

WHAT **DO > YOU THINK?**

MIGRATION

IDENTITY

HUMAN RIGHTS

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HUMAN RIGHTS

Works by

Ali Assaf

Peter Assmann

Kateryna Lysowenko

Lisl Ponger

Michael Vonbank

curated by

Paola Artoni

Mary Angela Schroth

Beate Sprenger

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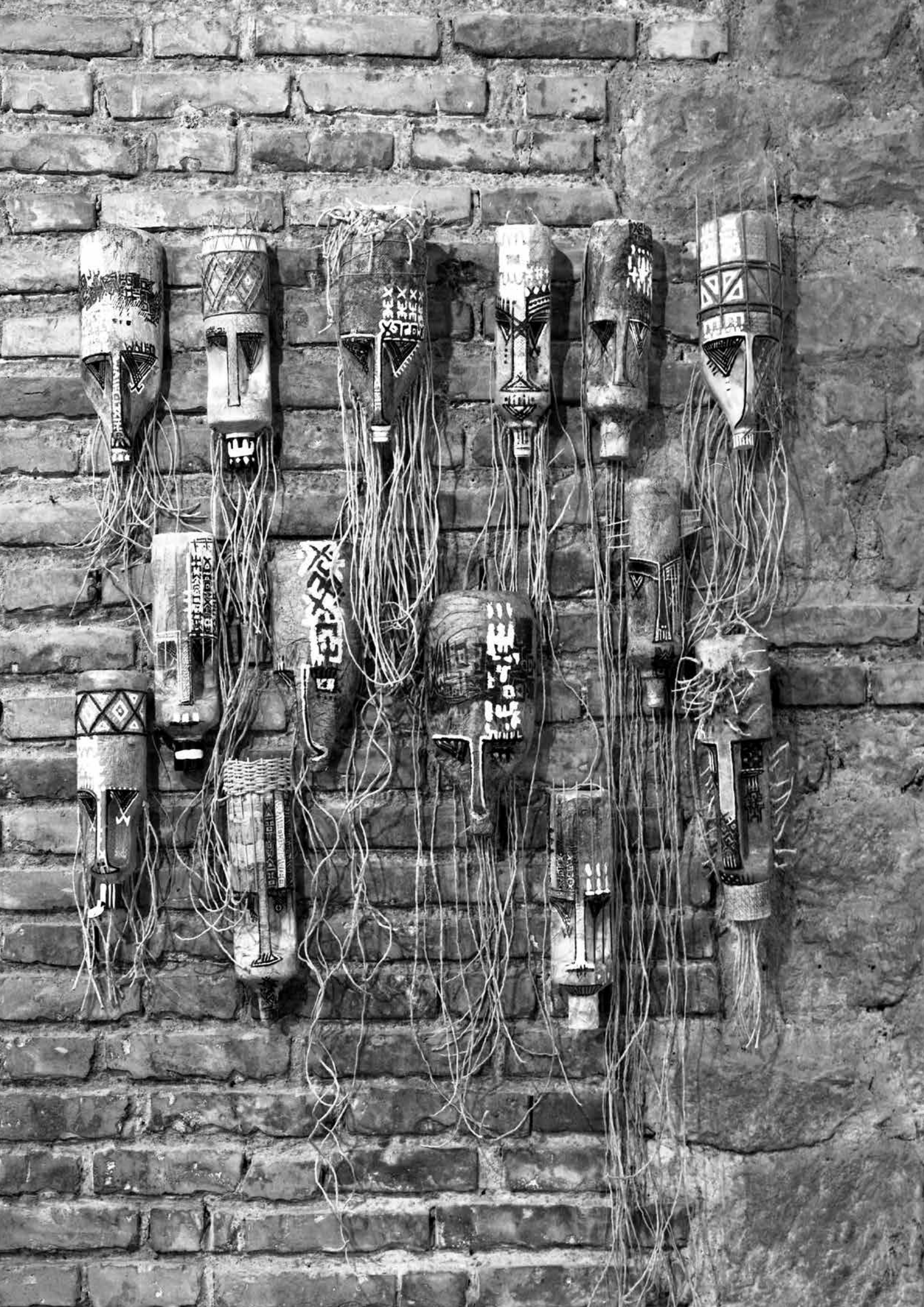
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Cultural Identity: how Sala 1 makes a difference

Mary Angela Schroth

"Art itself is changing society all the time." (Gabriela Orozco, 2024)

The invitation by Austrian curator Beate Sprenger to write a text for her exhibition "What do you think? Identity, migration, human rights" was a welcome chance to travel through the various exhibitions and projects by Sala 1 in its 50-year history. The subject, while enjoying much visibility in recent years due to the huge problems for the EU posed by mass trans migrations from not only Africa but the Middle East, Southeast Asia, China, and Latin America, has always been on our gallery's rostrum. The issue is recent: a century ago, it was the Italians themselves who migrated to the Amerlcas, leaving their homes and families due to extreme poverty, full of hope for a new life.

The reversed situation began in the 1980's, especially in Italy. Huge numbers of non-visa-bearing migrants from eastern Europe, Asia, and especially Africa transformed the social, economic and political, situation in Italy, whose population had never before seen this kind of influx. Sala 1, a small non-profit institution and probably the oldest institution in Italy dedicated to non-commercial activity for contemporary culture, found fertile ground for a new approach to its programming. This was in great part to the founder of Sala 1, sculptor and Passionist Tito Amodei, whose humble but strong ethical and moral example was an influential force. Rome in the 1980's lacked institutional support for the arguments of multiculturalism, international artists who were experimenting new processes and who were outside the mainstream. There were no MAXXI, MACRO, PALAEXPO at the time, even the Galleria Nazionale was inactive. Private financing of contemporary art was just beginning, as was arts patronage from enterprises. Director Mary Angela Schroth, having created a non-profit gallery in France and arriving in Rome with ideas and energy, began to explore a way to exhibit these non-European artists who were hidden in Rome and a way to include those on their way.

Italy, unlike Germany, Britain and France, did not have a colonializing past, only parts of the Corn of Africa in a brief conquest during the Fascist era.

Many Italians had never even seen an African until the 1980's, contributing to the first issues of difficulty in integration of migrant newcomers. As for contemporary artists coming from Africa and the Middle East, Italy has never been particularly supportive. Now, there is a serious backlash against these migrants, who arrive with the hope of beginning a new life after undergoing human rights violations, extreme poverty and political exclusion.

Our story starts with the Anglo-Ethiopian artist and video-maker Theo Eshetu, whose presence in Rome was both unusual and productive. His exhibition in 1983 at NGI (Nuova Galleria Internazionale), then co-curated by Mary Angela Schroth together with other international artists, resulted in an on-going collaboration with Sala 1: one of the most interesting was Antonio Presti's "La Città Ideale" in Pettineo Sicilia in 1995. Schroth curated a large section of African artists in Italy for the small town, and Eshetu's film documents the manifestation. Presti's goal was to open doors in the area, many of the inhabitants had never seen a Black person. Around the same time, the gallery established an on-going collaboration with the magazine "Africa e Mediterraneo", directed by Andrea Marchesini and Sandra Federici. Their aim was to sensitize the Italian public and schools to better understand the migration situation. Innovative projects such as "Matite Africane" and "Africa Comics" used African comics artists and their cartoons to illustrate both African and migration, and various exhibitions followed, include a section of the Biennale di Venezia in 2006. African artists in Italy such as George Zogo (Cameroon), Ali Kitchou (Rome), Fathi Hassan (Nubia/Egitto) and Bertina Lopes (Mozambique, later noted for her role in the peace resolution for her country in 1992 in Romel with the Comunità di S. Egidio) were part of such exhibitions as "Transafricana", "Africana" (including the renowned sculpture El Anatsui) and "Afritalia" (together with artists from Molise). The famed American-Italian curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev (immigrant refugee



Ali Assaf, "NARCISO", 2010, videostill

father, herself migrating to Rome where her career began) curated a major look at transcultural construct with her 1992 project "Molteplici Culture". Sala 1 participated with the Nigerian immigrant critic Olu Oguibe and an extensive exhibition at Sala 1 of the African art collection of Gianni Baiocchi, whose militant outreach brought this subject to a larger public. Sala 1 followed with the co-production of the first Venice Biennale Pavilion of South Africa in 1993, featuring artists such as Willie Bester, William Kentridge, Kendall Geers among others. Other Pavilions include Iraq (including Sala 1 artist Ali Assaf, whose works underlined the tra-

gic destruction of his country after the U.S. invasion in 2003 and subsequent lack of resources) and Bangladesh (both produced by Sala 1) in 2011. Pioneer projects and the Italian public began to see the cultural value in these exhibitions and publications, thus paving the way for new understanding of the "other". Gianleonardo Latini's benefit exhibition, book, and auction to benefit children of Palestine, the exhibition "Dena" with women artists from Iran, and photography projects with some of the world's most important photographs such as Paolo Pellegrin, Guy Tillim, and Alf Kumalo underlined the issues of human rights. The pro-

ject "Bitter Oranges" (2015) documented, through ethnologists and photographers, the living and working conditions of migrants employed as a workforce in many of the citrus groves of Southern Italy and is the result of a three-year ethnographic project. The aim of the exhibition is to raise awareness among the general public, showing the living conditions of farm workers, as part of a single theme that includes not only migration policy, but also the pressure on prices in the production of foodstuffs and the precariousness of the last working groups. One of the many collaborations with the Austrian Forum of Culture in Rome with whom Sala 1 has collaborated for some 35 years.

We are living in an extraordinarily difficult time, with economic inequality, mass migration, pandemics, destruction as a result of climate change and war. While much attention was given to these social issues 30 years ago, recent times have tended to ignore them. It is not easy provide solutions to today's problems. It is "the arts" - with their narrative that connects humanity towards oneself and the planet that allows us to transform negativity into the will to act, even starting from small things. Creative vitality can give meaning and value to our existence. This has always been the mission of Sala 1. And this is why "What do you think?" is so timely



Exhibition "Bitter Oranges"
at SALA 1, december 2015, invitation



Human rights and new generations: a path of hope at MAM – Museum of Modern Art

Paola Artoni

For its 2025 exhibition season, the “MAM - Museum of Modern Art” in Gazoldo degli Ippoliti (Mantua) has decided to dedicate its temporary exhibitions to two important themes: human rights and the new generations. For this reason, the doors of Villa Ippoliti are opening wide to host the exhibition “What do you think? Migration, identity, human rights”. The exhibition proposed by curator Beate Sprenger is in perfect harmony with what we are developing at the “MAM - Museum of Modern Art”. In March, we welcomed an educational exhibition that dealt with the theme of math assignments in the time of fascism, i.e., how textbooks were written to indoctrinate an entire generation with racism, the primacy of ethnicity, machismo, and a highly divided society. We wanted to create a dialogue with some contemporary artworks dedicated to the utopia of the partisan republic “Ossola”, a fleeting experiment that left deep traces in the Italian constitution. A seed of freedom that seemed destined to die sprouted shortly afterwards. With “What do you think? Migration, identity, human rights”, we are organising the exhibition of spring and rebirth, opening the doors to the future, with painful awareness but also with hope. Following this exhibition, in May we will present a project with “artist’s books” by some young 18-year-olds who talk about their turmoil and their changes with regard to their future life choices. The new generations have fears and dreams and are the best expression of a country where the worst borders are those of the closed minds of adults. They are young people who are used to travelling, to the mixing of peoples, to an inclusive vocabulary that should be a common heritage of the whole society.

