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sislej xhafa -
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▼ Ne ulazeći u analizu uzroka i posljedica, pitanja koliko su za neke od bitnih pojava na suvremenoj likovnoj sceni bili važni ili presudni pad komunizma, nedavni ratovi na prostoru bivše Jugoslavije, postkolonijalizam ili konačna provedba ideje o Europi kao o zajednici zemalja, može se utvrditi da se Stari kontinent našao pred neodgodivim pitanjem određenja vlastita identiteta. Umjetnici s donedavno izoliranog dijela Europe postali su, logično, jedni od najtraženijih protagonista, dio bez kojeg je nemoguće složiti *puzzle* novih povijesnih okolnosti - shvatiti ih i konačno procijeniti budućnost. Zapadni kustosi otkrivaju svakodnevno nove i nove zlatne rudnike, a takva je klima osigurala i da mnogi, koji su iz političkih i drugih razloga htjeli stvarati na Zapadu, dobiju priliku. Jedan je od njih Sislej Xhafa, Albanac s Kosova. Performansima, instalacijama, fotografijom i videom na granici ironije i subverzije djeluje od Italije i Nizozemske do Pariza, New Yorka i Tokija, prije svega na propitivanju osjetljivih polja /ilegalnih/ migracija, globalizacije i multikulturalnosti. U performansu *Stock Exchange*, izvedenom na Manifesti 3 u Ljubljani, bio je odjeven u poslovno odijelo i izvikivao vozni red vlakova ciljajući na tlapnju da nas, napustimo li ekonomski nestabilnu tranzicijsku zemlju, čeka blagostanje Europske Unije. Xhafa je provocirao i kad je transparentom visokim 12 metara prekrrio jednu talijansku crkvu koja se obnavljala i najavio gradnju džamije. Smislio je i novu sportsku disciplinu, trčanje s deblom, a osim što je u Fondaciji Michelangela Pistoletta u Bielli organizirao okrugli stol na koji je pozvao ostarjele antifašiste nezadovoljne cijenama električne energije, ili, poigravajući se omiljenom temom Vanessa Beecroft, umjesto bijelih ljepotica na scenu doveo crne emigrante i skitnice, nadahnunče za sudjelovanje na projektu *Nivea* u amsterdamskoj Galeriji W1 39 nalazi u Rembrandtovo *Noćnoj straži* koju pretvara u živu sliku i happening. Prošle je godine gostovao u Zagrebu. U suradnji s Galerijom proširenih medija bio se u svečanost otvorenja obnovljenog Meštrovićeva paviljona uključio *site specific* projektom *Zagreb Boogie Woogie*. Njegov rad koji će, odlučeno je, trajno osvjetljavati paviljon, neki hvale, drugi zbog njega negoduju. Jasno, u pitanju je ne samo činjenica da se radi o iznimnom arhitektonskom zdanju, nego i o njegovoj slojevitoj povijesno-političkoj sudbini. U svakom slučaju, riječ je, pogleda li

● Restraining oneself from doing analysis of causes and effects, and from wondering to which extent the fall of communism, the recent wars in ex-Yugoslavia, postcolonialism or the final realization of the idea of Europe as a union were crucial for some important phenomena on the contemporary art scene, one could argue that the Old World faced the urgent question of determining its own identity. Logically, artists from that part of Europe that was until recently isolated became almost the most wanted protagonists, the indispensable part for completing the puzzle of the new historical circumstances, in order to comprehend them and finally to assess the future. The western curators reveal new gold mines every day, and such climate ensured that many artists who wanted to create in the West now could seize their opportunity. Sislej Xhafa, Albanian from Kosovo, is one of them. With his performances, installations, photographic and video works bordering on irony and subversion, he travels from Italy and Netherlands, to Paris, New York and Tokyo, questioning the sensitive fields of (illegal) migrations, globalization and multiculturalism. In his performance *Stock Exchange*, performed in Manifesta 3 in Ljubljana, he was wearing a business suit and calling out train schedule, alluding to the illusion that, if we leave an economically unstable transition country, the well-being of European Union is just awaiting us. Xhafa was provoking also when he covered an Italian church, that was being renovated, with a 12-meter banner, and announced that a mosque was going to be built there. He also invented a new athletic discipline, running with a trunk, and besides organizing a panel discussion in Michelangelo Pistoletto Foundation in Biella, to which he called aging antifascists complaining about high electricity prices - or playing with Vanessa Beecroft's favorite theme and bringing to the scene black emigrants and vagabonds instead of white beauties - he found enough inspiration to participate in the *Nivea* project in Amsterdam Gallery W1 39 in Rembrandt's *Night watch*, which he transformed to a living picture and a happening. Last year, he visited Zagreb. In collaboration with PM Gallery he participated in the celebratory opening of the renewed Meštrović Pavilion with his site specific project *Zagreb Boogie Woogie*. His work, which will, as it has been decided, permanently

