

GALERIE JOCELYN WOLFF

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sarajevoarbeit/le travail sarajevo/ the sarajevo work

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When did you first begin to work on Sarajevo? And for what reason?

From the very beginning of this war, I worked as I have always worked, by integrating things happening in the world.

However for a while there, I also had the impression that I had to change my way of working; I had the impression of a routine, of knowing too well how my work functioned – boredom in the work.

It was also the first "new" war since the "cold war" (=das Gleichgewicht des Schreckens = balance of terror/fear) and the first war in Europe since 1945, so close to home.

I watched the television, and I saw people like us, running with their plastic bags from their supermarkets, like MIGROS and ALDI, in a street that resembled Kleinhüningerstrasse*. They were running because snipers were firing at them. This made me aware of the different nature of all the other images of war I had already viewed on television: even if these were much more brutal, they were more distant, images on television...

My work changed: it became completely basic, simple, made up of small drawings, with poor materials, as though I had started from scratch. I didn't know what to believe anymore. What to do, if there were concentration camps in Europe again, not elsewhere, but here, in our place. So I returned to my table, with my pencils, to start over...

In 1995, you were invited to participate in a project in Sarajevo. How long did you spend there? Did your stay change the way you understood the conflict?

The cultural policy at Obala-center was that of normality, which meant (if I simplify) "don't care about the war, don't care that the Chetniks want to

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bombard Sarajevo and make an international and multiethnic city into an ethnic village, don't care about this idea of national culture anyhow, we are making an international film and exhibition festival with international artists."

So they invited me, which still moves me today... Normality, that meant that the director came to see me at my studio in Basel; we chose the works together, and I sent them to Sarajevo.

I went there for a week; I installed my exhibition; as always, there was an opening, and that was it.

Because the city of Sarajevo was under siege, the normality was rather complicated. And I found myself in the situation where I felt as though I had already pretty well summed up the war.

sarajevoarbeit or sarajevo work: how many years did you work on this conflict? Are there recent works that are tied into this theme?

I more or less worked on Sarajevo throughout the duration of the conflict. I would say that the entire discussion concerning Islam (the "burkas and minarets" discussion) and the damage done in Europe are not only, but also connected to this initial conflict in the Balkans. Still today, a few works within my work are connected to this theme.

sarajevoarbeit represents a large scope in your work; why did you chose to show it all?

Each time I am in Basel and I look at the *SARAJEVO* works on my studio table, I tell myself that I have great difficulty selecting, even more than with other works. Each and every time, it was nearly impossible for me to make a "selection" in this work

Perhaps it is this very word: selection, that, in the case of *SARAJEVO*, carries a disagreeable double meaning (= selektion). Maybe this is the reason, but perhaps it is also because I cannot really chose from, which is for me, a *WHOLE* without thinking in terms of a room-installation.

* Kleinhüningerstrasse: a street in Basel (Switzerland), near where the artist lives.