

No One Is Home

Belu-Simion Făinaru

Curator: Cristina Stoenescu

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Anca Poterasu Gallery

58 Plantelor Street, Bucharest, Romania

Encountering "the Other" is a matter of mirroring, a process that is accompanied by the fear of the unknown, the paralyzing doubt induced by change. Hatred comes easily, while the guilty party is always someone else, from or towards a desired territory. Therefore, this exhibition seeks out to explore the commonality, the familiar – albeit not a threatening word, home is at the core of the most violent conflicts. By accentuating absence, we relate to the current immigration and emigration crises and to their seemingly repeating histories of reactions: fears, violence, alienation.

It is not by chance that this exhibition is taking place nearby the former Jewish neighbourhood in Bucharest, which used to be situated alongside the Calea Văcărești – beginning of Calea Dudești areas, including the Traian connecting-street and Hala Traian (Traian Market). This area has been greatly impacted by demolition projects during the communist regime, with many modified, renamed or completely erased streets. Thus, after the trauma of the Legionary Rebellion from the 1940s, during which period the Jewish community in Bucharest has been especially targeted, the physical space has also been scarred. Home is therefore the main referent of an empty space, a void through which we are searching for a Paradise Lost or a mirage, a space in which we reach for comfort and that we are ready to defend.

The void, the absence, the search, are recurrent themes in the artistic practice of Belu-Simion Făinaru. The history of the Hala Traian neighbourhood is also the history of his childhood, before moving with his family to Israel. His series reference this past as well as the present international conflicts. However, the cross-media installations of Belu-Simion Făinaru are rather conceptual approaches, read through a hermeneutic lens of Jewish philosophy. The series of artworks "Black Milk" (2012 - present) that we witness now under the shape of a dining living-room, "Black Void" (2012-present) shown in Berlin and Cluj adopt the concepts of empty space, of void itself from the Kabala Theosophy as places of duality, as a negation of the surrounding world with the ultimate goal of divine creation (from "The Depths of Nothingness", text by Moshe Idel written on the occasion of the exhibition "Nothingness – The Poetics of Void", Plan B Gallery, February – April 2012).

Who is to be home though in this globalized context of instability, where all trust in the other is lost? Where does this hermeneutical approach take us when decoding the art installation and the art-objects by Belu-Simion Făinaru? His most recent photographic series can help us in at least understanding the question better. The artist recomposes clothes gathered from war immigrants and then photographs the newly-made pieces. The re-imagined clothes seem to be describing a false exoticism, of imitating a homogenous western European style without offering enough visual clues regarding their origin or the fashion they subscribe to. Dissonances, visual inconsistencies, subtle ironies regarding the roles we imagine for ourselves and others – in this sense, no one is home.

Within the space of Anca Poterasu Gallery, both recurrent and recent series of artworks connect with the history of Bucharest at the start of the XXth century, in the building of the former store of Nae Petrescu, continuing with an inn-looking architecture. These features define a space of shelter, an impermanent habitation, a place where we can temporarily recreate the uncertain universe of home. The visitors are to be met with soup heated unto a wood stove – the heat emanating from it serving as a sculptural element in itself. The would-be-inn receives guests, reintroduces the codes of communication, of a community. Within layers of interpretation, we are able to explore micro-histories connected to a larger, recognizable stream, without being able to fully discover it: the history of the neighbourhood, the history of Nae's old-store, the past of the nationalised houses in the area, the past of the surrounding families, the story of past-destruction and of estrangement, of collective hope for a community and facing the fact that retrieving home is a process that can never remain neutral.

Belu-Simion Făinaru (b. 1959) was born in Bucharest, Romania and emigrated to Israel in 1973. He now lives in Haifa, Israel and Antwerp, Belgium. This is the second time he exhibits at Anca Poterasu Gallery after the site-specific project "4 Broken Walls", curated by Anca Verona Mihulet in 2013. Belu-Simion Făinaru's works were exhibited at the 1992 Documenta in Kassel, the 1993 Venice Biennale, the Sonsbeek, Biennale in Holland, the 2006 Biennale in Havana, Cuba and more recently, in 2017 at the Kathmandu Triennale, at Socle Du Monde Biennale at HEART- Herning Museum of Contemporary Art, Denmark. Previous solo exhibitions include Israel Museum in Jerusalem, S.M.A.K. Museum in Ghent, M HKA in Antwerpen, Lehmbrock Museum in Germany, Saitama Museum in Japan. He is represented by Gallery Plan B.

Belu-Simion Făinaru is a guest lecturer at universities in Belgium and Japan, and has been teaching in the Department of Architecture at the Wizo Academy, Haifa, Israel since 1984. In 2008 he initiated the Mediterranean Biennale - since 2010 Belu-Simion Făinaru has been the artistic director and curator of the Mediterranean Biennale of Contemporary Art, Israel and 2015 he founded AMOCA, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Sakhnin, Israel.