

Staying or leaving / Ostati ili otići

"Staying" or "Leaving" – motionlessness or motion – these two terms refer to a place at which you have arrived, where you want to stay, where you are perhaps at home; or, on the other hand, a place you have to, want to or can leave. The "or" seems to urge a decision, or it stands for the uncertainty of choosing between the two possibilities and the option of making yourself at home or departing. "Staying or Leaving" – the question arises against the backdrop of a world that is constantly reorganising, in which migration no longer appears only as a phenomenon of flight caused by political or economical necessity, but has come to be a constant in the question of identities, a form of permanent surveying and exploration of the cultural territory.

"Staying or Leaving" puts eight artistic projects into a temporary context within the framework of this publication and for the duration of the exhibition: for the artists featured at the exhibition, the key theme of their work and point of departure for their projects is to explore possibilities and drafts of social coexistence, concepts and utopias of belonging, experiences of uprooting and endangerment, and their politically or economically motivated conditions. They describe processes in which living space – private or communal, permanent or temporary – is negotiated, and they refer to very specific geographical, historical and social situations and may be seen as strategic navigation through cultural landscapes.

Landscapes, buildings and situations in life – the factual object of these works – form a panorama in which the conflict zones of our generations and of generations past coincide: the colonial struggles for power that characterised the past century, the failure of social utopias and the "internationalisation of people and cultures" that are founded equally in post-socialism and late capitalism. In the "Staying or Leaving" projects, these conflicts are manifest or lie, barely concealed, below a thin layer of the familiar. In his 2001 work "Bag People", Mladen Stilinović addresses the phenomenon of impoverishment and socially induced inequality – which is commented on, as it were, by Dan Panaitescu's poster work "If you buy this" (2002), that talks about the lack that can only be healed, it would seem, by consumption, which, in turn, nurtures the myths of belonging. Hegemonic conflicts and the fact that they are fought out through territorial control are explicitly demonstrated in Ahlam Shibli's work "Unrecognized" (2000), in which she describes the Palestinian village 'Arab al-N'aim not recognised by the Israeli authorities. In the series "New Homes in Israel and the Occupied Territories" (1992 – 1998), Efrat Shvily confronts us with the typologies of Jewish settlements which have been documenting Israel's territorial policy since the Oslo Agreement of 1993 and against the backdrop of the First Intifada (1987 – 1993). Particularly in the private sphere, as described in the video work "Das Haus" (2002) by Ana Hušman, the image/text work "Neighbours 2: The Yard" by Oliver Musovik (2002) or the pictures of the "Rooftops of Cairo" by Randa Shaath, we find the breaks, the doubts and the after-images of orders that no longer hold good; but from these disrupted zones of private and urban organisation we can also extract energies that trigger collective processes. Maria Papadimitriou demonstrates this in "T.A.M.A. – Temporary Autonomous Museum for All", a project that she has been developing since 1998 together with itinerant sections of the population, the inhabitants of Avliza, a run-down area in the west of Athens.

The question of "Staying or Leaving" does not arise for the traveller who sets out to get to know a foreign culture, to learn of other places and different ways – one of the key factors in the formation of the European world view. So these are not accounts of journeys describing what someone has seen and experienced in foreign lands – on the contrary: here the focus is on places and situations in one's own area of life, where we observe rupture lines of individual, cultural and geographical belonging, lines along which stories evolve and social self-conception becomes visible.

Even if these are not descriptions of journeys, these eight works could be referred to as "accounts" that tell of real circumstances. But they do so in a way that is different to the pictures of the world's crisis areas that are put about every day by the mass media. The preferred media for these descriptions – photography and video, with their direct access to reality – presuppose trust in the ability of these media to capture economic and social realities (formerly the realm of the

"documentary"). Artistic practice processes the contradictions between individual experience and collective utopia in such a way as also to exhibit the constructedness of the accounts; as such, the work also takes place at the level of the image and puts its status up for discussion that is founded on the reality effect of photography, the guarantor of "what once was so". The modesty in the use of the media, the detachment of the observer, who is aware of his detachment, but who at the same time has a familiar "relationship" to the object of the description – this artistic stance is what the different positions of "Staying or Leaving" all have in common.

Christine Frisinghelli

Published in the homonymous catalogue accompanying the exhibition, with texts by the artists and curators in Germ./Engl./Croat.;

ed. by Christine Frisinghelli and Sandra Križić Roban for Hrvatski fotosavez, Zagreb;

140 pages, 23 cm x 16,5 cm, numerous color and bw illustrations;

ISBN 953-98197-7-6.