

« Faces of Europe – Freedom Passages »

The starting point of this artistic project spreading now over Europe was born in the twin cities of Strasbourg and Torino. It is produced by Laura Martin (France) artist photographer, and Lucia Portis (Italy) autobiographical writings researcher expert, skilled in social sciences specializing in the study of migrant groups. With an open view on all « Fields of possibilities », we are striving from the deepest of our hearts, to materialize the bond connecting solidarities and fellow-feeling with Art and Society, individual voices and all communities' History.

The exhibition taking place in Strasbourg's «Istituto Italiano da Cultura » suggested the development of narrative fields enabling us to experiment a complete visualization with the help of autobiographical and pictorial art & skills through one's self narrative and inner story.

Art offers visualization essential in identifying and understanding of each other's diversity and the fundamentals of our common heritages.

Each of us – participants in our pictorial and written works as well as the public discovering them - will be driven to this « twin motion » of staying tuned to and of discovering « who the others » are really, bringing awareness of our mutual existences – Being aware that lesson has become vital today, although European borders are actually disappearing, we unfortunately have to admit the persistence of speeches still spreading all over, distinguishing the bad and the good migrant as well as the reasons to emigrate or not. Multicultural experimentations, and truly the true process of dismantling the current « clichés » is giving us the chance to boost the value and esteem of the migrant person, as shown through their own words and their images which I am bringing forth here.

This methodology of biographical writings applied & put in practice- through « existential spiraling », « autobiographical geography » - I am, I was, I shall be - allows migrants' inner research bringing forth their capacity to tell and narrate their own life's story.

As far as I am concerned in this endeavour, setting up the image representing these people through photography came through owing to close cooperation with them.

My participation in Lucia's workshop, and listening to these people's stories, and this involvement helped me giving substance to my project and to my photographic encounters with peoples.

Identity – one's own – is an unstable and shifting thing, as I discovered in the autobiographical narratives. I did not have in mind to freeze the identity of the migrants. Listening to their desires, hopes and expectations, I wished to catch the energy sparked by the encounters in their welcoming countries, and discover their propensity to share new realities and hopes and unknown wealth.

Some of my photo sessions were enriched by my artistic performance of « skin goldening » - which I introduced in December 2006 in India during my contact with the called « untouchable » populations, which is the way I am stressing the goldness of existence.

These photographs are poly-semantic if they are viewed in keeping in mind the accompanying text, or if you look at them blankly, they are viewed as the images of the histories of life.

Here, the Afghan Sadegh with his golden hands in a state of pure meditation skilled in the finest Italian pastry making. Is this not a wonderful blending of culture?

Here, Gessica from Perù a cleaning woman, expecting a brighter future, feeling close acquaintance with the sensual, joyful, peppy Italian youths playing in Torino's main piazza's fountain.

Here, Ouail from Morocco, referee in Torino's suburbs, mixing extreme right and extreme left youths with keeping end of ideological conflicts and violence in mind.

Aphrodita-Areta cartographer from Romania, angry at Romanian biases, anti-tzigane « clichés », showing her studious face and her thirst for culture.

Here also Josè, Péru, and Murat, Turkey. I took them to a Torino exhibition of historical pictures, posing in front and in solidarity with South Italian migrants working in North Italian manufactures.

And Josè alias Arturo, thousand trades clandestine and intellectual praying to have his face goldened, in mention of Italian Antonio Raimondi "Perou the beggar on the Golden Bench..."

Here, Sarah the Somalian, black Muslim Madona fluent in four European Languages and her Mauritanian husband Samba nursing their children at home.

And, last but not least, Fatiha of Kabylia on the Rhine footbridge – between France and Germany, feeling a free woman, and dancing this freezy cold day in Alsace...

Laura Martin, Strasbourg, France,
November 2007