
Martyna Bec

Babel

The inspiration for this work came from my experience of living in Berlin. I began to photograph the city by concentrating on its multicultural aspects, especially focusing on its black diaspora. Later on, however, I realized that the project constituted my self-portrait.



Fig. 1: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photo). Courtesy of the artist

Berlin is a unique place, different from any other German or European city. It offers a habitat to many cultures and subcultures. It is a city of curiosities and contrasts, which does not try to be accommodating. It only offers a strong allure. I don't know any other city that is so complex, with so many layers, ugly and beautiful at the same time.



Fig. 2: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photo). Courtesy of the artist

What primarily fascinates me is its ‘underground’ world, the world ‘under’ its surface, what we don’t see when visiting a European metropolis. Like a real subconscious of the city, this world is full of hidden colors, and of extremes, where phenomena appear in a movement that is difficult to grasp.



Fig. 3: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photo). Courtesy of the artist



Fig.4: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photo). Courtesy of the artist



Fig. 5: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photo).
Courtesy of the artist

In an effort to get to know this world, I encountered the people of the Black diaspora. This community finds its ‘other life’, another home, a ‘territory’ in Berlin. It is often the world of poor people, who live at the edge of the city, experiencing a poverty that has a double meaning. It is not only an economic condition; it implies an inability to adjust to a condition which, at the same time, brings the black immigrant to a ‘schizophrenic’ life, full of harm and mental pain. In Western terms, it could be called ‘a life at the bottom’, ‘a life without morality’; still, the people who live this life try to behave according to their own rules and organizations, their ways of thinking and moving.



Fig. 6: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photos).
Courtesy of the artist



Fig. 7: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photos).
Courtesy of the artist



Fig. 8: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photos). Courtesy of the artist



Fig. 9: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photos). Courtesy of the artist

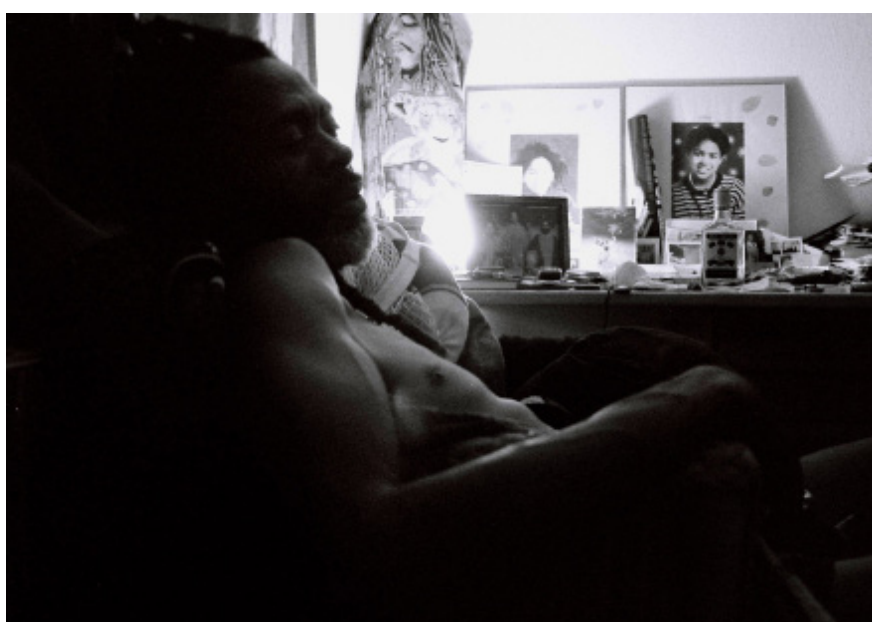


Fig.10: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photos).
Courtesy of the artist



Fig.11: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photos).
Courtesy of the artist

On one hand, it is a world of instincts; on the other hand, it is inhabited by spirits, ghosts, animistic and obsessed creatures. The people living in it search for a space where their desires can be fulfilled. They run families, trying to make music and art, and living the way they want to live. They belong to Berlin society, acting by its rules and bringing their qualities into it. At the same time, they produce forms of folklore that transform the city into a hybrid, which does no longer belong to Europe, and which, at the same time, does not belong to black culture either. This folklore is not meant in a traditional sense: it is a kind of spirituality, a way of thinking, a lifestyle, which, at least from a European perspective, does not fit in a common mentality, and which often leads to cultural and social misunderstanding.



Fig. 12: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photos).
Courtesy of the artist



Fig. 13: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photos).
Courtesy of the artist



Fig. 14: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photos).
Courtesy of the artist

Gradually, in meeting these people and photographing their underground world, I began understanding that, as someone who is torn apart from her roots and homeland, who walks between invisible spirits, on the border of mental illness, sometimes choosing extreme solutions, I was working on the ‘stranger’ who is myself. I began asking myself: ‘How do we function in this world?’ ‘What is home? Is it a land, a people, a culture, or is it our own reality, our inner space?’ Diane Arbus once said: “The further we go, the closer to home we are”. I then decided to tell my story through the stories of the people I was photographing. With my images of ‘others’, I wanted to describe my own ‘homelessness’, the search for an identity that had already changed during my ‘journey’.



Fig. 15: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photos). Courtesy of the artist



Fig. 16: Martyna Bec, *Babel Berlin* (Photos). Courtesy of the artist