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My home is where my heart is?

The well-known saying tells us that home is where the heart is. It means that the feeling of being at home, and of fulfillment, is closely related to what we love. On the other hand, it also suggests that real homes, with all their contents, are the images of our hearts, true reflections of our dreams, convictions and ideals.

Since the dawn of time people have tried to get to know and understand the world around them, depicting this world in the interiors of their homes. Hunters from Lascaux, whose lives depended on the hunts, captured reality by painting these chases on the cave walls. In the yurts and tents of nomads there was a place for the axis of the world (axis mundi) – a central beam connecting “mother earth” and “father sky” – as well as feathers and claws of totemic animals and representations of guardian spirits. A bonfire, like the sun, was the centre around which everybody gathered, and thanks to which life flourished.

Over the course of time, ornaments and details changed : eagles’ feathers and bears’ skulls were replaced with noblemen’s crests, icons of saints and portraits of ancestors. Later, various gems and trinkets, expensive carpets, and paintings by recognized artists, informing guests of the owner’s status, took their place. Today, advertising posters, photo-wallpapers and modern functional art prevail. Wood and coal-burning fireplaces, as well as candles and petroleum lamps, replaced the bonfire, only to be superseded by electric lighting and gas heating. Trends, designers, and style gurus reign over the modern home. Homes that were once ascetic gave way to modernist, strikingly baroque or postmodernist designs.

However, despite modern equipment attesting to the unbelievable technological progress that goes on around us – computers, surround sound systems, refrigerators, washers, air-conditioning systems – the essence of the home has remained unchanged. It is still testimony to how we see ourselves and how we understand the world that we live in. We feel intuitively that our home is more than just a set of rooms – above all it is our history and our memory, our loves and our work, our children and our parents, the important and insignificant events in our lives, shared meals, and our sorrows and joys.

Exiles, rebels and protestors, those who left their homes of their own free will and those who were deprived of their homes, all of them feel just how important a home is. Complaint, sorrow and nostalgia often sound in their declarations. When Jesus said, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head,” he probably meant that true loneliness begins not only when we lack the company of other people but also when we do not have our own home.

The universe today is not as coherent as it used to be – it seems to be divided into parts, shattered; it lacks unity and certainty. Life in today’s fast-paced world is deprived of continuity. Our identity is torn and can fall apart at any time – we are different at home,

at work, and different with friends and family (if we still have the time and strength to keep the ties). Recently, and probably not by accident, the pertinent advertising slogan “My home is where my hard drive is” appeared. We are more and more withdrawn and isolated, put simply – autistic ; we are wrapped up in the worlds which exist only in our computers, where official documents abound, alongside vacation pictures, some mp3 music, recorded films, e-mails...

Man at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries is a nomad, a global wanderer, an accidental tourist. He moves job and house according to the rhythm of births and downfalls of great corporations. He migrates to earn his crust and to have a better life. He often lives in many homes, which more and more rarely are the image of his interior, and which begin to function as an impersonal bedroom. A rented furnished home becomes a momentary stop before the next one, while one hotel room blends into the next.

The photographs by Andrzej Kramarz and Weronika Łodzińska bring an original look at the home. They create a picture that is not only peculiar but surprisingly disturbing – as always when we peek not only into somebody’s world but also deep into his soul, and maybe even into his innermost dreams. Astonishing in their diversity, they show traditional homes in which sacred pictures, embroidered table-linens and pyramids of down pillows abound. Next to it they show peculiar ascetic homes of circus artists, makeshift bedrooms of truck drivers, homesteads of collectors of nick knacks and cells of eccentric monks. Reflecting on these photographs, for many of us it seems that the home is so intimate, tamed and permanently present that it has become simply unnoticeable and, because of that, unknown. Only contact with various and contrasting incarnations of the home gives us a glimpse of contemporaneity – its entire unarranged mosaic and riches.

These visual treatises on the subject of homes are in fact portraits of contemporary man, an attempt to capture the souls of their owners, an intriguing diagnosis of our contemporary condition. Some of the photographs emanate calmness, while others seduce with their mystery, and others evoke the absurd and grotesque. The diversity of the portrayed homes astonishes; randomness and methodical madness can be found hiding behind furniture, while decoration and atmosphere disturb. Looking at the photographs makes us feel like early anthropologists and ethnologists. The longer we look at them the more our feeling of being exposed to foreign civilizations, different people and exotic planets grows. We realize that to meet such exotic people as the Bushmen from the Kalahari, Eskimos from Greenland or Amazonian Indians we don’t have to sail to a tropical island.

These photographs by Weronika Łodzińska and Andrzej Kramarz seem to bring out motifs and elements from the interiors of the homes and their inhabitants that may seem slightly peculiar, not only to the viewer but also to the owners themselves. Like a psychoanalyst with an unsuspecting patient, they reveal hidden meanings, reinterpreting what seemed to be known, enabling us to distinguish between absurd dream and peculiar fantasy. In any case, any description is unnecessary and pointless – it is enough to have the pictures in front of us, letting the uncertainty grow within us

regarding who we are, where we come from and where we are going It is worth letting the pangs of sadness and melancholy take over, emerging thanks to our exposure to the photographs which, by turns, show transformation, continuous flow, change, a lack of anchoring and an unknown finale.