

Apocalypse and catastrophes - are subjects that are quite frequent for contemporary arts, as long as the very "modernity" of XX and XXI centuries arts claims to be its symbolic end. New tendencies were called not only to cross out the previous ones but also to look ahead the future how to generate or even design it. However, in the beginning of XXI century it seems to be more relevant to make some excursions in the past, psychotherapeutic, philosophic and political because the future is still covered with darkness but past is spread out between the concentration camps, the gulag, terrorist attacks all over the world and also man made disasters, the worst of which is considered to be the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in April 1986.

The events such as these fill us with such horror that seem to us incomprehensible. The enemy in this case is invisible and intangible - radiation, and its effect is stretched for centuries. Svetlana Alexievich, the author of documentary book "Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster" (1997), calls Chernobyl "the time catastrophe". She also writes about the moment of Silence and the man shocked about new reality faced by humanity after Chernobyl. She puts this tragedy in one line with already known "incomprehensible" mass extermination of people, even though she highlights: "Chernobyl beyond Auschwitz and Kolyma...".

Giorgio Agamben in his book "HOMO SACER" claims that facing such tragedies "...you just want to bow the head as if it was in front of God."

As a result it appears as an "unconscious need to justify the death", which is actually senseless.

Agamben's compatriot, the Italian artist Maria Assunta Karini, comes to the problem through the stories of real witnesses collected by Alexievich. Maria, same as the Belarusian writer, does not stop on the level of awareness of the incomprehensibility of of this phenomenon.

The witnesses of "Chernobyl Prayer" were telling "new texts", where they repeated words like "first ever", "nevermore" and "forever". They were talking about the life "after all", the life without a man. They were looking for some language, new lexicon. Karini finds the visual images for that "language of catastrophe". Some of the stories on the Karini's photos are quite representative (for example in the work "Stem of the Black Glass" where a girl is hiding from radiation in the fridge while the landscapes refer to the recognized zones of alienation). The photos and sculptures of the artist are more like symptoms of how contemporary art works with the catastrophes then the addition to Alexievich book. Catastrophic perception of the world that is close to the baroque stereotypes, embodied in the imagery, almost to the literary, where a disaster becomes a symbol. Chernobyl is a symbol of how man is helpless in front of the nature, of the science and technology crash. In some artworks that refer to "Chernobyl Prayer" Karini includes "Hibakusha" series that links us to the Japan's tragedy ("hibakusha" means "people who experienced the effects of the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945"). For the artist it means connecting both catastrophes; however, one of them happened because of the war. Thus in the mass consciousness the war and catastrophe blend because it all leads to the same

experience of mass humiliation. All the witnesses claim the same experience of what is impossible to survive.

Karini, using traditional medium, refers to the tradition of memorial sculpture, monuments to the victims or heroes. In installations and performances of the artist these two, usually separated, subjects are crossing and the function of pedestal moves from only functional (to associate the object with the surrounding and the audience) to informative. For example, in the “*Sindone que corpus induit et vestigia eius servavit*” installation the pommel horse acquires features of some machine where a man is trying in vain to save his life. The machine here also looks like a little human (in order to have its life saved). In a catastrophe situation, as witnesses claim, the machines stop but at the same time people, the very bodies are still functioning trying to fight. It highlights the strength of a man as a biological species and the heroism of the rescuers. At the same time the human body changes, mutates, needs “new clothes”. Quite often there are some gears like “clutches” that recall surrealistic objects by their form. It could substitute unprotected hands of the people who were cleaning blockages near the reactor.

Very heavy iron shoes in the project “Hibakusha” made like Japanese geta sandals, create a distance between man and contaminated soil. “New human inhuman business - burying soil in the soil, “- Alekseevich writes about the practice of burying infected ground formations in concrete bunkers.

Shoes equipped with silk stripes with handwritten DNA formulas modified by ionizing radiations. In the other projects the artist uses mixture of ciprofloxacin and synthetic human protein BPI, that doctors use for radiation disease treatment.

Still, the shoes in “Hibakusha” remind of the very atomic reactors in their form. Women who wear such shoes are tied to the source of their pain but at the same time they stand on it. Their pedestal fixes these women in such a role.

This shoes refer to the wives of the dead liquidators so expressively presented in the book, because they are the only ones left as witnesses of deaths of real bystanders - the rescuers who died.

The “true” witnesses, by Agamben, are the people who did not witness and could not do it because they are already dead, The silence of such figures is effectively presented as ground meat in plastic bags that is gently holded by three ladies - post-apocalyptic Graces. There are decaying bodies of their irradiated husbands and their unborn children, and children who was born with pathologies that are incompatible with life, those who will no longer claim their witness about this accident and its consequences.

In Karini’s work the heroes are women who remained to live with the knowledge of how Chernobyl's victims died. Almost completely naked they stand with no move no participation, showing the nudity of their witness and helplessness. Their white off size underwear refers to hospital or funeral clothes. Dead bodies could be dressed off size, as one of witnesses explained how she tried to put on shoes on her dead husband-rescuer whose body was bloated of the radiation sickness. The obvious reference of “Hibakusha” series to Vanessa Beecroft’s performances helps us to understand this work as silent expectation of the Day of Judgement as it was interpreted by Agamben.

This expectation is consciously theatrical, it is displayed on the stage so the disaster would be lived through again and overcome. The victims should get a chance to tell about their sufferings and documentary literature helps in it. Their experience must be admitted and it needs its language, it should be actual and represented - that is a task of art.

In art pieces provided by Karini images of catastrophes, which we are quite familiar with because of mass media, become the subject of contemplation and emotions again. They speak to us about human body and the possibilities of life “after everything” again.

Ilmira Bolotyan