

IKONA GALLERY

Campo del Ghetto Nuovo, Cannaregio 2909 – Venezia

EXHIBITION

Still Lives. Portraits from Oswieçim
Photographs by **SIMONE MANGOS**

OPENING

Ikona Venezia
Campo del Ghetto Nuovo, Cannaregio 2909

DATES

Thursday, 27 January from 6pm

GALLERY HOURS

27 January – 22 March 2009

from 11am to 7pm – Saturday closed



Simone MANGOS

Simone Mangos grew up in Australia. She trained as a concert pianist and later as a sculptor and installation artist. She began to live in Berlin from 1988 following a DAAD and Australia council Artist in Residency Grant. Mangos has exhibited extensively in Europe, Australia and also the USA. Her recent solo show at the Museum für Fotografie in Berlin 2007 was accompanied by the publication of her doctoral dissertation on the National Holocaust Memorial in Berlin.

Still Lives. Portraits from Oswieçim

An exhibition of photography and video

Andrzej Janczukowski runs a photography shop. He specializes in wedding ceremonies, but he will also make your passport portrait. The walls of his shop are covered with decades of ceremonies, serious sitters together with a hundred packets of tea, which are also on sale at his premises. Andrzej's family of photographers have been living in Oswiecim for some 150 years.

Jadwiga Kubica prepares meals at the Inka Bar, the cheap diner where the locals get their cabbage soup for a modest sum of zlotys. Jadwiga has been preparing soup for more than half a century. Before that she was in a German concentration camp.

The nineteen year old, Evelina, who bears a skull and cross-bones stretched across her breasts, works at the Pizza Hit in the main square. A large block of concrete from socialist times dominates the centre of the square, which before the arrival of the Germans was adorned by a fountain.

Janusz Marszalek is the city mayor. As there isn't too much industry in and around his town, he has decided that tourism is going to be his main future target. But who are the tourists who would visit a town bearing this terrible name?

Simone Mangos didn't come to Oswiecim as a tourist. She wanted to get a glimpse of ordinary life, of citizens going about their daily routines, of common people who all happen to be born and live in the town that has become synonymous with industrialized mass murder.

In November 2008, Mangos travelled to Oswiecim. In her pocket she carried a card explaining in Polish that she wanted to make a portrait of Oswiecim and its inhabitants. At first she noticed that many people, especially the elder generation, shunned the idea. Then she discovered that many younger people would immediately pose as if they had been selected for a fashion magazine. All wrong: Mangos wanted to make a registration of what Oswiecim really looks like – knowing that only the immediacy of photography would bring that across.

Arriving at Auschwitz one feels at a loss. The first discovery is that it is in fact called Oswiecim – it has a Polish name. One observes the local people operating the banks surrounding the town square, running hamburger bars, hairdressing salons or selling cars – yet every aspect seems unreal. It is almost impossible to reconcile the ordinariness of everyday life there, with the monstrous extraordinariness of the place. It is as if those who live there are not of this earth.

Mangos is interested in the friction between authentic experience of historical events, which for one person forms a tragically unforgettable part of themselves, and the gradual oblivion of the very same historical events for those others who did not experience them, or for whom they are impossible to imagine at all.

Still Lives was created by Mangos in response to an invitation by Ikona Gallery Venice to produce a work at the former and very first Jewish Ghetto on the occasion of the 63rd anniversary of the arrival of Soviet troops at Auschwitz.