

TRAVELING EXHIBITION OPENS WINDOW ON BALKANS IN ISTANBUL



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A traveling exhibition of photographs offering a glimpse of everyday life in the Balkans that has already been shown in Serbia and Romania is currently on display at the Beyoğlu Municipality Art Gallery in Istanbul.

Titled "Light and Shadows in the Balkans," the exhibition is organized by the Hellenic Foundation for Culture (HFC), which hopes to promote intercultural dialogue. The exhibition, which the foundation plans to display throughout the Balkans and Western Europe, is now part of the Beyoğlu Municipality's Intercultural Dialogue in Art program, which will continue throughout 2010.

The show is made up of 80 black-and-white photographs from Turkish artist Timurtaş Oran, Albanian artist Bevis Fusha, Bosnian artist Milomir Kovacevic, Romanian artist Virgil Mlesnita, Bulgarian artist Nina Nikolova, Serbian artist Imre Szabo, Croatian artist Stanko Abadzic and Greek artist Stelios Efsthopoulos.

Today, as we live in an age of globalization and rapid geopolitical and cultural change, the need for better understanding between peoples has taken on new significance, explains the curator of the show, Magdalena Michalidou.

"Photography, as a means of artistic expression, opens up a window into the world in which we live and into the world in our possession. It makes it possible for us to transcend the barriers of communication much more easily by overcoming language difficulties," Michalidou says in an interview with Today's Zaman. "The image is capable of taking us on distant journeys but at the same time bringing us closer together since by means of it we come to know the 'differentness' of others and at the same time recognize the factors that bind us with them," she adds.

The artists featured in the show were selected on the basis of their work, she notes. "Some of the

artists were well-known to me. Others were suggested by colleagues or found through the Internet. The main idea was to find artists who work in a classic style using black-and-white photography and who have recent works depicting daily life in their countries," Michalidou explains.

A unity of subject matter is not emphasized in the show. "The selection of the pieces has to do with the redefinition of space which arises through a record of time and people. What the artists' works have in common is the fact that they show contemporary artistic activity and creativity, the life and the historical development of the region."

Although the artists depict daily life in the Balkans, there are some divergences in their perceptions. Some of the photographers are more realistic, while others are more romantic and symbolic or expressionistic and even surrealistic. The differences in technique among the works on display are mostly visible in the art pieces of Greek photographer Efsthopoulos, who approaches the subject in an expressionistic and surrealistic way using various technical means, such as camera obscura.

Asked about the different approaches the photographers take toward their region, the curator points out that the works focus on the region from the personal experiences of each artist. "The subject matter emerges from the personal histories of each photographer. The individual style of each artist shapes the framework within which he or she lives and moves. If you put together these differing visual angles, you gain a feeling of a 'pan-Balkan' space," she stresses. "Photography is a 'window' that offers a view of everyday reality, and photographers are not mere observers but give expression to a viewpoint and take a position toward events."

"Light and Shadows in the Balkans" runs through Feb. 9 at the Beyoğlu Municipality Art Gallery in Istanbul's Beyoğlu district.



IMRE SZABO-SERBIA



VIRGIL MLESNITA-ROMANIA



BEVIS FUSHA-ALBANIA

The Hellenic Foundation for Culture

The aim of the Athens-based Hellenic Foundation for Culture (HFC) is to promote the Hellenic culture and to disseminate the Greek language all over the world. Since its founding in 1992, the HFC has created branches in Odesa, Alexandria and Berlin. It operates offices with representatives in London, Vienna, Brussels and Washington. Between 2007 and 2009, the HFC founded centers of Hellenic culture in Trieste, Belgrade, Bucharest, Tirana, Sofia and Melbourne. The foundation offers Greek language courses, organizes cultural events, publishes books and operates libraries at its branches, which are open to the public. For more information visit www.hfc.gr.