

WeAreTheArtists



Reception desk at the Ritz Carlton, Hongkong

Art and the City

By artandthecity@hotmail.co.uk

Artless Nights

Boy George was closing London fashion week with a runway show of his latest collection and the P.A. had scored choice seats for myself and The Summer Berries. The P.A. is an assistant for a new phenomenon of celebrity so we were given class A treatment and whisked to our chairs behind those that were being photographed. Photographers kept asking people to pose and journalists kept sticking microphones in their faces but I had no idea who anyone was. We waited for the show to start, spotting fashion victims preening themselves everywhere and even a Jamiroquai look-a-like, scurrying around trying to steal everyone's front row seats. The show looked as though Boy George had traveled back to his glory days of the 80's, ran into Walmart, ripped all the clothes off the mannequins, shredded them, sewn them back together again, then raced back again to 2006 with his new creations. The only respite was being in the third row, seeing it all unfold, and watching gorgeous hunks strut up and down the catwalk. He surprised us at the end by presenting himself surrounded by his models, as designers do. We all thought he was still in a New York cell with a cocaine charge. But there he was in full makeup, bigger than ever.



At the Boy George runway show. Photo by Shaan Syed

We hopped in a cab over to Soho House where the door lady was weary about letting us in. The P.A. had failed to inform them that he was coming with guests. London has these private members clubs that cater to the ultra exclusive, namely those with money. There's no squeezing your way past these doorpersons' nose unless you have serious connections. The Walrus once introduced me to the manager of another Soho club who told me they declined to host Madonna's birthday party. The P.A. pulled some strings, the doorlady made a note in her big black leather book and allowed us in but not without a disapproving "next time..." Company was great but once inside, it's just another dark pub, only you feel rich and fabulous even though you're eating burritos. The P.A. discreetly let me know that this is the place where Jude Law accidentally slipped his newborn a tab of E. It didn't quite look like the party crowd, but maybe Jude was trying to liven things up? After a light meal and a few drinks we headed back out into the night on a whirl-wind tour of The Summer Berries' favorite Soho haunts. We stopped in at a garlic restaurant (everything is made from garlic) and they lead us through the dining room to the back of the building where we descended a narrow staircase to a cavernous basement. The room was decorated with skeletons and death metal blared from the speakers. We knocked back a few shots with the long hair metal types who were only too happy to keep company with The Summer Berries. Leaving, we stumbled out onto the street to see Morrissey eating a slice in Pizza Express.

The Summer Berries were now pissed and they suspected that the P.A. and I wanted some Soho fun done more our style, so they let us be and head on home. My fellow companion and I then checked ourselves into an ultra snotty gay club. Inside, I was leaning over the bar buying us a drink when I felt wet all down my back. I turn around and there's a guy with a half empty gin and tonic that proceeds to yell at me for spilling his drink. Confused at what was going on I told him that he was mistaken – HE had actually spilt his drink –and all over ME. I don't think he was listening because he kept yelling at me to apologize. I said "No". He said "aplogize!" I said "No". He said "aplogize!" I said "Fuck Off". He said "APOLOGIZE!" I said "FUCK OFF!" This went on back and forth, only getting us both more angry until the P.A., spotting what was going on and fearing a punch-up, slipped in between us and quickly pulled me away. After calming me down, the P.A. and I proceeded to get sloshed as one does in this great city when away from the comforts of your shoe box home. I lost him at some point and decided that it was time to leave, so I picked up my jacket from coatcheck, told a boy he was cute (he yelled in my face "I'm Jewish!") and headed out once again into the Soho night. Back in South-East London I stopped off at the Princess' place before turning in. He had been watching re-runs of Oprah and when I came in there was her 20th anniversary on. She was re-visiting old shows from earlier on in her career and bringing back old guests. There was this one episode about fifteen years ago that featured a woman who was terminally ill with breast cancer. She had been making a massive archive of videos of herself speaking to the camera, giving her then-baby daughter advice throughout her prospective childhood and adolescence. The Princess is a sucker for this kind of sentimental stuff. I couldn't help thinking; lady, leave your daughter alone! You're dead and gone and let her get over you! You're selfish and controlling and there's something sick about you coming back from the dead to tell your daughter how to make a guy ask her out! Oprah had invited the now-sixteen year old girl back on the show but I didn't get to hear how she felt because of the argument that erupted between The Princess and myself over my apparently insensitive take on the video tapes. Deeply offended, he told me to get out of his house and that I had to leave immediately. Used to art school arguing, I refused, restating my position. Things rapidly escalated and he started pushing and shoving and I started pushing and shoving back and then we actually started to physically have it out, falling to the floor, on the way down smashing his glass coffee table. It continued until he was able to push me out his front door and slam it shut behind me. I stumbled, regained my balance when the door re-opened and my wallet came flying out, hitting me in the head. When I got home I looked in the mirror to see my face slashed, blood covering my left cheek. It was four am already and I had a plane to catch in the morning. I washed it off, set my alarm, and fell asleep. On the plane as my hangover subsided, my side began to ache like hell. Finally went to the doctor and found out I had a broken rib to go with my now scarred face. I could barely face the doctor's questions, ashamed that it was because of Oprah. So where's the art in the City? I'm still looking...

