

IN SEARCH OF BALKANIA

In Search of Balkania lifts a long overdue ban on the Balkans as a site of intellectual endeavor and cultural desire. Conceived from the outset as a curatorial operation and artistic experience against expectations, this exhibition confronts a subject full of contradictions, to which everyone brings baggage they can't easily drop. This exhibition requires that visitors check their baggage at the door, and allow the content of their own mental suitcases to be disturbed, questioned and de-sensitized before thinking uncritically about their relation to Balkania again.

If on one level In Search of Balkania is a rendez-vous with a dented landscape full of used parts and accidental art, where the real still matters and storefront windows resemble surrealist displays, on another level it is a virtual encounter with a symbolic geography that will be the 21st century's most important fold: where East meets West, where Occident becomes Orient, and where none of the old lines and myths about identity, self, nation, and other hold. Indeed, if this exhibition presents a picture different from any picture previously shown in Europe of the Balkans, it is that there is nothing in Europe but the Balkans. Balkania is not a world unto itself, but a mirror onto all selves. To recognize the Balkans is to recognize features and syndromes out of which cities, wars, experiments, ideas and visions are composed.

How is such a world insinuated within the museum environment? Working with over sixty artists encountered during five years of close exchanges in the Balkans, the curators construct a matrix of Balkanic spaces and build a complex of metaphors derived not from the white cube of museum logic, but from the street collisions and market chances of Balkanic knowledge. Some rooms lead to a secret history of the avant-garde, others to a phenomenology of the banal. From the bunkers of Enver Hoxha to the imaginary of the Black Sea, from religious kitsch to urban folklore, and from Croatian Conceptualism to Romanian Dadaism, this exhibition considers the Balkans as a source of culture without which the future of Europe is unimaginable.

The exhibition is accompanied by three publications: In Search of Balkania: A User's Manual; Balkanian: A Non-Standard Cultural Dictionary; Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation.