

SO FAR, SO CLOSE

photo exhibition 9-26 October 2014



Abbaye de Neumünster, Luxembourg

Dans le prolongement du cycle thématique **Si loin, si près** le festival CinEast, présente une exposition éponyme réunissant plus de 200 œuvres de seize photographes polonais, tchèques, slovaques, hongrois, roumains, néerlandais, italiens et luxembourgeois.

Cela fait un quart de siècle que la chute du mur de Berlin a mis fin à la douloureuse partition de l'Europe. 25 ans au cours desquels les Européens de l'Est, mais aussi de l'Ouest ont essayé d'effacer les multiples frontières qui les séparaient. Un quart de siècle après nous avons tenté de dresser un bilan de ce processus de rapprochement en recherchant dans plusieurs projets des réponses à quelques questions centrales:

Y-a-t-il toujours deux Europe ou bien n'y en a-t-il plus qu'une seule? Subsiste-t-il une identité spécifique de l'Europe de l'Est? Une unification complète de l'Europe est-elle en marche? Et si c'est le cas, est-elle souhaitable?

Que ce soit la persistance de l'héritage communiste, les ravages récents de la société de consommation ou l'effacement apparent des frontières, les réponses des artistes participant à l'exposition ne sont jamais univoques et constituent plutôt une invitation au voyage et à la rencontre.

Exposition organisée en collaboration et avec le soutien du CCR "Abbaye de Neumünster"

Jagna Olejnikowska (commissaire)
Radek Lipka (coordinateur)

Complementing the CinEast festival's thematic cycle **So Far, So Close**, an eponymous photography exhibition brings together more than 200 works of sixteen artists from Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, as well as Luxembourg, Italy and the Netherlands.

A quarter of a century has passed since the fall of the Berlin Wall ended the painful division of Europe. 25 years during which the people of Eastern Europe, but also those from Western Europe, have strived to bring down the multiple borders and boundaries that used to separate them. A quarter of a century later we have tried to define the state of affairs of the reconciliation process by searching for answers to some key questions by means of more than a dozen carefully selected photographic projects:

Are there still two distinct Europes or does only one Europe now remain? Can we still talk about the specific identity of Eastern Europe today? Is there a complete unification of Europe happening now? And, if so, is that desirable?

Whether it concerns the persistence of the communist legacy, recent ravages of consumerism or the apparent erasure of the borders, the responses of artists participating in the exhibition are never univocal and seem to constitute an invitation to travel and to encounter.

Exhibition organised in collaboration and with the support of the CCR "Abbaye de Neumünster"

Jagna Olejnikowska (curator)
Radek Lipka (coordinator)

NICOLE SEGERS (NL)

Nicole Segers is a documentary photographer. Her work appears in the form of long-term projects which are published and exhibited in solo exhibitions and festivals in her homeland and abroad. She focuses on contemporary subjects, where she investigates the deeper meaning of a specific issue. Since 2001 Segers has been fascinated by the borders of Europe. She has published two books on this subject in Dutch and in French: *Gens des Confins* and *Les passeurs d'Istanbul* (Editions Noir sur Blanc).

WHERE EUROPE ENDS

For *Gens de Confins* Segers travelled along the eastern border of the European Union, a 7 000 km long journey beginning at the northernmost tip of Finland, far beyond the Arctic Circle, and ending at the Black Sea coast in southern Bulgaria. On this journey she experienced the immensity of the newly defined Europe. In search of emblematic images which would reflect the atmosphere of the different countries and their histories, she concentrated on the border areas, which are subject to multiple influences, and their inhabitants.



DANA POPA (RO)

Dana Popa is a Romanian-born photographer currently based in the UK. She completed an MA in Documentary Photography and Photojournalism at the London College of Communication. Her interests lie within contemporary social issues, with a particular emphasis on human rights. She has been working mostly in Eastern Europe and the UK. She was awarded the First Prize in the Center's Project Competition, Santa Fe, USA, (2010) a Jerwood Award (2007, UK) and the Jury Prize in Days Japan International Photojournalism Awards (2007).

