

**In Transitional Landscapes**  
**\_ LECTURE by Azra Akšamija \_ 16 January 2015, 3.30 p.m. \_ at Packhaus**

**Future Heritage**

October 4, 2012. Dozens of protesters, students and citizens of Sarajevo are gathered in front of the entrance of the National Museum Bosnia-Herzegovina, witnessing what has already become a historical event: the Bosnian National Museum has been closed to public for the first time in its 124 years of existence. Six other state-level institutions in Sarajevo, including the National Art Gallery and the National and University Library are also suffering from an unresolved legal status and lack of funding and, it is rumored, are also on the verge of shutting their doors to public. This cultural crisis, which is easy to minimize, even as it works to lobotomize whole cultures, has caught the attention of artist and architectural historian Dr. Azra Akšamija. She works through an artistic lens to address the crisis of Bosnia's cultural institutions within the context of the socio-political transformation processes that have traversed and remade post-Socialist Eastern Europe. In particular, she is working with the question of whether a national museum can be a vehicle to reclaim public virtue – things like solidarity, collective memory, the integrity of public institutions, and the opportunity for cultural renewal – in post-national societies. Though Akšamija acknowledges the museum's institutional power structures and instrumentality in colonialist and nationalist projects, she does not see this history as annulling the possibility of making the museum a catalyst for public good. In a society that is still recovering from the consequences of the war, museums and archives represent a contested sphere -- they are in crisis precisely because they preserve the collective memory and the material evidence of coexistence in the region that nationalist-extremists seek to erase. In what ways can people in Bosnia reclaim their shared histories and create new cultural capital for the civil society to overcome the violence of competing nationalisms? In this context, Akšamija makes a case for cultural preservation as a positive instrument for state building and peacemaking in the Balkans. Her work encompasses physical and social sculptures, inspired by recent events, meant to incite a broader discussion about the future role of national museums and other cultural institutions affected by the current political and economic crisis. Her work intervenes to relocate that discussion from the closed doors of committees and bureaucracies to the museum and its public itself.

**Azra Aksamija** is an artist and architectural historian, Assistant Professor at MIT's Art, Culture and Technology Program. She holds master degrees in architecture from the TU Graz, Austria and Princeton University, and received her Ph.D. from Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2011. Aksamija's multi-disciplinary work investigates the potency of art and architecture to facilitate the process of transformative mediation in cultural or political conflicts, and in so doing, provide a framework for researching, analyzing, and intervening in contested socio-political realities. Her recent work focused on representation of Islamic identities in the West, spatial mediation of identity politics, and cultural pedagogy. Her work takes on varied forms, including clothing, video, sculpture, new media and interventions in public space. Her works has been published and exhibited in leading international venues such as at the Generali Foundation Vienna, Valencia Biennial, Liverpool Biennial, Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb, Sculpture Center New York, Secession Vienna, Manifesta 7, Stroom The Hague, the Royal Academy of Arts London, Jewish Museum Berlin, and the Fondazione Giorgio Cini as a part of the 54th Art Biennale in Venice.