

20 Years Nine Dragon Heads

Collateral Event of the 56th Venice Biennale

Jump into the Unknown

Palazzo Loredan dell'Ambasciatore, Dorsoduro 1261/62, Venice

About A horse a horse...by Annelise Zwez.

Quartair group with Jessy Rahman, Thom Vink, Pietertje Splunter and Geeske Harting from the Netherlands started their investigation with the incredible story of the horse sculptures on the Basilica of San Marco, that were, in course of time, looted, stolen, returned and finally copied because of pollution. From this starting point the four artists developed four stories of Venetian horses – each a separate sequence – presented as video-performances (all videos by Enrique Muñoz García.). The physical center of the work however was a life-size horse, built of foam pieces in slightly different colours such as light blue, light green, beige, of wood and visible screws, suggestive of a construction set. The horse had a tail and a forelock of course and – very important – little wheels in order to be able to move through Venice. Everybody loved the piece.



One morning it left its site and “went” – pushed by a lady in full equestrian costume (Pieterje van Splunter) - from the Palazzo through the narrow little streets, even over bridges to the “Fondamenta Zattere”. The exhaustive nature of this performance (that was photographed by hundreds of tourists!) was a humorous statement by van Splunter on the absurd and desperate efforts of artists to shape horses as insignia of power throughout history of art, be it in Venice or elsewhere. Enrique Muñoz García. filmed the performance that became afterwards a chapter in the video of the Quartair’s Venice horse stories, shown on a monitor in the exhibition. A projection onto a wall would have been more impressive, but group shows have their own parameters....

Geeske Harting chose an entirely other incident for her horse story. She was touched by the legend that – more than 50 years ago – the last horse of Venice was taunted more and more as motor power had definitely replaced its services. Harting decided to try to give it back its

dignity. In a performance with several chapters the death of the horse was re-enacted on the Fondamenta Zattere. As restricted in her mobility, the artists effort of drawing the outline of the body of the dead horse on the pavement created a very emotional situation for all, who were there. It was as if the mourning would be visible. After the corpse had been borne away, the funeral guests bestrew the horse's outline with flowers as if it's death had just taken



place. History had come to presence. It was a touching performance in real time and it is a touching video-performance thanks to Enrique Muñoz García. . Some Quartair chapters are to be taken with a pinch of salt...especially the fifth, that was spontaneously realised during the set-up days. It made it possible for the horse to have a ride in a gondola (something that is in every day Venice life far to expensive for ordinary artists...).

With wood plates, additional screws and stones the safety for the horse and the "gondoliere" was assured. Did I imagine it only or did I really see that the horse was proud that finally someone recognised the importance of his majesty's visit to Venice? With a vodka douche on the arrival at the Palazzo the Nine Dragon Heads payed their tribute to him.



The wildest horse story was the one of **Jessy Rahman**, an "old" Nine Dragon Head and the initiator of the Venice Quartair project. In his artistic work The Hague based artist often tries to create a cultural dialogue between his original home-country, which is Surinam, and the place where he stays as a guest, focussing hereby often old, eventually folkloristic traditions. For Venice he reverted to the old colonial tradition of playful dances with self-made cardboard horses as a sign of invincibility. He made contact with the last teacher on Pellestrina (there are less and less children on the island) and suggested a workshop, which the lady accepted and so girls and boys of Pellestrina proved their strength, dancing with the cardboard horses round the fountain in the court yard of their school. Surely an event that they will remember, even if they probably didn't realise that it was an artistic project that they were part of...