

INTERVIEW

JOSEF DABERNIG

Standart: How did your cooperation in the Triennial begin?

Josef: It all started in 2008 with meeting Ruben Arevshatyan in context of the Gyumri Biennale. That was also the first time I have visited Armenia. I was really pleased to see the country's stunning landscape, nature and architecture, but also touched to experience existential sub-layers, since the Spitak region was heavily destroyed by an earthquake in '88. The dream of the south is a dream from my childhood, because I grew up on the border between Austria and Italy. It caused my early desire for the Mediterranean and Armenia represents the south within the former Soviet Union. In this sense my encounter with Armenia was in part a kind of shift or Déjà-vu with regard to early desires.

All of a sudden in 2010, Georg Schöllhammer--who was one of the curators in the 2008 Gyumri Biennale--sent me some photos from Armenia with the question: "Wouldn't that be a location for a new film?" The photographs were from the cinematographer's resort built during the Soviet times in Dilijan. I was positively surprised how all of the specific architecture was still authentic, accessible and functioning nevertheless a patina of decay. When soon afterwards I was in Tbilisi for a project, I took a taxi to Dilijan in order to check the site and on my flight back to Vienna I started already writing the script for this film. I was so inspired by this location that I found the plot quickly.

Standart: What significance do you think the Triennial will have in Armenia?

Josef: A triennial is an event following a certain rhythm. What I understood from the press conference is the aim to invent the venue always new, means to find different access to the format of the exhibition from triennial to triennial. For instance the Writers House in Sevan as an exhibition site is giving a plot due to its very particular form and context. Changing narratives set up over years should have its positive impact on the art discourse in Armenia.



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Standart: What about the influence of this project on you as an artist?

Josef: I had several reasons to come back to Armenia. Presuming the invitation as an honor, having the project at such a great site which is the Writers House at the Sevan Peninsula--I thought this chance wouldn't come back. I'm showing three films: On a big screen Hypercrisis which was shot in Dilijan, an early piece in cooperation with Markus Scherer titled Timau, which sound was additionally split to fill the Outside Space, and my newest film Stabat Mater presented in the quasi private ambient of a hotel room. The selection was done by Ruben Arevshatyan, in reference to his visions towards architecture and landscape. The Writers House at the Lake Sevan is not a museum, it's not frozen history, it's still a functioning hotel that you can even find at booking.com. Within the exhibition the selected films become part of an environment and unfold their dialogue with the place. Another reason to come back was to use the opportunity of joining the trip to Kapan, where I plan to take pictures at the stadium in order to add them to my related collection.

Standart: What will you take back with you from Armenia?

Josef: I hope some sportsgrounds and stadiums! (laughs) Over two decades I formed a collection of such images which is about the empty spaces in form of stadiums, about segmented geometry of the rectangular sportsgrounds. I do these photographs only when the sites are out of function. I am still reflecting about the sense to capture these places: Usually standing in front of an empty field, taking three photos to the left and three to the right, capturing a 180-degree half-circle. It seems to be challenging the meaning of the void, since there's nothing happening there. Just its frames are speaking through landscape, architecture, often political implications. It was a strange moment when I dis such photos in the Armenian National Stadium in 2008, coincidentally two days before the match between Armenia and Turkey. The stadium was freshly painted in the National colors and--as far as I remember--the Turks opened the roads on the border for one day as a symbol of everybody's hopes for moving forward.

standart 2017

Triennial of Contemporary Art in Armenia
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Standart: Are there any details you'd like to tell us about the work you're going to share in Sevan?

Josef: I guess Adelina von Fürstenberg and Ruben Arevshatyan had very clear ideas about the project. As mentioned above, in case of Sevan it was drawn up on the dialogue between the works and the place. This is substantial. It really made sense to come here not to control it, but influence it and discuss it with Ruben and others. Not at least to meet the artist colleagues Gerard Byrne and Igor Grubić, whose work I knew, but I have never met them before in person.