1. S. Xhafa, *Stock Exchange*, 2000.





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se Xhafina praksa, o svojevrsnom odmaku od nje. Ali umjetnik će reći kako je, osim što je *hommage* bogatom lumino-kinetičkom i geometrijskom naslijeđu od EXAT-a i Novih tendencija naovamo, ostvarenje nastavak njegova bavljenja temom migracija

■ ■ Hrvatska je poznata po, gotovo bih mogao reći, ludim kinetičkim i geometrijskim eksperimentima. Na tom je polju od pedesetih postignuto iznimno mnogo. Zaintrigirala me, dakle, kinetika, prije svega svjetlo u pokretu na način kako su se tim fenomenom bavili ovdašnji umjetnici. *Zagreb Boogie Woogie*, što je, naravno, povezano s Mondrianovim *Broadway Boogie Woogiejem*, sastoji se od neona postavljenih na stupovima kružnog pročelja Meštrovićeva paviljona. Instalacija se vidi jedino tijekom noći, a koriste se četiri boje svjetla - žuta, plava, bijela i crvena - što su i Mondrianove osnovne boje. Pri tom manje inzistiram na estetici, a više na fizičkom doživljaju rada, na pokretu. Instalacija i, dakako, veličajnost modernističkog zdanja, potpunoma se doživljavaju tek s dovoljne udaljenosti. Najbolje ako se automobilom kruži oko zgrade. Da bi se neke stvari vidjele jasnije, potreban je odmak. Zbog toga sam uključio pokret. Na taj način potenciram značenje zemljopisne datosti i razmjene, a sve vjerujući da je i Hrvatskoj svojstvena kultura migracija. Kada se pozivam na Mondrianov rad, to je zbog fizičke i emo-

provide Meštrović Pavilion with light, provoked mixed reactions. Clearly, it is not only because of the fact that this is an exceptional building, seen from an architectural standpoint, but also because it had a complex historical/political fate. In any case, Xhafa's work presents a step away from it. But, the artist says that, besides paying tribute to the rich lumino-kinetic and geometric tradition, from Exat and New Tendencies to the present, it is a continuation of his dealing with the migrations theme.

● ● Croatia is well known by its, I dare say, crazy kinetic and geometric experiments; from the fifties, much was accomplished in this field. Therefore, I became interested in the kinetics, moving light before all, in the way Croatian artists were treating it. *Zagreb Boogie Woogie*, which naturally recalls Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, consists of neon lights placed on the pillars of the circular façade of Meštrović Pavilion. The installation is visible only during the night, and I use four colors of light - yellow, blue, white, and red - which are Mondrian's basic colors, too. In so doing, I do not insist on the esthetics, but on the physical experience of the work, on movement. The installation, and, of course, the magnificence of the modernist building, can be fully experienced only from a distance. It is best if you drive around the building in a car. To see some things clearly, you need distance. That is why I included the movement. In this way, I emphasize the meaning of geographical determination and exchange, all the time believing that the migration culture is characteristic of Croatia, too. When I refer to Mondrian's work, it is because of the physical and emotional mobility it contains and emits. Of course, the interpretation of both traditions stems from my dealing with the theme of movement, or more precisely, migration.