Then, in the autumn, we are preparing for an exhibition specifically dedicated to the 30 articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, interpreted through the works of a group of artists from

Italy and Austria, who will organise an international symposium on this theme in the Kunstammer of Palazzo Sarto in Grazie di Curtatone (Mantua) – a meeting of peace and exchange that stands in stark contrast to the battles that the Piedmontese army fought against the Austro-Hungarian army in this area in 1848.

Also in the fall, the “MAM - Museum of Modern Art” will host a group of teachers and young students from the Liceo Artistico in Mantua, who will present the results of their work on the theme of “Manual Intelligence”. The aim is to rediscover ancient artistic techniques that are in danger of being forgotten due to the exclusive use of artificial intelligence. Contemporary art has the extraordinary ability to narrate reality in the here and now by means that go beyond mere words and enter into direct dialogue with thoughts and feelings, and that is its strength. We would like every viewer who enters the museum to ask themselves a direct and substantial question: “hic et nunc,” what is my personal idea on these topics? We want the museum to become a place of civil debate, for the locals and for the people who have come here with their personal baggage of hardships, dreams and hopes. We are all strangers in this world, no one is excluded, we are all fleeting and fragile creatures going through the ecological, health and political storms of these years. Art does not describe – it writes into consciousness. The use of such different techniques and forms of expression makes this exhibition a varied manifestation of creativity, from photography to multimedia, without forgetting the current possibilities of painting. When words fail to express the painful separation from one’s own country, the difficulties of integration, the tragedies of entire peoples, art comes to the rescue with its open, welcoming, non-judgmental gaze, open to the future and to hope.



WHAT DO YOU THINK? Migration, Identity, Human Rights

Beate Sprenger

Migration is one of the key issues of our time. Climate catastrophes and wars are increasing the pressure to migrate. The question of integration is becoming one of the most burning issues in our society. The exhibition „What do you think? Migration, identity, human rights“ was shown at the 'SALA 1. International centre of contemporary art' in Rome (6 to 31 March 2025) and at the 'MAM-Museum of Modern Art' in Gazoldo degli Ippoliti (4 April to 4 May 2025). The exhibition presents works by the five international contemporary artists Ali Assaf (Iraq/Italy), Peter Assmann (Austria), Kateryna Lysowenko (Ukraine), Lisl Ponger (Austria) and Michael Vonbank (Austria) and puts the topic up for discussion.

The artists Ali Assaf (Iraq/Italy) and Michael Vonbank (Austria) place questions about the reasons, backgrounds and opinions on migration at the core of their works presented at the exhibition. Both choose the interview as the medium for their artistic research. However, the target groups interviewed are different: Ali Assaf interviews refugees, while Michael Vonbank interviews residents of the host country. „Why are you here?“, Ali Assaf asks 48 refugees in his work „The obscure object of desire“ (2001/02). The answers are used to create the installation, which shows portraits of 24 male and 24 female refugees. The spectrum of answers given by those asked „Why are you here?“ is broad. It ranges from fleeing from death, persecution and torture to longing for a better economic life. „What do you think?“ Michael Vonbank asks the inhabitants of the host country about their attitudes towards migrants in the video series of the same name

(2007). The spectrum of opinions is broad, ranging from open-mindedness to rejection. Three of the interviewees in the video series are real, while two others are fictitious. Hidden behind masks, the two fictitious interviewees reveal moderate or direct xenophobia. The masked speakers represent the „voice of the people“, which rarely speaks out loud. As the interviews were not always conducted in linguistically correct English, the interviews were subtitled - in correct English. The subtitles shift boundaries, with the nationals interviewed being suddenly placed in a larger, global context and thus becoming strangers in their own country.

Playing with identities is at the heart of Michael Vonbank's poster series „Noi romani a Roma“ (2009), which shows migrants in their typical professional environments. The poster slogan „Noi romani a Roma“ forms the themed bracket of the series, while the artist himself forms the visual bracket. Michael Vonbank lends his face to migrants on the posters and thus embodies all Romans with a migration background in an exemplary manner. In this way, he plays with national identity attributes based on outward appearances, breaks up their patterns and playfully reduces them to absurdity.

The primary artistic media of artist Lisl Ponger (Austria) are photography, film and installation. Themes of the deconstruction of post- and neocolonialism, the appropriation of artifacts of foreign cultures by artists of the beginning of modernism and the reflection of political contexts with artistic means are original fields of content in her works. The photographs displayed at the exhibition

< Michael Vonbank: „What do you think?“ Anonymous 2, 2007, C Print 70x50cm

“Dyptichon: Trickster will remake this world” (2023) refer to borders and dividing lines between the familiar and the foreign and show the constructed nature of cultural identity and our often-stereotypical ideas and images of the “other”.

The works on paper by artist Peter Assmann (Austria) focus on human rights, the fragile foundation on which they stand, and their necessary defence. As the backbone of a fair society, human rights must be constantly protected and promoted. In the triptych “For me and others” (2024), the artist operates with modules and combinations that open up new constellations and spatial experiences. Human rights are a historically hard-earned basis for the mobility of (not only artistic) creative development.

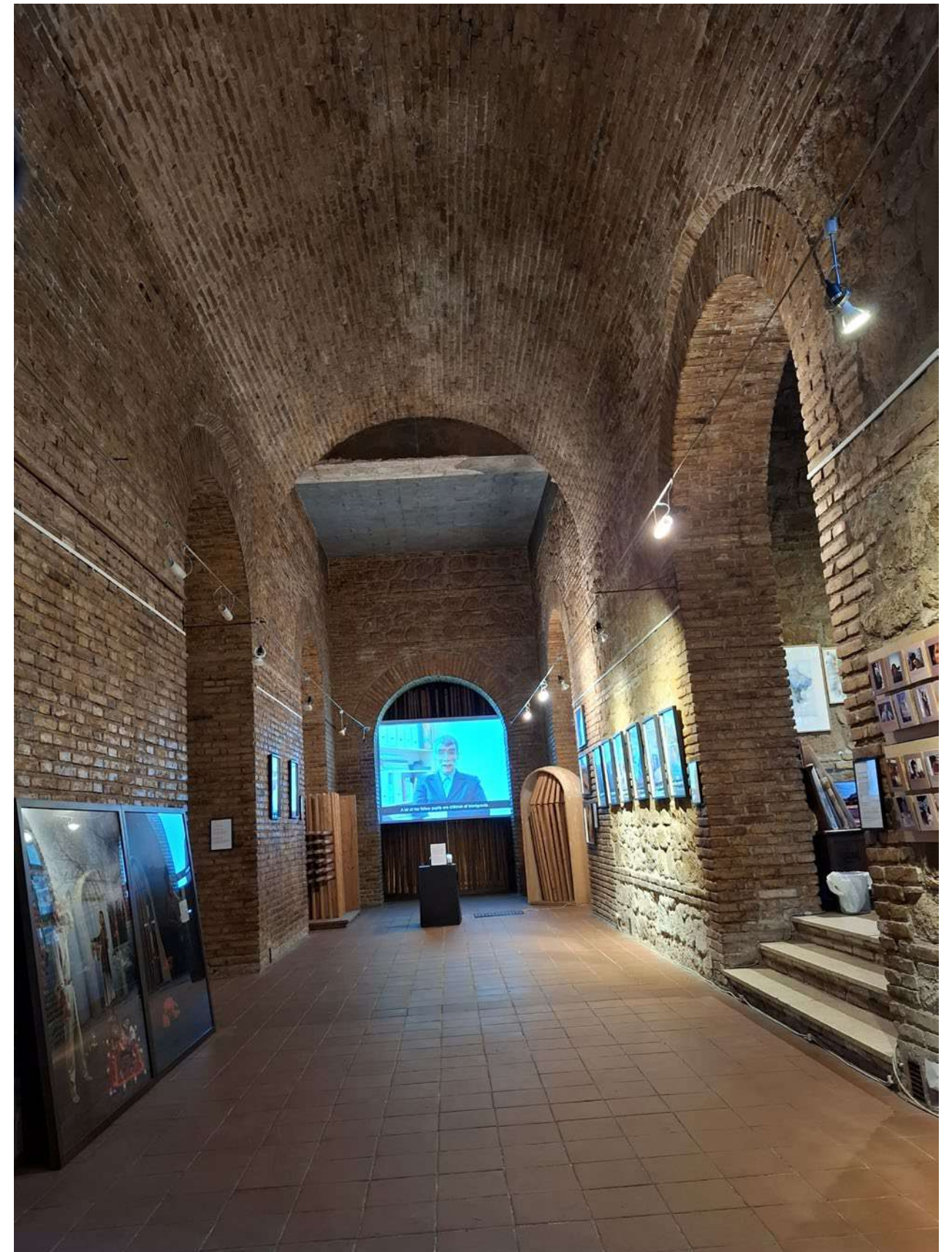
Her experience of fleeing and the attempt to make a new start are the focus of the works on paper by artist Kateryna Lysowenko (Ukraine). The works “Middle European migrating duck”, “Refugee is trying to find human inside” or “Human flag” address the image of the “victim” and reflect her per-

sonal experiences as a war refugee: “It’s strange; you become a refugee to save your children and yourself, to save them and your life, but it turns out that you’re running away from your own life, leaving your home, everything you know and love, and becoming a ghost of yourself. You wait for real life to begin, for the new empty city to take on meaning, for you to learn something and for the slippery lives of others to stop hurting. A new place begins to germinate inside you, very slowly and strangely”, says the artist, describing her experiences of fleeing and new beginnings.

The exhibition puts the topic of “migration” up for discussion and attempts to encourage a mindset that leaves behind stereotypical ways of thinking along the lines of “pro or con” or “black or white”. The exhibition, entitled “What do you think?”, is open-minded: all opinions are allowed, but intellectual discussion and critical debate are encouraged. The exhibition attempts to give visitors the opportunity to experience a broad spectrum of the topics of “migration, identity, human rights” and thus open up new creative perspectives.



