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Report on museological practices in a country at war

Témoignage sur les pratiques muséologiques dans un pays en guerre

We are always speaking about former Yugoslavia but the fact is that Croatia and Slovenia have been recognized states now for more than two years and are part of the United Nations. Speaking of that area, I would like to give some extraordinary examples to you.

The main topic of today's discussion is to commemorate or to inform. From my point of view, wars of the 90's cannot be commemorated. We have looked war in the face and so try to make an exhibition as part of our professional work. In my museum, the City museum in Zagreb, after bombing on 9th October 1991, we presented an exhibition on this event, only ten days after it happened. We used artifacts made during the bombing, that is the photos taken during the bombing of the city and the central attack on the Residential Palace which was full of objects of very historical importance. We tried to combine all that had been destroyed, the photos taken at the moment of the bombing and also used children's tapes which recorded the sounds of the bombing. We tried to collect things from the people living in the neighbourhood, parts of their home furnishings, books, private photographs of a close connection with someone or some family. This was to inform. We feel that this was our professional task.

The other exhibition we made was an artistic one, a famous cartoonist who lives in Zagreb made a series of sketches of these awful events in Zagreb and other parts of Croatia. If you have a good artistic ability, the standard is of course high. The cartoons had a taste of humour, satirism and irony. All the thoughts of someone not directly involved in the war, that is not a soldier. This was his way of expressing what had happened. The exhibition has been shown at the City museum in Vienna.

● COMMÉMORER OU INFORMER ?

The other museum in Zagreb, the National Museum of Croatia, also prepared an exhibition but from a different approach. From the very beginning of the war its curators organized a collection of items connected with war and in the exhibition they exposed these objects : political posters, artistic posters, small things belonging to soldiers, Christian crosses... Something to identify them with the big family which, in this case, was struggling for survival. These are our recent experiences of exhibitions up until now. Museums and War, Museums in War.

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