Update: Baden

By flow@code-flow.net

Fuck! Our TV says "Qrrrrk". That nicest of all second-hand TV sets which has provided good services for years. As we are wondering whether we're true intellectuals who don't give a shit about TV, or fresh lovers who won't need any TV to the end of their days, or whether we're in fact media geeks who cannot do without for even one day, we spend all of that Saturday in media shops trying to decide whether we'll buy

the TV of our life or prefer to spend the money on a holiday in Italy, or plane tickets to Berlin to visit the Biennale that has just opened the night before. By the time the latest shops are closing, we find ourselves with a brand-new 120 cm Panasonic plasma TV on our hands, which we somehow fit into the not-so-small trunk of our deep granite Citroën Picasso. Getting that thing heaved into our apartment without laying it down is hard work. Installing it eats up a chunk of the evening. Rather late to go to the Restaurant. From the list of parties we have invitations for, the Dizzyland video awards are somewhat promising: art, competition, glamour, the cream of the crop, winners and losers, the latest gossip, in a word, fun and spectacle.

On the highway from Zurich to Aargau it looks like we'll be missing most of the official part. So what! For sure tons of people will stick around for the post-award party. The stylized map on the invitation first sends us off in the wrong direction. Parking eats up another 15 minutes. Arriving on the scene of the crime, fuck, half the canton is standing in line to get in. Style: village disco. Age group: no more than 15. My goodness, darling, what have we embarked on. Briefly, we consider getting right back to the car. No. We bypass the line and make for the main entrance. Peaking in through the door we catch a glimpse of a guy in complete contrast with the teens. Despite the suit, it's not one of the bodyguards, either. Hey! That's Oliver! We enter. The master of ceremonies looks splendid tonight. As fresh and kind as always. Nonetheless special tonight, with an elegant cashmere retro style suit in the line of this season, with perky pink lining, in contrast with the bold explosion of jungle floral motives in several nuances of green on his shirt. So fantasy.

As a good host, despite the humming hive around us, in two sentences he has introduced us to the situation. We know who has taken first, second, third prize, and the audience prize. Just minutes ago, the winning film has been screened once more, the prizes handed over, last drinks drunk, gossips exchanged, and the art scene has gone home. With the exception of a few colleagues who have taken refuge in the canteen, wave after wave of young and younger guys and gals stream by us and into the disco room, too dizzy to have a clue about Dizzyland.

For the first time we spend more time with Pascal. Interesting guy. He introduces us to the secrets of good wines. In the meantime, Oliver is busy with two ladies who look very important. From Pascal we understand that they see them once a year. And that they've taken on weight. Like last year. And the year before. Talk about people growing with their careers. After he sends off the ladies, we have the pleasure of Oliver's company at the table. The end of the evening with Oliver and Pascal is very pleasant, indulging in our common penchant for good red wine. We truly enjoyed this dizzy night.

The last train to Zurich has left. They consider a taxi. We offer a ride and leave them in front of the postmodern minimalist building where they live. In return, Oliver promises he'll cook for us. He's a good cook! And what a collection of red wines! (Oliver, we haven't forgotten!) At home, we pour ourselves a small Glenkinchie each, slide the Dizzyland DVD into the player, and enjoy our new wide-screen TV! Folks, wanna read more? Wanna know what the films are like? <http://www.code-flow.net/cflow/2006/dizzyland.html>



1st prize winner „Alice“ by Margot Zanni, 2006

Update: Bangladesh

By simon@norcottarts.co.uk

I am having some difficulty adjusting to my comfortable life back here in the UK, after spending two months in Dhaka, Bangladesh, one of the most polluted and over populated capitals, in one of the poorest countries of the world. It is probably quite normal to feel disorientated after such an intense period of work and certainly common to feel 'culture shocked' even returning from a short break in Southern Europe. But this time the adjustments are harder to make and perhaps the changes to my outlook are permanent. Bangladesh culture is the richest I have ever experienced in terms of creativity and ingenuity; folk art, textiles, music...the country is also rich in natural resources. It is however, the most corrupt country in the world. These contradictions woven into the daily life provided endless artistic fuel for my work. The beautiful textiles; wood block printed cottons as cheap as chips, hand woven silks and jute cloth next to the beggars sifting rubbish for anything recyclable, next to the heroin addicts sleeping on pavements. The colourfully painted trucks belching out thick smog into the barely breathable air and the Rickshaw pullers, with no shoes, who sleep on the streets, between pulling the beautiful people and their heavy loads everyday, all day, for very little money.



Jessica Rost, Mother of Corruption, 2006, Installation (detail)

The frustration, even resignation, among young Bangladesh artists was obvious. The longer I stayed, the more I understood what they were up against, the more I admired their strength and witnessed their helplessness, verging on hopelessness.

