

EAGLES & DOVES

In August Kunsthalle Bratislava (KHB) will host a wide-ranging international exhibition entitled *Eagles & Doves*, which presents a selection of works by Slovak and German artists. The exhibition project came into being in cooperation with the Goethe Institut in Bratislava, which is celebrating 25 years of activity in Slovakia. The curators are Lenka Kukurová, who has already prepared several exhibition projects for KHB, including *Fem(inist) Fatale*, *Fear of the Unknown*, and the recent solo presentation by *Tomáš Rafa*, and Omar Mirza.

*“With the help of communication we can solve conflicts, but when it goes wrong it produces most of our misunderstandings. A national or local culture does not come about by domination: rather, it is founded upon interactions, absorptions, selections and transmissions, hence on functioning communication. Communication between different cultures is the main idea of *Eagles & Doves*, which presents works by contemporary Slovak and German artists,”* Kukurová and Mirza write in their accompanying text.

The exhibition also thematises cultural exchange, which is frequently both celebrated and condemned. This highly-charged debate, where ideas of a pure national identity clash with discussions about the positives and negatives of multicultural mixing is as much present in Germany, which has long experience of the coexistence of different cultures, as in Slovakia, where this theme is relatively new. Cultural exchange poses complicated questions of national identity and patriotism. What is the form of national identity today, and what influence do various symbols exert upon it? Can we positively identify with a nation without nationalistic and xenophobic overlays? Contemporary art too can be a medium of intercultural communication: the encounter, not the clash, of cultures.

The exhibition presents works by contemporary Slovak and German artists who respond to these difficult questions with broad perspective, criticism and humour, in a playful and open manner.. What the two curators are attempting is to help viewers look more openly at these issues.

The title *Eagles & Doves* is inspired by the influence of those birds on the creation of national symbols. National and state symbolism always emerges at a specific time and place, and its significance is not unchanging. The same symbols may in different circumstances be perceived as positive, neutral or negative.

The exhibiting artists too address the question of symbols. Erik Sikora, who takes a playful and creative approach to the question, seeks to redefine the image of Slovakia. The artist's distinctive absurd humour is a parody on marketing strategies which try to sell abstract cultural values, whether in the form of kitsch souvenirs or artificially constructed national myths. Visitors to the exhibition can buy souvenirs with this artistic image of Slovakia, which Sikora made specially for the Kunsthalle. Uli Westphal works with the historically loaded symbol of the eagle, stripping it of its ideological deposits in his video. Anna Witt and Nasan Tur consider the motif of flags as state symbols. The German artists are concerned especially with the themes of the unification of East and West Germany, playing with national symbols, right-wing extremism, the direction of the European Union, and so on.

Some of those exhibiting have created new works directly responding to the *Eagles & Doves* project. Monika and Bohuš Kubinský have taken the motif of the dove; here, however, the bird is linked not with the proclaimed peaceloving nature of the Slovaks, but rather with a pigeon-loft as a symbol of chaos. Ivana Šáteková has produced drawings inspired by the results of an internet survey, "What would Europe look like if Germany had won World War II?" For the duration of the exhibition visitors will have the option of on-the-spot participation in the survey.

Works by Stano Masár and Henrike Naumann respond to the transformation of society in the 1990s, which to a notable extent determines the contemporary form of political reality in

Slovakia and Germany. Masár exhibits a kiosk for the Postal Newspaper Service, a well-known feature of Slovak public space, where visitors may browse the press of the period. Naumann's video installation is a reconstruction of home videos from the 1990s, which visitors may watch in an "apartment" interior fitted out in the design of the late 20th century.

Eagles & Doves non-traditionally makes its way out of the gallery precincts and is enriched by works situated in public space. Large-format prints by the celebrated German artist Hans Haacke, reflecting the theme of the people and its problematic definition, attract attention on the facade of the House of Art. This work was also exhibited at the prestigious *document 14* (Kassel, Athens) in 2017. Directly in front of the KHB's main building is a caravan, which Tomáš Džadoň has turned into a traditional Slovak wooden house with the perfect illusion of a folk-style room, which visitors may enter.

Can culture be a mediator of solidarity and tolerance? Can contemporary art replace nationalist kitsch with positive self-identification? Is art in a position to offer a polarised society a space for communication? A place where traditions, clichés and parodies are deciphered, this exhibition becomes comprehensible for everyone who cares about what kind of society we live in.

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Exhibiting artists: Ulf Aminde (DE), Tomáš Džadoň (SK), Hans Haacke (DE), Monika & Bohuš Kubinskí (SK), Stano Masár (SK), Jarmila Mitříková & Dávid Demjanovič (SK), Henrike Naumann (DE), Erik Sikora (SK), Ivana Šáteková (SK), Anna Tretter (DE), Nasan Tur (DE), Uli Westphal (DE), Suse Weber (DE), Anna Witt (DE)

Curators: Lenka Kukurová & Omar Mirza

Opening: Thursday August 16, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at KHB, first floor

Duration: August 17 – October 28, 2018