albania's political elite has taken a dim view of Rama's rise, and in 2000 he survived a sniper attack that made the shot Valerie Solanis fired at Andy Warhol look positively quaint. Still, Rama says, he's not afraid: "It's not important how. It's important when. I hope it's as late as possible." And while many of the city's residents would love to see him challenge the national establishment, Rama seems content with his local beat: "I became mayor of Tirana because I think, here, politics can be an instrument to make things happen, and I feel like an artist using politics as a medium. I will never become mayor of a very nice, stable, depressing Swiss city." He adds, "Nothing against the Swiss, but it would be psychological suicide if we Albanians became perfect. Our potential is having the impossibility of being perfect." —Jennifer Turner and Michael Hogan

That Dress Sounds Great on You!

As a child, Brooklyn-based conceptual artist Alyce Santoro was an avid sailor. Perched on the deck of her father's sailboat, she would fix her gaze on the directional telltales (made of used cassette tape) attached to the mainsail and muse on what occurred when the air hit the acetate. "I believed that if the wind hit the telltales just right, we'd be able to hear the Beatles or Beethoven wafting out into the atmosphere," she says. Years later, Santoro undertook an art piece entitled *Fabric of the Universe*, weaving cassette tape together with other materials. Thus was born Sonic Fabric, a 50-50 blend of cotton and repurposed eighth-inch cassette tape, which she now uses to manufacture her own line of Sonic Fabric dresses and shoulder bags. And yes, they can be listened to by unscrewing a tape-head from an old Walkman and running it along the fabric. "I like to create works that are odes to the wonder and mystery of the human sensory experience." —Andy Baker illustration www.mydeadpony.com

Santoro's designs are available through her Carroll Gardens studio, 718.779.9794.



"Art is never chaste ... art is dangerous. Where it is chaste, it is not art." —Pablo Picasso