In this country the political system holds everything in an impossible arm lock. Those with any power will stop at nothing, using bribes, blackmail, religious law and force, to gain more power. They are controlling health services, businesses, trade, and education.

This includes the Art Colleges, where, due to the continual national strikes by various political factions, the average time taken to complete an MA is eight years. Many students are forced to show affiliations to particular groups to gain access to their Halls of Residence and the lecturers are employed and selected not according to experience, qualifications or even enthusiasm but according to their political alliances. Most of these lecturers offer no guidance to students and are rarely seen in the colleges.

My residency was supported by Triangular Arts Trust and funded by Arts Council England. The residency was hosted and organised by Britto Arts Trust in Bangladesh. Britto is a voluntarily organisation run by a small group of trustees, –practicing artists themselves. Despite the constant struggles, which include; keeping foreign funding safe from the corrupt banking system, facing the changing, often dangerous situations, working in a country where inflation is out of control and the electricity is cut off up to six times a day, where people have little or no contact with the international art world...despite all this, Britto survives. It provides a valuable support, a forum, for many young artists, who want to make contemporary work but would otherwise give up, with no dialogue and no audience within the art education system provided.

Update: Berlin

By axel.lapp@snafu.de

An exhibition without a theme, but with many stories, some terrible choices, some wonderful works, a museum show in the disguise of a biennale, too many loose ends, precise installations, lots of nostalgia and pretence – I find it really difficult to make up my mind about this show. It is neither overwhelmingly good nor tremendously bad, but both at the same time. The curatorial team – Maurizio Cattelan, Massimiliano Gioni and Ali Subotnik – have done their best to cultivate strong ambivalence. They have created a show of contemporary art using historic pieces; they have diffused the pressure for a consistent storyline by making this an exhibition of subjective choices. They hold it together by placing the show in several distinctly different spaces along Auguststraße, a street in the formerly eastern city centre of Berlin.

Many smaller exhibitions are hidden inside this biennale. One follows the human narrative from birth to death, from Corey McCorkle's graphic and somehow exploitative photographs of his son's birth, Spiritual Midwifery Rush, 2005, to the melancholic sound installation Follow me, 2004, by Susan Philipsz in the trees of the Old Garrison Cemetery, and Berlinde de Bruyckere's lichaam (corpse) of a horse-like shape, 2006, in the cemetery's lapidarium. The life between is presented as a fragile

equilibrium, as in Mircea Kantor's Deeparture, 2005, a video installation in which a roe and a wolf are shown to circle around each other in a gallery space, under the constant threat of lethal violence and bloodshed, or in Presentation Sisters, 2005, by Tacita Dean, a very intimate film that closely follows the routines of five elderly nuns, whose sisterhood will most certainly face extinction with their own demises.

The fabric of the city, of this street, with all its memories and inscriptions, with all the overlying stories and historical sediments is the meta-story for this show. The exhibition opens up and extends into historic spaces, their histories are a part of this exhibition, as each site is carefully described in the catalogue. Yet, the present is somehow excluded. Almost the only piece engaging with current political concerns is Pawel Althamer's Fairy Tale, 2006. It consists of a petition for visitors to sign as an attempt to secure a German residence permit for Besir Olcay, an eighteen-year-old, who grew up in Berlin and who together with his family is threatened with deportation to Turkey, and the installation of a single trainer in an otherwise empty space. Few other works create a sense that there is a contemporary society beyond the confines of Auguststraße, or actually that there is anything beyond the exhibitions spaces on Auguststraße. In the narrative of the exhibition, this street only exists as a viewpoint from which to look back. Contemporary developments of gentrification and commercialisation have been ignored.

Fifteen years ago, when this part of Berlin-Mitte was still an uncharted area, being a decrepit quarter in a decaying city, that was scarred by war and half a century of negligence, it seemed to provide effortless opportunities and a strong notion of liberty. For a short time, this part of town was everything to all people. Space was readily available, bureaucracy not yet developed, in fact impotent. Projects could simply be done, and it all felt like a huge cultural adventure playground. ‚37 Räume‘ (‚37 Spaces‘), an exhibition that was organized for a week in 1992 and that brought together 37 curators in mostly very dilapidated rooms along Auguststraße – in empty shops and closed factories, in hotels, flats, squats and ruins –, was at the height of this development. At the same time the starting point for the area's gentrification, as it marked this street as a location for art, that would later attract many of the more commercial art galleries and dealers. It serves as an inspiration to the current biennial. This exhibition was, however, not a milestone of curatorial or artistic practise. Even with the aid of the catalogue, I fail to remember a single work of art or an installation, though I can recall the sensation of the show being like a treasure hunt in this to me then not yet familiar part of town. It seems that this is exactly what this biennial is trying to re-evoke, being deeply nostalgic about the early 1990s.