● ● The Zagreb project seems to be a kind of stepping away from your practice, in which irony is inevitable, as you had already shown in your first noted action, a kind of subversion in Venice Biennale in 1997.

I was born in Kosovo and when I left it, I was not forced to do so, as many others were, but I left because of my personal reasons. I was studying and working in Italy, in London, and now in New York. Mobility is

cionalne pokretljivosti koju sadrži i odašilje. Naravno, interpretacija oba naslijeđa proizlazi iz mog bavljenja temom kretanja, točnije migracija.

■ ■ Zagrebački projekt čini se na neki način odmakom od vaše prakse u kojoj je ironija neizostavna, kao što ste bili pokazali već svojom prvom zapaženom akcijom, svojevrsnom subverzijom na venecijanskom Bijenalu 1997. godine.

Rođen sam na Kosovu i kad sam otišao, to nije bilo zbog prisile, kao kod mnogih drugih, nego zbog osobnih razloga. Studirao sam i radio u Italiji, Londonu i sada u New Yorku. Pokretljivost je dio moje kulture, emigracija i migracija su dio albanske kulture na Kosovu, a vjerujem i društava koja ga okružuju. Radi se, međutim, o vrlo starom fenomenu, a danas možda stvaramo neku vrst stereotipa raspravljajući o njegovu podrijetlu. O emigrantima, *boat people* kako ih se naziva od Vijetnamskog rata, govorimo iz pozicije suvremenosti. Dakle, ono čime sam se bavio do 1997. nisam javno pokazivao, a tada sam shvatio da moram izaći s radom, dijeliti ga i kritički sudjelovati, postavljati pitanja. Nisam bio pozvan na Bijenale, ali sam došao i smislio ilegalni albanski paviljon. Projekt sam nazvao *Clandestine Albanian Pavillion*. Odjeven kao nogometaš, s dresom naslikanim na koži, nosio sam loptu, a na leđima torbu s albanskom zastavicom i radio prijemnikom s kojeg se čuo prijenos utakmice. Prošao sam kroz britanski i francuski paviljon, igrao nogomet sa slučajnim prolaznicima. Nije tu bilo ni nametljivosti niti agresije. Prije sam tom, nazovimo je "pokrenutom arhitekturom", želio ukazati na neprestanu razmjenu Zapada i Drugog ili Trećeg svijeta. Konačno, bilo je to i pitanje zašto Albanija, ili ako hoćete Hrvatska, nemaju svoj paviljon, a ima ga Luxemburg s 200 tisuća stanovnika. Zar to što Indija nema paviljon znači da nema umjetnika? Sustav umjetnosti je pervertiran, nema *fair playa*. Ali kada to kažem, nikako ne želim iskorištavati činjenicu da sam Albanac; to je naslijeđe koje ni na koji način nisam spreman iskoristiti. Nacionalizam me ne zanima.

■ ■ Često ističete da se ne radi o poslanju, da ne dajete odgovore. Ipak, koliko mislite da provociranjem političkih, socijalnih i kulturoloških pitanja umjetnost može utjecati na ustanovljene strukture moći?

Ironija i utopija su, rekao bih, zdravi



a part of my culture, emigration and migration are a part of Albanian culture in Kosovo, and also of neighboring societies, as I believe. However, it is a very old phenomenon, and we are today maybe creating a kind of stereotype when we discuss its origin. We talk about emigrants, the *boat people*, as they are being called since the Vietnam War, from our contemporary position. Therefore, until 1997 I did not show in public what I was working on, and then I realized that I had to go out with my work, to share it and critically participate on it, to ask questions. I was not invited to the Biennale, but I came and invented the illegal Albanian Pavilion; I called the project *Clandestine Albanian Pavilion*. Dressed as a football player, with team uniform painted on my skin, I carried a ball, and on my back I had a bag with a small Albanian flag and a radio that transmitted a football game. I went through the British and French Pavilions, playing football with passers-by. There were no imposition or aggression; rather, with this, let us call it "moving architecture", I wanted to point to the permanent exchange between the West and Second or Third World countries. Finally, it was the question why Albania, or Croatia, if you will, did not have their own pavilions, and Luxembourg, with only two hundred thousand inhabitants, had one? And, if India did not have a pavilion, did it mean that there were no artists? The art system is pervert-

2-3. S. Xhafa, *Nivea*, Amsterdam, 2003.