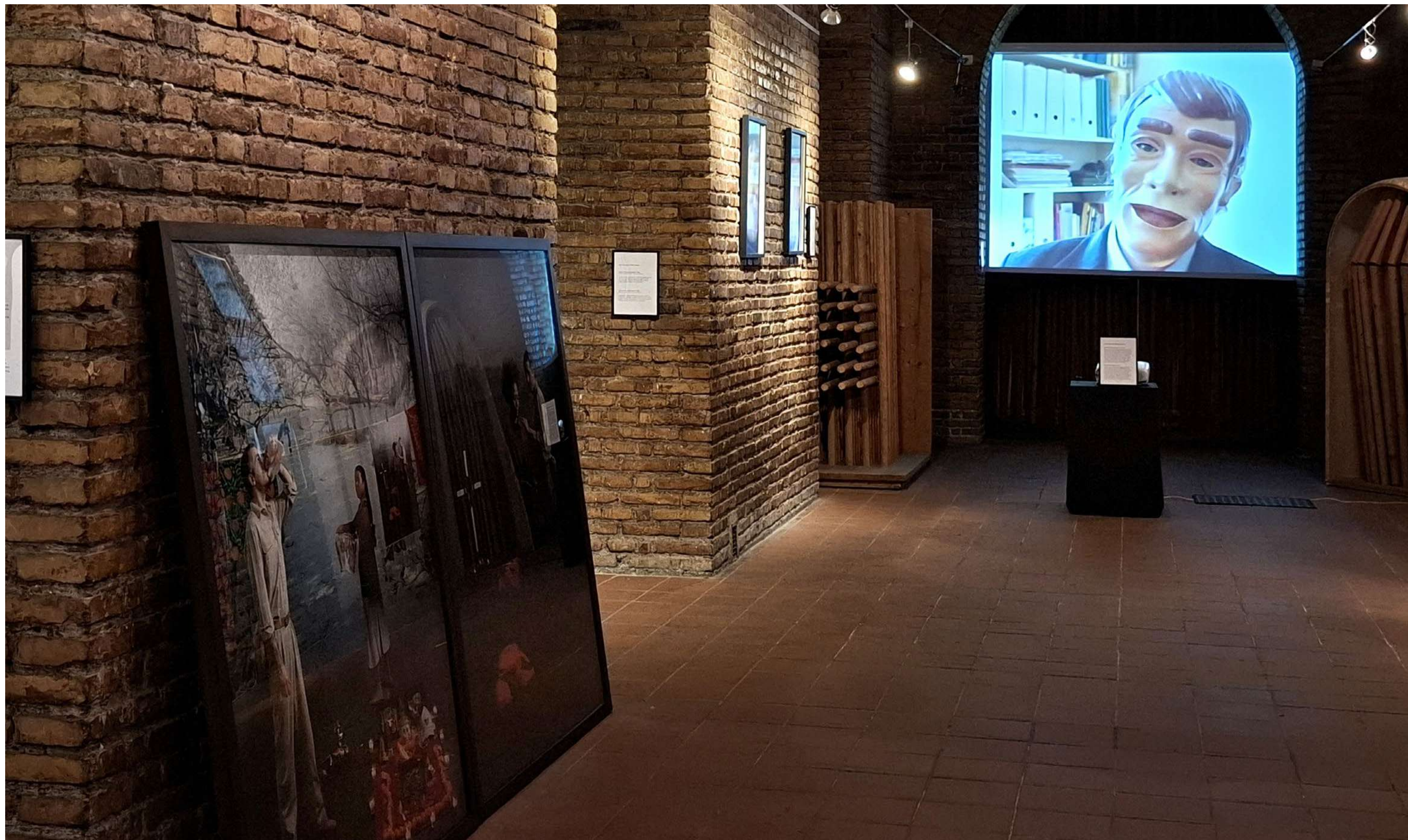
Michael Vonbank: “What do you think?” Anonymous 1, 2007, C-Print, 70x50cm



Exhibition WHAT DO YOU THINK? at SALA 1. International Center of Contemporary Art at Rome/Italy
On the left: Lisl Ponger: „Trickster will remake this world“, at the back: Michael Vonbank: Video „What do you think?“

< Exhibition WHAT DO YOU THINK? at SALA 1. International Center of Contemporary Art at Rome/Italy
On the right: Ali Assaf: „The obscure object of desire“





< Exhibition WHAT DO YOU THINK? at SALA 1. International Center of Contemporary Art at Rome/Italy
 On the left: Peter Assmann: „Triptychon for me and others“, at the back: Michael Vonbank: Video
 „What do you think?“, on the right: Michael Vonbank: Series „We romans at Rome“, C-Print, 70x50cm

Exhibition WHAT DO YOU THINK? at SALA 1. International Center of Contemporary Art at Rome/Italy
 On the left: Lisl Ponger: „Trickster will remake this world“, at the back: Michael Vonbank: Video „What do you think?“





< Exhibition WHAT DO YOU THINK? at MAM – Museum of Modern Art at Gazoldo degli Ippoliti/Italy

On the left: Peter Assmann: „Triptychon for me and others“, in the center: Lisl Ponger: „Trickster will remake this world“,
on the right: Kateryna Lysowenko: „Refugee is trying to find human inside“

Exhibition WHAT DO YOU THINK? at MAM – Museum of Modern Art at Gazoldo degli Ippoliti/Italy

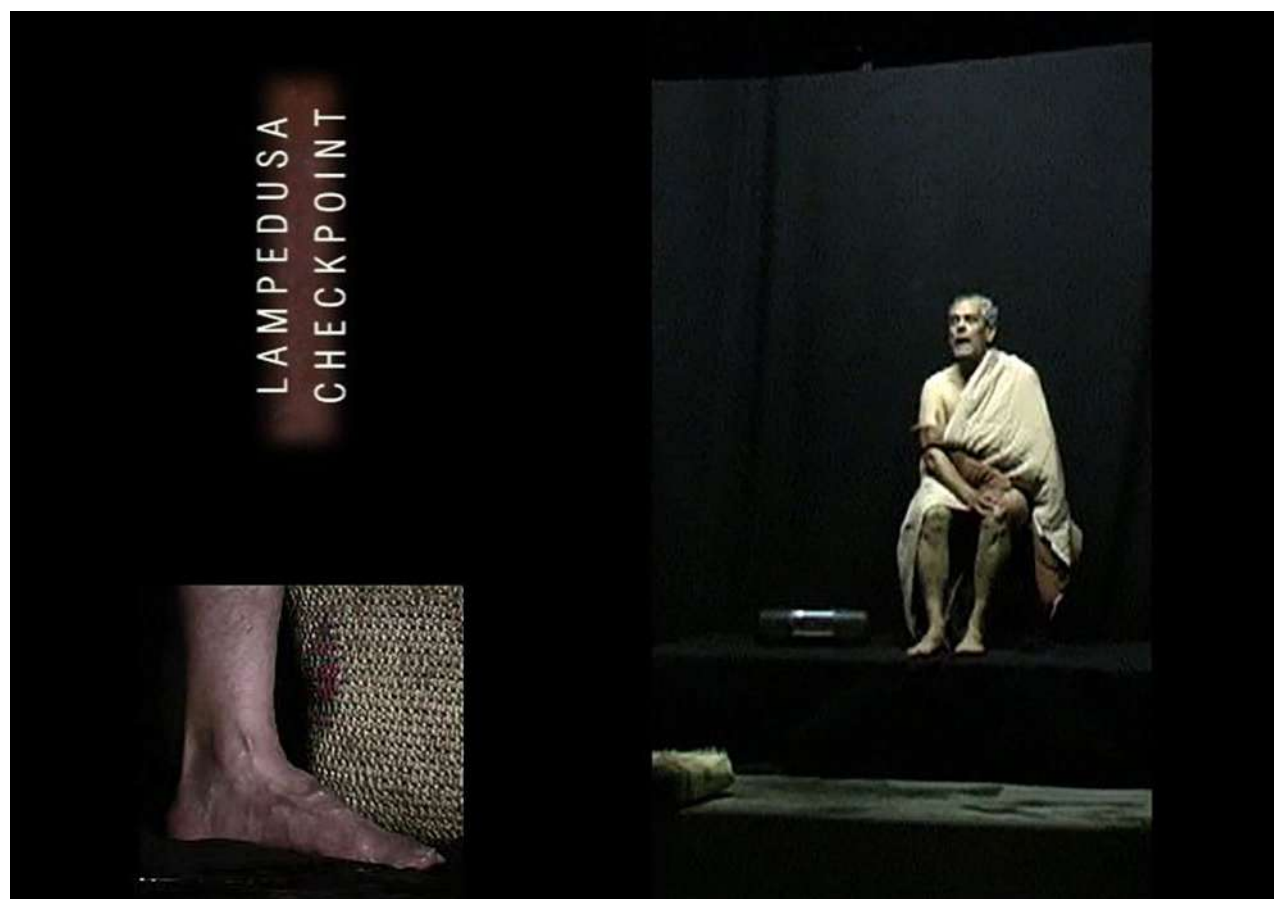
Michael Vonbank: Series „We romans at Rome“, C-Print, 70x50cm



Exhibition WHAT DO YOU THINK? at MAM – Museum of Modern Art at Gazoldo degli Ippoliti/Italy
 Ali Assaf: „The obscure object of desire“



Exhibition WHAT DO YOU THINK? at MAM – Museum of Modern Art at Gazoldo degli Ippoliti/Italy
 Michael Vonbank: „What do you think?“, C-Print, 70x50cm



Ali Assaf: "Lampedusa Checkpoint" (Video still), 2004, colour, sound, 11'20"

ALI ASSAF

An artist's look at transmigration

Ali Assaf

"In art I have always tried to be myself, despite the fact that I was undergoing a very difficult task of expressing two cultures and two identities: that of the Middle East (my original identity) and the West (my adopted identity).

I tried to maintain a balance by avoiding falling into one or the other dimension, by avoiding being exotic to Westerners while maintaining a foreignness to codes that do not belong to me.

For me, the artist, before being an artist is a man who lives life and the society around him, nothing comes from nothing. My unconsciousness has been nourished by the beauty created by man and nature: the civilizations of the past and present, culture and the arts ... but at the same time it has also been fed by another kind of man, who has produced war, exile, censorship, environmental destruction and racism.

All this has become the baggage of my artistic production and the basis for creating works that, from time to time, have found their own specific form of expression: installation, photography, painting, video, performance.