Through the spaces used, and in some of the works responding to them, the exhibition elaborates on the historic tragedies that affected the inhabitants of this street. However, quite often the spaces contribute nothing but historicity, embedding the works in a picturesque environment of yore. And at times the spaces could not have been designed more fittingly for this. Paloma Varga Weisz's busts of dogs and people find a congruous home in the environs of an old-fashioned sink and wildly patterned wallpaper, in which they appear much less alien than in a whitewashed gallery space. Similarly, Christopher Knowles's typewritten concrete poetries from the 1970s seem to fuse with the atmosphere of the classroom, the torn wallpaper and the surviving notes and announcements. Victor Alimpiev's video Summer Lightnings, 2004, also makes use of the school location. It shows a group of young schoolgirls making the thundering noise for an occasionally slotted in image of lightning, by tapping with



Robert Kusmirowski, Wagon, 2006. Photo: Axel Lapp

ArtsCharts Los Angeles

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| 01
(NEW) | MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
„Painting in Tongues“ |
| 02
(NEW) | DANIEL HUG GALLERY
„Bart Exposito, Roger Herman and Hubert Schmalix“ |
| 03
(NEW) | MANDARIN GALLERY
„Richard Allen Morris“ – see above... but much more paint. |
| 04
(NEW) | ARMAND HAMMER MUSEUM
„Project: Monique VanGendren“ – painting on walls. |
| 05
(NEW) | LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM
LACMA at 40 and well... the Klimts. |
| 06
(NEW) | NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM
„Sonic Scenery: Music for Collections“- Audio Taxidermy |
| 07
(NEW) | SUSAN VILMEITER
„Sean Duffy“- Taxidermied Audio |
| 08
(NEW) | GETTY CENTER, GETTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE
„Agitated Images: John Heartfield and German Photomontage“ |
| 09
(NEW) | 1301 PE
„Ann Veronica Janssens“- Agitated Albers in video color! |
| 10
(NEW) | ANNA HELWING
„Emilie Halpern“- Agitated Sculpture |

their fingers on the tables, and keeping the suspense by holding their hands before their mouths when quiet. Their agitation while doing this is palpable and extremely touching.

Gagosian Gallery, one of the biennial's spaces on Auguststraße had already opened last September for an introductory exhibition programme. The name appropriated – the curators of the biennial called it a „guerrilla franchise gallery“ –, it mimicked the many artist and curator-run spaces that are the grass roots of the Berlin art community. However, it couldn't have been more different, as structurally it was fully institutional. For the grant it received from the European Union, Gagosian Gallery needed to have a minimum budget of 100.000 Euros for the year, which is not much compared to the 2.5 million provided by the Federal Foundation for Culture for this, and again for the next biennial, as support for the so-called „beacons of contemporary culture“, yet it seems a very comfortable position to be a guerillero from.

Update: Boyaca

By alejo.duque@europeangraduateschool.net

This Text is inspired on an interview with Manuel, a real Colombian who's now living back in South America. He lived 7 years of his life far from his family; from a 12.000k distance and with the help of his brother he managed to build via telephone instructions and monthly bank transfers a „villa“, I saw the house in pictures and just a few months ago when it was ready, Manuel flew back, for the first time in a „legal“ way to meet his family, 2 girls and his wife. I wish I have the chance to meet him there and show him a video of an interview we had in front of the Lac Lemán in Geneva few years ago. Respect Manuel!!

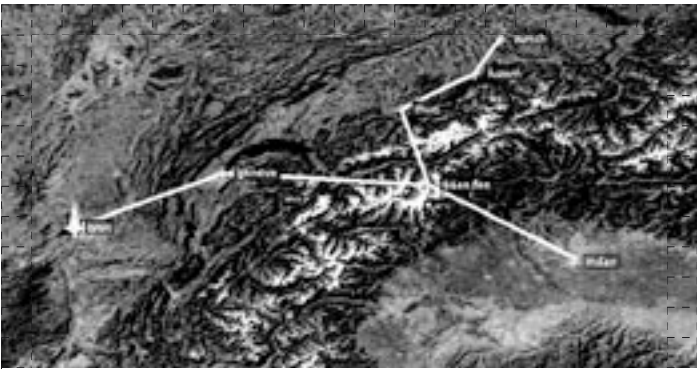
The potatoes on my table come from a desert like region in Colombia, a place 2 hours (by car) from the countries capital, a place called Boyaca. In these days of mobile geekeness let's say it coordinates: 5°47' Latitud North; 0°57' 17" longitude East. But to get closer to the point in question... Did you know that the potato was taken a long time ago from the Andes mountains in South America and smuggled into Europe? and that in the south hemisphere you can find more than 500 different potato varieties? The ones in front of me are made of the same soil that made up my friend Manuel; he lived in Europe and washed dishes 10 hours a day, his backache was well known by so many so called „chamanes“ who also came to Europe to make their living out from fashionable western mystical Europeans; they haven't been able to cure his pains.

