

IMAGES OF THE WORLD ON THE MOVE

Movements of Peoples and the Modern World

Important discoveries of new geographies on the map of the world, constant movements of peoples, emigrations and migrations of groups and individuals from one territory to another for political, existential, economic, educational and other reasons have been present and followed in the world history since ancient times. In the 20th and 21st centuries, marked by two world wars, atomic disaster, bloc divisions of the world, the fall of the Berlin Wall and collapse of the USSR as a great world power, civil wars in the Balkans and the emergence of a series of small nation states, war conflicts in the Arab world at the beginning of the new millennium, all of which associated with great human suffering, the modern era has also brought about economic prosperity, technological advancement and the development of transport that takes you to the end of the Earth and back quickly and easily. At the beginning of the new millennium, the Internet only strengthened the idea of the mobility of the modern world by starting the nomadism of people who change places of living in search of work, better education or to flee from war. Anthropologists of the contemporary world use the term “the world on the move”¹ to describe last century and the beginning of the new millennium. Thinkers and humanists of modern times see the society of liberal capitalism as a world in which the same values of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism are shared, but migrants in new movements, coming to European borders, are still met by barbed-wire fences, refugee camps on border territories and the international FRONTEX,² which defines the rules of conduct in the new circumstances. The situation with the new movements of people who emigrate has made intellectuals rethink the concept of cosmopolitanism of the modern world and redefine it as “new cosmopolitanism”, now related to observing the rights of people on the move in four reference points – borders, territories, identity and demos, i.e., free people.³

Border, identity, territory

Contemporary migrations are dealt with in the art practices of the authors presented at the exhibition *Both There and Here* – Ana Vujović, Jelena Janković, Goran Dragaš and Bojana Lukić, who articulate the basic themes of borders and identities in various narratives, each of them from their own subjective experience and in various media of expression.

In the work *To Leave Room for the Others*, created during an artist residency programme in the Italian town of Conzano, Ana Vujović explores and authentically interprets the accumulated memory and the identity of this place, known in the local community for emigrants going to Australia to be employed on sugarcane fields and in the newly developed sugar industry in the British states of New South Wales and Queensland⁴. From the creative perception of a foreigner at an artist residency, she articulates a story about the history of the area, significant for the local community, but also for the positioning of the place in the development of the culture of sugar at the global level. The space installation that thematizes a certain time and space is designed in a

specific visual and aesthetic code in which the elements of the family table in an ambience that evokes a family home composed of ethnographic contents, artefacts and mobiliary, are united in a composite whole by an effective painter's intervention with caramelized powder. The shapes "coated" with bittersweet sugar on the table and the accompanying mobiliary of the wall opening, through the reception of the ambience, invoke empathy for the place and the bygone times and, at the same time, through the striking scenes, evoke images from the life and work, events and emotions of the inhabitants.

Jelena Janković's photographic cycle *The Eighth Floor* was created from her personal experience of life in a new and unknown environment. Taken from the window of a flat on the eighth floor of a Zagreb skyscraper, where the young artist built her love nest, these black and white photographs of the surrounding buildings and landscapes, taken at different times of the day and in different weather conditions (sunny morning, rainy day, mist, lightning in the night sky), and always without the presence of people, were made in the film manner, so they could be seen as a diary recording of everyday life and interpreted as biographical material. The images of the city in the frames perceived from the existential space and the scenes of the subject, in the shots made always from a bird's eye view, away from the ground and real life, in the sociological and anthropological context, clearly refer to the desocialized identity of the author and her status of a foreigner in the new environment.

The life on the move between two worlds is characteristic for the Belgrade artist Bojana Lukić, who graduated in painting from the renowned Brera Academy, and is equally present as an artist in the country and abroad, whether through exhibitions or educational workshops with the audience. Her experience of frequent crossing of borders and different perceptions of the reality of these spaces in the migrant crisis since 2015 are the theme that she deals with in the media of drawing, object making and installation, through problematization of the identity culture of people on the move. Thematizing the sensitive situation at borders and the fragile status of migrants, the artist varies the known discourses through different scenarios of drawing interactive geographical maps and maps of refugee routes, building of bird nests, by which she compares migrations of birds with migrations of people, figural compositions of people on the move, that she represents as the anonymous identities of moving bodies, recognized tired bodies in dirty and ragged clothes, with luggage on their backs, with walking legs in close-ups, or just soles stuck in mud... Her work refers to the well-known modern world international conventions on borders, speaking of free movement of goods and capital and, at the same time, of moving of people that has become very difficult, sometimes impossible. In the committed visual expressions of the sensitized "speaking bodies", the artist apostrophizes migrants as tragic heroes of our time and their vulnerable status that qualifies them as the "stateless nation".

Goran Dragaš, who has the experience of migration in his personal life story, consistently explores this topical theme in his work with the dominant preoccupation with the extended

understanding of borders as risky territories through which migrants move on their way to the unknown. The watercolour cycle *The Butterfly Effect* problematizes movements of migrants or a group of migrants along the usual refugee routes leading through the inaccessible snow-drift mountain landscapes, mysterious forest areas, through deserted villages and urban areas on the outskirts of cities, settlements in flames, areas affected by the elements or some other disaster, projections of the sky with a drawn target, and the like. The characteristic visual concept of displaying the minimized dimensions of figures of people walking through the landscapes of vast state territories apostrophizes the imaginary subject and the ambivalent position of the migrant as a political body in the space they are conquering. In the depictions of landscapes with migrants, different degrees of reality of the way into the unknown are presented, in which the artist, sometimes, in the scenes of the harsh reality, introduces the elements of meditation of nature with the effects of light that radiates from the scenes.

A note at the end

At the workshop that Group 484 held a few years ago at the same gallery, at the exhibition that also dealt with migrations⁵, the educators marked a square area on the floor (3x3 metres) with duct tape and in that space, simulating a refugee boat, placed some 20 people that were present, mostly young. The participants hardly managed to enter the small area and sit on the marble floor, huddled together; it was tight, heat radiated from the bodies and filled the whole gallery space. In the imaginary situation of a quiet summer afternoon, the mentors asked each participant to share their experience of movement if they had it, whether it was changing the address in their place of residence or moving to another city or state. Most of the present were deeply impressed by the presentation of the girls' work with migrants in refugee camps in the country, and great empathy was aroused by the story about an elderly man who would put on his white ceremonial clothes (that he had in his luggage) every evening, to be ready in case he was to die, and the touching story about a young woman, a Syrian doctor's wife, who smiled for the first time after a long time, when she saw her polished fingernails, which restored her dignity for a moment. Stories and images of closed borders and migrant camps appear paradoxical to young people today, when we live in the world of Internet and media platforms with extensible boundaries brought by transnational electronic technology. Perhaps the meditative notes that Goran Dragaš brings in the images with migrants still give utopian hopes of the modern world that there is light at the end of this path.

Gordana Dobrić

¹ Agier, Michel, *New Movements of People, New Cosmopolitanism* Biblioteka XX vek, Belgrade, 2019

² FRONTEX, The European Border and Coast Guard Agency, founded in 2004, which guards the borders of the European Union and the countries that are part of the Schengen Agreement

³ *Ibid*, pp. 29-62

⁴ Elizabeth Abbot, *Sugar: A Bittersweet History*, Geopoetika, 2009, p. 271

⁵ G. Dobrić and D. Žarevac, the exhibition *Two Worlds* (D. Dakić, V. Nair, L. Nimcova), Art Gallery, July 2016