

## **Presence through Absence: The series *Invisible People* (2016) by Eva Borner**

A portrait of a beautiful young woman in perfect light, black and white photography. The radiant rainbow colours of a graffiti. If there was not the disturbing surrounding, you'd imagine a private, spartan bedroom: A mattress on pallets. A curtain. Very few personal items as a pillow and a small, self-made "table". Someone sprayed "Athens is the new Berlin" at the wall. Not only the graffiti and the portrait, another picture-in-the-picture appears: A religious ikon, surrounded by a golden aureola. Two doormats remind of a former flat and the will to keep up some form of normality.

As a volunteer for helping newly arrived refugees in Athens, Swiss artist Eva Borner came to Athens in the year 2016. Then, very quickly, something else caught her attention: She became aware of the many homeless people in the Greek capital. In the current economic situation since 2008, if people lose their job, they have around three months to find a new one. Otherwise, they often very quickly lose their apartment, too. They become homeless. From there, it's nearly impossible, to find a way back. They become outcasts. And there are a lot. Everywhere Borner saw sceneries of personal tragedy and loss. Borner got in touch with the street paper "Schedia" and received her informations from them. Additionally, a homeless news vendor guided her through "his" Athens. So, Borner received deep impressions from their daily life on the streets.

In contemporary and modern art, many artists dealt with the subject of waifs. Duane Hanson, for example, adopted in his artworks *Bowery Derelicts* (1969) or *Homeless Person* (1991) the complete opposite path by placing the individual, body and face, in the very centre. On the other side, German figurative painter Tim Eitel took unnoticed photos from street persons in Los Angeles and then painted these people afterwards in his studio.

Borner's photographs are special and unique mainly by two characteristics: Firstly, she never pictures the protagonist or victim. The defined programmatic presence through absence gives even more suggestive power to the images. Through this step, Borner empowers the viewer – to imagine, how the person living in this environment may look. Or, how it feels, to live in such circumstances. Or, how it would be to live like this. All the parts of Borner's series *Invisible People* produce empathy through the viewers gaze. Secondly, Borner always asks the inhabitants for permission. This profoundly ethical attitude leads even so far, that she does not want to personally profit from income through sales of these pictures. Therefore, she gives the revenue back to the individual depicted derelict. And the belief in human, ethical values in a neoconservative society. And self-confidence. And energy.

© Sara Tröster Klemm, Basel/Leipzig 2017