Never putting language before content, since my initial work in the end of the 1970s I have tried to express ideas by investigating new artistic media, hoping to reach the widest possible audience." (Ali Assaf)

For the exhibition 'What do you think? Migration, Identity, Human Rights' at Sala 1 and at the Austrian Cultural Forum Rome Assaf will present two works created in the early 2000s:

THE OBSCURE OBJECT OF DESIRE (2001/2002)

Desire is the engine of subjective actions, the drive that determines individual action. Of the many encounters made in the 1990s with new migrants from the Middle East, the artist decided in early 2000 to create a work from these contacts.

He selected a group of 48 people with whom he had been able to delve into existential and material conditions, thanks to their common language (Arabic).

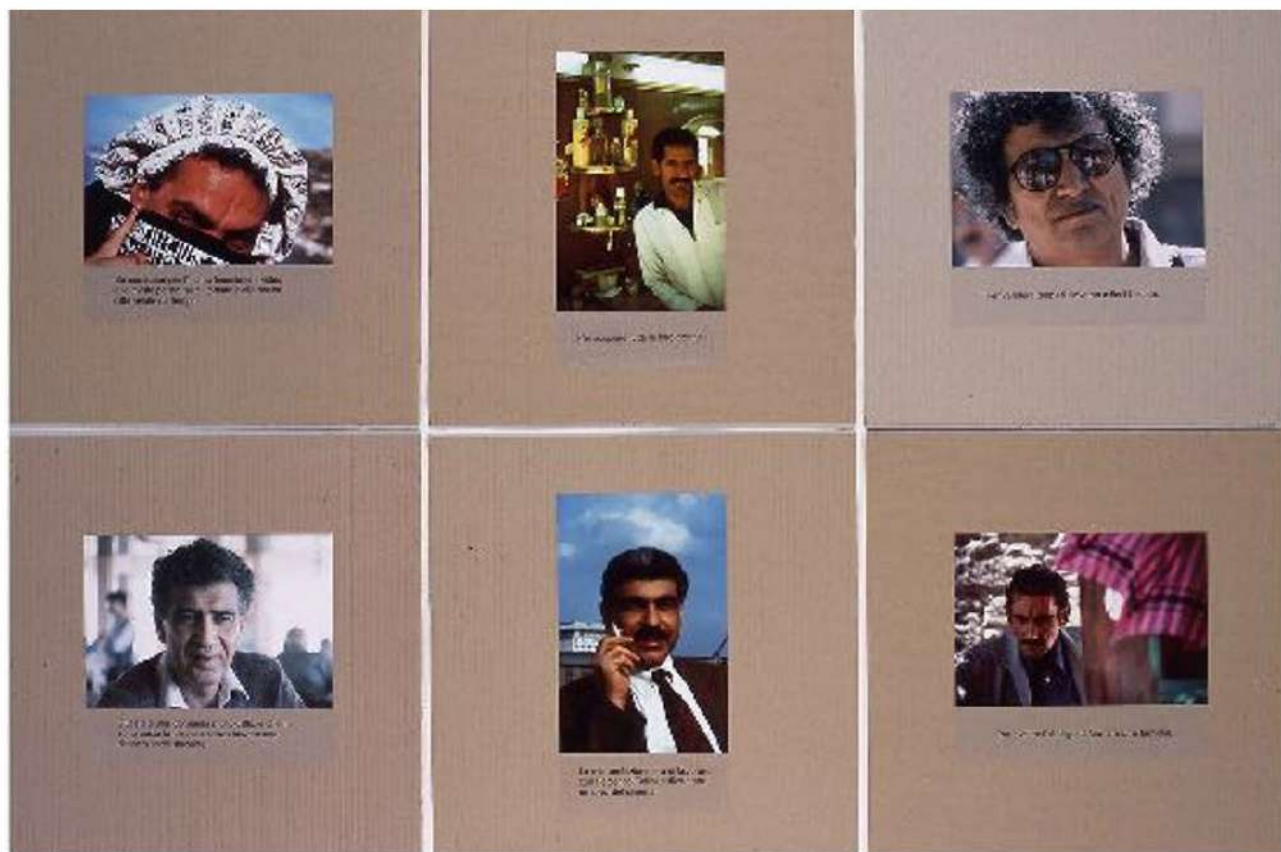
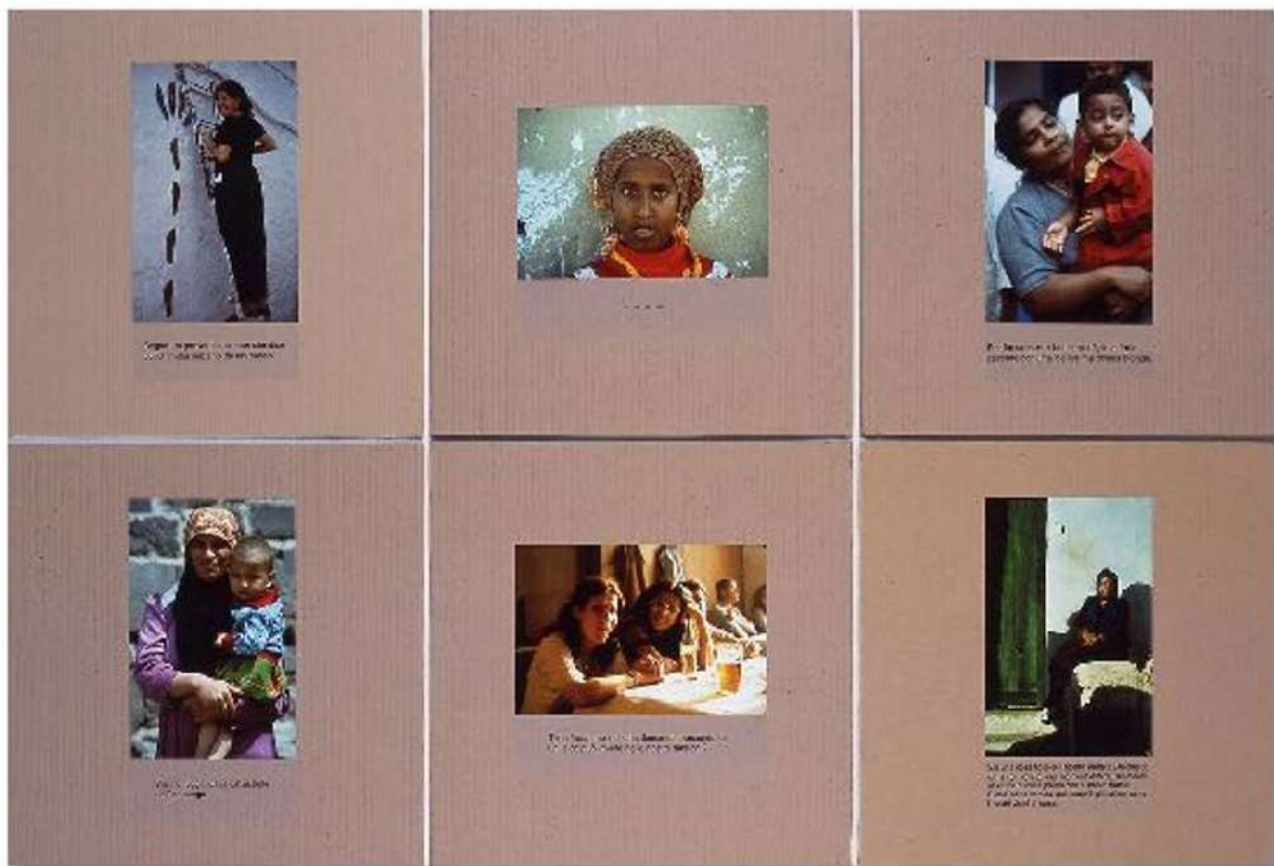
The result is an installation consisting of 24 male and 24 female portraits. Each portrait is fixed on a cardboard support, a poor material that also recalls the beds of the homeless in Western cities, and each portrait is accompanied by a caption. The caption is the subject's response to the question the artist asked them before making the photograph: "Why are you here?" To which each one answered according to his or her personality, joking about the motivations or responding with sorrowful words.

In the installation, the portraits are arranged on the floor on several layers of cardboard that keeps them suspended and not resting on the ground. It is a representation of the rootless condition experienced by every migrant, a continuous position of instability. The portraits, side by side, form two long lines, a kind of mosaic of subjects photographed either in close-up or engaged in action. Their eyes could suffice to represent their condition. In the installation of these long rows of portraits, as in the home society of many of the protagonists, men and women are separated. (the installation will be hosted by Sala 1)

LAMPEDUSA CHECKPOINT (2004)

Lampedusa for decades has been the landing point for thousands and thousands of migrants, who dream of reaching Europe by sea from Africa. Governments change, both in Italy and Europe, but nothing changes in the numbers and tragedies that follow one another.

'Lampedusa checkpoint' was created in 2004 based on a performance made the previous year, in Rome. The video begins in darkness, in the distance the sounds of the Coast Guard and seagulls can be heard, indicating that land is near. At this point



Ali Assaf: "Quell` Oscuro Ogetto Del Desiderio", 2001/2002,
Print from negative, cibachrome, acetate and cardboard, 48 pieces, 50x50x4cm. Cad.

it slowly absolves into a reference to Gericault's painting 'The Raft of the Medusa' (1818-19), an image of shipwreck that emerged from the artist's unconscious.

Assaf plays the role of an immigrant who has lost everything in the crossing, and his only possession is an emergency blanket. The protagonist lays out his soggy underclothes and is then caught up in nostalgia reminisces about an Arab singer, Asmahhan (1912-1944), whose persuasive voice gives rise to a pained expression on his face. Asmahhan's story is very significant; she was born on the ship that brought her parents from Syria to Egypt, fleeing French colonizers. Her family's story has never stopped repeating itself; it is the same as that of thousands of women who leave full of hope of a different future for their children. But her migration is also a symbol of two cultures merging in each migrant.

In the wake of this strong suggestion, the protagonist lets himself go with the story, as if to make contact with the viewer, but this naivet  soon clashes with reality. All the obstacles he will encounter become a burden: from his residence permit to the lack of work and a home, from distant affections to the inhospitality of the people. All those blocks end up building a wall between him and the viewer, the returning sound telling us of the endless repetition of the same tragedy. (The video will be shown in the Austrian Cultural Forum)

Ali Assaf (selected biography)

Ali Assaf was born in Basrah, Iraq in 1950. He has lived and worked in Rome since 1974. After graduating from the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad, Iraq in 1973, he moved to Rome and continued his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts, graduating in 1977. His initial choice was to encounter Western art and ended up staying because of the political vicissitudes of his home country.

