

Primož Bizjak: Notes on Bamberg project (16.04.-06.05.2021)

This year was extremely difficult for all of us, with challenges and difficulties to overcome, but it also offered opportunities. At the beginning of the residency, I preferred to avoid establishing any expectation. Nobody expected from us a work or a project and this gave us freedom, that I really appreciated. I tried to simply "live" the place, know the people, feel, breathe... I knew that I didn't have much time to develop a project, so I focused more on discovering new places and taking pictures of them. I am a curious person, so my first interest was getting to know the place a little better, where I was going to spend almost a year of my life. Normally, I spend a long time in the places where I decide to create a project, but in this case I had to adapt my way to work considering time limitations. So, while I was discovering more about Bamberg I was also shooting, sometimes just following my instinct. My intention was not to take just an image as a document, but also to capture a special light and moment and transmit them in black and white.

I looked at Bamberg from the inside, but also from the outside, with the "heritage" I brought with me: we always look with the "eyes of our memory". I was always interested in military history since my beginnings, as it is something that marks all of us as a society. I did several works linked to this aspect such as one about the military cemeteries from the first World War in Slovenia, then another about the Italo-Slovenian border and its "karaule" (military buildings located on this border) as well as "Difesa di Venezia", about the military defense of Venice. So, the important military past of Bamberg immediately kept my attention, although sometimes I had the feeling that I arrived a bit too late to the city. In any case, I was still able to find some inspiration and interesting images in Lagarde, Muna and other military areas around the city. I took the image of the entrance door of Lagarde just some days before it was removed.

I also took a few images from cemeteries in Bamberg. This is another constant aspect of my work. One of my first images was from a cemetery in Slovenia, illuminated by candles during the night of a 1st of November; another was a Jewish cemetery in Rožna Dolina, a village close to my native village, Vrtojba. This was the cemetery of Gorica, which after the second War belong to Yugoslavia although the city of Gorica was included in the Italian territory. But there were no more Jewish community in both parts. The cemetery was just there; stones that are, for the moment, resisting to the powerful time... I took several pictures also of the old Jewish cemetery in Bamberg. When I visited it I was surprise not only on how beautiful it is, but also because they are replacing old grave stones with new ones. It's the image which I include in the selection of the "Bamberg" work.

I grew up in a country where there were plenty of monuments reminding of the Second World War, so it also kept my attention to see the several cemeteries and monuments dedicated to German soldiers here in Bayern. One of the images in the project is one of these monuments.

For someone who lived for years in Venice, it is quite strange to see some "briccola" and Venetian gondolas here in Bamberg. If you look at the city from some angles and in certain moments, you can remember Venice for an instant... but what attracts me more was the river, the water channels, the bridges and the idea of travelling and connecting these different realities.

I dedicated some of my interest to Villa Concordia itself because I wanted to take some pictures which could be a way to say "I was here". I wanted to somehow recreate in these photos the experience of the residence in such a difficult, but for me also lucky year, showing my life in this period in Bamberg where we were all together suffering the consequences of this historical moment.

Another picture included in the show is one of the most famous images from Bamberg, the old "Rathaus" and bridge, but taken from a different point of view. The three - "Rathaus", bridge and tree - is the main protagonist of this photo that was taken at night, after some hours of exposition. The water is like a mirror, in a way symbolizing the time that is passing. The bridge, the entrance, the light that illuminated the scene, all these elements can be read as symbol in this difficult moments to overcome this situation.

I chose 9 images which can clearly work independently. Each picture is a complete experience by itself, so it is possible to see them individually or, even better, to see them, on the same day, one after the other.

After almost 20 years taking photos in colour I decided to return to Black and White. I started this process even before the residence began, so I arrived at Bamberg already prepared to work with the Black and White. This change started from an economic challenge as the costs of the production of negatives in colour increased year after year and I had such a high pressure that I couldn't enjoy any longer taking photos in colour. It was a bad feeling and it was also a difficult situation because I was still "looking" in colour and it took me almost two years to change my way to work.

When I arrived to Bamberg in August, I was already familiar with the B/W system, so I had only to start shooting in large format. I spent some days of the week in Bamberg, discovering places and taking pictures, and on weekends I was in Munich with my family developing the negatives. Week after week I did the same and it was nice seeing how things were coming out. The work was something "new" and "fresh", so I enjoyed it as when I was a student at the Fine Arts Academy, but with the advantage of having more than 20 years of experience.

I took quite a big number (at least for me) of photographs, around 150, because I have known since the beginning that time was limited. At the end, from all the photos I took, I selected 9 images, which you can see in this show.

I liked the idea of the project "Art Bus Stop" organized by Villa Concordia to present their artists to the citizens. I was quite surprised on how my works can be still very "powerful", especially thanks that the format 2,5 m x 3,6 m allows the spectator to feel that he is "inside" the image as in my original pieces.

I decided to use one of the cheapest and more classical film (among the films are still on the market) because I like the aesthetic of the grain. For me, this "past, old aesthetic" is not just about a technique, but more linked to the idea of resisting to the moment we live in. My objective is to avoid immediacy, perfection, uniformity, superficiality, ...

At the beginning, my idea was to organize a "walking" exhibition and that is why I marked them on the map from 1 to 9. But then I saw that the distance between each of them is quite

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big, so I am not sure that visitors will see all of them the same day one after the others. Anyway, this is not a problem, each person can decide when to look at each image. Indeed, I also like that each piece works by itself. In any case, if you see one work, waiting for the bus, or just passing, and this captures your attention, you can enter with the QR code into the Villa Concordia web page and see in the map where the other works are located. Also on each billboard you have written the previous and next bus stop with my works.

I'm really happy to finish this "residency" in a way that I can show the people from Bamberg the images I made there in last nearly 7 months. I hope it will be interesting for all of them.

The technique is important and of course it influences my work, but at the same time it's something that I prefer to "learn and forget". When you are taking pictures, you are not thinking about technic, but what to capture and how transmit this feelings... It's not just a technical process, but more so a mental approach.

I work with a large format wooden camera, which is like an old camera. It guarantees me on the one hand the aesthetic I always try to achieve and on the other hand a completely different mental approach. Everything takes time with this analogue camera: to assemble the tripod, to install the camera, to compose, ... You have to meditate every shoot because there is an economical, mental and physical effort. All of that is, of course, reflected in my work.

This process is very slow, not immediate, you don't see the result until some days or even weeks later, so the work is first just in your mind. You have to take the picture after it has been "already born" in your mind, then you take the negative, and you develop it days after. There is a lot of time of processing and also of thinking. I like that the analogue creative process is not immediate. I'm not saying that analogue is better to digital, it's not about technique, much more about approach.

Then, depending on the image, I worked during the day or at night. I even had to take some images during winter, with minus fifteen degrees. Also these aspects are reflected in the final result even then its sometimes difficult to understand the mental and fiscal effort.

At the the end, everything is about the creation of a piece, a series of works that transmits feelings, emotions, questions, You just have to find your own way.

Primož Bizjak, 2021/03/25