THE EU EASTERN FENCE

In January 2007, Romania joined European Union. The five hundred year old village of Ruginesti lies isolated in the hills of the Romanian Carpathians. A hundred and eleven families live a life frozen in time, just like that of their great-great grandfathers. Only young children and the elderly remain. Every single household has a relative working abroad. Towards the east, the EU border with the Republic of Moldova (an ex-Soviet country) runs through the middle of another village. Both Romania and the USSR, which took control of Moldova in 1945, sealed this frontier. For 45 years almost nobody crossed it. There are families who had relatives in the same village, but on the other side of the border, and they never saw each other again. In 1990, after the first free elections in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova, tens of thousands of Romanians and Moldavians gathered at the border village to celebrate what they thought would follow: reunification. The scenes on the bridge were reminiscent of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Since then, Romanians have looked towards the west and Moldavians have chosen to stay under the wing of the east, even more markedly than since the Communists ruled the country. Romanians are now confident at the table of the European Union. Moldavians have been left behind the fence.



TAMAS DEZSO (HU)

Tamas Dezso is a Hungarian photographer born in 1978 and based in Budapest. He worked as a photographer for Hungarian political newspapers and magazines, then on commission for European and American publications. Since around 2005 he has been focussing on Eastern Europe's transition period. He is interested in the presence of iconic locations and social groups neglected after the political changes of 1989 which transformed the region. With the primary content of the photographic essays taken in Hungary and Romania, he is trying to portray universal phenomena such as physical and intellectual isolation, survival and demise.

His work has been exhibited worldwide and published in TIME Magazine, The New York Times, The National Geographic, GEO, Le Monde Magazine, The Sunday Times, PDN, Ojo de Pez, HotShoe Magazine, The British Journal of Photography and many others.

NOTES FOR AN EPILOGUE (2011 - ongoing)

Spiritual tradition and physical heritage are simultaneously disintegrating in Romania. Time is undermining centuries-old traditions preserved in tiny villages, as well as bastions of the communist era's enforced industrialisation. Those living in these bastions slowly returning to nature exhibit a humility inherited through generations. Urged on by modernisation, they are living out their last days in an evident closeness to nature and, with the time helping, they are diligently pulling down the absurd edifices. Like termites, they carry away particles of immense concrete constructions on the carts of poverty, pick through frames of former factory monsters, power stations and furnaces, dismantling corroded monuments of enforced modernisation. For four years Dezso has been capturing this irreversibly decaying world and the transformation of the region's harshest dictatorship. He is examining the parallel of a general tendency and individual stories: a resilient humanity condensing into symbolic destinies takes shape in the face of mortality.



HERE, ANYWHERE (2009 - ongoing)

The map of Hungary is speckled with capsules of time. During the political transformation twenty five years ago, certain places went forgotten – streets, vacant sites and whole districts became self-defined enclosures, where a certain out-dated, awkward Eastern Europeanness persists. There are places which seem to be at one with other parts, but their co-existence is only apparent; places which decompose with their own chronology, determined by their past. What remains would then either be silently re-conquered by nature or enveloped by the lifestyles of tomorrow's generations. Of the inhabitants, who have never fully integrated with society, soon only traces will remain, until they, too, disappear.

In 2009 Dezso began recording the hidden realities, to understand the country on the borderline between the east and west and to examine the transitional period and the symbolic dimensions of post-communist space.



One of the themes of the exhibition consists of showing how, in a way, 25 years after its official collapse, communism, or at least the environment shaped by communism, lives on. The most obvious element of the communist system was collectivism in housing and the unending and identical blocks of flats. In 25 years many things have changed, but the physical context seems, in many places, to have frozen in time. This is what Andrej Balco has tried to capture in his project 'Suburbs': the specific atmosphere of the world of the big blocks of flats.

ANDREJ BALCO (SK)

Andrej Balco was born in 1973 and received his master's degree in photography at the Institute of Creative Photography in the Czech Republic. His work has been exhibited at the Prague House of Photography, the Leica Gallery in Prague, the Festival of Photography in Lodz as well as in England, Australia, Holland, Finland, Brazil and Japan. Andrej is a winner of the PhotoDocument.sk grant and Changing Faces of the international programme of IPRN.

SUBURBS

More than 2 million Slovaks, making up more than one third of the country's population, live in large blocks of flats. In the 1970s, the construction of blocks of flats contributed to 97% of all housing developments. By comparison, this was 70% in the Czech Republic and 50% in Poland. This project focuses on looking at who lives in these buildings now. Is it a particular kind of people – 'block' people, living at the margin of the current model of consumerist society?

Balco says that during his research, he arrived many times at the conclusion that these blocks of flats were mainly characterised by their dilapidated bathrooms, broken letter boxes and the colour grey. However, he tries to avoid this oversimplified view by pointing out the colourfulness, variety and vividness of life in the blocks of flats.