From the 70s to the present, invited by national and international curators, he has held numerous solo and group exhibitions both in Italy and around the world. These projects involved him mainly as an artist but also as a curator. In 2011, he was part of the 54th Venice Art Biennale as Commissioner and participating artist of the Iraq Pavilion. Assaf has collaborated with the Sala 1 in Rome for more than 3 decades.



Ali Assaf: "Quell` Oscuro Ogetto Del Desiderio"
(View of the installation), 2001/2002,
Print from negative, cibachrome, acetate
and cardboard, 48 pieces, 50x50x4cm. Cad.



PETER ASSMANN

Not only my art is constantly on the move

Peter Assmann

"I realised with my childlike mind that ,I' was more than I had been able to imagine until then. Even if I were to say: ,I am not here', the two words ,I am' would still be there at the beginning - the most important and at the same time most peculiar combination in the world.

(Olga Tokarczuk: The loving narrator. Lecture on the occasion of the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature, Zurich: Kampa 2020, p.14)

"I am" - thus meant when discussing migration, identity and human rights. My artistic work can/should/must constantly speak to this. This probably only works with a healthy mixture of humility before the great task and constant appeal work, creative new connections and a solid basic apparatus.

My art is constantly on the move, migrating between word and image, consistently seeking to open up further and constantly making new reference to the "pictorial darkroom within" (Alfred Kubin) of the viewer: every pictorial impulse must be a stimulus, must continue to have an effect and remain (mysteriously) interesting - even after prolonged contemplation and critical reflection: naturally capable of its own identity and yet open to further, complementary, moving things.

Human rights are a historically very hard-earned basis for such mobility, for this (not only artistic) creative development, which has the "I am" of all people at its centre again and again: not in parts, but each person seen as an identity whole (which is composed of the most diverse identities), interacting in constant migration.

My artistic work operates in modules, mergers, open to new constellations and spatial experiences; it endeavours to be unbound by time and yet to satisfy the demand for topicality. Just as the textual is very pictorial and the pictorial forms do not just seek out title-oriented word contexts, it is the quotation-like extensions, the cultural points of reference and, above all, the possibilities of contact within that enable (artistic) communication.

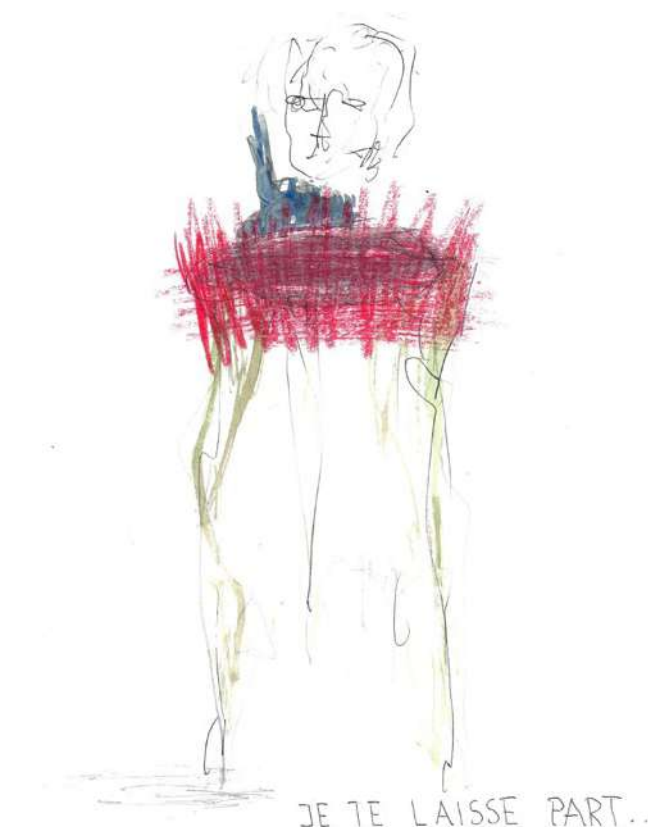
Peter Assmann: with title (je te laisse), 2024, graphite/colored pencil on paper, 29.7 x 21 cm
< Peter Assmann: with title (no escape), 2024, graphite/traces of color on paper, 29.7 x 21 cm

The basic attitude of the artist, which I try to be, could certainly be seen as a form of "loving narration" (in the sense of Olga Tokarczuk), respectful in its devotion and yet poetically ironic: I remain creatively mobile, so I am ...

Peter Assmann Ali Assaf (selected biography)

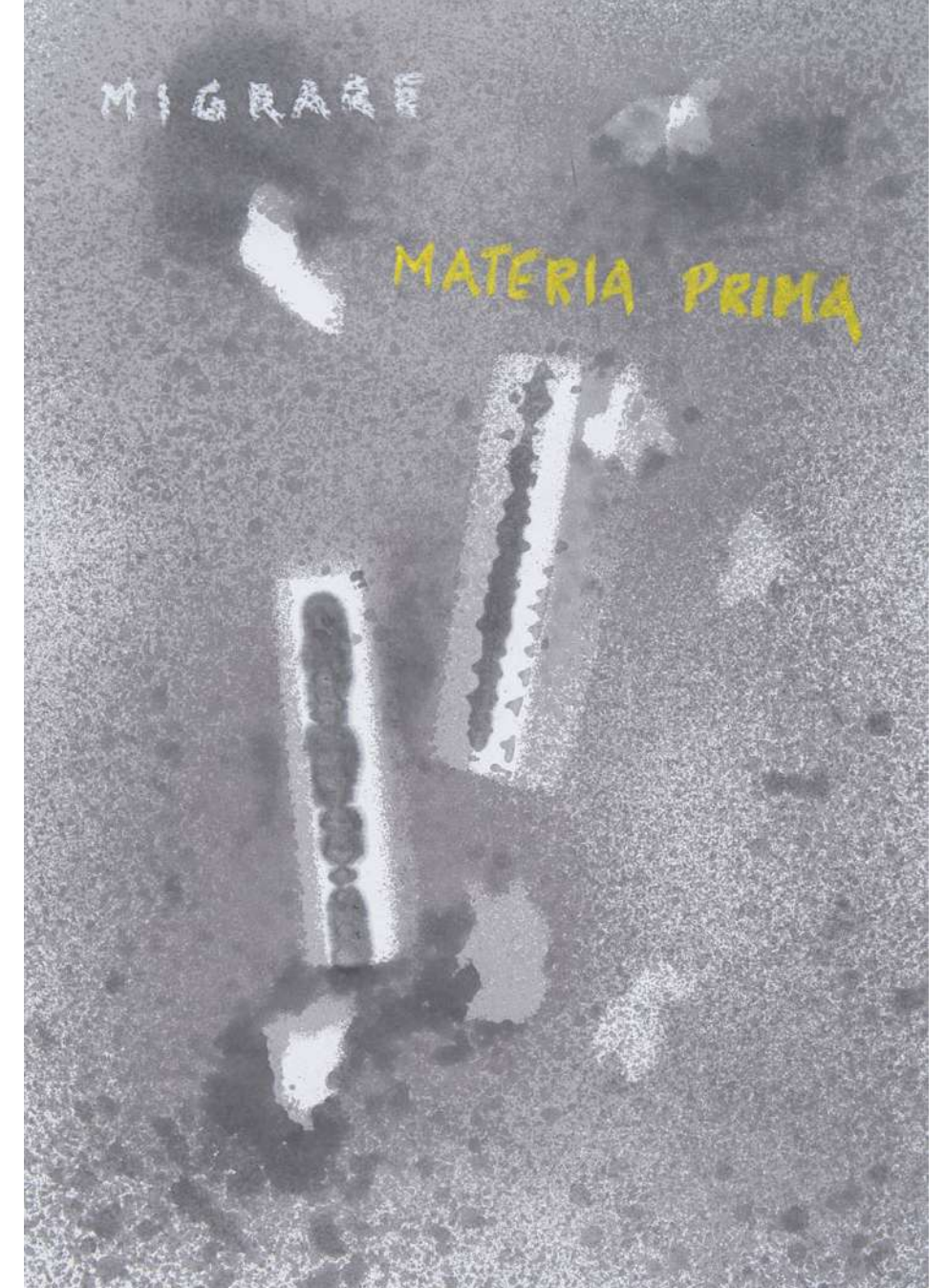
Peter Assmann (b. *1963, Austria) was the director of the Museums of Upper Austria and Tyrol and Director of the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua. He is a visual artist, writer, art historian and curator as well as president of the association SOS Menschenrechte. International exhibitions 2024: Museo San Benedetto/Po in Polirone; Museo d'Arte Moderna (MAM), Gazoldo degli Ippoliti; Galleria immaginaria, Florence; 17th Biennale di Trieste, Trieste and others