Officially deported twice, Manuel knows his way back in. On foot to Switzerland via the Ofental Pass once or by car via a forgotten road in the french-swiss border near Basel. In Geneva he made “clean” francs working „underground“ in a hotel's kitchen making dishes and rooms. When there's some time to spare, a good amount of black hours he worked in one very luxurious place, I have seen pictures. A place were bankers, those that everyday move insane amounts of “dirty” money from country to country, come to meet their clients and seal the deals. I met Manuel 5 years ago, we religiously spent 10 swiss francs every night on calling cards, a telephone shop is where we immigrants gather to keep in touch and inform our families about the money they will soon receive via Moneygram, Western Union or a close friend who's on special delivery service of high quality cocaine to be ported in his stomach. Freelance entrepreneurship commissioned by the parties of the rich, bored and well educated Europeans.

When Europe or „America“ import drugs, they bring us along, porters that carry and hand the deal. This 1st class world believes it can dispose humans elsewhere, believe that the immigrants takeover won't ever happen. They might think that the „minorities“ be it Black Americans, Pakistanis, Indians, Arabs, Asiatic and Africans will never be able to join themselves and work for a common interest...

But today we are probing networks that have inverted the capitalistic cultural crusade, re-appropriating methods and technics to liberate and propagate ourselves through so called „new“ technologies. I use a G.P.S, a second hand one bought on eBay. This instrument of military origins, based on spying technologies that has also served to trace routes for cocaine, heroine and marihuana arriving to Bricklane, Les Marais or the Red Line Districts here and everywhere, has also helped many of our friends navigate through the Alps and across central European borders (like many other immigrants some centuries ago and without the hype, but their sons forgot).

We are part of a shift that will take many by surprise; it began long ago and in slow moves, but now we have seen how to potentialize the military leftovers of the first world... you are invited to come to the park and see how we trade from a needle to a russian rocket to some magic medicines; come and check our –“illegal beings“– ordeals taking place all around central Europe every Sunday in the local park; you are invited to taste good potatoes coming from far. Like good friend Manuel.



Picture by alejo.duque@europeangraduateschool.net



Kunstfly wishing all the best: The Graduate Jean-Claude Freymond-Guth.



Maha Maamoun: The Beach, photo from Domestic Tourism series, 2005.





Update: Cairo

By kielmayer@gmx.net

Arrival

Arriving to Cairo was stressful; checking in at Zurich train station taught me that I should have applied for a visa. Unfortunately it was a Sunday and my plane leaving Monday 7 am. I was near to freak out as I had researched the web and also asked my Cairo contacts and they all said I will get the fucking visa at Cairo airport! And now I was facing that over friendly Swiss woman who desperately tried to get hold of somebody at the airport to confirm that I couldn't fly. Well, she finally got a line and told me very reproachfully that I must insist to be a tourist and then I will maybe get this visa...

Approaching Cairo made me totally nervous. Also irritating was a shooting field just about 500 metres before the plane touches down...What if they wont let me in?! After finding out where to get the visa – interesting enough you get it from banks! – I queued 3 times at the wrong desk before I finally found one that accepts Egyptian pounds. Luckily I had been given some money by friends who had been to cairo 15 years ago and when I heard 90 without any questions about my nationality, purpose or whatever I proudly gave them two 50 notes. They laughed at me and gave them back. Now panic again, as I only had 20 francs left in cash and my question for a cash machine was answered with another laugh. What if they wont let me in?! Totally irritated I thought I had brought old banknotes with me and now I would be really fucked. But helpful as they are they took my 20 francs and another 5 pounds and gave me the visa. Drinking coffee with the driver who took me downtown made things clearer, as the 50s I wanted to pay with before were not 50 pounds but half a pound. First laughing at myself I soon realised that there is not so much to laugh: the supposed 230 pounds in my pocket instantly shrunk to a total amount of cash of 31 pounds.



Ashraf's PC that looks like a BMW

1st week

31 pounds proved to be more than enough for dinner – well, not proper dinner, but McDonalds and beer. Everybody told me that it's difficult to get alcohol here, but virtually round the corner from my hotel there is an off licence. Back to my room I watched arabic TV; it looks actually quite the same as in central Europe. I watched an arabic version of Musicstar; very funny as they perform in traditional dresses and sing folkloristic songs... It's actually difficult to get a picture of this world. On the one hand it almost looks like ours; there is Musicstar, shopping centres, alcohol, Hollywood films on tv and at least 3 arabic versions of CNN. But what I don't know is the role of all this in the society; is it mainstream or just for a pro-west minority who earns enough money to produce and broadcast all the shit? I heard there is organised opposition against McDonalds; but this was totally the same when burgers first came to Switzerland.



