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Outrage at Cartoons Still Tests the Danes

"I think this is safe house No. 5," Kurt Westergaard said the other day, and it was clear that he genuinely had lost track. Last month the Danish police arrested two Tunisians and a Dane of Moroccan descent on charges of plotting to ...



Contemporary artists on the border of the old and the new Europe

By Wilma Sot

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Juul Hondius, 'Plastic', 2001. cibachrome, dibond, perspex, 125 x 158 cm. courtesy Galerie Akinci, Amsterdam

The exhibition DELAY throws light on the dynamics between the West and the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. From August 28 until November

7 DELAY presents audiovisual installations, sculptures, paintings and photographic works by nine artists. Their work reflects contemporary social shifts: sometimes it is documentary in nature, sometimes a poetic transformation of reality, usually a combination of both.

In 2004 the European Union was expanded with ten countries. DELAY connects with this widening of the frontiers. Several artists are active in a borderland. The Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen gathers together work by Maja Bajevic (1967, former Yugoslavia), Pavel Braila (1971, Moldavia), the artists' duo Freek Drent (1959, the Netherlands) and Stella van Voorst van Beest (1963, the Netherlands), Roderick Hietbrink (1975, the Netherlands), Juul Hondius (1970, the Netherlands), Carla Klein (1970, the Netherlands), Predrag Pajdic

(1965, former Yugoslavia) and Anri Sala (1974, Albania).

These artists unlock a mysterious force field on the border of the old and the new Europe. Urbanization and increasing traffic suggest a purposeful movement here: beyond the past, towards the future. But DELAY also shows the friction between conflicting processes. The public is transported to a slanting environment. They travel through recent history by way of airports, subway corridors and a railway station. Communist housing estates rise up against the most modern architecture in a glowing but also disorienting twilight zone. With the shifting of geographical and ideological borders, the personal, physical environment has also become subject to vibrations.

Using images of building and mobility, but also of displacement and stagnation, DELAY places the social dynamics in the West and the former Eastern Bloc side by side. For instance, at a station on the Moldavian-Rumanian border Pavel

Braila has filmed the trains passing through here being forced to change wheels (Shoes for Europe, 2002). During a three-hour stopover, the Russian model is replaced by an undercarriage that fits onto the Rumanian and Western-European tracks. The train, refitted at night, becomes a symbol of the search for cultural identity, and more than that: a mythical colossus. The airplanes in the paintings of Carla Klein also find themselves in a mysterious stage of their flight. They are continuously in transit, are just taking off or just touching down, their contours disappear or appear in a haze of watery colors. Klein paints transitional areas: airports, car parks, subway stations. There are no humans to be seen, however; not a trace of the usual activity, as if arrival and departure have been postponed indefinitely.

Flattenwijken' ('Highrise estates') (2001) by Freek Drent and Stella van Voorst van Beest is a multi-colored installation of plastic structures, made in Romania, as an interpretation of the building of tower blocks over there. The work sheds light on the heritage of Ceausescu's systematization plan: village after village was torn down, the agricultural community housed in flats. After Ceausescu's downfall the plan was terminated abruptly. Some flats have been going to seed since then; others were bought by occupants who try to brighten them up with their own hands. Through filmed portraits combined with footage of their colorful flats, Drent and Van Voorst van Beest give tower block development a human face.

Sometimes I long for times past, sometimes for times to come', Maja Bajevic says. Her video performance 'Women at Work — Washing Up' (2001) ritualizes the break with communism in former Yugoslavia. In a bathhouse Bajevic, together with refugee women from Srebrenica, washes cloths covered with texts by Tito in dirty water, until the optimistic slogans are as faded as the ideals represented by them. This purification ritual marks the transition to a future freed from the totalitarian regime. In the video Green green grass of home (2002)

Bajevic strolls through a radiantly green pasture. As if sleepwalking, she opens doors in it and leads us through corridors and rooms. She is our hostess, but a lady of the house without a home: in the grass, she evokes the house of her grandparents in Sarajevo that was taken from her during the chaos of war.

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