www.peter-assmann.com



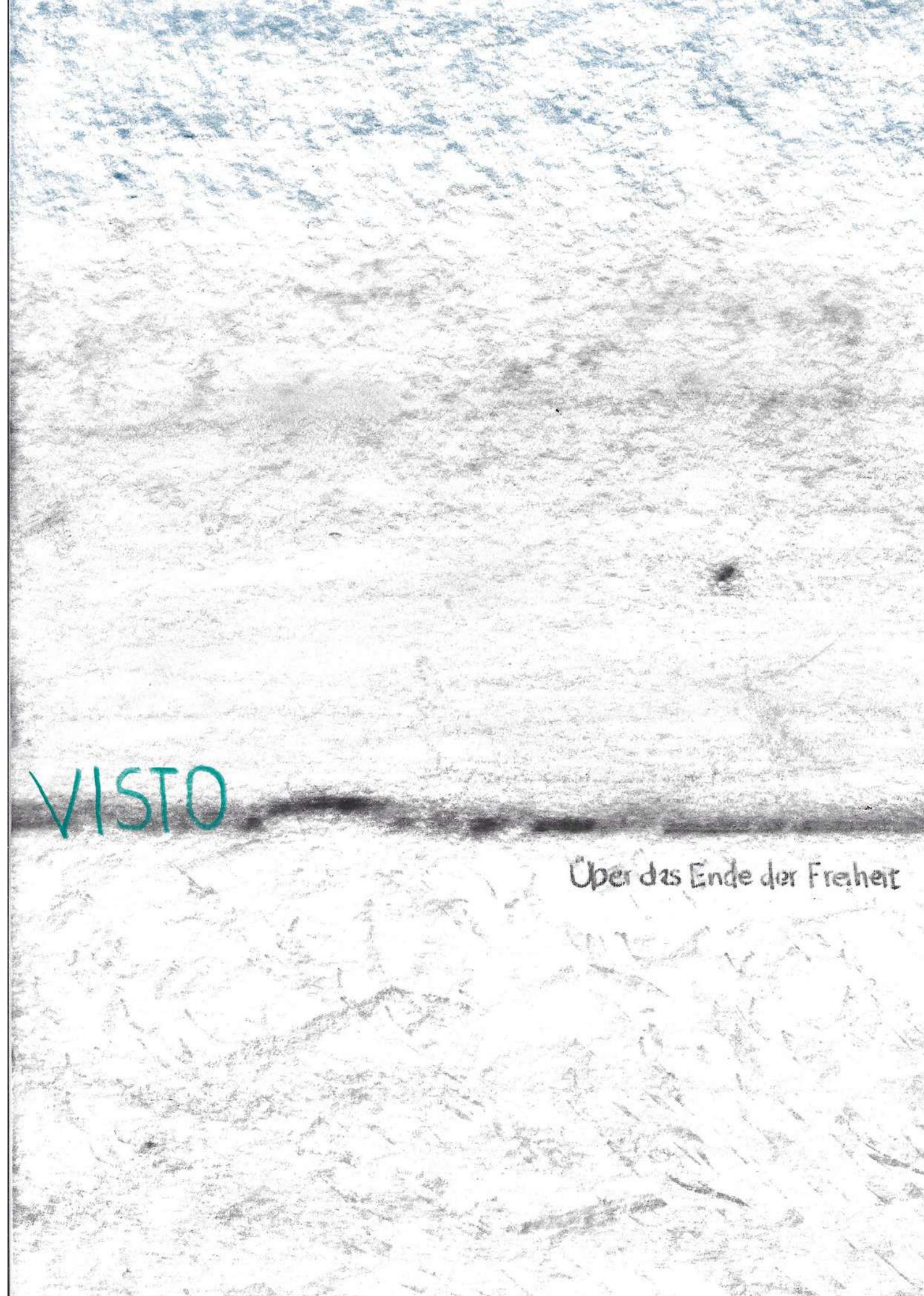


Peter Assmann: with title (Triptychon for me and others) 2024,
mixed media on paper, three parts, each 70x50cm

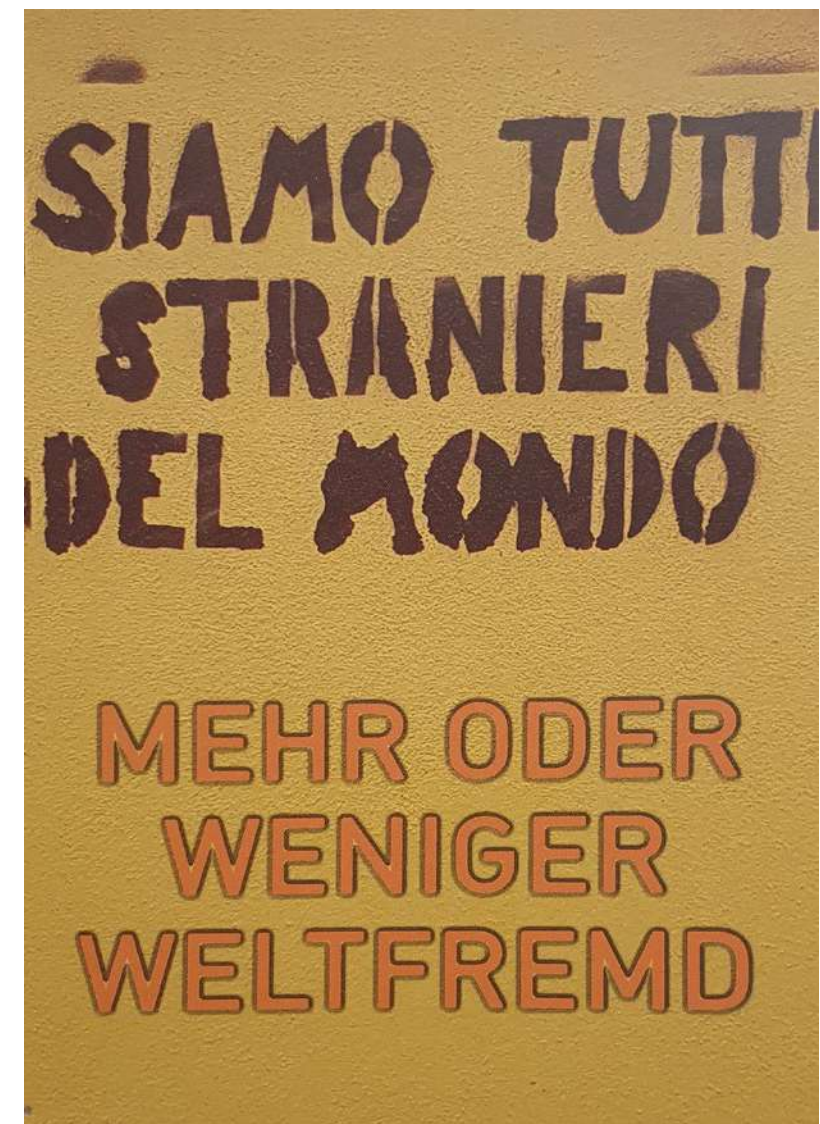




Peter Assmann: with title (care), 2024,
graphite/colored pencil on paper, 29.7 x 21 cm



Peter Assmann: with title (visto), 2024, >
graphite/colored pencils on paper, 29.7 x 21 cm



Peter Assmann: with title (siamo tutti stranieri), 2019/24, postcard

< Peter Assmann: with title (HUMAN = RIGHT), 2024,
graphite/colored pencil on paper, 29.7 x 21 cm



Kateryna Lysowenko: "Farewell", Acrylic on canvas, 180/200 cm



Kateryna Lysowenko: "You can't help me, because you don't understand me", Acrylic on canvas, 180/200 cm

KATERYNA LYSOWENKO

You're waiting for real life to begin

Kateryna Lysowenko

It's strange, you become a refugee to save your children and yourself, to save them and your life, but it turns out that you're running away from your own life, leaving your home, everything you know and love, and becoming a ghost of yourself. An abandoned place is not empty, new people come into a rented apartment, a rented workshop, the place forgets you, you leave it, and it leaves you.

You try to flounder and find an identity for yourself, something bearable, sometimes it helps, sometimes it doesn't. You become a mistake in a new place, your language is a mistake when you try to speak the local language, your habits and way of life are wrong here. You spend a very long time in the complete emptiness of a new place, it's like being in a hospital, for example.

You wait for real life to begin, for the new empty city to take on meaning, for you to learn something and for the smooth lives of others to stop hurting. A new place begins to germinate in you, very slowly and strangely, you suddenly find new habits, and the unfamiliar cleanliness of the walls or very small streets and strange houses become normal and familiar. You and your new language must become like a child growing up in a new place.

Kateryna Lysovenko (selected biography)

In her art, Kateryna Lysowenko (b. *1989, Ukraine) deals with the relationship between ideology and painting as well as with the image of the victim in politics and art. Her media are painting (monumental painting), drawing and text. She has been living in Austria since the outbreak of the war.

Education: Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture (Monumental Painting Department) in Kiev, Ukraine; studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna under Marina Grzinic

Selected exhibitions: "Transcending boundaries", Voloshyn Gallery, Kyiv; "Territories of Terror" in the garden of the Museum of Totalitarian Regimes, Lviv, 2021; "Garden of Sorrow" at the Galeria BWA, Zielona Góra, 2022; "Cemetery Garden" in the Galeria Arsenał, Białystok, 2022; "Kaleidoscope of Stories, Ukrainian Art 1913-2023", Albertinum, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden, 2023. "Mutterland", Stadtmuseum Berlin, 2023; Collection exhibition of the Ludwig Museum Foundation, Cologne, 2023/24; 'Dare to dream', group exhibition in the parallel programme of the Venice Biennale, 2024; 'Materia der Kunst', Prague Biennale, 2024; 'Sea and fog', Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, 2024

