

100% FOREIGN? - 100 stories in photo and text from 100 former refugees **Exhibition 30 June - 27 July 2017 at the Copenhagen City Hall**

Copenhagen City Hall is turned into a living archive with 100 stories, 100 photos and 100 voices with and from 100 citizens who have one thing in common – they are all former refugees.

For the month of July, this unusual exhibition is a reaction to counter the on-going debate on the “refugee” issue, which like many other places in Europe exploded some 18 months ago, when the country experienced lines of Syrian refugees along motorways heading for the Swedish border.

The discourse is about numbers and allocations between European countries and between cities in Denmark, consequently leading to debates on the protection of national identity, the fear of being overrun by refugees, problems with integration, and threats to the survival of the welfare state.

Metropolis / Copenhagen International Theatre has for 35 years worked to engage Danish society in a positive dialogue with both European and non-European arts and culture. 100% Foreign? is launched to turn the tables around and give voice to these citizens who are former refugees. Based on a statistical analysis of the 160,000 people who have been given asylum in Denmark since 1956, 100 former refugees have been invited to participate.

A LIVING ARCHIVE

“The participants are of course different. Their backgrounds, their situations, their dreams and the issues they have to deal with differ. They have one thing in common though - they all came to Denmark by chance and many of them not by choice”, says social anthropologist Mette Katrine Balle Jensen, who worked on finding the participants and interviewing them.

Copenhagen’s City Archive is including the material from the exhibition in a “living archive”, which will be continually updated. This is the first of its kind in Denmark as no previous documentation exists covering the history of this sizable and unique “community” of former refugees. The hidden stories of how these people have started a new life have never formally been documented. Their history is the history of how Copenhagen has been part of a global change.

THE INDIVIDUALS BEHIND THE STATISTICS

Based on statistics from the Danish Statistical Office since 1956, the 100 participants reflect the “flow” of refugees from 29 countries over the past 60 years, selected on criteria of country of origin, gender and year of arrival.

Since the UN passed the 1951 Refugee Convention, almost all states now accept responsibility for refugees – people forced to flee due to war, civil war, armed conflicts, political persecution, natural and climate generated catastrophes, etc. Since then, some 160,000 refugees and their families have been granted asylum in Denmark.

The oldest participant of 100% Foreign? is now 79 and came to Denmark as one of the first refugees from Hungary as a result of the Soviet invasion in 1956, and the most recent arrived from Syria in 2016. Participants are selected in proportion to the numbers from the individual countries, e.g. 14% are from Iraq, 11% from Afghanistan and Syria, 7% from Somalia and Iran, but refugees from e.g. Hungary, China, Burundi and Chile are also represented to exemplify the flow of people dictated by world events.

“100% Foreign? turns things around to start with the individuals and the families who are often in a void; the people who relocate and have to create new lives in uncertain conditions and in constant renegotiation between here and there and between now and then and the future”, says Trevor Davies, co-director of Copenhagen International Theatre.

REFUGEES IN TIVOLI

Art historian Maja Nydal Eriksen is the initiator and photographer of the project.

“The participants encouraged me not to take their photos in their homes or in the street, as so many others have been portrayed. So I tried a more unusual approach – to use the famous Tivoli gardens and fun fair as the setting. Tivoli is a national symbol of fun and freedom located just opposite the Town Hall – also a national symbol. These two constructed realities represent the political/real world and the unreal world of fantasy, fun and escapism. Tivoli was also the place where, at the start of the 20th century, one presented exotic people from Africa and Asia.

The photos escape the stereotype social realism, which keeps the issue of refugees in a limited context and portrays them as victims of circumstances. We are breaking out of this discourse through the myriad of colours, symbols, figures, and materials, which characterise Tivoli as a truly multicultural fun fair”, underlines Eriksen.

“HOW FOREIGN DO YOU FEEL?”

At a time when the notion of “Danishness” is being highly contested, we asked all participants this question. How and why does one define this state of belonging, which is reduced to a categorical either/or question of simple nationality?

“I am not at all foreign. I feel at home in Denmark, because I have created a life here. And I have made an effort to become part of Danish culture. I’ve read the Bible, I know the Danish islands, and I know how to say “hi” in the dialect of Southern Jutland.”

“I haven’t applied for Danish citizenship, as I see myself as a citizen of the world. Nationality is a category, which only intends to put mankind into categories.”

“I have a good job and I’ve had a good education in Denmark. But despite this I don’t feel at home here. My children are Danish, but I don’t know what I am.”

100 very different answers suggest that the concept of foreignness has many interpretations and meanings.

The exhibition will travel to other cities in autumn/winter 2017-18.

SEE INDIVIDUAL PHOTOS AND TEXTS IN DANISH AND ENGLISH

www.100pctfremmed.dk

CREDITS

Production: Copenhagen International Theatre/Metropolis by Trevor Davies & Katrien Verwilt

Concept and photography: Maja Nydal Eriksen

Supported by: Danish Arts Foundation, Copenhagen City Council, Interkulturelt Center, Sportgoodsfonden, Knud Højgaards Fond

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