

SPACES OF PLACELESSNESS

Exhibition by ZORICA ZAFIROVSKA



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On the 28th September 2018, o.T. Projektraum will open the exhibition “Spaces of Placelessness” by Zorica Zafirovska (Skopje, Macedonia, 1982). This is her first solo exhibition in Germany.

The exhibition is curated by Elena Veljanovska

Text: Elena Veljanovska

Migration has been cutting through our societies’ fabric, thus slowly crumbling the ideas of free movement and stronger than ever, making visible the power relations and the vulnerability of the migrants. In *Spaces of Placelessness*, Zafirovska, a migrant traveler herself, is unraveling a very intimate view of the migrant crisis that is restructuring Europe’s socio-political fabric.

Her approach is characterized with specific inclination towards working with vulnerable groups. Additionally, with her highly sensitive radar for human suffering, she possesses the ability to get close and establish emphatic contact with different subjectivities and situations. In this way, she is building her narrative around a variety of fields and topics, ranging from human rights violation, trafficking of children and women, gender violence and inequality, social and political injustice, migration and displacement.

The current exhibition is thus built around the notions of placelessness, space making and mobility, or more precisely, around the invisible force that sometimes can move masses into extinction. The collection of works hints to the variety of reasons to move towards salvation. Consequently it puts on

display several different strategies of escape, some of them with lethal closure for those undertaking them. In the attempt to uncover them, it reveals the risk factor, manipulation and corruption as an inevitable factor for operating in these gray zones of exchange of goods and human lives.

The exhibition structure consist of a combination of media events and lived stories, Heightened by the artists' family history of displacement in the second world war, as well as her long personal experience as a migrant worker on the sea. Therefore, when one walks into the exhibition space, one is confronted with these different realities of space-making. The exhibition is open with the work "The leaflet" or "Step by step to crossing the Macedonian-Greek border", signed by Kommando Norbert Blüm. A leaflet with very controversial origin and aim, manipulated and mobilized masses of refugees to escape from the camp "Idomeni" on the Greek border with Macedonia and move towards Macedonia on foot in 2016. To this day the motive for printing this leaflet is highly unclear. The second work "One and a half hour of air" situates the story about a tragic event, a truck which smuggled refugees from Serbo-Hungarian border to Austria. It was discovered in Parndorf, Austria, where 59 men, 8 women, 4 children and 1 baby, suffocated to death in their attempt to escape. "Journey" brings another aspect in the mosaic, this time reminiscing the most frequent traffic that is taking place at the open sea. The video filmed by the author uses found rescue materials, discarded whistles from safety vests. The sound of the whistle from the video resonates with the visitor throughout the exhibition. The very calm video "Journey" is actually the loudest element of the exhibition, remind the viewer of the importance of the sea as the carrier of masses of refugees, as well as the gray and most dangerous zones of risk, corruption and death. In her fourth work "Lost hearts, lost lives" she demonstrates a map of the routes and most dangerous gray zones for movement in the Mediterranean.

Whereas these works are showing the different aspects of placelessness creates by the constant mobility – whether it is on foot, on the road or by sea – the last work shows a strategy of place-making. "Abandoned office" shows a survival strategy and an attempt to attachment, if only temporary, where a former UN and humanitarian aid offices at the Macedonian border with Serbia, "Tabanovce" are turned into a space for living.

The exhibition oscillates between situations that were lethal for the risk-taking refugees, and the need to create a space in a situation of placelessness and displacement. It observes and shows the various dangers that these people have faced, the lack of human rights and dominant power structures that exist in these gray zones of existence, but it also shows the need to settle, to create a space and the necessity to hope for a better life. Like in all her previous works, Zafirovska is approaching these situations with an abundant feeling for sensibility and responsibility. By facing the viewer with the crude material, it points to the vulnerable social groups and circumstances, and calls to action against social injustice and systemic violence!

Zorica Zafirovska is born 1982 in Skopje, Macedonia. She holds a bachelor degree from The Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Ss. Cyril and Metodius of Skopje. Since 2011 she is a Ph.D. Candidate in cultural studies at the Institute for Social Sciences and Humanities "Euro-Balkan". Her work as a visual and conceptual artist involves a wide spectrum of research concerned with contemporary socio-political topics, such as human trafficking and homelessness. In her home town Skopje and elsewhere, Zorica does mostly site- and time-specific installations and small actions, that rely on critical and subversive approaches of executing and presenting her work. This is her first solo exhibition in Germany. Zorica lives and works in Skopje, Macedonia.