

katarina šoškić
rb-61/120
-excerpts from a book

Katarina Šoškić is a student of graphic design at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. "rb-61/120" was her diploma project on the College of Fine and Applied arts in Belgrade which she made in summer of last year.

From 10th to 23rd of May, 2009, Katarina will present this work at Bildetage gallery, Barichgasse 6, 1030 Wien, www.bildetage.com

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I live in the 61 Rifata Burdzevica street, in Belgrade, Zvezdara.
My building is a 14 stories high tower block with one hundred and twenty apartments.
It is in the middle of a field, on the verge of a forest.
Its facades are free, its not attached to any other building.

One night I was possessed by an idea, it seemed like one of those really impossible to excersice, but strong enough to keep me awake. It grew onto an earlier one, conceived in a trolley-bus. About horizon and windows. About man's destiny to always look at the same picture, through a given frame. About society, architecture. About things that are there, because man made them for himself that later turn out to be a bit of a trap.
Maybe he could emerge it, but mostly he chooses to stay, comfortable.
Looking through his one window.
His whole life, one identical picture.

*Imagine if you could see all those pictures.
Imagine, Katarina, if you could enter all of those apartments, to capture the sight.*

Jovana was amazed by this metaphore. According to her, that was the difference between a person that was given the ability to be an artists and the one who wasn't. She says, that someone else said, that this is the role and the purpose of an artist – the ability to place himself into other people's situations, his chance to see more, he is the one that can disfigure everyday life. The art theory is dead serious about it, but pop cultures offers numerous examples alike mine, too. But for me, it was still only a bunch of pretty pictures. I have this camera of mine, that I never let go off, it always gives me good photos, that's the kind of mechanic it has, the picture always looks like a dream. I would like to see this lot of very same and very different pictures. To lay them out and see what happens.

At first, I was obsessed with the idea (it appeared to be a banal one at the time, but that made me want to put it into action even more) – the metaphore about the angle of perception, about pointing out the different positions of looking. Then, I found it interesting to look at it as a technical mission. Like a problem to be solved. Like a bit of an impossible task that I give myself just to see how I manage, in order to be satisfied in the end, because I could touch the result.

I would picture myself in other people's flats, which would be a little creepy in the middle of the night. One hundred apartments is in fact a lot of different people in one place. At first I thought I'd like to have every tenant let me in and have me take a picture of the view from their favourite window, but then I wondered if I, myself, would let someone fiddle around my house, just like that. I realized it would be much better to put my position into a uniform to make the comparison of the photos easier. And decided to take a photo from the balcony of each flat. Later on, it turned out that some of the tenants would take me to a window they preferred so I could capture those sights, too.

I chose to use Lomo LCA analogue 'idiot' camera, I figured how many Fuji Provide 100asa slide films I would need and decided to develop them in a different process to what is normally done in order to achieve more intense colours.

It was clear I had to keep a serious record of what I was doing so that I didn't have to ring the same door twice.

I kept imagining the result would be some kind of a geometric net of a square, as the idea was a mathematical illustration of the fact that everyone sees the same thing differently. I thought that this was what I wanted to show.

On November the 28th, 2007 I sent a letter to all of my neighbours notifying them of my intentions and shortly after started the tour. Unfortunately, I wasn't very neat about noting all the important dates, but I do know that my first flat viewing was on December the 5th. I started off with the 14th floor, my floor, the last floor, making my way down.

I rang 75 doors. 29 people answered. I was rejected by 3 of them. The rest I didn't find home.

In my first viewing I used the entire film.

In some of the apartments I took a few shoots, but not off the balcony – there were some other things that attracted my attention. I tried to go by unnoticed while taking them, so even though they're not sharp or well composed you will find them in this book. They ended up being a good illustration of what really happened. The project I started didn't become a sterile report of different views on the world, but a very intimate insight of different people's realities.

It was one headspinning experience.

Within 2 hours I entered 30 apartments.

I felt a headache all through the day, as well as any other day when I would tell someone about my impressions. There were many events that could be told as a story, but for the most part, it was the smells, colours and habits that took over. People in their micro-spaces and their marks in the wallpapers, dinners, wall paintings.

I was amused by imagining the tower block without its inner walls. Just thousands of rows of order and mess, so close to one another, things piled up, a massive chaos with an inner well trained logic.

So many objects, so many rituals.

And in the end, a collection of invisible things that fly in the air, giving the personal space its basic tone.

On one hand, I had to take care of the light, part of the day, precisely writing down the flat and shot numbers; whereas on the other hand I had to notice small rules in my neighbours' daily rhythm. The fact that these people were my neighbours only made the communication part easier, seen as the situations that were occurring would be the same in any other tower block.

The amount of time it takes to walk from the hall, through the kitchen and reach the balcony is enough for me, the stranger, to get the feel for the atmosphere. Not in the sense that it was significant to understanding the family who's home I was entering, as I wasn't interested in that, but as an example of the multitude I wanted to show.

It resulted in pictures that were both sufficiently different and alike to point out the number of possibilities, but it also gave me a much clearer impression of these viewers' positions. There's a public impression, given through this collection of photographs for everyone to interpretate, and then there's my personal impression, the one I got while meeting people who's points of view I was borrowing for this occasion.

It was a moving journey. Through others' corners.

The solitude and loneliness of the old and ill. The busyness and elusiveness of the young and employed. The different comprehension of mess and order. The remains of the past and died out fashion. The facing of my fears and fears of others'.

Memories, smells, colours. Superficial conversations that seemed to have given depth to my work. I had no plans of writing down the invisible things, but only the ones obvious to anyone who would step onto the balcony. The fact I managed to gather both makes me happy, even though my final work might not show it very clearly.

Out of 120 apartments, throughout 6 tours, I never found anyone in 10 of them, and 9 residents wouldn't let me take the pictures.

The format of the book was shaped by my stand that each right-hand page, with a photo of the view from particular flat, should be juxtaposed with section of horizontal row and vertical column marking its position on the left on the left hand page.

This way, every blown up view from the balcony can be compared to the ones surrounding it. I found this possibility of comparison more important than my original thought that the book should be of more subtle format.

I divided the book into 15 chapters which are introduced by "accidental" photographs, made along time way and lines cut out from my modest notes of impressions. Underneath each selected photo of the view you will find data about the apartment, floor and cardinal point of the balcony. As for the people who wouldn't let me in, instead of the balcony view, I took the picture of their peephole and the door bell for the ones who were never home. Both of these are represented with a white cross on the left sides of the book. I'm also contributing a poster that shows all of my tower blocks' balcony views in one place.

Belgrade, 2008.