

Disappearance of unknown

Looking at your photos, gazing the landscapes at their background or their human characters, I realized that nothing surprises me. What I see seems to me familiar and recognizable. That could be easily explained by the fact that Central Asia and the Caucasus are the regions which I have visited many times and where I can hardly meet something really unknown. Nevertheless, I guess that the adequate explanation is different. The disappearance of unknown is one of the most evident consequences of the more than two decades of globalization. Exotic nowadays are rare and expensive goods highly requested by media or the tourism industry, and its reservoir seems to be exhausted. So my hypothesis is that "displacement" mentioned in the title of your work is provoked not by incapacity to familiarize with the new territories, but the opposite, by incapacity to alienate from it. that could be named a Stendhal syndrome , on the contrary.

From my perspective, displacement starts when your curiosity begins to be as unlimited as the infinite choices this contemporary world offers us.

Displacement is what we experience daily when confronting ourselves with the outer world, with the unknown. Displacement is what makes us uncertain to then generate around us new energies. Whether it is incapacity to familiarize with the new territories or, in the opposite, the incapacity to alienate from it, in the end, the result is the same. Roots are what identify us, and the globalization in which we are trapped has brought many of us to confuse our beliefs and certainties and to constantly try to fit in as well as assert our origins at the same time. The wonderment or psychological tension that can rise from the encounter with new territories can both enlarge one's vision as well as perilously obfuscate its real purpose.

Orientalism is usually associated with Western cognitive domination. Europeans explored the East, conceptualized it and then imposed upon it their own idea of the Orient. But is that concept still valid? Are we still able to apply our Western knowledge-power? Perhaps our concern is not an external world but our own consciousness? Perhaps we are leaving the border of the so-called West with an intention only to gaz into ourselves? Perhaps "displacement" is a diagnosis that you put to yourself and not to the world?

An errant woman in the series Falling Icons photographed during travels in the Orient, in the depths of Central Asia between the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea along the Silk Road, appears in the act of falling, unable to keep her balance in this world too dense with symbols, in solitary places and unknown lands she travels, crosses and interacts with. These sometimes-inhospitable spaces have long stories to tell, rich in cultural, social and geopolitical implications.

I chose to set these images in lands that are in transition, in places that are still searching for a specific identity and in countries where tolerance is a somewhat delicate issue. This woman could be seen as an allegorical figure of fragility, the archetypal image of an individual facing the gravity of the world, a contemporary woman trying to find her own roots by confronting herself with new territories. Eventually the process changes and brings her back to her own consciousness.

My work began investigating religious minorities along the former Silk Route -- now known as the Oil Route -- and sought after by the great powers. The research on the accounts and origins of the people slowly led me to reflect on my own personal identity.

The Orient became in the late XIX and XX century an object of curiosity, knowledge and domination. The concept of Orientalism has been part of an intense debate among anthropologists, artists and other social scientists concerning their perceptions and methods of studying other cultures. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the other. It has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, and experience and is an integral part of European material civilization and culture.

The Europeans at the end of the last century and the beginning of the 20th century have tried to conquer in many different ways the East. Some explorers were eager to conquer new territories, many intellectuals and artists to bring back their visions of the West. Some succeeded in conquering lands, and finally, many others went in or were sent in to find new scenarios of assimilation. Orientalists were fascinated with these exotic identities that Europeans were eager to discover.

What fascinated me in that period and process was the drive that brought many European explorers along the Silk Route. During the "Great Game" account (told to us marvelously in Peter Hopkirk's book *Foreign Devil on the Silk Route*) Sven Hedin, Aurel Stein and many others dedicated their lives to new archeological and art discoveries along this route. They somehow did not invade the new territories but attempted, maybe sometimes arrogantly and on request of their respective governments, to fill up the museum back in their European home cities with treasures from deserts and peaks of the East. Their journey, guided sometimes by vanity and success but mixed with immense curiosity and dedication and the desire to obtain a greater knowledge, influenced a great deal of my project.

And this process of learning and seeing the unknown without, in my account, a predefined idea of specific expectations when confronting myself with these new lands brought me to the understanding that no matter how far one goes, it eventually all comes back to one's self consciousness and self awareness. In the displacement of these territories that have gone through intense transformation are reflected the displacement of our own identity, as fragile as theirs. A kind of vicious circle in which a dialogue between a woman or a man and their surrounding lands becomes the starting point of the journey back to one's own origin.

Interview with Viktor Misiano, Art critic and curator