SYL GEYER (LU)

Syl Geyer was born in 1959 and he lives and works in Luxembourg. It all started at the age of 18 with shooting in theatres for various newspapers. It was the time of the A1 Canon and a darkroom borrowed from a photographer friend. After a gap of a few years, he took up photography again at the beginning of the digital age. His job as a computer trainer and his many trips to Ukraine have given him the desire to photograph. He hasn't had many exhibitions and avoids photography competitions, devoting his time mainly to publishing albums with his photographic reportages. However, the recent events in Ukraine and the series of pictures he has taken have made him change his mind and he now believes that it is important to show the complexity of the country and its peoples' stories. Ukraine has never been so much in the public eye, but very few seem interested in its peoples' everyday lives.

MA BELLE UKRAINE

Syl Geyer has been taking his journey to the East for more than 10 years. By car, by train, by plane and even on foot. He has brought pictures from each of his trips to Ukraine but in August 2014 he felt the need to go back and photograph the changes taking place. He was lucky enough to arrive in Kiev the day before the celebration of the national day of Ukraine.

Ukraine at first might not seem a promised land for a photographer. However, Syl seeks to present all its diversity and attempts to portray an element evident only in reflections: the Ukrainian soul. Burdened both by the difficult legacy of communism and of the last 20 years, for the past 6 months Ukrainians have been writing a new chapter in their history. Syl Geyer has returned there and accompanies them with a knowing look.



EVŽEN SOBEK (CZ)

Evžen Sobek was born in 1967. He attended the University of Technology in Brno and trained as a technical draughtsman before transferring to the Institute of Creative Photography at the Silesian University in Opava. Currently working as a freelance photographer and a photography instructor, the focus of Sobek's work is documentary imagery. His work can be found in numerous private and public collections, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the School of Visual Arts, Osaka; and the Museum of Applied Arts, Prague. He is the founder of the Brno Photography School and the Frame photo competition.

LIFE IN BLUE & EUROPE IN BLUE

These projects look at leisure activities and focus on how people experience their freedom in the open air. "Life in Blue" was taken at Merkur campsite in the south eastern tip of the Czech Republic, where holidaymakers spend their time on the banks of a reservoir in caravans and bizarre architectural constructions. The second series was made in Sylt – the most famous, iconic and expensive summer resort in Germany. This project is intended as a kind of parallel to the "Life in Blue". It explores the diversity of the activities and moods you can discover at various places on the island.



Courtesy of ClampArt, New York City

HOME SWEET HOME

There was a mixture of political and economic changes in the 1990s in the Czech Republic. On the one hand, these changes have definitely brought economic growth and a higher standard of the living, on the other hand, there is enormous pressure on consumption, buying goods and passive entertainment in huge "amusement factories" which have appeared and swallowed up the population. Supported by aggressive advertising, identification with all this shopping and this easy living lifestyle has become widespread.

Last but not least many festivals and other events were organised which could never have taken place during the communist regime – pilgrimages, various meetings, performances and demonstrations, or simply nonconformist clothes and hairstyles...

Focusing on the wide spectrum of leisure activities, the Home Sweet Home series portrays the story of a nation experiencing freedom and dreams... and their limits.



Courtesy of Clampflrt, New York City

PORTRAIT OF EUROPEAN

Are we so different after all? Isn't what makes us "Europeans" much stronger than what makes us Europeans from the West, East or South? Twenty five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and ten years after the accession of many Eastern countries into the EU are there still "two Europes"?

What can portraits of Europeans tell us about the physical and non-physical boundaries between us?

Is there anything typical in the portraits of an eastern or western European or even in the portrait of a European in general? The juxtaposition of portraits taken in several European cities is an interesting barometer to measure the distance or the lack of distance between inhabitants of the re-united Europe.

PHOTOGRAPHERS:

Paweł Piotrowski, Paweł Repetowski, Mieszko Stanisławski, Przemek Woźny oraz **Henryk Kuś** with project **Young Generation**

Paweł Repetowski



Henryk Kuś



Przemek Woźny



Mieszko Stanisławski



The projects Olympia by Federico Caponi and Flea Market by Mieszko Stanisławski show parts of the urban areas that seem frozen in time over 25 years. This is the case of the tradition, still strong in many Eastern countries, of markets, where everything is sold (or exchanged) and everything is discussed ... Both photographers give us an interesting perspective on this tradition with their projects - "Bazar Olimpia" made in Warsaw and "Flea Market" taken in Kraków. They show quite a different reality co-existing next door to the shops and shopping centres of big Polish cities.

