

There are two persistent and recurrent inspirations in the work of Jana Kasalová, to which this Czech visual artist returns: maps and animals.

At first it seems there hardly could be two such mutually distant sources for the imagination. Maps are sophisticated human artifacts offering a sum of ready information, flush with facts and metaphors. They reassure people: with me you'll know what to do, I will not betray you, you will see. Animals, "faceless" of man to change refers to his dark instinctive, pre-rational past - which, as man believes, thanks to his thinking, culture, etc. Overcame with a long sigh of relief. That's how things stood, and as they were written in books by honorable citizens, historic optimists, who wrote and read around the world before the emergence of Communism and Nazism. Later, in concentration camps and gas chambers, many historical optimists learnt firsthand about his theories of truth. Ever since the relationship between man and beast has been a controversy that is hard to consider resolved.

As with maps so history. Many believe that maps capture the real picture of the world, just as historians also consider that they faithfully reconstruct what once was (they 'find' the correct history, stored somewhere in the archives). Both opinions are in danger of resembling prejudice. How can maps capture reality, when from the moment they appear, the details captured on them are out of date? What use was a map depicting Atlantis after the mythical empire sank? But most importantly: who understands maps better – he who solves all the distances and scales perfectly, or the one who pines over remote regions so intensely that he sees them in his mind's eye? Maps, those seemingly super-rational artifacts, depend most of all on the human imagination for their interpretation. Even to the degree that Judith Schalansky, author of the 'Atlas of Remote Islands', cites cartography as a kind of poetry, and recommends reading a geographic atlas as a kind of fiction.

The world of maps and world of animals at one point overlapped. "Here lions abound," was written on old engravings everywhere where ancient cartographic limits had parts were supposed to be drawn, but could not be imagined. Wherever reason was unable to serve, there it somehow reminded itself of the existence of the original, pre-rational world. It seems the ancients did not forget what their descendants in many further generations denied: that cultural layers cannot disguise the essence of beings that before they learned to read, write and love looked somewhat less commendable..

A few authors of modern times would have been aware of it. In the novella *Lady into Fox* the British author David Garnett described the transformation of a young and beautiful woman into an animal and the turbulent ups and downs this caused. In the novel *Unnatural Animals* the French writer Vercors rejects the human sense of superiority over nature in a way that still fascinates today, after more than half a century. And another Brit, William Golding, in his novel *Lord of the Flies*, perfected the final break with man's illusion about himself: according to Golding inside we are all predators at heart, such as we were before we started making art, growing crops and building houses.

Most books dealing with the terms of the animal and human world sound a passionate condemnation of the prejudices of the human world. However the journey to uncover these layers do make sense even without a moralistic outcome, actually all the more. The work of Jana Kasalová is a good example of this.

Maps always attracted her: as a distinctive and beautifully formalised way to document, via which society releases a report about itself. However even Jana Kasalová was unsettled by

the overt superficiality of their contents. Like Sigmund Freud, who perceived the possible unconscious projection of the painter's imagination in Leonardo's portrait of the Madonna with Jesus and St. Anne (and, by extension, the whole of his psychopathology), Jana Kasalová also found, in her earlier series of drawings *Tabulae Terrae*, that something else can be read from maps via artistic transubstantiation. Previously invisible and hidden animal beings, also dark and mysterious, like the fantastic beasts of ancient and Mannerist maps and bestiaries suddenly seem to peek from portraits of landscapes.

She found that even the seemingly most factual human artefact can conceal a decipherable message about the irrational side of reality. A side about which the original creator (the "cartographer") had no idea that he has also inscribed on the "maps". But it happened: a new creator arrived and interpreted this message from the original work.

There is one historical theme in the Czech lands today that is more controversial than any other topic. This is the memory of the expulsion of three and a half million Sudeten Germans in 1945-1946. The way in which collective guilt was applied in the Czech Republic then, and the political and economic consequences that it led to, prevents many people from reflecting on it to this day. The result of this displacement is a sort of widely-shared state of mind that is a considerable factor in the Czech nation's collective neurosis. It is not surprising that an author capable of uncovering the "hidden" and "irrational" in "obvious" and "reasonable" is able to open up an interesting field of activity here.

Thus both of the past angles now came joined together. When she began obsessively studying all the names of these former German villages eradicated after 1945, she was surprised to realise how often these original names were inspired by the animal world. Someone somewhere once, centuries ago, met a deer, wolf or fox in the forest and the place name came from the memory of this meeting. After the demise of the village that bore this name, only the name was left to clog the map.

Jana Kasalová started working with today's map of the Czech-German border: she blackens the town names in them and takes them to logical conclusion of the *ad absurdum* process begun in 1945. As a result of all these radical negations contours and structures unknown till now rise again from the maps. Just as the artist once unexpectedly revealed hidden animals in the landscapes of maps, now from the newly transubstantiated maps arise contents that could barely have appeared other than in this supremely artistic way.

From today's perspective, the old maps of the Czech-German border lie. Anyone who wanted to drive with them, would not reach their destination. However just as a detail on the map does not refer only to the view of reality, so for Jana Kasalová historical information does not move in only one direction, politically, from the past to us. Just as a map, a seemingly stringent artefact, may become a haunting metaphor, so it is possible to 'read' history so that it does not follow only one imaginary "chronological" time, but so that all instants carry through and all times then "flow" together. The old guilt is not forgotten. But the artistic statement, which is born of it, is not limited by it.

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