

## *Journey to the Center of the Earth*

We take off from Bucharest. It's a mild, snowless November day. We are flying to a far away northern land, surrounded by water in all its forms: glaciers, waterfalls, snow and ocean. Megan takes out her yarn and starts crocheting on the plane. Her yarn is a fellow traveller, guiding us on this journey to the center of the earth, ensuring we do not get lost. It measures our distances and our differences. What you'll see in this exhibition is a shipmate's journal. It's a map of a world that we discovered in a season of freezing blue light.

We have never been to Norway before. From Maramureş, we have a long way to go, a path strewn with images, and sensations, blending together like a dream. I haven't seen so much snow since I was a child playing in the village where I was born. The water, the sky, the mountains, and the snow make the landscape seem unearthly. We stop in the middle of a small harbor town, Bodø, which has been chosen as a cultural capital in 2024. It's cold and the air seems fresh and crystal-clear. We visit cities and museums and we want to understand history. To taste and smell the tastes and smells in the kitchens of the people who live here. "We'll only eat fish," we said to ourselves as we left. We kept our word.

The heritage of the Sami people is a strong, living presence in Norwegian history and culture. These people of the snow were reindeer herders and had a myriad of terms to describe their animals, nature, environment, land, water, and snowdrifts. We stop in front of the reconstructed Sami hut at the Bodø Historical Museum. It simultaneously resembles an iceberg, an igloo, and a Maramureş shepherd's hut. Megan Dominescu's artwork, the wool-woven iceberg, becomes a strong, sublime essence of the land of ice. The object she made carries within it the solitude and majesty of a separate, parallel world. The Sami drum, made of animal skin, is a traditional object with magical powers that can induce a trance-like state. In the folklore of the Sami, the living and the dead are part of the same whole.

We look at photos of Sami women in the exhibition. They are dressed in colorful and sophisticated folk attire. Their clothing is full of red adornments, a celebration of life. Their colors remind us of traditional costumes from Maramureş, the doilies (*mileuri*) that adorn the *good* rooms. This visual correspondence inspires us and the similarities move us. Our story flows on.

On our Norwegian journey, we are constantly blocked by snowdrifts. Here, the whole world seems buried in snow. The wind is our shadow. It follows us like a faithful dog. It follows us everywhere. It waits outside our doors and stirs our souls in a way we have never felt before. The beauty of the northern landscape is breathtaking. The cold sharpens all of our senses. It gets dark just after noon and life moves fully indoors, as if people are still nestled under warm animal fur. The further north we go, the thicker and more merciless the fog becomes. We arrive in the Lofoten Islands. They seem more like the backdrop of a surrealist dream and less like a piece of reality.

The steam of a sauna beckons us to go inside. How else to warm your soul in a sea of ice? In the town bar, people meet in the evening, drink beer and sing, as if to forget the darkness outside. So do we. We participate in Elin Már Øyen's performance *Vedøya. Lament to the bird mountain who lost its voice*. Composer Jostein Stalheim finds a ring decorated with a bluebird in the snow. He gives it to me. It's the color of the cold, just like the tapestry of Linn Rebekka Åmo, the Norwegian artist in the exhibition. There is both sky and water in her work; the shades of blue are like a snapshot of the world we visited.

There is a Norwegian proverb that says, "Write where it burns." And that's what we do. We take the stillness and strangeness of a wintry landscape with us and journey further into ourselves, seeking warmth.

It's Christmas Eve, and it's a long way from Norway to Maramureș. At this time of year, carolers wear masks made of goat or sheep fur. Costumed monsters invade the village streets. These fantastical creatures, akin to Norse mythological spirits, drive away evil apparitions.

Loredana Ilie, for her part, weaves a series of fearsome yet genial masks. They don't scare us; rather, they are the guardians of our way home. She charts a map of the monsters from Maramureș and Norway, thus mapping the mythologies of the two spaces.

Mihaela Moldovan's artwork starts with a powerful image: the dust threads on pieces of furniture. Her work reminds us of the shapes of our footsteps in the Norwegian snow. Crocheted doilies, once common in childhood homes, have become oversized in Mihaela's work. The fragility of handmade twine has replaced the tough ropes and cables used in construction. We wipe away

the dust and, with it, our footsteps and marks we leave behind us. Family histories are made of feet treading on clean carpets and hands shaking and wiping away traces of what was before.

In the Jules Verne novel *A Journey to the Center of the Earth*, the characters enter the belly of a volcano and descend into the bowels of the world. In this otherworldly space they experience all sorts of revelations. We've traveled the same journey ourselves, the sentimental map of that adventure reflected here, in this exhibition.

Anca Poterașu *featuring* Ana Maria Sandu