MIESZKO STANISŁAWSKI (PL)

While studying philosophy in Kraków (Poland), Mieszko Stanisławski travelled to remote and interesting places, but his main field of interest became people rather than the places themselves. He has visited almost the entire continent and many places beyond, such as Turkey, Georgia, Armenia, Russia, Morocco, Israel and Palestine. After years of working as a photographer his pictures have been published in all the major Polish magazines and several foreign titles, like National Geographic Traveller, Courier International, among others. He is a co-founder of the international collective of documentary photographers "Babel Images" and a member of Reporter Photo Agency.

FLEA MARKET

At nearby "Okraślak", a historic trade house built in the late 19th century, a traditional Flea Market takes place from Monday till Saturday, where you can buy anything from soap to antiques and from books to all kinds of trinkets (old photos and postcards, military souvenirs, coins and stamps) and even pigeons.



FEDERICO CAPONI (IT)

Federico Caponi started taking pictures when he was 10 and was trained in black and white photography and darkroom processes by his father, a serigrapher. He graduated in philosophy from the University of Florence. Since then, he has mainly been working as a stage photographer for Italian and foreign theatres and a stills photographer for TV and film production. Today he is mostly employed in commercial photography for advertising, editorials and magazines, but he continues with his street photography projects using analogue cameras. He has lived in Warsaw since 2006.

BAZAR OLIMPIA

Every Sunday morning, homeless people, alcoholics and the unemployed gather at Bazar Olimpia to display on the bare ground their meagre things and try to sell them. This project forms part of research about the heritage of more than 40 years of the communist regime in Poland. The effect of the collapse of the communist system is still reflected in contemporary daily life. After 25 years of “freedom”, Polish society is not the harmonic middleclass society that it could have been. Especially in the big cities, it seems to be drastically divided into two main groups: on one side a small elite of young and enterprising businessmen and professionals, mostly based in Warsaw, who took the opportunities of the freedom they gained and who imposed a consumerist life style, and on the other side a multitude of people who could not find their place in a dynamic, fast changing and demanding social model, and so they were left adrift in the margins of society. They find a way to survive by finding odd jobs, collecting scrap metal or trading old belongings at flea markets. This “B” side is also an important part of an evaluation of the last 25 years.



LOST IDENTITY

When visiting larger cities does it seem that the changes of the last 25 years have mainly consisted in an intense westernisation of Eastern Europe? The 'return to Europe' often meant a forced (and sometimes caricatured) imitation of Western lifestyles and values. In many places this new context has put at risk the traditional values and profound identity of Eastern European societies.

PHOTOGRAPHERS:

Radosław Budnicki, Wojciech Gepner, Sławek Głowacki, Bart Różalski

Radosław Budnicki



Bart Różalski



CITY GAME

How far, how close? The unification process is probably faster and more visible in the urban fabric, particularly in major cities. Photographs by [Mieszko Stanisławski](#), [Paweł Repetowski](#), [Paweł Piotrowski](#) and [Przemek Woźny](#) show different facets of European cities in the east and west, and invite the viewer to guess which side of the former Iron Curtain the photographs have been taken. Apparently the differences seem to fade, but perhaps only in appearance.

Paweł Repetowski



Paweł Piotrowski



Artists participating in the exhibition:

Andrej Balco www.andrejbhalco.com
Radosław Budnicki www.radoslawbudnicki.pl
Federico Caponi www.federicocaponi.com
Tamas Dezso www.tamas-dezso.com
Wojciech Gepner www.wojciechgepner.com
Syl Geyer www.pitvanreyeg.wix.com/syl-geyer
Sławek Głowacki www.sglowacki.wix.com
Henryk Kuś www.zpaf.lublin.pl
Dana Popa www.danapopa.com
Paweł Repetowski www.repetowski.art.pl
Nicole Segers www.nicolesegers.com
Evžen Sobek www.evzensobek.com
Paweł Piotrowski www.piotrowskipawel.pl
Bart Różalski www.bartrozalski.com
Mieszko Stanisławski www.mieszkostanislawski.art.pl
Przemek Woźny www.wozny.com

Curator: Jagna Olejnikowska

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