

THIS ARE NOT ME

exhibition by Franz Wassermann

speech by Bogomir Doring

Just before my first trip to China. In search for inspiration, maybe to experience the very well-described state from Sofia Coppola's movie "Lost in Translation". For sure, to meet rapidly growing capitalism, attached among huge blocks of skyscrapers, under extreme pollution, decorated by impressive flashing screens in 360 degrees arrangements. This trip was to a country which for the last 10 years caught up what Europe built up during centuries, and whose culture is developing from fake to original in no time. At precisely that moment, Franz Wassermann kindly asked me if I could write a text for his new exhibition. To be honest, until that moment I was not familiar with his work.

After learning about Franz's work, it became clear to me, why this task had been given to me. I understood that, as artists, we address many similar subjects. We both refer to the collective and the individual. After my trip to China, I would rather name those two as corporative and single, it also fits much better with what follows and what surrounds us in the exhibition space. Franz and I devotedly investigate, in a critical way, fabrication or propaganda that embedded itself in our daily life and identities. In that way we are questioning manipulated collective history, that has been presented to us through education and mass media with the purpose of satisfying different socio-political concepts such as national identity, which still remains one of the most stable ways to hold together a group of people.

Before I give you an overview of Wassermann's works, arranged in the gallery in a welcoming way, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce you to a phenomenon that I finally managed to propose as a curator last year, the phenomenon of the faceless. At the invitation of Elisabeth Hayek from the Museumsquartier in Vienna and with the support of Brigitte Felderer, I curated a two-part exhibition named "faceless". This exhibition gathers more than 100 artists and fashion designers; we exhibited production from the past 13 years.

What is faceless about?

While still a student, I noticed a constant growing amount of images of hidden faces which, from my point of view, started spreading after 9/11. Images of hidden, masked or invisible faces penetrated our society in the form of terroristic threat, pressured questioning of burqa as a garment against values of the western world, followed faces of terrorists under balaclavas. Surveillance installed itself at its maximum in our daily life, under the excuse that it will be for our own safety. Our faces are, on a daily basis, recorded and distributed by social networks that are nothing else than companies. Our data is used for economical purposes or unknown, ongoing experiments. Our position as individuals or as collective body is challenged, under the pressure of fast-growing companies that, within different governments, operate with the use/manipulation of technology and human resources. In such an environment one can lose one's face in all the senses of the expression. One might seek for a "mask" as a solution. As Oscar Wilde said: "Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth."

These faceless images remained a tendency in the creative arts and eventually entered, through pop culture, the mainstream. Today we live in a time when fashion industry promotes the return of the masks as in ancient times, when they were used for props, entertainment or protection. We live in the times of protests by Pussy Riot and Anonymous that go almost hand in hand with riots exploding in New York, Turkey, Egypt, Venezuela, Ukraine etc. altogether these images form a collective statement, a criticism of many problematic aspects of contemporary society.

The consequences of 9/11 on global cultures and the degradation of society are more than visible, but nevertheless quite ignored. 9/11 remains a taboo even 13 years after this spectacular and tragic attack on the twin towers, the Western symbol of economy and power. The collapse of this symbol presented in the form of skyscrapers shook up the economy and deranged public and private space, and finally changed the way we live today. The attack was a reaction to the long bullying of the east by the west, and to hidden political agendas that are in manner of transparency shared with us but in fact are quite subtle.

Following from my initial paragraph, I will remind you that today, while entering the exhibition space you walked a red carpet path, a walk of fame, you were treated as a potential celebrity or VIP. You stepped towards the work that Wassermann calls "GROUND ZERO". While taking glorified steps over an imprinted glued surface, your shoes left traces that you brought from the public space. These traces will remain glued to the red carpet and mix themselves with other visitors' traces, as a kind of virus forming from dirt. This way, all of you formed unconsciously a collective path. Another layer of this work is that you walked towards yourself, towards your own reflection. This mirrored sculpture is a monument that has discreetly impacted on your own image and identity. Wassermann's creative decision does not stop here, the back of the mirror is covered in his handwriting; in a non-proper word order there is a text saying "DAS BIST NICHT ICH." Could it be that the walk that you/we took is an illusion, fabrication, and manipulation? By whom or what? On the other hand, every good artist deep inside hides an optimist, so Mr. Wassermann might suggest to us that it is time for reinvention, time to start from a new basis, to seek new ideas and knowledge.

