

Matei Bejenaru. *'The Steps, the Words, and the Usual'* Text by Mălina Ionescu

In his exhibition at Anca Poterașu Gallery – *'The Steps, the Words and the Usual'*, curator Anca Verona Mihuleț, Matei Bejenaru brings together works with, apparently, very different motivations. As the title suggests, the exhibition – as a whole – steps outside the set of themes which have, up until this moment, defined Matei Bejenaru's attitude of a very direct social and political critic. This exhibition showcases works in which, beyond their subject, Matei Bejenaru reflects upon his own position in relation to the aspects and phenomena of reality. He analyses the way in which a visual discourse is articulated, in all that this process implies formally, from the option for a specific medium and the aesthetic pleasure derived from its accuracy, to an analysis of the duration and effort in the making of an artwork.

He also investigates the profound level of the selective, associative process in the formation of an image – the artistic response to a reality which is experienced and understood in its entirety: this everyday and permanent Usual, which here reads as totality. Works which investigate the lyrical realm of introspection, remembrance and contemplation are associated with socially polemical works, and this very counterpoint gives the full understanding of the social critic practiced by Matei Bejenaru – militant but not in the ostentatious or limited way it has when militancy is the main motivation of an artwork.

The Natural History Museum in Iasi is one of the socially critical works, as it captures the moment, November 2015, in which this museum stopped its activity, the same time and context in which The Simeza Gallery and The Nottara Theater from Bucharest also closed down. The image is part of the series *'In-between Worlds'*, in which Matei Bejenaru investigates a subject of current urgency and, fortunately and surprisingly, also of increasing interests – in the light of a reconsideration of certain artistic and cultural instances – the disappearance of museums and other economically, socially and culturally important institutions.

The subject of disappearance of social and cultural landmarks, and the consequent changes in society, is present in several of his projects, and not only in the critic of the present and the analysis of change, but also, always, underneath the criticism and the analysis, in a nostalgia for a time past, for landmarks which were lost, for a time which erased its traces. The artist's relationship with the events of our recent history always remains objective, and the past is never idealized; however his actions of documenting, recording and signalling that certain aspects of a meaningful and consistent past should not be eroded by the present are nevertheless coherent with all of the lyrical charge of a necessary persistence of memory.

His critical works are always, very openly and directly, not only about but also for a certain community, and this derives from his distinctive and unitary manner of relating to reality and to his subject, a way which is the most complete, familiar and usual way of relating to one's own, personal and individual contexts. His, is a freedom of expression, the main attribute of which is an honesty of reaction, direct and uninfluenced by any predilection for an artistic medium, visual repertory or any correspondence, developed over time, between visual elements and themes, between the investigations and the representations of reality.

In the installation *Thinking March in the Bârnova Forest*, we find ourselves in the almost magical realism of the walk through a forest which is represented as the place of personal experiences and history, but at the same time as the generic space for relating to nature – on an immediate and sensorial level, but also profoundly, on the level of impressions lived as the birthplace of ideas.

We also find the drawn map of this thinking process – of finding oneself, of finding ideas, of thoughts overlapping, of converging experiences – highly familiar, because nature itself functions here as a cultural citation, and so do introspection and the evolution of ideas from the direct and intensely emotional contact with nature, as the artist constantly quotes a visual and poetical heritage which is common to the entire European culture.