



Signals in the body of cities

Remote from the world, in conflict with everyone and isolated, Albania lived through an almost caricatural experience of communist totalitarianism under the leadership of Enver Hoxha. The doctrinairism of the regime separated it from the rest of the soviet-style communist countries, which the authorities in Tirana considered revisionist and liquidationist with the ideological essences. The Museum of Tirana is the symbol of a State which closed off the country so that, as it is protected from all outside contamination, the conditions for the appearance of new man could be created. In the outside world, hardly anything was known about what was happening in Albania. Tirana was a city on the sidelines of everything, a mystery. However, there were people who lived and survived, subjected to a state of permanent ideological pressure. A minority enjoyed the privileges of the nomenclature, the majority took a long time to demythologise the overwhelming mirage of consensus while another minority resisted. There were people who thought, people who tried to create and people who believed they were part of a strange—absurd—vanguard of humanity, of an insurmountable ethical horizon.

All powers—and totalitarian power even more so—have a tendency to paranoia. The authorities in Tirana were obsessed with the enemy: the immediate enemy, the enemy to be found in the nomenclature itself, subjected to regular cyclical purges; the enemy inside: the reactionary who was incapable of understanding the supreme destiny of the fatherland; the enemy outside: the entire world. As a memento of that paranoia, thousands and thousands of small bunkers remain which make up the Tirana plateau. One day the city represented the symbol of the permanent state of alert which the regime lived in, of the pressure which the world subjected the Albanians to. A world, incidentally, which had completely forgotten about them. Nowadays, anyone who doesn't know the story might think that it is an installation by the Romanian artist Christo. A homage to the delusions of power, to the absurd. The centre of Tirana, from the Central Committee building to the banking universe, and the pyramid schemes which ruined thousands of people, is a small compendium of the series of follies which characterised Albania in the second half of the twentieth century. These issues are dealt with by this exhibition which seeks to explain what could be called the cultural spirit of the city. And I use the word spirit in the most open sense, far removed from any strong concept of an identity kind or all fantasies about the collective subconscious. It deals with the state of the culture—the ways of speaking, wishing, working and ordering—at a time and in a country which was the sum of the passions, knowledge, desires, frustrations, impositions and manipulations which its citizens have experienced and suffered.

With *Tirana / Tyranny* we hope to launch a series of portraits of cities which, to us, had remained hidden or were unknown. Because things happen, even in the most remote and isolated places. And cities bear the symbols and remains of these things engraved on their bodies. These signals allow us to understand what we could call the spirit of cities and, with them, their history and their inhabitants. Tirana represented an extreme, particularly attractive case with which to begin this series of exhibitions. However, at the end of the day, the human factor is decisive in any project. And the participation of the writer Bashkim Shehu—who knew every face of Tirana / Tyranny: the nomenclature, prison and resistance—in order to trace the story, meant that the reasons for choosing Tirana were overwhelming. Tirana / Tyranny the city which believed in new man. And this is where we begin.