4. S. Xhafa, *Zagreb Boogie Woogie*, Zagreb, *Dom hrvatskih likovnih umjetnika / House of Croatian Artist*, 2003., foto / photo: Ivana Vučić

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načini na koje postavljam kompleksna društvena pitanja. Ne mislim pri tome isključivo na politiku, jer danas je politika i kada govorimo o štetnosti pušenja ili o nacionalnoj zastavi. Nastojim otvoriti prostor komunikacije, govoriti o ljudskosti i o poštovanju. Kad se u radu dotičem zemalja kao što je, na primjer, Švicarska, aludiram na ekonomski monopol, na prljavi novac, na činjenicu da i danas "gradimo zidove". Ne kažem da ih moramo rušiti; možda tek preskočiti ili ih učiniti "mekšima", da se i sami ne bismo ulovili u zamku nasilja.

■ ■ Takav mekši pristup ističete u mnogim radovima koji se bave otporom prema autoritetu, nastojite ukazati koliko su porozne i labave granice između ilegalnog i legalnog.

Kad smo kod autoriteta, spomenut ću projekt za izložbu *Over the Edges*, koju je u Gentu bio postavio Jan Hoet. Za rad *Pleasure over Flower* policijsku sam stanicu, dakle mjesto kamo se dolazi, primjerice, zbog uhićenja, pretvorio u luksuzno, ugodno mjesto s tepisima, zrcalima iz 17. stoljeća, stilskim namještajem i cvijećem. Dakle, bavio sam se autoritetom na vrlo, vrlo senzibilan način, jer smatram da je napad znak slabosti.

■ ■ A što je s uhićenicima? Kako su oni reagirali?

ed; there is no *fair play*. But when I say so, I do not want to exploit the fact that I am Albanian; I do not want to use this heritage in any way. I am not interested in nationalism.

● ● You often emphasize that this is not about the mission, that you do not provide the answers. Still, how much do you think art can influence the established structures of power by provoking political, social and cultural questions?

Irony and utopia are, I would say, healthy ways in which I pose complex social questions. When I say this, I do not mean exclusively politics, because today even talking about how smoking can damage your health is politics. I try to open a space for communication, to talk about humanity and respect. When, in my work, I mention countries like Switzerland, I allude to the economic monopoly, dirty money, the fact that even today we are "building walls". I do not say we must demolish them, maybe only to jump over them or make them "softer", or else we ourselves would fall into the trap of violence.

● ● You emphasize this kind of softer approach in many works dealing with resistance to authority; you try to point out how porous and permeable are the borders between the legal and the illegal.

Talking about authorities, I will mention a project for the *Over the Edges* exhibition that Jan Hoet curated in Ghent. For my work *Pleasure over Flower*, I transformed a police station - a place where you come, for instance, when you are arrested - into a luxurious, pleasant place with carpets, seventeenth-century mirrors, stylish furniture and flowers. So, I was dealing with authority in a very, very sensible way, because I think that attack is a sign of weakness.

● ● And what about the arrested people, how did they react?