www.instagram.com/lysovenko_kateryna/

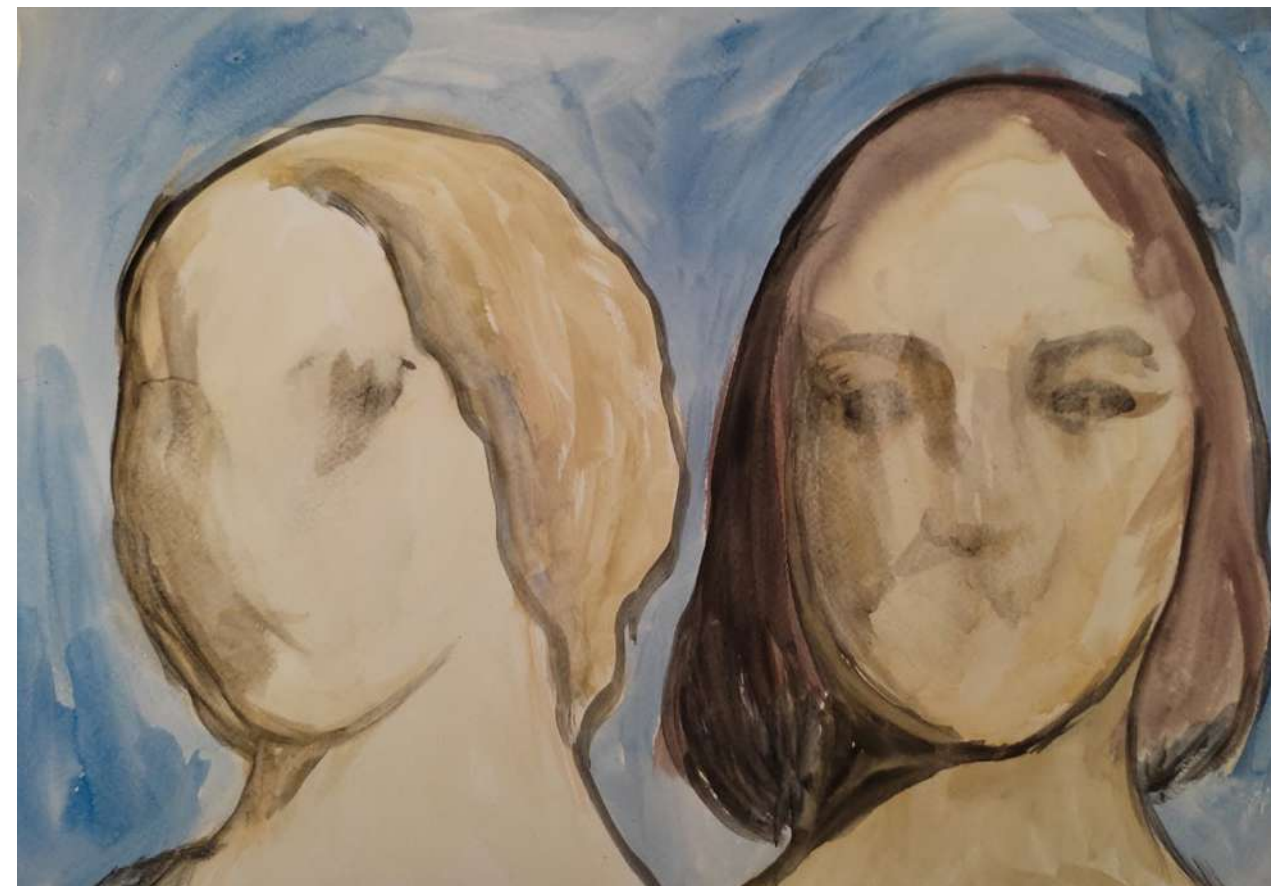


Kateryna Lysowenko: "Refugees' clothes", Watercolor on paper, 30/40 cm





< Kateryna Lysowenko: "Body of the empires",
Acrylic on canvas, 100/140

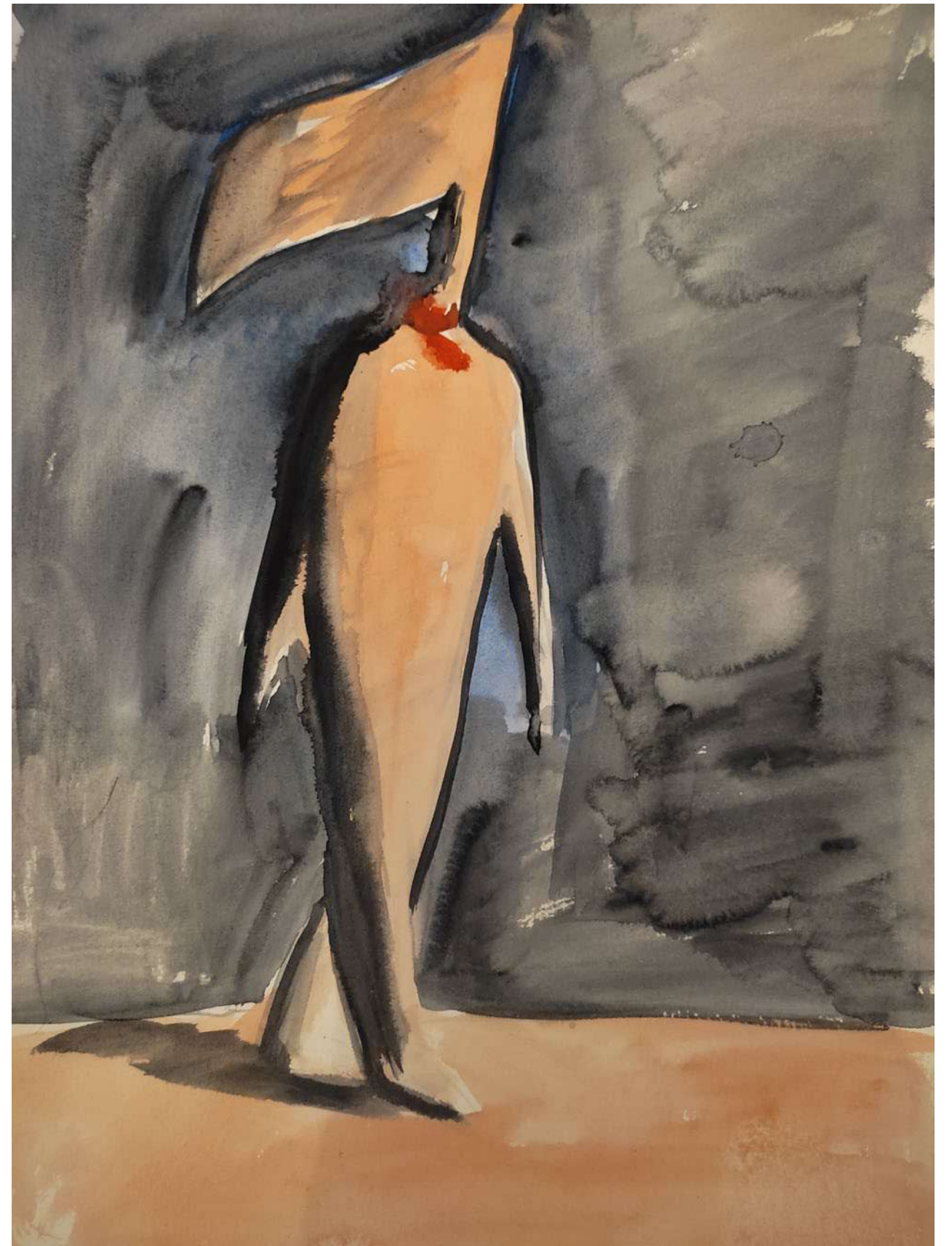


Kateryna Lysowenko: "Self portrait with an Austrian woman", Watercolor on paper, 30/40 cm



Kateryna Lysowenko: "Middleeuropean migrating duck", Watercolor on paper, 30/40 cm

Kateryna Lysowenko, Untitled,
Watercolor on paper, 30/40 cm



Kateryna Lysowenko: "Human flag", Watercolor on paper, 30/40 cm

◀ Kateryna Lysowenko: "Refugee is trying to find human inside",
Watercolor on paper, 30/40 cm

LISL PONGER

A heart of darkness beats in the middle of Europe

Kurt Kladler

A heart of darkness beats in the middle of Europe, fortifying its borders. The migration movements of recent years may be the reason for this, but the causes lie deeper and can be found much earlier in Europe's history.

Since the times of maritime exploration, the idea of the superiority of Europeans, who roamed the newly discovered continents with the beacon of reason, has been fortified and equipped for defence. The hearts of these smoke-blackened darkneses pumped goods and wealth into the countries of origin of the colonisers in widely ramified veins, leaving behind misery and post-colonial injusti-

ce. Goods and raw materials from these countries have always been allowed to travel, people mostly only when they themselves became commodities; shipped as disenfranchised slaves. This repressed past is now lapping at the shores of the present.

Lisl Ponger already stated in 2007 "There is no place" and showed a protective Madonna surrounded by the starry wreath of the European flag against a blue background. The motif of the protective Mother of God, familiar from religious tradition - "Europe rests on the foundations of the Roman Catholic faith" - is equipped with attributes of the present. Her cloak is lined with a fabric that resembles that



Lisl Ponger: "There is no place...", 2007
analog C-Print, 156 x 126 cm

of the camouflage suits worn by NATO soldiers. She is also holding a golden baton in her hands, because protection is no longer expected from divine encouragement or the commandments of charity, but from the threat of violence and demarcation. A wreath of stars on a blue background therefore also adorns the uniform of a Frontex "employee" of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. As in the days of "voyages of discovery and the conquest of sometimes entire continents", they are on the lookout for the unknown. Danger seems imminent, because: "There be Dragons". In concrete terms, all of this is also an implicit betrayal of the values of the often invoked Christian tradition and of human rights, the legal effectiveness of which became necessary due to Europe's history of hatred and violence. Lisl Ponger's work echoes this colonial history and the injustices that go hand in hand with it.

In her artistic work, she deals with stereotypes, racism and constructions of the gaze at the interface of art, art history and ethnology in the media of photography, film, installation and text. She sees her staged photographs as films condensed into one image, whose temporalisation only emerges in the process of viewing. They tell polyphonic stories whose political agenda becomes vivid in the concrete sense of the word, without being assertive or moralising. Because "The political", however it may be defined, does indeed manifest itself in specific events, but these are too opaque and all too often reduce images to documents. In many cases, it is traces, unexpected impressions and fleeting perceptions which, in their casualness and brevity, convey what is actually at stake. This is the starting point of Lisl Ponger's works. At the same time, her artworks create environments of meaning and references that are indicators of the contemporary approach to images, political content and theoretical concepts. In her works, Lisl Ponger always creates relationships of signs whose relational assignments and the semantics of the materials used to stage them reveal what motivates, moves and makes us act as responsible citizens.

Accordingly, in her diptych "Trickster will remake this world" (2023), an "alarm" sounds in the tone of a conch shell. Presumably to protect what is supposedly one's own from the foreign by attributing

the threat to an outside entity. "There is no place! There be Dragons!" An alarm also sounds from the distance of history. It is a signal to those who are now caught up in their repressed and denied history! The return of the repressed is always also the source of fears and their denial through asserted non-ambiguities. The consequences of a populist policy of obfuscation are therefore usually the suppression of contradictions and of people who disagree. Migrants fleeing violence and dehumanisation are once again stigmatised and become victims of a self-righteousness that is unjust in its concrete effects.

Lisl Ponger's photographs to take a look at these political and social constellations from the present. At the same time, they are an appeal to see ourselves as political subjects, in the knowledge that history does not necessarily happen, but is always made by people. Let's move forward in solidarity! Migrants' rights are women's rights! Human rights are the rights of all people!

Lisl Ponger (selected biography)

Lisl Ponger lives and works in Vienna. Her primary artistic media are photography, film and installation. Themes of the deconstruction of post- and neo-colonialism, the appropriation of artifacts of foreign cultures by artists of the beginning of modernism, as well as the reflection of political contexts with artistic means are original content fields of her works.

She is the curator of MuKul, a (fictitious) museum for foreign and familiar cultures, which cooperates with various institutions and organises exhibitions. Lisl Ponger has taken part in numerous exhibitions in Austria and abroad, such as documenta 11 and 12. In 2024 there was a retrospective of her films and an exhibition at the Diagonale in Graz. A selection of solo exhibitions: Secession in Vienna, Museum der Moderne in Salzburg, Kunsthaus Dresden, Kunstraum Lakeside in Klagenfurt, as well as participation in exhibitions at the Kurpfälzisches Museum Heidelberg, the Dommuseum Vienna and Galerie 5020 in Salzburg.

www.lislponger.com



 **FRONTX**

EUROPEAN BORDER
AND COAST GUARD



Lisl Ponger: "The Alarm", analog C-Print, 126 x 150cm

< Lisl Ponger: "There be Dragons", 2018, Light box, analog C-Print on Duratrans, 140 x 120cm



Lisl Ponger: "The Transfer", analog C-Print, 126 x 150cm

Lisl Ponger: "WIR SIND VIELE, quod erat demonstrandum", 2011, 1 von 3, analog C-Prints each 126 x 102cm >



ALLE DIE HIER SIND
SIND



Migrantinnenrechte sind Frauenrechte!



