Greif Alumni: Q&A with Ewa Doroszenko and Jacek Doroszenko

Article by Ilaria Sponda

Dec 22, 2021

We periodically invite our alumni, artists we have featured in the past, to share their new work and projects with us. Ewa Doroszenko #'s work was featured in several of our Guest Rooms as "Poet HomoSapiens" curated by Monica Allende #, and "Die Welt ist schön" (The World is Beautiful) by Nathalie Herschdorfer #. We caught up with Ewa and her work partner Jacek Doroszenko # to delve into their current projects "Overlooked Horizons" and "Impossible Horizon" respectively shown at Pragovka Gallery # (Prague, CZ) and Foto Forum # (Bozen, IT).

Ilaria Sponda: Your photographic oeuvre, and specifically the project you're exhibiting at Pragovka Gallery and Foto Forum, is associated with the Western tradition of landscape painting. How have technologies, in your development language?

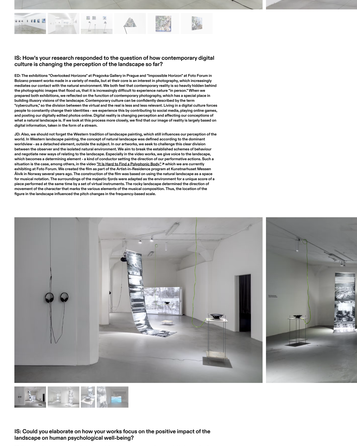
Ewa Doroszenko: We are a duo of intermedia artists, but it was classic painting that became the starting point for our artistic journey. Jacek Doroszenko graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, and I graduated from a master's degree from the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow, which I received my doctorate in fine arts from Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun. As our artistic expression has evolved, we have also incorporated other media into our creative practice, including photography, installation, and video. We have been working on a photographic project, each of us deals with the full spectrum of contemporary media. The basis of Jacek's artistic activities is a very broadly defined sound environment, while my work is dominated by the theme of exploring the structure and meaning of the photographic image. Our common interest is the issue of the place of man in the world, which we try to show from a photographic family, my father has run a small studio and photo lab for several decades, and my brother is a specialist in photo printing. As a child, I became well acquainted with the techniques of analogue photography, and later had the opportunity to observe the transformation of photographic representation into digital form. I was also fascinated by the perspective of a collector photographer. My relationship with photographic images was probably quite different from my peers. Throughout my childhood, I accumulated myself with photographs, photographic copies, and later prints were the same household objects as, for example, newspapers or books. I saw the events and stories of the photographic production process in gardens, and analogue photo samples served as drawing surfaces for me. Even today, I have a very tactile relationship with photographic images, I like to touch them, I like the process of reproduction. I thought of analogues not only in terms of technology or a medium that influences how we see panorama reality, but first and foremost as an object. These reflections influenced my later work, as can be clearly seen in both the exhibitions of Pragovka Gallery in Prague and Foto Forum in Bozen.

IS: In order to bring to the spectators a 'holistic experience' of landscape, your installations make use of soundscapes. What's the process behind this synergy of image/sound?

Jacek Doroszenko: Sound is featured in all our collaborative projects. We began our audio-visual work in 2014 during an artist residency in Barcelona. Inspired by our research of the soundscape, we decided to document and process the sounds we encountered. We used the sound material we collected to create a piece of music. Later, visual compositions were created, which have pretty much set the stage for our future work. We are convinced that a holistic experience of the natural landscape, which is not possible without the acoustic factor. In our projects, very often the sound material we use is recorded in the same place as the photographic material, and in the post-production phase, we seek to draw attention to the need to restore the sense of hearing. Our current work in culture dominated by visuality. Our intention is to emphasize the value of active listening as a cognitive process requiring special effort and commitment. In the process of experiencing the landscape, we direct our attention first and foremost to the sound environment - the closest surrounding layer of reality, which is usually treated only as a background, a kind of accompaniment to what can be seen.

IS: You then build yet another simulated landscape in the exhibition space. How do you intend the relationship between all the different landscapes represented and presented?