Of course, I didn't want to suggest that they should have been happy for being arrested. But, pleasantries aside, I was interested in attitudes towards work from both perspectives. A thief is outside the law, but if we consider that this is also a kind of work, I think I am not to judge him. Someone may be forced to steal to stay alive, and, of course, the police don't need to treat him like an angel, but one must bear in mind that he or she is a human

Dakako, nisam htio sugerirati da bi trebali biti sretni što su uhićeni. No, šalu na stranu, zanimao me odnos prema radu iz obiju perspektiva. Nekakav kradljivac jest izvan zakona, ali ako uzmemo u obzir da je i to posao, mislim da nisam pozvan osuđivati. Netko je na krađu prisiljen da bi preživio i, naravno, policija ga ne treba tretirati kao anđela, ali mora se imati na umu da se radi o ljudskom biću. Za zločin ili prekršaj mora se platiti, ali mora biti poštovanja, bez obzira na nečiju prošlost ili zemlju podrijetla.

■ ■ I sami ste za projekt Piazza dela Signoria krali iz džepa jednog Marokanca. Koja je bila poruka? Pretpostavljam upravo ovo o čemu ste maločas govorili.

Projekt sam, odnosno fotografiju koja je ostala kao zapis, nazvao *Piazza dela Signoria* prema trgu u Firenci na kojem sam ga izveo. Poigrao sam se širokim značenjem riječi "krađa" na engleskom jeziku. Dakle, čim se nadete na Piazzu zarobi vas njezina ljepota, ali popijete li ondje kavu, na određeni ste način orobljeni. Zavukao sam potom ruku u tuđi džep i krao kao logičan nastavak priče. Prije tri godine surađivao sam pak s antverpenškom Kraljevskom filharmonijom za projekt *Again and Again*. Tražio sam da članovi orkestra budu elegantno odjeveni, a za vrijeme izvedbe nosili su preko lica crne kape s otvorima za oči i usta. Kao teroristi. U tom sam se radu slično bavio kompleksnošću, raznolikošću i jedinstvenošću suvremenog društva ali, opet naglašavam, bez ideoloških predznaka. Konačno, i sam rad ostvaren je u mediju fotografije, jer nisam želio iskoristiti mogućnost javnog spektakla. Kada mi je ponuđeno da isti projekt, ali uživo, izvedem s Njujorškom filharmonijom, odbio sam. Cilj nije vezati rad uz određenu situaciju, nego ga uopćiti. On se može odnositi podjednako na Čečenu, Kosovo i Meksiko, kao i na Irsku ili Španjolsku.

■ ■ Insistirate na općim demokratskim postavkama koje podrazumijevaju uvažavanje drugog i drugačijeg. Post-kolonijalni Zapad posebno je senzibiliziran za takav dijalog. Kako, međutim, pronaći ravnopravnog sugovornika? Ne čini li vam se da oni koji dolaze iz bivših totalitarnih ili kolonijalnih zemalja, upravo zbog iskustva življenja u njima, govore iz drugačije pozicije?

Vjerujem da svatko ima osobni sustav vrijednosti kojim potvrđuje da jest, da je

being. One must pay for committing a crime or misdemeanor, but there must be respect. Regardless of our past or country of origin.

● ● For the project *Piazza della Signoria*, you yourself stole something from the pocket of a Moroccan man. What was the message of this? I presume, the same as what you have just been talking about.

I named this project - that is, the photograph that remained as a record - *Piazza della Signoria*, after the square in Florence where I performed it. I played with the wide meaning of the word "stealing" in English. The moment you step on the square, its stealing beauty captures you, but if you drink a cup of coffee there, you are being robbed in a way. So I put my hand in someone's pocket and stole something, as a logical continuation of the story. Three years ago I collaborated with Antwerp Royal Philharmonic in the *Again and Again* project. I requested that the members of the orchestra dress elegantly, and during the performance they carried black masks with holes for eyes and mouth. Just like terrorists. In a similar manner, in this work I was dealing with the complexity, multiplicity and uniqueness of the contemporary society, but I must emphasize again, without ideological judgments. Finally, the work itself was performed in the photographic medium because I didn't want to use the possibility of public spectacle. When I was offered to perform the same project, but live, with the New York Philharmonic, I refused. The aim was not to associate the work with a certain situation, but to generalize it; it could refer to Chechnya, Kosovo or Mexico, as well as to Ireland or Spain.

