

LATITUDE-LONGITUDE: DIEGO ESPOSITO'S NEW WORLD MAP

Dreams and phantoms are
Shades of the world
And the incorporeal world
Is the struggle of mine.

A.M. Dobrolyubov,
From the Invisible Book.
Moscow, 1905

Traveling is the ongoing state of Diego Esposito, who is always on his way, even if he doesn't move anywhere, for his territory is intangible. This is the incorporeal kingdom of soul, spirit and senses — the idea he expressed as early as in 1975, when he created a huge map, with only two axes, latitude and longitude, outlined on it. It is in these coordinates he is seeking for the place Greek philosophers used to call «epistrophe», the place, where there is no room for mundaneness, accidental events, but everything is filled in with meaning. Rejecting conventional categories of time and space the artist recreates the image of the non-physical world thus witnessing its existence. Thus, latitude longitude is a junction of two terranean coordinate axes needed by those, who want to determine their position on this invisible map.

During the long way he started as early as in 2001, Diego Esposito has been traveling and finding these points on the earth surface, and these are the points where he «finds himself», where his self-identification occurs. The foundation of this art project was laid in the Italian ground, in Prato, where, in the Centro per l'arte contemporanea Luigi Pecci the first milestone for this point appeared. The project has been continued in quite unusual places on the map of our planet: these are Shanghai (China), Cordoba (Argentina), Lima (Peru), a Buddhist monastery in Koya (Japan), Marseille (France), Cini Gardens in Venice (Italy) and Teramo (Italy), where our artist was born. And, finally, Zuratkul National Park in the Southern Urals, near Satka, where in autumn 2018, the ninth arrangement appeared, marking the coordinates on the map of the secret world Esposito is the guide to.

According to the artist: *«Traveling is not only an ideal state of the soul, but also the event encurling fibers of the cultural dialogue that makes us address universal values. All my sculptures performed out of local stone in different parts of our planet include a dome-shaped steel disk — oculus, an eye installed in the upper part of the stone slab— witnessing the never-ending dialogue between the Earth and the Heavens».*

The master does not find the very, metaphysical, point of junction of latitude and longitude right away — he has to «get a feeling» of the area, to understand it as the shaman does engaging in the dialogue with the spirits that live here speaking to the Genius Loci itself. This is the reason why the artist performs his ritual walking a long distance to the place where the sculpture will be erected.

This was also the case with the ninth installation created not far from Satka in the Southern Urals. As signor Esposito narrates: *«After the long journey through the taiga and mountains, I arrived to Zuratkul National Park in the enchanting silence of the night time.*

In the fresh of the next day, the Zuratkul mountain, sacred since the Neolithic age, has revealed all of its grandeur re-

flected in the water of the ancient lake. I was impressed and attracted by the light it radiated, and felt the inexpugnable desire to approach it, so I went until I reached the bottom of the mountain. I stopped to contemplate it. But to climb up the slope I would have to overcome the obstacle: to pass through the thick forest. If you wish to see the Zuratkul mountain, you will have to approach it with reverence.

During the next days, its image was present all the time, until the Holy Mountain became a part of me, and I «became» the Zuratkul mountain. I felt I had experienced regeneration. Since that moment, everything around me seemed to be close and even familiar, as if I had been here before.

It is then, having spent several days in Satka looking for the stones I could use for my work, I have discovered magnesite blocks. This is how I started.»

Diego Esposito is one of the recognized maitres of the modern Italian sculpture, who prefers to work with the dense steady mass of the stone. He was born in 1940 in the town of Teramo lost in the mountains of Abruzzo known for its deep ancient traditions of statuary art. Signor Esposito is professor of the Milano's Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera sharing his creative life between two cultural capitals of Italy — Milano and Venice.

Since his studentship, the artist was attracted by the ancient cultures that divinised and worshiped the stone — unique nature-made objects of unusual forms. Starting for Russia, the Urals, the sculptor was completely unaware of how rich with ancient megaliths the Ural ground was: these are not only table stones of the Turgoyak lake, but also unique cup-shaped stones in the Moskal chain. In high antiquity, people milestone holy places with the cup-shaped hollow carved in stone that collected rain water bearing resemblance to the convex lens. These amazing cup-shaped hollows were perceived as the threshold to another world, within confines of which only the devoted could look into. Cup-shaped stones also resemble the eye, oculus staring upward to the heavens, other worlds, to the past and the future: this pattern seems to witness animativeness, spirituality of the mountain, rock or stone.

The Southern Urals are well known to be rich in ancientries quite comparable with the famous British Stonehenge: as a rule, these are megaliths created out of huge stones in the Bronze and Early Iron Era (that is, II — I millennia B.C.). They include menhirs — vertically erected stones sometimes decorated with cuts and ornament, and sometimes acquiring anthropomorphous silhouettes. Menhirs are the first experience of monumental sculpture, resemblance of idols, graven images of gods and heroes. Besides, megaliths also include table stones — stone boxes made of large plates; as a rule, these are burial or memorial constructions, and the best example can be found in the Vera Island of Turgoyak lake. Table stones illustrate the first steps of the monumental architecture, they are coevals of the Pyramids. Other type of the memorial and hieratic objects are seitas — gigantic boulders raised slightly above the ground on small foot stones that can also be often found in the Urals. All these ancient constructions tincture epic tone to the landscape, so «Hero's Grave», the picture of Caspar David Friedrich, a famous German Romantic artist (1820) or

Nicholas Roerich's opera sketch «Stow» (1912) occur to you unwillingly.