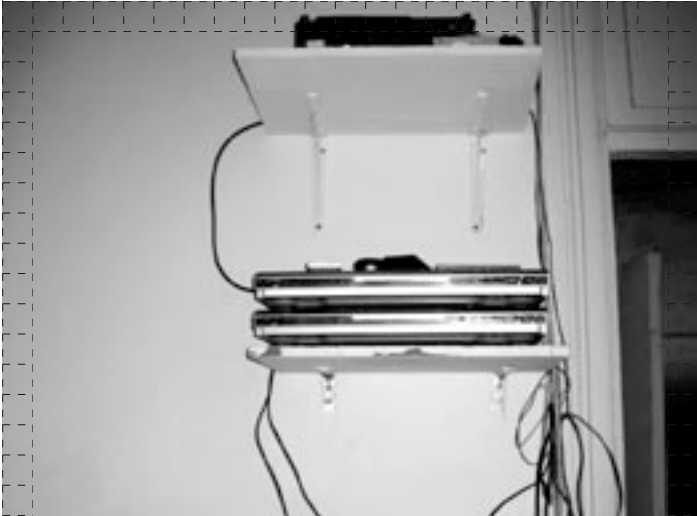
Arabic Pepsi bottle

2nd week

When I had looked at the toilet in my hotel room on my arrival, I had been rather surprised to find a primitive version of what we call a 'Closomat'. I say primitive as in my country this is an expensive device for wealthy people's toilets; when you have finished your 'business' it comes out electronically and starts showering before it goes back to a hidden place again. Here you just have a metal tube that is basically hanging in the middle of the bowl. In my hotel it is fixed more discretely to the rear, but in other toilets here – and they really all have it! – it is just in the middle! Last time when I had to do heavy business outside my hotel I became aware of the problem that if I just sit down and let go, I would cover the device with

my load. So I spent some minutes to calculate the way it would take and found out that it is really hard not to hit it. However, I managed well in the end; but I thought how tedious it must be for the people living here to do all these calculations all the time. Driven by my experience I started paying attention to the device and I must say that obviously I was the only one who had accepted the challenge before: If you have a closer look you will easily find out that everybody here is mindlessly shitting over it constantly. Fair enough but then I ask myself if people still use this device to clean. The constant absence of toilet people makes me fear the worst.

3rd week



Egyptian way of installing a projector and 2 Dvd-players

After telling these not so nice things about my Cairo experience I should write about people here. First and most important is that they are friendly, helpful and honest. Contrary to my expectations they don't cheat (or just a bit). Of course taxi drivers will lament when you want to pay them that it is not enough, but it's part of the game and not tedious at all. In Switzerland the Arabs normally give me the impression that they are constantly shouting at each other, waiting (and ready) for a fight any time. Here their voices still sound aggressive but you quickly learn that this is just their language and has nothing to do with aggression; all of a sudden they smile and hug each other... At least Cairo can be said to be quite free with individual expression; also for women. I saw the most daring decoltées here and the most aggressively fitting jeans in my life. In cafes you see man talking to women like in Europe and in the Underground there are separate women carriages provided. I don't want to pretend that everything is fine here – as it is not, human rights, minorities etc. – but the picture of Islamic countries we normally get in Europe is totally not corresponding to reality. The real thing is – as usual – quite difficult; but it is neither the cliché of an aggressive fundamentalist brute nor a society that is happy with Musicstar, shopping malls, McDonalds and an oriental version of US-trash as suggested by 'inside the middle east' reports on CNN.



Visitors in front of 'The Ramses files', an installation by Susanne Kriemann in the exhibition 'Downloads from Future' at Townhouse gallery. All photos by Oliver Kielmayer

Update: Paris

By doris.schmid1@chello.at

Satellite cities and the French unrest

„Banlieue“ means originally spell mile or place of banishing (the language is sometimes so exact), and it is completely good to make a picture of the reality of the urban apartheid, in every regard...

The periphery is the motorway belt around the city center of Paris and it seems to me like a protective wall against the banished in the suburbs and against the extreme political and social crisis. After the escalations in the banlieues last autumn, the anger reaches the city center, too; and demonstrations and strikes shake the museum and tourist world of the city center. One asks oneself how artists can afford a studio in Paris. For the smallest room with no luxury one pays 800 Euros and more... there are doubtfully efforts in some banlieues to let some apartments to artists in the immeubles as studios; probably thought as a social mixing project or in connection with a communist tradition...

In the banlieues there are some interesting places of art; they are partially attached to TRAM (This is a net of art houses, artist collectives and galleries and so on in Paris and the banlieues). For example the „maison populaire“ in Montreuil takes part of it. It organises video presentations among other things; the artist is present then and can talk about his work.

The culture of discussion in Paris is much more alive at all than in German speaking areas. Also a „taxitram“ belongs to TRAM, a marvellous thing: One rides along for 5 Euros with a coach to several art places in the banlieues. There are possibilities for conversation with the artists or the curators; perhaps an attempt against the centralisation or the answer to advertising travels...

There is the exhibition „une vision du monde“ in the „Maison rouge“ until end of May. 25 international videos from a collection. It is divided into „the poetics of the world“, „the politics of the other“ and „the aesthetics of exchange“. One feels a care in the selection and presentation. I was there several times and I am inspired! Recommendation!