● ● You insist on general democratic assumptions that imply respect for the other and the different. Post-colonial West is especially sensible for such dialog. But, how to find an adequate interlocutor? Don't you think that those who come from former totalitarian or colonial countries speak from a different perspective, precisely because of their experience of living in them?

I believe that everybody has one's own system of values, by which one confirms that one exists, that one is present. But at the same time, we don't know for sure what we are and who we are. My place in the West is a matter of personal choice, and not something I got because of my origin, not something inherited. I see value only in

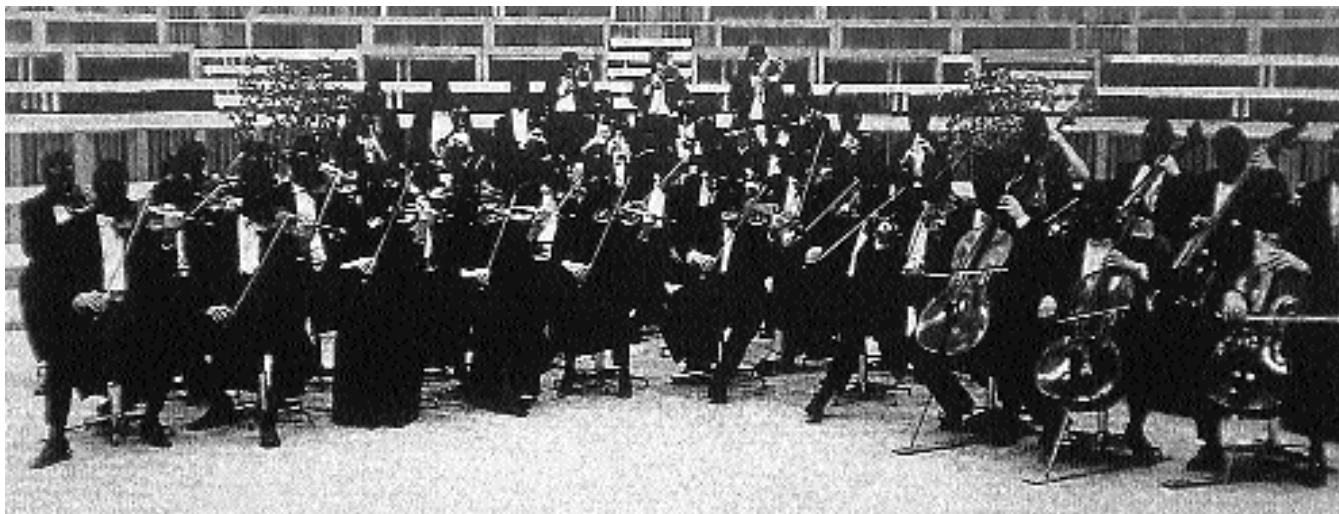


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5. S. Xhafa, *Clandestine Albanian Pavillion, Venecija / Venezia, 1997.*

6. S. Xhafa, *Pleasure our Flowers, Gent, 2000.*

7. S. Xhafa, *Piazza della Signoria, Firenca / Florence, 1998.*



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8. S. Xhafa, *Again and Again*, 2000.

