



MAJA BAJEVIC

interviewed by Predrag Pajdic, March 2007

In late December 2006 I visited Beirut. I couldn't help thinking how much that city reminded me of Sarajevo, the place you came from. I thought that Lebanon is like : only was the multireligious, multicultural part of it visible, but also the effects of a war that had just ended, conflict, political uncertainty... What do you think?

I have unfortunately never been in Beirut but from what I know of its history it must be as you say. On the other hand I remember watching the Beirut tragedy on TV from a safe distance. At that time war was still something that only happens in history books or to someone else. I saw absolutely no parallel between Beirut and Sarajevo. I lived safely in my multi-cultural city and there was nothing more natural on earth.

When you think of war, in general, what strikes me is also the empathy the surroundings have for the war struck environments. If we talk about the First or Second World War, we are touched, although the reasons for those wars were not that different from the ones in Beirut or Sarajevo. Behind all the religious excuses is the craving for power after all. But as war is so horrible and unimaginable, until it happens, it is easy not to have empathy for war struck regions that do not concern us directly, since it only happens to someone else, and that someone is somehow responsible for it. That reassures us that it will not happen to us, be it the religious mix, the 'primitivism', the 'underdevelopment'.

You are certainly not a stranger to wars, conflict, dogma and violence. You explored such dark and hypersensitive issues in many of your works. You also dealt with them even dare to speak. Why?

Well, I might have said this before but I will risk repeating myself and say it again. Since neither the war nor political games avoided me, I could not avoid them later on. War is horror; the other part is what happens after the war. Recently the Dutch squad of the UN observers that was supposed to protect Srebrenica got medals from the Dutch government "for having been through". When I first heard that it seemed like a joke, especially if you know that, some time earlier in history, the Dutch government resigned after the report was completed that happened in Srebrenica. After a brief moment of hope and belief in some justice the injustice came back reinforced. That leaves as deep a trace as the war itself.

If the attitude of the international community was at least similar to that after the WWI and WWII, healing would be possible. As it is the mainstream attitude is to forget about the past as soon as possible and talk about something else.

That is why I still think it is important to talk about it, even if it isn't as fashionable as it was during the war and even if there are no more big international stars wanting to have Sarajevo. Maybe now it is even more important than it was during and straight after the war.

Imagine Iraq now. Afghanistan, how about Palestine? What are your first thoughts?

War leaves me thoughtless. I still can not grasp it, as I can not understand death. It only gives me this mean and constant pain in the stomach that makes me think "if I touch my hand it would be full of blood," and I would look at it not believing that it is mine.

And Tchechenia?

I am getting disturbed even talking about it...

Last year you made a work 'Sculptures for the Blind'. Can you please tell me about it?

'Sculptures for the blind' is a work that deals with immigration. Actually with the split in between the immigrants' dream of a better life, better situation, even better self and the reality through a combination of a Hollywood classic 'Casablanca'. It functions on two levels: there is the level of the dream/reality bipolar, the dream factory Hollywood and the reflection rather the disturbed reflection of reality that you have in Hollywood. Something like the picture of Dorian Gray where the picture reflects reality (as art tends to) and the Hollywood representation is the dream. Secondly, in the film Americans and Europeans are hiding in Casablanca during WWII. The situation was the opposite of what it is now. In the film "...unfortunately with these unhappy refugees, it will take us years to get rid off them..." This is an attitude that is common in the 'first world' nowadays. On the other hand today perhaps need to come to Europe or to America, the trip is somewhat different, and the dream often finishes in a nightmare.

The situation is, as in other works of mine, local. It deals with the crossing from Morocco to Spain, but it tries to talk about immigration in general. It is the same dream that moves the world.

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