Michael Vonbank: "What do you think?" Anonym 1 & 2, 2007, C-Print, 70x50cm

MICHAEL VONBANK

What do you think? - Michael Vonbank's work on migration

Beate Sprenger

Michael Vonbank tracks down both individual and collective "demons" in his art. While he explores personal, inner worlds and their "demons" in his paintings and sculptures, his spatial installations, photographs, photo collages, video and audio works address social issues such as migration or religion and expose contradictions and collective fears in society.¹

"What do you think?" (video series, 2007)

"Somewhere in Europe" is the title of a major group of works on the subject of migration. It consists of photos, photo collages and a six-part video series "What do you think?", which is conceived as an installation. In the video series, everyday scenes from "migrant neighbourhoods" form the scenic background, with the "voice of the people" in the foreground. The video series is set in Vienna, but "What do you think?" could be set anywhere. The scenery of the "migrant neighbourhoods" and the range of opinions represented in the interviews, the content of the "voice of the people", are interchangeable on a national and regional level. Three of the interviewees in the video series are real, two others are fictitious. Hidden behind masks, the two fictitious interviewees reveal moderate or direct xenophobia. The masked speakers thus represent the "voice of the people", which rarely speaks out loud. As all the interviews are conducted in English but are not always linguistically correct, so the interviews were subtitled - in correct English. The subtitles shift the boundaries, the nationals interviewed are suddenly placed in a larger, global context and thus become strangers in their own country.

"Transformations" (series of photo collages, 2008)

"The richness of a country is the cultural richness, I think", Michael Vonbank reveals his thinking in the video "What do you think?" He reworks the photos from the "Somewhere in Europe" series of works, enriching them as collages and transforming them

with new mosaic pieces of the other culture. The "Transformations" series thus shows both the "cultural clash" and social-collective fears and contradictions, as well as the "appropriation", the appropriation of established cultural set pieces that come together for the best of both worlds. Lucas Gehrmann writes: "Vonbank's work is therefore also about acceptance and about tolerance, without, incidentally, expressing any particular appreciation of such virtues. Ultimately, they have to be taken for granted, the conflictual is depicted, but at the same time broken in an ironic and comical way".² The "Transformations" series thus forms the conclusion of the large series of works.

"Noi Romani a Roma" (poster series, 2009)

"So, where are you from?" was a frequently asked question to the artist Michael Vonbank, who lived in Austria, a country of immigration, with a southern appearance and Austrian origins. In the poster series "Noi Romani a Roma", he explores the question of identity attributions based on outward appearances and the simultaneous affiliation to different identities. In the series, Vonbank portrays migrants in their professional environment, ranging from vegetable and newspaper vendors to horse-drawn carriage drivers, musicians and footballers. In doing so, he not only shows the wide range of their professional activities, but above all their sometimes close connection with the identity and tradition of the host country (as in the case of the horse-drawn carriage driver or musician, for example). The connection with the host country and the national origin - both are identity-forming. The series is about dual or multiple identities and the question of which one dominates.

The poster slogan "Noi Romani a Roma" forms the themed bracket of the poster series, while the artist himself forms the visual bracket. The Austrian Michael Vonbank lends his face to migrants from Rome on the posters and thus embodies all Ro-



Michael Vonbank: "What do you think?", videostills from the video series „What do you think?", 2007, colour, sound, 5'52"

mans with a migration background in an exemplary manner. In doing so, he plays with national identity attributions based on outward appearances, breaks up their patterns and playfully reduces them to absurdity.

1 "Whether dealing with the flip side of being or with groups of people who are perceived as foreign, for Michael Vonbank, egalitarianism is a standpoint from which one can think in all directions." Daniela Gregori: "In-Between - A Condensation", in: "Michael Vonbank: Demon theater. Works 1986-2015. An Overview", Verlag für moderne Kunst, Vienna 2008, p. 21.

2 Lucas Gehrmann: "Magie als Selbstverständlichkeit", in: "Michael Vonbank. Gegenwelten - eine Zusammenkunft. Works 2002-2008", Bucher Verlag, Hohenems 2008, p. 50.

Michael Vonbank (selected biography)

Michael Vonbank (1964-2015 / Austria) was painter, draughtsman, sculptor and writer. Over three decades, he created a large, original and diverse body of work that encompasses the media of painting, drawing, sculpture, installation, photography, video, audio, theater, poetry and prose. His works have been awarded prizes and are represented in private and public collections.

In his art, Michael Vonbank focuses on uncovering and reflecting on "counter-worlds" that coexist in the same context and regularly collide. These worlds can be of an individual or psychological nature, but also social or cultural worlds.

Education: 1986-1991 self-taught, 1991-1995 studied painting with Christian Ludwig Attersee at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, 1995 diploma with distinction, 1996 studied sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts with Bruno Gironcoli.

Exhibitions and prizes: His works can be seen in 2025 at the SALA 1. International center for contemporary art in Rome (Italy) and at the Museum of Modern Art (MAM) in Gazoldo (Italy). He



Michael Vonbank: "What do you think?", videostill from the series "Somewhere in Europe", 2007, colour, sound, 6'9"

has exhibited at the Museum Angerlehner in Wels (2022), at the Museum of the City Innsbruck (2013), at the Museum for Applied Art in Vienna (2008), at the Museum of Military History in Vienna (1993) and the Museum Ferdinandeum in Innsbruck (1991). He has received numerous prizes, including the Austrian Graphic Design Prize, the Creditanstalt Prize, the Prize of Tyrol and the Siemens Artwork Network Prize.

www.michaelvonbank.at



Michael Vonbank: "Somewhere in Europe. Transformations 1", 2007, Photocollage, C-Print, 50x70cm



Michael Vonbank: "Noi Romani a Roma 1",
Brazilian, 2009, C-Print, 70x50cm



Michael Vonbank: "Noi Romani a Roma 2",
Arab, 2009, C-Print, 70x50cm



Michael Vonbank: "Noi Romani a Roma 3",
Romanian, 2009, C-Print, 70x50cm



Michael Vonbank: "Noi Romani a Roma 5",
Albanian, 2009, C-Print, 70x50cm

Authors' biographies

Paola Artoni

Paola Artoni is director of the “MAM Museum of Modern Art” in Gazoldo degli Ippoliti (Mantua). She is art historian and has a doctorate in cultural heritage. From 2018 to 2020, she managed the Madonnari Museum in Grazie di Curtatone (Mantua). Since 2025, she has been director of the MAM-Museum of Modern Art in Gazoldo degli Ippoliti (Mantua). She has curated numerous exhibitions of contemporary art in public and private spaces. A selection of publications:

<https://paolaartoni.academia.edu/research#contemporaryart>

Kurt Kladler

Kurt Kladler (b. 1958, Austria, studied Psychology and Philosophy) is the director of the Charim Gallery in Vienna (since 2002). From 1980 to 1984, he was the assistant to Hermann Nitsch and from 1990 to 1994 the assistant to Rosemarie Schwarzwälder at Galerie Nächst St. Stephan. From 1994 to 1999, he directed a social science research group (Der AKKU, Art and Research: Vienna, Bonn) together with Lioba Reddeker. Accordingly: publications of texts on art and art-scientific studies. Consulting work for the cultural administration, federal ministries, for the Steirischer Herbst, for the BVDC (gallery association in Germany) and Art Cologne. 2000 - 2002 Managing Director of Galerie Bob van Orsouw in Zurich, working as a freelance journalist with publications in art magazines and the NZZ, texts for artists' publications. 2007 - 2008: Film documentaries in the context of art exhibitions at “Hangar 7” (Red Bull), teaching at the University of Art and Design Linz, at the University of Applied Sciences in Kufstein and at the WIFI (Vienna) Course: Gallery Management 2018/2019. www.charimgalerie.at

Mary Angela Schroth

Mary Angela Schroth (b. 1949, Virginia USA) is the founding director of Sala 1, Italy's oldest non-profit for experimental contemporary art. She has curated and produced hundreds of exhibitions and events throughout the world since 1984. These include Moscow: Third Rome (Sala 1, 1989); Pavilion of South Africa, Biennale di Venezia - 1992/Sala 1 - 1993); retrospective ORLAN (Rome, 1992); Gino De Dominicis (Rayburn Foundation NY, 1989); Africa Comics (Studio Museum in Harlem, 2007);

Pavilions of Bangladesh and Iraq, Biennale di Venezia 2011, all of which are accompanied by publications. She has edited published numerous books, catalogues and essays since 1984, in addition to lectures, guided visits, and conferences. She also created Sala 1 Viaggi in 2000, with custom cultural visits throughout the world for selected art lovers. She was responsible for Development and Special Restoration Projects for the Patrons Office of the Arts at the Vatican Museums, including the renovation of the Sanctuary of the Holy Stairs in Rome (1588-90), terminating in 2022. She is on the editorial staff of “Africa e Mediterraneo”, a magazine dedicated to contemporary Africa. Schroth is also president of the Salvatore Meo Foundation and is on the board of other artists' estates. She lives and works in Rome, Italy, as well as in the U.S. www.salauno.com

Beate Sprenger

Beate Sprenger (b. Innsbruck, Austria, Romance Studies, German Studies and Comparative Literature) was a researcher and lecturer at the Institute for Comparative Literature at the University of Innsbruck. She was editor and co-publisher of the magazine “Media Art” and worked as freelance journalist for print media and radio. For many years, Beate Sprenger worked in leading positions in political and policy-related communications (i.e. press spokeswoman for federal ministers and government). She was curator and co-curator of many exhibitions: “What do you think? migration, identity, human rights” at “SALA 1. International centre of contemporary art” at Rome (with M. Angela Schroth) and “What do you think? migration, identity, human rights” at the MAM - Museum of Modern Art, Gazoldo degli Ippoliti (with Paola Artoni); “What do you think? Statements on migration and human rights” at the Austrian Cultural Forum Rome and “Kritzle-Kitzel-Kabinett: Padhi Frieberger, Anton Herzl, Elke Silvia Krystufek, Michael Vonbank” at Galerie Sommer Graz. She was publisher and editor of the artist monograph “Michael Vonbank. Demon Theatre. Works 1986-2015. An Overview” (Verlag für moderne Kunst, Vienna 2022) and editor and co-publisher of the artist monograph “Michael Vonbank: Gegenwelten - eine Zusammenkunft. Works 2002-2008” (Bucher Verlag, Hohenems 2008). Since 2022, she has been managing the Michael Vonbank estate. www.michaelvonbank.at

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“WHAT DO YOU THINK? Migration, identity, human rights“ at MAM. Museum of Modern Art (4 april to 4 may 2025, Villa Ippoliti via Marconi 126, Gazoldo degli Ippoliti (MN) / Italia). The exhibition was curated by Paola Artoni and Beate Sprenger.

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