Very interesting is also „Vidéo appart“, a row of exhibitions during three weekends in private apartments. One receives the codes for the doors by e-mail, travels all over the town and enters then in a private flat, the place of the exhibition. Art and existing movable assets mix as well as private and public space. Due to this situation one is confronted more directly with the pieces of work, the scene of the action and the artists; especially as the artists and the flat owner are present in most cases.

Very bad indeed was the video presentation of the „viperleitung“ in the „centre culturel suisse“. The program was a mixture in regards to content and left the impression of coming out of an archive without any thematic context ; titles and credits were cut out. Where is the passion and the responsibility to the audience and the artists?..It was completely different to other events that are programmed mostly very professional and interesting in the „centre culturel suisse“.

Almost cynical, the trees and the flowers start to bloom happily in the parks notwithstanding the political and social crisis. Artists from Paris told me that exactly the current situation now could be a chance; it seems that a large resistance is building up also in the artist scene, like always when the powerful eagles bite each other's heads off... (merci markus)

Update: Zurich

By kontakt@christianvetter.ch

One cannot allege not to be warned. While recently I was browsing through a book about Pasolini in the Löwenbräu bookshop, some obtrusive noises like somebody's permanently vomiting on the floor were pervading the open door of the gallery Hauser and Wirth. But when I entered the first blacked out room of the gallery, it still stroke me quite unprepared: On a lifesize screen-projection you see a young woman bend over in an empty white studio vomiting extensively. Splashes of puke are pouring out of her, accompanied by rather unpleasant noises. On and on she puts her finger into her throat, retching, splashes, spitting endlessly. The sight was so disgusting that I had to leave the room after a short time instead of puking myself on the gallery floor. I expected to see more ugly things like that and I was a second time surprised finding the rest of the space filled with hundreds of simple drawings, all in the same standard size, attached to the wall closely one after the other. Most of the drawings are simply and painstakingly scribbled from top to bottom with some normal markers and light pens. Line after line the format is filled. What a mania! To me it seemed like the obsessive manifestation of boredom. Very anti, very angry. Martin Creed is the artist, and it's no surprise that he's British.

I didn't expect that the work of Martin Creed would occupy my mind more than that. I just thought: „disgusting“ and „cautious: provocative!“, but during the following days I kept on asking myself: What have I seen and why did it shock me to such a degree?

It is obviously never pleasant to see somebody throw up. Nevertheless it is not strongly disturbing. Martin Creed's video is fundamentally different to the movies when actors who express going through a crisis or being under shock moderately regurgitate. All we see is the persistent act of vomiting. Neither do we get any information about the girl nor is it a critique on anorexia. If you bother reading Martin Creed's own words you quickly notice that the young woman stands for the artist himself: „I am sick of thinking. I am sick and tired of thinking. I want my work to be more like a vomit than a rumination.“ This radical reduction of the intention to the image is the real shocking thing: The pitiless detailedness, the empty white space and the camera which is emotionless but much closer to the scene than you wish – all of this adds to the fact that the spectator is not able to defy the work. It is a total and violent confrontation. Here the conceptual approach isolates the real act of all deceptions of the staging. In the end the drawings achieve the very same effect. The artist seems to tell us: This is all I'm capable to do. There won't be more... Meantly he doesn't save with quantity neither of the drawings nor the vomit.

With all this self-hatred and despair that show in this work, I ask myself anxiously how Martin Creed wants to continue. Pasolini once said: „There's no poetry but real action.“ But it's also said that Pasolini planned and staged his own death.

I couldn't say that I like Martin Creed's work, but it's long ago I've seen any art that has disturbed me so deeply.



Martin Creed, Work No. 509, 2006. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth Zurich London

Update: New York

By aeneaswilder@hotmail.com

Dear Jim, many thanks for the book, “After the empire”. It was a timely read and has allowed me to observe, on the front line, the ideas that Emmanuel Todd outlines in his book. Certainly, from my experience here in upstate New York, the American system does appear to be in decline. However perhaps you would appreciate more my basic observations rather than a recapping of the main tenets in the book.

My first impressions of this place were not so good. It all began when I was picked up at JFK airport. As we left the area and headed out onto the freeway, there was a 6 story building going up in flames. “Christ!” I thought, “the buildings are burning all around me”. But no, it was only one, but it is a bit like stepping out of a plane and putting your foot into a dog shit. It is only natural then to think, are there a lot of dogs shits around here? Is this normal to stand in one so soon? Will it happen regularly? Is this sort of thing tolerated?

Sculpture Space is a workshop/residency programme for visual artists, so I do not expect polished floors and comfy chairs. The people I have met have all been very pleasant and open minded liberals. However there is still a sense of isolationism, and I have been asked on many occasions what the rest of the world thinks of the USA. Not able to speak for all the world, I try and be as diplomatic as possible. Most people take the bad news on the chin, but there is a prevalent defence mechanism that kicks in to the conversation if I become to explicit. I have been screening the BBC documentary “The Power of Nightmares” and many people as asking for a copy. However Emmanuel Todd’s book is another matter, and will come as a shock to most. It may take a couple of generations yet to reach fruition, but the signs are clear and America’s time is definitely on the wane.

