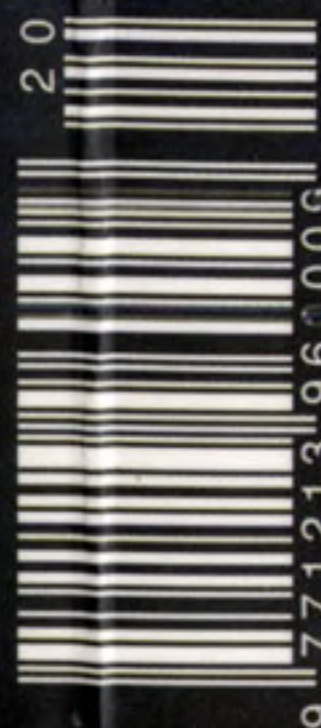


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Fotograf Festival – Off Limits
Festival Program

Susanne Bosch

The Voices and Faces of the Others



In 2003 Susanne Bosch spent six months in Istanbul as one of twenty-three artists who participated in a cultural exchange program between Berlin and the Turkish metropolis in the years 1998–2009. For Bosch this experience was a turning point in the sense that it was during the exchange program that the issue of migration became the primary focus of her work. In Istanbul she started to collect the stories of people who had returned to Turkey after a short- or long-term experience of living abroad, most often in Germany. Bosch continued to collect these stories – mainly triggered by an initial desire for a better life – even after returning to Berlin, neighborhoods of which (Kreuzberg in particular) are home to the largest Turkish community outside of Turkey. One of the outcomes of her many years of contact with Turkish and Kurdish communities is her project *Strange That You Wonder – But We Do As Well* (2009). This book, capturing a selection of several such stories along with audio-recordings of interviews conducted with their protagonists, was presented in summer 2009 at Café Kotti, a coffee house located in the above-cited Kreuzberg district, a neighborhood which has in recent years become a much-visited hub of cultural tourism. The informal character of presentation in a non-gallery setting was partly at odds with the artist's photographs, which were displayed in a most utilitarian way – printed on the café's tablecloths. In this way Bosch used photography as a sign signaling a departure from the framework of the mundane.

The *modus operandi* Bosch has developed over the past decade can be safely ranked among the broader spectrum of participatory approaches based on raising consciousness among both individuals and entire communities. Several theories have been articulated over the course of the last decade that enable one to critically reflect on the work of artists such as Susanne Bosch and others like her, from Grant Kester's concept of a dialogical aesthetic or Miwon Kwon's analysis of community-oriented projects in the field of site-specific art. Within the paradigm of participatory art the question of the "medium" plays only marginal role, since the primary aim is not the manufacture of an artifact but rather to achieve a concrete change in ways of thinking, attitudes and even the daily life of the participants (direct participants in the project as well as "viewers"). To Susanne Bosch, photography is just one of the tools she uses in working with people whose lives she is interested in. In the past she has also worked with video or audio recordings, most often organizing events in the course of which the participants in her projects themselves actively perform in various situations.

Susanne Bosch thus uses photography mostly as a medium of documentation or gallery presentation. This approach is exemplified by her participation in the exhibition project *Prehistory of the Crisis (2)*, presented in 2009 simultaneously in Dublin and Belfast; its main issues were the implications of the global financial crisis in Ireland. The massive economic growth of the "Celtic Tiger" era which developed in the mid-1990s had drawn to the country an unprecedented number of immigrants seeking jobs, the prospect of a better life, and in some cases

also political asylum. Susanne Bosch herself is in some sense part of this wave of migration – since 2007 she has supervised the MA program Art in Public at the University of Ulster in Belfast. She became engaged with the phenomenon of immigration immediately after her arrival in Northern Ireland. A characteristic example of dialogical art in her rendition is the project *Whose Voice Is It Anyway?* (2007), in the course of which she – together with Anthony Haughey – worked with a group of immigrants from fifteen countries; from preliminary interviews and workshops focusing on working with video they proceeded as far as producing their own programs for Belfast's community television station NTV. The nexus between working with video and a form of community art which enables a marginalized group to "acquire a voice" and enter into public discourse follows on from approaches which existed already at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, in the context of the so-called "new genre public art", e.g. in the work of Suzanne Lacy or Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle.

However, to return to *The Prehistory of the Crisis (2)*, this project is an immediate response to the consequences of the failure of the bank sector and the subsequent plunge of the Irish economy, the implications of which included, among other things, the rise of xenophobia. Bosch's contribution to the exhibition, entitled *Ourselves Alone*, 2009 – an English translation of the motto of Irish Republican party Sinn Féin – was a reaction to the rising nationalist and protectionist mood in the country. It consisted of a series of eight photographs of the streets of Dublin, in which she manually cut out and removed everything that was not of Irish origin. At the exhibition in Project Arts Centre, Dublin, Bosch chose to present one series of photographs in a dual form: firstly, the photographs were hung on a wall in an aesthetic installation. However, each of the photographs was also reproduced in a thousand copies piled up on the floor for anyone to take. Bosch also adopted the approach of Felix Gonzalez-Torres based on the principle of "minimal participation" (in this case going beyond the role of passive viewer and taking one or more of the copies) which today forms a standard part of the canon of participatory art. The urge to go beyond the traditional installation of a hanging picture and to pursue at least a minimal activation of the audience clearly confirms the artist's belief that art contributes to our moral and ethical principles, not by simply being a passive presence in our minds, but by projecting itself into our attitudes, and most importantly, the way in which we live our lives. In this sense Bosch does not address her work merely to "viewers" but to citizens, agents who participate in determining the character of the world we live in.

Jan Zálešák

pp. 48–49: *Prehistory of the Crisis II – Ourselves Alone*, poster series for 'Prehistory of the Crisis II', 8 x 1000 posters

pp. 50–53: *Strange that you wonder – but we do as well but we do as well*, five biographical extracts from Turkish and Kurdish migrants, an audio-visual installation, Café Kotti, Berlin, 2009

