

ALEC VON BARGEN

54th Venice Biennale – Costa Rica Pavilion

“The long walk home” and “Totalitarian Tinkerbells”

“Travel not only expands the mind: It gives it form.”

Bruce Chatwin's words are fundamental in presenting Alec Von Borgen: artist by profession, photographer by inspiration, actor by profession, but above all, world traveller.

Born in New York in 1972 from German parents, he has lived in England and Mexico.

His life can be allegorically defined as a long journey in search of new sensations, new experiences but most of all as a continuous desire for internal enrichment.

Travel becomes an Oneiric propulsion, a continuous and spasmodic search of that which lies beyond, where reason gives free reign to one's own restlessness and the desire to see and discover in order to be able to describe the world. It is the metaphor of a journey which reconfirms its value; and as a ritual, an initiation which permits to enrich ones own vital experiences, lifting one's soul, seeking always to go that one step further.

Each destination has it's own particularities, its own fragrances, its own colors, its own customs.

Alec Von Borgen's work is comparable, by poetic similarities, to several stories written by Bruce Chatwin, but instead of the pens and the "cahiers" with which Chatwin took notes of his travels, Alec uses a camera, a point-and-shoot camera, which gives testimony to his revelatory and assiduous conversation with the world.

An intense analysis of the places visited, permits him to achieve a true intimacy with the space. Images are not prepared, instead they are immediate to the emotion of an instant, a place or an expression. An intimate *reportage*, like a 'secret diary' composed of figures and forms, which clearly represent the mimesis of the moment.

The chosen subjects are in fact prevalently people, places or moments, which encounter the artists disciplined and attentive stare. They are the 'cries' of unheard voices, exiled - at times - from the world, fragments which pulsate with life and which through a simple look, a gesture or a shadow desire also to express and communicate something specific to the spectator.

Two installations are present at this occasion at the 54th Venice Biennale, proposals hosted by the Costa Rican Pavilion, which has chosen as its common denominator the theme "Stupore", or "Amazement", emblematical, identifiable with the historical figure of Federico II of Sweden - defined as the *Stupor Mundi* - for the importance achieved for his development of human history. The Costa Rica Pavilion is one aware and is careful to rediscover the true values of life, to rediscover and revisit articular moments in history and to bring to light the continually disappearing social values. A warning to the visitors to find and reorganize a new *renaissance*.

On the outside of the pavilion, the piece 'The long walk home' plays protagonist. It is a polyp composed of 27 panels in which Alec Von Barga delves into the international crisis of the refugees and those in despair. An undeniably current social and political theme .

People in search of themselves and that need to find a place of their own, and an individual identification on this planet. A long path full of adversity: a silent march towards territories frequently hostile leading to darkened destinations. The road becomes eternal, uncertain toward unfamiliar terrain.

The voyage done in this manner can be comparable to an escape, a reaction of the individual, a gesture almost antisocial in nature. The traveler through this slow and long path, escapes in order not to be suppressed. He escapes from the state, from family, from everything including himself. This gesture is as near as possible to a protest if any. It is a long road towards the research of existence, to smile, to concentrate and to release oneself from our own anchors. One seeks self-affirmation in order not to dissolve, in order not to become a gaseous ghost in the quotidian social magma.

"The long walk home" is an abstract puzzle born from moments and fleeting encounters, from memories and conversations already forgotten, like voices slowly dissolving. It is also the testimony of the people entering and exiting our lives, of passing and forgotten relationships leaving nothing more than an empty void in our existence. "The long walk home" is also ourselves, immersed in our own thoughts, scattered along the road home with our problems, our anguish, our joy and those crossing glares which

remind us of the sounds of the city which envelopes.

“Totalitarian Tinkerbells” is the other installation present at the Biennale. Composed of a series of shots evidencing light and the importance of detail. Buildings are represented, crowded spaces where the lack of intimacy prevails. Spaces invaded, stripped of their own identity, where you become a part of the other, where the voyeuristic practice becomes not only commonplace but the principal material. It is a journey, also in this case, into the realms of a dark and enchanting world, which are the senses, in search of a certain behavior, a gesture, an impulse. The Orient mixes with the west, the old with the new, the wealth with the impoverished. At the same time it is an accusation towards those regimes which in silence repress the population. It is an alarm bell, with which the artist forces us to stop acting like nothing were wrong.

Marcel Proust affirmed that *The true journey of discovery does not consist in seeking new land, but instead, seeing things through new eyes.* Today it must be us to seek out those human rights, which unfortunately too often not affecting us directly, we tend to ignore. The artist forces us to be moved, inviting us as participants and co-inhabitants into his world with "new eyes" with which to explore, dream and discover.

Alec Von Bargen lives everywhere, a true citizen of the world. He rests at times at his home in the Mayan jungle in Akumal, Mexico.

Diego Viapiana

Director of the Nuova Galleria Morone, Milan