

HARALAMPI G. OROSHAKOFF

HOHENTHAL AND BERGEN

In his exhibition "Inhabitants on the Edges of the World: Itinerants and Orientalists" Haralampi G. Oroschakoff has brought together 15 large-format paintings, a vitrine with images of *Inhabitants on the Edges of the World* from the 16th century, a video sculpture, and a two-volume collection of essays.

The *Inhabitants on the Edges of the World* are panel paintings in plaster and pigment on canvas. They represent maps of the world which can be read either in a concrete, almost Mondrianesque way, but which also suggest complex historical connections. These pictures are placed in a dialogue with colorful history paintings which visualize the yearnings and exotic projections of the 19th-century *Itinerants and Orientalists*. These are oil paintings of figures and scenes from 19th-century "itinerants" (Russian artists who left academies to celebrate reality) and "orientalists" (longing for the mysterious East) movements; here the clichéd notion that the bourgeoisie had of the "unknown" comes to the fore.

Oroschakoff's own story is marked by emigration and migration: born in 1955 in Sofia, he escaped to Belgrade in 1963, and in 1964 emigrated to Austria. Against the background of the most recent political transformations in Eastern Europe, the mass media images documenting these changes strike him as references to his own identity. At the same time the reality of the media conveys images that have little to do with his experiences as a "wanderer between two worlds." This was what initially prompted him to supply his own images about actual events, and include fundamental historical and geographical information in his work.

In the press release of the show, Maria de Mercedes said that *Inhabitants on the Edges of the World* thematizes the atavistic need to defame the unknown person living on the other side, in order to assure oneself of one's own identity. Of these conquests, and of the great powers of the past, the paintings provide only the trace of their extent and their dynamic: on the unchanging white background, nations, ideologies and religions are rendered equal; little signs make cultural memory and identification possible.

In certain circumstances, panel paintings are still capable of representing the most complex connections.

Wolf-Günter Thiel

(Translated from German by Shaun Whiteside)



Haralampi G. Oroschakoff, *Inhabitants on the Edges of the World: Itinerants and Orientalists*, 1997. Installation view.