prisutan. Ali istovremeno, ne znamo pouz-
dano što smo ni tko smo. Moje je mjesto
na Zapadu stvar osobnog odabira, a ne neš-
to dobiveno podrijetlom, naslijeđeno. Vri-
jednost vidim jedino u kreativnosti i indivi-
dualnosti. Trauma kolonijalizma je preduboka i osjećat će se, sasvim sam siguran, još dvije ili tri generacije. Zapad i bivše kolonije moraju dijalogom razriješiti mnoge traume. Francuska, primjerice, zbog svega što se događalo u prošlom stoljeću, zna da ne može tek tako zatvoriti granice. Vrijeme je da se Zapad suoči s dolaskom, da tako kažem, novog, zdravog identiteta. Možda će uskoro ministar vanjskih poslova Velike Britanije biti indijskog podrijetla, možda ćemo doživjeti vrijeme kada ćemo bez predrasuda i straha podizati samo jednu zastavu. Ljudi se teško mire s činjenicom da svijet nije rezerviran za odabrane i da bi trebalo raskrstiti s idejom o nadmoći. Sloboda ne znači lišavanje drugoga te iste slobode. Prošlost je za nama i o njoj treba govoriti. No reći ću i to da neke zemlje to još ne uspijevaju. To me žalosti, i to ne zato što sam jedan od, nazovimo pridošlica, nego zato što se ne shvaća koliko bogatstvo i moć leži u tom fenomenu lutanja, kretanja čovjeka od jednog do drugog mjesta. Ponekad to čini, kako se to kaže rječnikom autoriteta, ilegalno. Ali, ne obogaćuje li se tako ono što zovemo legalnim? Naravno, ako postoji dogovor.

■ ■ Mnogo putujete. Kakva iskustva nosite, primjerice, iz Izraela, kamo ste bili

creativity and individuality. The trauma of colonialism is too deep and the next two or three generations will feel it, I'm sure. The West and former colonies must solve many traumas in dialogue. For instance, France knows that it cannot close the borders just like that, because of everything that was happening during the last century. The time has come for the West to face the rise, if I may say so, of a new healthy identity. Maybe very soon, the head of the Foreign Office in Great Britain will be of Indian origin, maybe we will see the time when we will carry only one flag, without prejudices and fear. People do not easily accept the fact that the world is not reserved for the selected, that we should once and for all reject the idea of domination. Freedom does not mean depriving others of this same freedom. The past is behind us, we should talk about it, but I will say also that some countries do not succeed in this. This makes me sad, not because I am one of, let's say, the newcomers, but because there is no understanding of the richness and power that lie in this phenomenon of wandering, of people moving from one place to another. Sometimes it is being done illegally, if we use the vocabulary of authority, but does it not enrich what we call legal? Of course, only if there is an accord.

● ● You travel a lot. What experiences do you carry, for example from Israel, where you were invited to lecture at the Tel Aviv University?

pozvani održati predavanje na telavivskom sveučilištu?

Izrael je desetljećima u ratu i zanimalo me doživjeti ga iz perspektive kakvu ne vidimo preko TV ekrana. Razgovarao sam s mladima, s generacijom kojoj je dosta rata, ali nisam političar da dajem ocjene. Samo znam da ljudi žude za mirom i da pate i izraelska i palestinska strana.

■ ■ Nakon iskustva Europe i New Yorka rekli ste da odlazite u Bombaj.

Indija je za mene ideal multikulturalnog društva, iako o njoj ne znam ništa, jer ne želim učiti iz kolonijalne literature, nego je želim iskusiti. Ne znam odakle dolazim, kao što ne znam odakle dolaze moja majka ili sestra. Svatko od nas sa sobom nosi osobno iskustvo. Indija će me svakako iznenaditi. Koliko će to trajati, ne znam, ali bit će početak drugačijeg sagledavanja stvarnosti. ▼

Israel has been at war for decades and I was interested to experience it from a perspective we do not see on TV screens. I talked to young people, to the generation fed up with war, but I am not a politician, so I cannot give statements. I know only that people crave peace and that both Palestinian and Israeli side suffer.

● ● After your experience of Europe and New York, you said you would go to Bombay.

For me, India is the ideal of multicultural society although I know nothing about the country because I don't want to learn from colonial literature but to experience it myself. I don't know where I come from, as I don't know where my mother or sister come from. Every one of us carries a personal experience. India will inevitably surprise me. I don't know how long it will last, but it will be a beginning of seeing the reality in a different way. ●

prijevod / translation: Goran Vujasinović

→ Ružica Šimunović, povjesničarka umjetnosti, kritičarka, urednica emisije *Kretanje točke* na Prvom programu Hrvatskog radija.

Ružica Šimunović, art historian and critic, editor of *Kretanje točke*, programme on Croatian Radio.