

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

*"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow,
for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day
has enough trouble of its own"
Mathew, 6:34*

A hardly attainable ideal of a modern man is to live in the present, to live now and here. And what is the present anyway? Is it only the point where the past and the future meet? The past has already happened, so it is no more. And there is no future, since it is yet to happen. What is there, then?

The urban, neurotic man of the present lives in the non-existent. In fact, most of his life he is not present. He either lives in the past, thinking about something that has already happened and is immutable, or he worries in advance about the future that is yet to come. Today's man is not present, not living now and here. As Anthony de Mello said—"Life is what happens to us while we're busy making other plans."

When in 1996 I decided to make a photographic record of a group of Romani bear-handlers, I had no idea how much it would change me, and how much I would learn from them. Rade, Zoran and Ringo Todorović, Zoran Paunović and Mića Ledić lived semi-nomadic lives with their families. Traditionally, they were bear-handlers, passing this craft from generation to generation. As archaic entertainers, they would travel from April to November performing, and then they would go back to Paraćin to overwinter. And this was their life.

Although they tried to follow the rhythm of fairs, earlier even across Bosnia, Montenegro, Macedonia, but at the time only in Serbia, I realized that to them, travelling was more a goal than a means to get somewhere. This reminds me of the anecdote about a Bedouin and an urbanized Arab: The urbanized Arab asked the Bedouin:

- How much does it take your camels to take you from here to the next town?
- It takes them seven days - says the Bedouin.
- It takes me five hours by car. Isn't that much better?

Bedouin gave it a thought.

-You may be right, but tell me, in what way did you spend the time that was saved travelling by car?

Once, when I travelled with Zoran Paunović I asked him why they have a tendency to immediately spend everything they had earned, leaving nothing for tomorrow.

-We will still have our bears tomorrow, so we'll earn money again. Tomorrow is another day, and today is today- was his answer.

These men live in the present, and they are in constant motion. They live their lives at full intensity, without delay, or worrying about tomorrow, without thinking about the ugly past. They remember only the good things.

Three years, from 1996-1998, I was hanging out with them and taking photos. These photos became a photo-monograph that, at that time, had not yet been published. First, in the series of circumstances, that prevented me from publishing it was the NATO bombing of the then Yugoslavia. When I was invited, in 2010, to exhibit the photos in the ARTGET gallery of the Cultural Centre of Belgrade, I wanted to see where my bear-handlers were now, twelve years after, and to make a new story.

For the trip to Paraćin and the meeting with them I needed some time, I had to prepare myself. I wasn't sure what I was about to see after so many years. Last time we had met in 1998, hardly anyone had had a cell phone, so we couldn't keep in touch. Later on, nothing seemed to bring me there. I didn't know what they were doing; I only knew that, in the meantime, bear-handling had been prohibited and that all the bears had been put in the reservations.

First I visited some places where we used to spend time together and recorded how they looked. It was very interesting. Time distance inevitably creates emotional layers. Photography is a handy tool for saving something in time, which makes transience rather evident. This is why facing such document sometimes can be pleasant because it serves as an emotional catalyst, but also can be unpleasant since it reminds us of earthly time constraints.

I went to Paraćin and managed to find them. Except for Dica, everyone was still there. And there were many new children. I don't know why, but when in 1999 the Serb Radio and Television headquarters was bombed, they were all certain that I died too. They mourned my death and drank for my soul. Today, they make money collecting scrap metal. They still live and move in the present. They were very happy to see me again.

Miladin Čolaković