ED: Each of our installations focuses on a slightly different issue, so it presents a different challenge. We want the exhibition to interest the viewer with the theme, but also with its form. We try to ensure that the nature of the exhibition space is not a barrier to the viewer's contact with the work. We want the exhibition space to be transparent, so it seems to me that through the style of arrangement they can evoke positive associations. However, under the layer of aestheticizing form, very often hides a current and profound problem. We very much like to use visually appealing means to talk about very difficult topics. Currently, we are thinking about how contemporary digital tools and technologies are developing so rapidly, I think artistic productions are also becoming more engaging and cross-media. New tools allow us even more artistic freedom, offering entirely new possibilities for creation, including the ability to immersive viewers in the work. We are also considering how we can use these tools to draw attention to our serious reflections on the landscape that emerged from our travels or stays as part of Artist-in-Residence programs. At the same time, both exhibitions are about contemporary photography itself, which can be defined as the practice of creating images using the latest technologies, in the current mediated reality that we experience through a digital prism.



IS: How's your research responded to the question of how contemporary digital culture is changing the perception of the landscape so far?

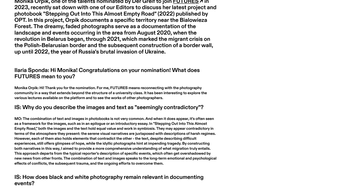
ED: The exhibition "Overlooked Horizons" at Pragovka Gallery in Prague and "Impossible Horizon" at Foto Forum in Bozen consists of photos taken in the Polish-Belarusian border and the subsequent construction of a border wall, which mediate our contact with the natural environment. We both feel that contemporary reality is so heavily hidden behind the photographic images that fixed us, that it is increasingly difficult to experience nature "in person." When we compared both exhibitions, we reflected on the function of contemporary photography, which has a special place in building illusory visions of the landscape. Contemporary culture can be confidently described by the term "Anthropocene", which means that the impact of human activity on the natural environment and human culture forces people to constantly change their habitats - we experience this by contributing to social media, playing computer games, and posting our digitally edited photos online. Digital reality is changing perception and affecting our conceptions of what is real and what is fiction. In the case of our two exhibitions, we feel that our image of reality is largely dictated by digital information, taken in the form of a stream.

JD: Also, we should not forget the Western tradition of landscape painting, which still influences our perception of the world. In Western landscape painting, the concept of natural landscape was defined according to the dominant worldview - as a detached element, outside the subject. In our artworks, we seek to challenge this clear division between the subject and the environment, between "I" and "the other", and we try to emphasize interconnections and negotiate new ways of relating to the landscape. Especially in the video works, we give voice to the landscape, which becomes a determining element - a kind of co-author entering into the distribution of our performative actions. Such a strategy is also used in our project "Ode to Joy", in which we tell the story of the Polish-Belarusian borderland, exhibiting at Foto Forum. We created the film as part of the Artist-in-Residence program at Kunstverein Werden Rick in Norway several years ago. The construction of the film was based on using the natural landscape as a space for musical improvisation. The sound material we recorded in the landscape and in the environment for a whole year, it plays a crucial role in the same time as all other elements. The sound landscape determined the direction of development of the show due to the use of various elements of the landscape, such as the wind, the sea, the rain. Then, the location of the figure in the landscape influenced the pitch changes in the frequency-based scale.

IS: Could you elaborate on how your works focus on the positive impact of the landscape on human psychological well-being?

ED: Nowadays, thanks to almost unlimited access to information, we are constantly surrounded by images of reality depicting current social and political problems, including violent images from distant places around the world. Current crises, such as the continuing Russian aggression in Ukraine, crises on the borders of European countries, a humanitarian catastrophe of shocking proportions in the Gaza Strip, and also the deepening ecological crisis, entrate our attention. We are in a state of "crisis" all the time, and this state of affairs is very tiring and causes considerable stress. In our work, we primarily address how, in the face of the above-mentioned problems, we can influence wellbeing, which is extremely necessary to taking effective, long-term, and complex actions in crisis situations.

JD: Primarily, we focus on the positive impact of soundscapes on human psychological well-being. As residents of Warsaw, we experience the city's soundscape, which is characterized by the dominance of "mechanical sound vortices", the absence of acoustic relationships between living organisms, human and otherwise, and their environment. It is well known that the positive sensations provided by contact with a particular landscape influence well-being and reduce the level of stress and aggressive behaviors. Sound is an important factor in the perception of the landscape, we create works - video and sound installations and sound pieces - that subtly reveal the inseparable connection between humans and the surrounding nature. Following this theme, we look at various natural and cultural landscapes, we travel to places where we can "hear the silence", such as the Polish Tatra Mountains, or at the end of the 19th century people traveled in search of "genius loci", places, sights and roads that lured people from the bustle of the city and allowed them to distance themselves from everyday life, we take "acoustic journeys," during which we focus on auditory exploration of places and regions, discovering spaces with unique audible features.



