

## **Subjective Map of a Lesser-Known Fucked-Up European Country Called Serbia**

July 22, 2011

By Melina, *invisibleadventure.blogspot.com*

**I dropped by Motto Berlin last week simply to browse and absorb the exciting things they have there, but I ended up leaving with a copy of “Subjective Atlas of Serbia,” a collaborative collage of a book edited by Annelys de Vet, which documents Serbia through photographs, murals, old ticket stubs, drawings, and revamped maps, all contributed by Serbian artists.**

When I got home with the book I ended up burning two pieces of toast in the toaster, therefore filling the kitchen with a smoke I could barely see through. I had dropped so fully into the pages of the book that even when I started smelling smoke my first thought was that it was coming through my open window from some cookout happening at the Turkish cultural center across the street.

The funny thing about “Subjective Atlas of Serbia” is that it feels like a compilation or a mixtape rather than a piece of experimental art, and by that I mean it’s not playing with pretenses or applauding itself for its clever exclusivity. Yes, bits of the book are clever and ironic and aesthetically awesome to look at. But what I kept thinking while I was going through was: This is just what it is. Pages full of banknotes. Pages full of map drawings. Pages full of objects from the artist’s childhood. And while the captions underscoring the images sometimes feel unnecessary or over-explanatory, it’s the simplicity of both idea and execution of this book that hypnotizes you and makes it something that you burn your toast over.

There’s this thing I’ve noticed from occupying many flea markets and junk shops all over the world: sometimes it’s all the little things together that makes a beautiful and mysterious spectacle. When you take one of those things out, it loses its appeal. That concept is working positively for “Subjective Atlas of Serbia”: the collections it lays out for you build on each other in a powerful, eye-to-eye sort of way.

And let me take that back in part: some of the bits in here could stand alone. I just like them better catalogued together.

In the introductory text, the author describes an image from the book, saying here, “...spreads the whole story of Serbia, one of the unlucky countries that feels strange and undignified and distant in all their sprawling misery to the Western eye. After all, that’s exactly why this book was made. You will never see the ‘The Subjective Atlas of Monaco,’ if you get my drift.”

Not ten minutes before I entered the bookstore where I bought this book, I was talking with some friends about wanting to take a trip to Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia, and Serbia. It’s an area of the world that I’ve always wanted to visit.

“Serbia,” a friend of mine said. “I do not want to go there.”

Later, however, he definitely wanted to look through this book.