

Forensic Excavations Inventory or The Total Deconstruction of an Armenian Family.

(Entry Freetheme)

I. Project description

Forensic Excavations Inventory is an ongoing project that uses photography, collage and text to tell a story. Currently around 70 photos are in existence, planned are several hundred. The story begins before my birth and spans from Eurasia to Eastern and Western Europe. It moves along my biography and touches different political and historic events like socialist totalitarianism in Bulgaria and the GDR, migration and the fall of the Berlin wall, the Armenian genocide, state surveillance, trauma, health, consumership, family, and everyday life.

About my process. I have scanned all family photos that were left in my possession. They were taken in Bulgaria and Germany between the 1930s and the 2000s. I digitally cut out the photos and extracted objects like toys, furniture and body parts of others and myself. I write something about each of the objects, what it reminds me of or knowledge about its meaning and origin.

The objects now seem perspectively distorted, because they are not rooted in their native photographic context anymore. This is why I identify them by name ('hand', 'modem'). The visual representation of an object is being doubled by the textual linguistic identification. Associations arise upon reading the identification and interpretation of the object meanwhile the simultaneous sight of the distorted visual depiction of the object might disrupt familiar associations.

As a next step, I have printed the elements on paper and mounted them on Kapa material. Now the individual elements have been translated from the confines of the square photos into threedimensional objects.

The once-whole family picture expands literally and figuratively and opens an inbetween level, a void, in which I can express something of the ambivalence and inexpressible.

The representative function of the photo as a family picture, snapshot or document gives way to the immediate view of the individual element. The complete photo loses its claim to truth because it becomes apparent that there is more than meets the eye on first glance.

The 'total deconstruction' of the photos gives me the tool of a methodology that allows for a decentralized storytelling with which I can examine the structure and political foundation of of my biography.

II. Political multi-perspective

Many artists work with family photos and documents that they alienate using various techniques or which they collage with their own or found material.

My development of the collage technique transfers the former 3D objects from the photographic 2D again into a new 3D environment. The objects, mounted on slabs of synthetic material, become props for the newly created photos in the here and now. Shadows that fell on the objects at the time of the photograph, or reflections on TVs are frozen in time and incorporated into the new photographic composition. Thus the newly created photo or photo installation works like a cubist time machine: all times and perspectives exist simultaneously and are put in relations to each other.

The cacophony of the different times allows a multi perspective look on my life that has been moved into different directions by so many political events. The cut-out objects are treated equally regardless whether they are organic or inorganic material. Each object, no matter if hand or toy, enables another perspective on my life, and with this, also on a piece of history.

This multi-perspectivism works not only in the photographic sense. The Multiperspective is a metaphor for the cacophony of interpretations of contested historical and political events. Historical scholarship is not politically unambiguous and is subject to interpretations influenced by changing narratives. Events like the collapse of socialism, migration or the Armenian genocide become a projection surface of different ideologies. For instance the genocide of Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks that took place in the Ottoman Empire between 1915 and 1919: since the founding of modern day Turkey its has been denied in the country. And Germany that, as the Ottoman's ally in the First World War, facilitated the deadly desert deportations and shipped the arms necessary, doesn't face the memory with the according perspective of a perpetrator.

Multi-perspectivism also means saying: a catastrophe can spawn something positive – selfishly speaking for instance my birth. A catastrophe can bear several truths.

III. Conclusion

Contrary to what the title Forensic Excavations Inventory suggests I don't work for this project like an archaeologist. I have excavated the missing pieces in my biography by doing the complete opposite of what archaeologists are doing - *they* search the grounds for shards of an antique, once-whole object to reconstruct them by drawing in the missing pieces. In contrast, I had to destroy my archetypical family picture to understand what the artifacts of my childhood held concealed in front of everyone's, especially my own, eyes. In the process of reevaluating memories, which, more so than I originally believed, resembled a healing journey of discovery, the artifacts revealed themselves as documents that connect my private history with the political history between Eurasia,

East and West Europe.