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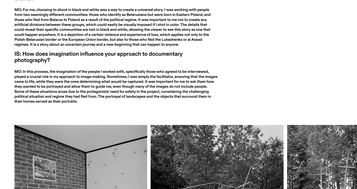

Der Greif X FUTURES: Interview with talent Monika Orpik

Article by Ilaria Sponda

Dec 16, 2021

Monika Orpik, one of the talents nominated by Der Greif to join FUTURES # in 2023, recently sat down with one of our Editors to discuss her latest project and photobook "Stepping Out Into This Almost Empty Road" (2022) published by OPT. In this project, Orpik documents a specific territory near the Belovieska Forest. The dreamy, faded photographs serve as a documentation of the landscape and events occurring in the area from August 2020, when the revolution in Belarus began, through 2021, marked the migrant crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border and the subsequent construction of a border wall, up until 2022, the year of Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine.

Ilaria Sponda: Hi Monika! Congratulations on your nomination! What does FUTURES mean to you?

Monika Orpik: Hi! Thank you for the nomination. For me, FUTURES means reconnecting with the photography community after the pandemic-induced isolation and being able to share my work. It means connecting to explore the various factors available on the platform and to see the works of my photographers.

IS: Why do you describe the images and text as "seemingly contradictory"?

MO: The combination of text and images in photobooks is not very common. And when it does appear, it's often seen as a framework for the images, such as in an epilogue or an introductory essay. In "Stepping Out Into This Almost Empty Road," both the images and the text hold equal value and work in symbiosis. They may appear contradictory in the sense that the photographs are dreamy, ethereal, and evocative, while the accompanying text describes harsh realities, such of fears and anxieties that contradict the other - the text, despite describing difficult experiences, still offers glimpses of hope, while the idyllic photographs hint at impending tragedy. By constructing this dynamic, I aim to show how the human experience encompasses both beauty and suffering, joy and sorrow. This approach departs from the typical reporter's description of grand events, which often get overshadowed by new news from other fronts. The combination of text and images speaks to the long-term emotional and psychological effects of conflicts, the subsequent trauma, and the ongoing efforts to overcome them.

IS: How does black and white photography remain relevant in documenting events?

MO: For me, choosing to shoot in black and white was a way to create a universal story. I was working with people from two seemingly different communities: those who identify as Belarusians but were born in Eastern Poland, and those who identify as Poles but have roots in the Belarusian borderlands. By shooting in black and white, I aimed to erase artificial divisions between these groups, which could easily be visually imposed if I shot in color. The details that could reveal their specific communities are lost in black and white, allowing the viewer to see this story as one that transcends boundaries. The photobook focuses on the lives of people who have been impacted by events on the Polish-Belarusian border or the European Union border, but also to those who fled the Lukashenko or Assad regimes. It is a story about an uncertain journey and a new beginning that can happen to anyone.

IS: How does imagination influence your approach to documentary photography?

MO: In this process, the imagination of the people I worked with, specifically those who agreed to be interviewed, plays a crucial role in the creation of the photobook. The participants had the ability to decide which of their images came to life, while they were the ones determining what would be captured. It was important for me to ask them how they wanted to be portrayed and allow them to guide me, even though many of the images do not include people. The photobook is not just about me as the photographer! I was the catalyst for the project, considering the challenging political situation and regime they had fled from. The portrayal of landscapes and the objects that surround them in their homes served as their portraits.

IS: How do you approach formalizing a project in a photobook? What is the scope of it?

MO: The scope of work on that photobook was bigger than I expected. In the end, we had 10 people working just on the book, not counting the people I spoke with and met along the way. It began with the visual layout and processing the images together with Łukasz Rusznica, the curator of this book. during a 3-week residency at Miejsce pro Fotografię in Lodz, Poland. We had to make many decisions about how we would tell the story of the people in Belarus, and how to deal with things that had gone too far/were no longer relevant due to the drastically changed political situation. It's important to remember that 2 years have passed since the beginning of the project and the start of work on the book. In the meantime, a well was built on the Polish-Belarusian border and Russia launched its invasion on Ukraine, so politically everything shifted 180 degrees. The team and I decided very early on that we wanted to show the complexity of the situation, that it wasn't black and white, that there were many factors that influenced the current story. Moreover, the locations were known from the text so that we gave a feeling that this story could happen anywhere. The process was a big eye-opener, not only in terms of working with images and text, but also in terms of collaborating with people who have different ideas, tastes, and ways of working. It was challenging, but I learned a lot about how with have ego, but most importantly, I learned how a good team changes the environment and becomes a support mechanism.

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