

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

Article by Ilaria Sponda

Dec 22, 2023

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 you developed your photographic language?

Ewa Doroszenko: We are a duo of intermedia artists, but it was classic painting that became the starting point for our artistic explorations. Ewa graduated from painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice, and Jacek received 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 Toruń. As our artistic expression has evolved, we have also incorporated other media into our practice, including photography, video, and installation. Today, we work in all of these media, sometimes using each or 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 interest in the image is also reflected in the fact that we run a family business. We have 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 work in the darkroom and experiment with the process of developing and printing. I also had, from the perspective of a craftsman photographer, My relationship with photographic images was probably quite different from my peers. Throughout my childhood, I surrounded myself with photographs, photographic copies, and later prints were the same household objects as, for example, newspapers or books. I saw the world primarily as a set of photographic production process in prints, and analogue photo samples served as drawing surfaces for me. Even today, I am not interested in the photographic image as a window to the world, but rather as a material for manipulation. I thought of photography not only in terms of technology or a medium that influences the way we perceive reality, but first and foremost as an object. These reflections influenced my later work, as can be clearly seen in both the exhibitions at Pragovka Gallery in Prague and Foto Forum in Bolzano.

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?

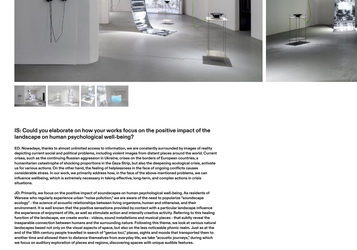
Jacek Doroszenko: Sound is featured in all our collaborative projects. We began our audio-visual work in 2014 during an artist residency in Barcelona. Inspired by our research of the soundscape, we decided to document and process the sounds we encountered in the city. Our interest in soundscapes dates back to the early 2000s, when the first such compositions we created, which were pretty much just 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 is the basis for the whole composition, and the visual layer is subordinated to it. Using contemporary digital technologies we developing our tapping, I think artistic productions are also becoming more engaging and more media. New tools allow us even more artistic freedom, offering entirely new possibilities for creation, including the ability to work in immersive formats. We are also interested in the creative use of artificial intelligence, which can generate our various reflections on the soundscape 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 Bolzano is dedicated to the theme of the landscape in the digital era. We are trying to find out how digital technologies mediate our contact with the natural environment. We both feel that contemporary reality is so heavily hidden behind the photographic images that flood us, that it is increasingly difficult to experience nature "in person." When we prepared both exhibitions, we reflected on the functions of panoramic photography, which has a special place in building illusory visions of the landscape. Contemporary culture can be confidently described by the term "panoramic turn," which is also reflected in the way we look at the world around us. Many of our contemporaries' future lenses people to constantly change their field of view - we experience this by constructing to social media, playing computers, and posting our digitally-edited photos online. Digital reality is changing perception and affecting our conceptions of the world around us. In the age of the Internet and social media, we find that our image of reality is largely based on 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. Our interest in the theme of the landscape is also a consequence of our engagement and ways of relating to the landscape. Especially in the video works, we give an voice to the landscape, which becomes a determining element - a kind of conductor setting the direction of our performative actions. Such a video is the work "Sonic Walk" (2021), which is the basis for the video in the Foto Forum exhibition and the exhibiting at Foto Forum. We created the film as part of the Artist-in-Residence program at Kunstverein Wiesen Rock in Norway several years ago. The construction of the film was based on using the natural landscape as a space for our performative actions. The landscape, which initially functioned as the environment for a unique score of actions, transformed at the same time by us and other creatures. The footage we made changed the direction of movement of the character that made the various elements of the musical composition. 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 rapidly 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, but also the deepening ecological crisis, activate negative feelings in us, such as fear, anxiety, and helplessness in the face of the scale of the problems. On a considerable stress to our work, we primarily address here, in the face of the above-mentioned problems, we can influence wellbeing, which is extremely necessary in 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 Toruń, we experience the beauty of the Vistula River valley on a daily basis. Our project "Vistula Soundscape Archive" the science of acoustic communication 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 human psychological well-being. We are also interested in the phenomenon of "soundwalking," which, by focusing on the functions of the landscape, we create works - videos, sound installations and musical pieces - that subtly reveal the inseparable connection between humans and the surrounding nature. Following this theme, we look at various natural and cultural phenomena in the landscape, which we then try to capture in our artistic projects. For example, in the 18th and 19th century people travelled in search of "genius loci" places, sights and natural wonders that were believed to be another time 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.



Ilaria Sponda

Ilaria Sponda is a writer, and curator based in Munich. She operates at the intersection of contemporary art, image culture, and systems of distribution. She is currently managing editor at Der Greif, where she develops editorial research around the homogenization of visual language(s) and how such processes intervene in photographic discourses. Ilaria is also curating an exhibition at Haus der Kunst Munich and independent curator in Milan. She holds a MA in Culture Analysis from the University of Amsterdam. Her writing has been published in Foam Magazine, Monopole, The British Journal of Photography, Fabrikzeitung, NERO, Lampoon, Undogs, Lyne Contemporary, as well as in catalogues and artist books.



Der Greif X FUTURES: Interview with talent Monika Orpik

Article by Ilaria Sponda

Dec 18, 2023

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 Rock" (2022) published by OPT. In this project, Orpik documents a specific territory near the Białowieża 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, which marked the incipient 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 long pandemic isolation and getting to know the artists' practices. It's also interesting how the various features available on the platform and to see the works of the 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 Rock," both the images and the text hold equal value and work in symbiosis. They may appear contradictory in terms of their content, but they are also complementary in the way they create a cohesive narrative. Through both regimes, however, each of them also creates elements 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 the narrative in this way, I wanted to show the complexity of the situation and the ambivalence of human emotions. This approach departs from the typical reporter's description of specific 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 numbness that sets in, 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 live in Poland. By removing the colors, I wanted to show that, in the end, we are all the same, and the 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 could be happening anywhere. I also wanted to create a sense of timelessness, as if the story could be from 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.

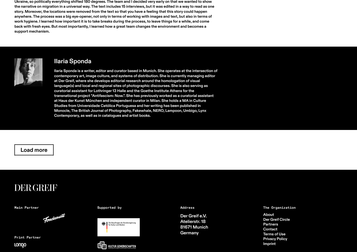
IS: How does imagination influence your approach to documentary photography?

MO: In this process, the imagination of the people I worked with, specifically those who agreed to be interviewed, played a crucial role. I asked them to describe their dreams, hopes, and fears for the future, and how they thought the images came to life, while they were the ones determining what could 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. Through this collaboration, I wanted to help the protagonists' need for safety in 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 layer and sequencing the images together with Łukasz Ruscinia, the curator of this book, during a 3-week residency at Miejsce poru. Then, I worked with Ania Kuczyńska, the graphic designer, and Jakub Woynarowski, the publisher at OPT, on the layout, and how to deal with things that had been said but were no longer relevant due to the drastic change in the political situation. It's important to remember that 3 years have passed since the beginning of the project and the start of work on the book. In the meantime, a wall was built on the Polish-Belarusian border, and Russia launched a war in Ukraine, so politically everything shifted 180 degrees. The town and I decided very early on that we wanted to show the complexity of the situation and not just the "black and white" narrative. We wanted to show that there is no single story. Moreover, the locations were known from the text so that you have a feeling that this story can happen anywhere. The process was a big eye-opener, not only in terms of working with images and text, but also in terms of working with people in publishing and design. I learned how to be patient, how to deal with the fact that you cannot back with fixed eyes. But most importantly, I learned how a good team changes the environment and becomes a support mechanism.



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