

Yanomami. Spirits. Survivors.

The Museum of Ethnography in Budapest is the first in Hungary to hold a comprehensive exhibition of works by photographer Claudia Andujar. Why did we think it was important to display her artworks at one of the first exhibitions in the recently opened new museum? The simplest way is to give our own subjective answer by highlighting a few key ideas that were raised when planning the exhibition.

The expressions “seeking a home” and “finding home” often came up when talking about Andujar’s oeuvre and the exhibition. At one point we could have imagined one of them as the title of the exhibition. This was because her photographs are held in several prominent public collections in the world and she is a regular participant in international events of photography, yet at the same time her artworks are known only by a few people in this region, despite the fact that she is Hungarian on her father’s side, was born Claudine Haas, lived in Nagyvárád until the age of 13 and still speaks Hungarian well. We wanted the now 92-year-old, internationally acclaimed artist’s introduction in Hungary, her home-coming, to take place during her lifetime.

Yet, the above ideas can be interpreted in a broader context. Andujar’s entire life and oeuvre were greatly influenced by her childhood trauma, the Holocaust and, as its consequence, the loss of her home in Nagyvárád, part of her family, friends, and her love. She escaped from Hungary in 1944 and fled to Switzerland and the United States. Decades later she found her home in Brazil, primarily among an indigenous community living in the depth of the Amazonian rain forest. All that became so important for her that her life and her artistic, as well as her activist projects became closely connected to the life of the Brazilian Yanomami native people and their struggle for survival.

Needless to say, not only her Hungarian roots but her photographs and her photographic oeuvre grasped our attention.

Andujar’s photography is especially exciting since she worked with a high degree of social sensitivity and a rich palette of photographic tools. Each of the series in her oeuvre was made with an approach of different genres and technical accomplishment, and in each case, she reflected on the con-

Photo exhibition of Claudia Andujar

tents and took into account the perspective of both the viewers and the characters in the pictures. She used the various opportunities of representation with equal confidence and great talent as a photojournalist, as well as an artist and activist.

Andujar focused on people who were compelled to remain beyond the attention of majority society. She was strong in the sensitive way of seeing so characteristic of women artists, representing the spaces and everyday life of cultures, communities and groups from a less customary perspective. She expanded the boundaries of photographic depiction with her unaffected portraits and reports. Mentalities, fates, myths and stories involving reality intertwined in her courageously experimental works, which pointed beyond genres. Andujar was able to create a dialogue between indigenous people, decision-makers and representatives of the art world.

In this exhibition, a small but significant part of Andujar’s oeuvre is being presented with the cooperation of São Paulo’s Vermelho Gallery. We have tried to select from the series which reflect the more important phases of her oeuvre without attempting to be comprehensive. The exhibition is presented chronologically from the 1960s to the 2010s and begins with the period of her photojournalism and experiments after her arrival in Brazil. It then covers the artistic and activist pictures taken among the Yanomami and subsequently focuses on the processing of her oeuvre in her mature age.

Finally, there is the question concerning why we think an exhibition of contemporary photography has its place in the Museum of Ethnography. The obvious answer is that the majority of images focus on a small Amazonian ethnic group, the indigenous Yanomami. Andujar does not primarily strive to thoroughly document ethnographic phenomena, but rather her photographs present a personal history involving the exploration of her own path in life and her dialogue with the Yanomami. This personal approach is what sets the images in a broader anthropological context, the subject matter of cultural encounter, knowledge, understanding and cultural representation. In addition, Andujar also tells us an important story of how photographs can become a tool of activist struggle for rescuing a community.