Besides, the Southern Urals opened another archeological revelation to the world — «circular cities» of the Sintashta Arkaim culture (end of III — beginning of II millennia B.C) with their radial planning resembling the solar sign looking upward to the heavens.

In other cases large stones were used to make up huge images visible from a long distance and even from the air: these are geoglyphs, one of which — Moose, the only geoglyph in our country situated on the slope of Zuratkul mountain — was reflected by the lake waters near the mountain foot in the ancient times. This amazing artifact means that this is the sacral place in front of us, a gigantic ancient sanctuary, with the Holy Mountain in the heart of it.

The environment created by Esposito in the Zuratkul National Park is of elliptical form that resembles the sacral cromlech — semblance to Stonehenge. It consists of eight magnesite blocks, one of which, the larger one, is distinguished with the dome-shaped oculus made of stainless steel that always reflects the sky and revolution of the seasons in different hours of day and night: it becomes red during sunset, gets pink at dawn, and greyish — under thunder clouds, it radiates illusive shine of the moonlight at night, and is covered by dew... The eight stones resemble the constellation invisibly related with the Zuratkul Mountain. Esposito seems to bring to life the long-lost mystic sense of the ancient megaliths that connected the earth and heavens, the world of people and divine universe.

Deliberating on his work in the Urals mountains, the artist explains his idea to us: «*For me, Latitude Longitude sculpture covers the en*

tire Satka's territory. It's not only what I've seen, but also what I've felt. Not only vision, but also the experience. Every place in the world has its own sound. I wish one could join the work of art through dancing. A visitor should blend into what is not just a sculpture, but a musical score. I hope I will be able to reveal the poetry hidden in any of us and deliver it to other people on Earth. I imagine not only earthy, but also cosmic brotherhood. This is the message I would like to deliver in my work.»

The sculptor divinifies nature, and its elements, he tracing history of the Creation in huge stone slabs. Working with the stone like the ancient masters — he partially leaves its surface untouched preserving character and texture of the material.

Besides, Esposito's stones manifest his long spiritual way as if expressing ideas of other «pilgrims» — A. M. Dobrolyubov (1876 — 1945), the Russian Symbolist and mystic poet, discusser of L. N. Tolstoy and adherent of the Esoteric Buddhism, who rejected common lifestyle and chose the Way as his home, and Bruce Chatwin (1940 — 1989), the British writer, with his apology of wander and spiritual quest. According to Chatwin, «The real home of the person is not a house, but the Road, and the life itself is a journey you have to walk». Chatwin, who had travelled all over Russia much and even collected the Russian icon paintings appears to hand the baton over to maitre Esposito. Through eliminating the borders our sculptor creates the invisible map dotting coordinates of the way on it, the Road Tolstoy, and Dobrolyubov, and Chatwin meditated upon.

Esposito seems to be universal in his ideas intrinsic to both extremely ancient culture of the Ural peoples, and the European philosophical tradition manifested through the art

of Italian Renaissance in works of such artists as Mantegna used to be. Frescos of the dome of the Camera degli Sposi created by Mantegna in Mantua Palazzo Ducale express the idea that leads back to the roman Pantheon. The temple built as early as in the II century BC by architect Apollodorus of Damascus upon the order of emperor Hadrian, according to the idea of the customer, who was fond of astronomy and astrology, is the rotunda overlapped by the dome. The temple is devoted to all gods, who lived in the starry heaven: here, the image of the heavenly sphere is manifested through the perfect spherical composition that embraces the perfect sphere. The building without windows has the only source of light — a round oculus aperture, «the eye», connecting the worlds with the ray of light.

Traveling to Japan led Esposito to the one of the most mystical sacral religious places — a complex of Koya Buddhist monasteries established in 819 and situated on the holy mountain. Here he finds another important junction of the longitude and latitude contrary to the rules of classical map-making, for, according to the Esoteric Buddhism, study of Kookay monk (who founded the first monastery here), it cannot be read or seen, but must be perceived through mediation. One of Esposito's turns a large stone into a uncritical «eye», searching for spiritual revelation. The installation has become not only the work of art, but also a sacral object that was blessed by the fraternity of the monastery through the occult ceremonies.

Following the ancient philosophical tradition above the artist fully denies narration and formal questing finding a special magic power in art that is capable of showing what cannot be seen. According to his opinion, everyone, who is searching for the Way, must learn to «see» breaking the wall of day-to-dayness instead of «looking» unadvanced. Thus, the arrangement of eight stones in Satka exists in a certain context, embracing the gigantic space: this is how the Zuratkul mountain, the lake, the ancient geoglyph, endless taiga and the artwork unite in Esposito's spiritual message.

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