Utica may not be typical of the USA but it does illuminate certain aspects of their society. Here is a transcript of my conversation with a policeman after being pulled over while bicycling along the road on a pleasant Sunday afternoon.

Aeneas: Oh! Are you stopping me? (looking at both officers)

Policeman #2: Yep. Do you have some I.D?

Aeneas: Yes I have a passport. Just let me rest my bike against this lamp-post.....here you are.

Policeman #2: Where are you from?

Aeneas: Scotland

Policeman #2: Did you cycle here?

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Aeneas: No I swam most of the way?

Policeman #2: Mr Wilder, is that right?

Aeneas: Yes that’s right.

Policeman #2: What is your first name.

Aeneas: Aeneas

Policeman #2: And your date of Birth

Aeneas: 29th of the 3rd sixty seven.

Policeman #2: What you doing here? All the businesses are closed around here on Sundays.

Aeneas: I am just out for some fresh air.

Policeman #2: Where are you staying

Aeneas: Jason Street

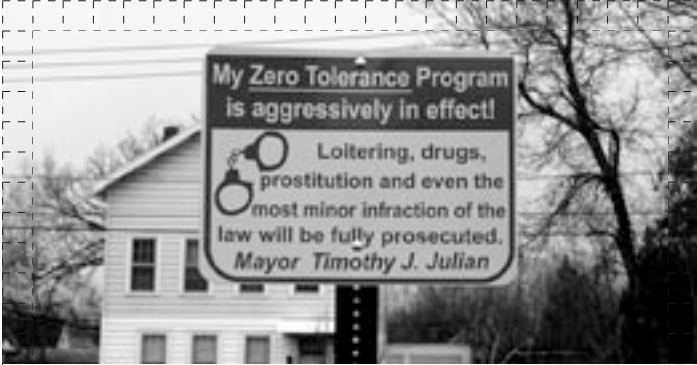
Policeman #2: You are a long way from Jason street. *(I was about 2kms away)

Aeneas: I am just out for a cycle

Policeman #2: What brings you to Utica

Aeneas: I have been invited to spend some time at Sculpture Space, here in Utica. Do you know Sculpture Space?

Policeman #2: Yep. Well all the businesses round here are closed on Sundays. Be careful.



Sign post on vacant lot, downtown Utica, NY, USA. Photo Aeneas Wilder, 2006

As I got back on my bike the dogs in the back of the police pickup started barking like hounds from hell. This little episode can be easily dismissed. However, it did not make me feel comfortable and I decided to head back to Sculpture Space, where at least I would not be in danger of being stopped and questioned for no apparent reason.

The police were perhaps a little edgy as one of their colleagues had been gunned down during a jewellery store robbery the week before. They may also have a long term stress issue in their lives as Utica was once a bit of a Crack haven. The crack problem was so bad here that landlords would set fire to their properties just to burn out the crack tenants – it was the only way to get them out of the building. There was a rash of house burnings that decimated the Cornhill area of Utica, with an Arson Investigation Team set up to look into why so many houses were burning down in



Utica. Eventually the insurance companies stopped paying out to anyone whose property burned down and the national guard was brought in to bulldoze the remaining problem properties. A happy ending to this story is that Utica has the highest number of Bosnian refugees in the US. The vast majority of them were housed in the decimated Cornhill area, and have turned the communities fortunes around. Garden flowers and freshly painted porches abound. Who indeed needs old Europe, I wonder?

Well, Jim I must keep things short this time. I have too may things to do and not enough time, as usual. Best of luck with your Phd thesis, and if I get out of here alive I will make a point of visiting you soon. Ciao, bello, aeneas

Update: Zurich

By kunstfly@bluemail.ch

Kunstfly reporting – Boy-Band Fever

If being a cool Zürich artist isn’t enough these days, then the next best thing is to start a band. As in London, boy-band fever is rocking the city. Following in the foot steps of Andreas Dobler and Rockmaster K, shooting ‘art star’ Tom Huber can be seen playing in many various venues around Zurich. He’s not shy to string his guitar in a tiny pizzeria, a dingy squat, an artist run space and the one and only Helsinki Bar. As lead singer and front ‘hunk’ Huber is a perfect tonic for a good night out. Johnny Cash eat your heart out!

Keeping up the rear is David Renggli, also strutting his coolness with his band ‘Waldorf’. Rumour has it that Renggli is not really gods gift to the music world, but this didn’t put off the crowds at his latest Zürich performance. Waldorf fans were prepared to pay the entrance fee of 25CHF to enjoy a night of rock n’roll, fantastic light show and expensive drinks.

There is something very refreshing with Huber and Renggli, both great young artist who’s talents are broad and experimental; to hear more about Boy Band Fever look out for the forthcoming Kunstfly exclusive in the next edition of WATA – Interview with the stars, pop star pin-up plus special feature on Britains hottest new band ‘Arthur Brick’ who recently played live at the Tate Britain, London.



Tom Huber performing live. Photo by www.bakara.ch



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