For a while already, Wassermann has been working on a project called "LIVIGN ROOM". It is an ongoing project; it is a collection of various works expressed in different mediums. If we look around in the gallery space of artdepot we will notice that the way the space is arranged feels like a company space. It is build out of furniture from Franz's private and working space it is a private space that exhibits itself to the public.

Furthermore, Wassermann's living room furniture could be seen as a designed waiting room. Indeed, modern men spend almost all of their time waiting, online, on the phone with call centers, hospitals, schools, on their own in restlessness. The carpet on which Wassermann's living room is displayed collects and documents traces of usage in a similar way as the previously mentioned red carpet. This time, the traces are over the statement "JEDE MEINER HANDLUNGEN IST POLITISCH." ("ANY OF MY ACTIONS IS POLITICAL."). The artist is clearly aware that one can never exclude oneself from politics, something which I myself, born and raised in Yugoslavia, these days known as Serbia, know very well.

With "LIVING ROOM / coat hook", the visitor is invited to participate by placing his/her jacket on a free spot. Depending on the time of arrival, a better position can be chosen. It presents a hierarchical construction. It encourages a different ranking of the visitors and hence separates them from each other. None of you is "hanging" in the same way in the artist's space.

I have been fascinated by the word "branding" for quite a while. Placing a mark onto the skin of an animal or imprisoned person with the use of a heated iron, became a hype and something positive in the modern world. It turned out that our bodies and minds desire company names. Consequently, the walls of the space around the "waiting room" are decorated with red flags, on which a nazi-style graphic design is used. The artist establishes a connection with today's leading companies, which appropriate the propagandistic strategy, by placing different brands in a white circle. The artist places his own name in one of the empty white circles. The well-known Joseph Goebbels, who killed himself at the very end of WWII in order to escape possible punishment that was coming in his direction, originally developed this truly horrifying but still amazing concept that is shaping the way we live today. I am saying possible punishment because, as we all know, many nazis escaped punishment and continued to live normally in another parts of the world, whilst keeping their nazi ideas. They remained active in silence.

The table on which I am seated now is Wassermann's working table. Whilst the exhibition is on, it is used by the gallery owner and her employees. The artist hires me too! His statement is attached to the working environment and faces are standing behind this computer screen. It resembles corporative behaviour, where we are what the company stands for.

"MEINE EXISTENZ IST EINE PROVOKATION." ("MY EXISTENCE IS A PROVOCATION.")

By questioning our moral frame, Wassermann fused different images and elements in order to tell us something about the contemporary. About the time when people are invisible and human bodies host as a parasite or simply embed corporative identity. On one of the walls you will notice that Wassermann installed his working suit as well as an image of a man that might be the artist himself, but could be anybody else because the face is missing. It is a blank, faceless round surface that

suggests that any other face could fit in, but also underlines the importance of and adds value to the uniform rather than to the personality. This uniform could be seen as a celebrated fetish of the successful contemporary man. It is a look of power. It is the suit of a minister. Finally Mr. Wassermann offers us a sculptural product titled "WE ME / The Platform". This object is a module that performs as different kinds of platforms. This perfectly clean and designed cubic form with a cut-out "We" on it, could transform itself in a mirrored "Me". It can reinstall itself easily and adapt to the various groups or individual uses depending from needs. This podium is multi-functional; it is customized. It presents the perfect so-called democratic platform for discussion. You may say something as one of our group while standing on it. You are also free to be a passive observer; it will not be your first time.

While standing on it I will conclude my talk, as "we": today we are here to witness the opening of a solo exhibition by Franz Wassermann. He welcomes us in a kind of limbo that resembles an institution or a company. I call this space limbo, because the direction we will take from here is unknown and uncertain. This exhibition serves to point out that this surrealistic set-up is nothing else than the pure reality of our contemporary world in which, with all respect, we are mainly non-active, conformist, and scared to loose what we have. We remain silent, maybe blind-like when facing immoral changes around us that are turbulently coming closer and closer. The reason why we feel or tend to be faceless today is for fear of loosing what we have. One should not forget the quite deeper fear, which is historically attached to us. We know that in the past we were not always doing the right thing, as history might teach us. This was also researched in Mr. Wassermann's work.

Congratulations, Franz

Your exhibition is declared open 😊