



## CRISIS OF PRESENCE

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Italian anthropologist Ernesto de Martino's concept of "the crisis of presence" describes the individual's experience in the face of events that undermine the foundations of identity. The "Crisis of Presence" exhibition examines this theme through the work of fourteen international contemporary artists.

In 1948, the Italian anthropologist Ernesto de Martino published *Il mondo magico* (English translation *The World of Magic*, 1971), a cornerstone in the history of European cultural anthropology. In the book, he outlined new perspectives in anthropological research that he had arrived at as a result of investigations within the so-called "world of magic". This latter was defined by de Martino as the ancestral human condition, beyond any specific historical determination, wherein the distinction between the self and the outside world is not yet fixed but rather a fluctuating, ambivalent process within which the sense of the individual 'I am' is still under development and therefore threatened by the prospect of disappearance.

De Martino defines this potential threat as a "crisis of presence", a condition in which the subject is put at risk by traumatic experiences such as displacement and distress. The loss of "domestic references" and established "signs of meaning" are events that can undermine the presence of the self, leading to a growing sense of disorientation. What De Martino is referring to are social and existential experiences of subjugation, migration, and alienation, which force the subject to face his/her crisis as an autonomous and defined presence in the world.

The crisis of presence postulated by de Martino provides an incisive analysis of the contemporary situation through its capacity to describe the various forms of latent crisis affecting numerous aspects of the contemporary world, particularly within a social and political context.

The "Crisis of Presence" exhibition project serves as an interpretative model for a thematic analysis built around the works of different contemporary artists active in the European, African, and American environments. European colonial history and its effects on migratory flows both past and present, the legacy of real socialism in Eastern Europe and Cuba, the new influence of Asian capitalism in the Third World as well as the economic and political crisis in Europe and the concurrent global rise of authoritarian right-wing politics, all these are among the main themes addressed by the featured artists.

Their works provide examples of itinerancy, a loose analysis in which the questions of the individual subject, the dispersion of memory and sense of displacement with regards to the present self are examined. As such, they are indicative of relevant contemporary issues – made as they are of unresolved memories of displacement, cultural dislocation and identities that are forever altered in the unrelenting groove of history. The methodology adopted is that of an evocative analysis, where each narrative component extends beyond its specific context to encompass more universal themes, thus encapsulating the scope of the entire event.

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