

HARALAMPI G. OROSCHAKOFF

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Although the 20th century could be called the century of refugees, the century in which those who lost their own culture were forced to adopt another, these refugees have left few traces of their struggles, their failures, and their doubts in the visual arts. While literature has relied heavily on such experiences, the visual arts seem to have been little touched by this question, except in recent years.

Today many artists attempt to locate their cultural origins and identity. Haralampi G. Oroschakoff has been on this quest for more than ten years. He was born in Bulgaria to a Russian family, and moved to Vienna to study art. Because he grew up in a Byzantine culture of Eastern Orthodox origin, he had to forge a new identity for himself when he immigrated to Western Europe.

This exhibition documented Oroschakoff's struggle for his own identity, which was not without painful separation or longing for the familiar. In the first half of the '80s he realized actions in Vienna. *I dreamed, I woke up* was the title of one; *Cage—Free space* that of another. In both, he attempted to break radically with his past—one piece was a play on self-immolation rituals. Yet the break did not occur. In his drawings and photos of subsequent years, he delved deeper and deeper into the icons of the culture in which he was raised. These icons recur frequently in his drawings, evoking an entire world. For example, in painting a series of Orthodox crosses, Oroschakoff realized that it was impossible



Haralampi G. Oroschakoff, *Projekte 1980-94 (Projects 1980-94)*, mixed media. Installation view.

to step outside the frame that still shaped his vision of the world.

This confrontation with his past, with the culture of his youth, was, in effect, liberating for Oroschakoff, allowing him to acknowledge and embrace the fact that he will never be at one with the culture in which he lives or with himself. In a world where such experiences are increasingly common, Oroschakoff's recognition of the fragmentary nature of subjectivity transcends the particularity of his own experiences.

—Noemi Smolik

Translated from the German by Charles V. Miller.