



Notes for the Photo-Presentation of **Nine Dragon Heads**

Nomadic Party#2 in the Literature Museum of Tbilisi, October 6th
2012

By Annelise Zwez

I will tell you something about the 27 Nine Dragon Heads that did a journey from Tashkent to the Aral Sea in 9 black & white Chevrolets Captiva made in Uzbekistan. A modern Silk Road caravan on its way from east to west.



Do not worry, I will not give you a lecture on Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva etc. I would like to present you along photographs chosen by the Dragon Heads for this presentation here what kind of inspiration field such a journey can be for visually thinking artists.

It was for me – being an art critic and not an artist – once more an extraordinary experience to follow the artists way of looking and listening at the same time and transforming the situation around them in a one minute-performance perhaps, in an unexpected photograph, in a video that shows the happening from an other side. It is as if the right and the left brainside would connect in a very high frequency and interact at the same time with the long term profile of their individual art work.

You see right from the first picture, that the power point presentation does not start with one of the wonderful islamic architectures from the period of Timur – the new national hero of the now independent state of Uzbekistan - but with a dry



and dirty landscape. It is a photograph taken out of one of the cars driving trough the seabed of the dried out Aral Sea. It was with the environmental disaster of the lake in mind that the crew was on the way. We will see it.

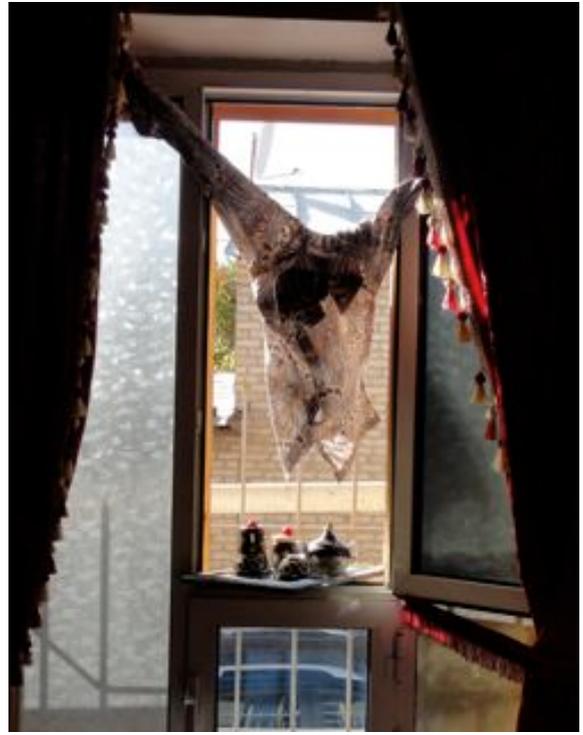
The presentation does not follow the chronology of the journey, but the artists that have been on the Nomadic Party.

You will above all see photographs that come out of the two presentations that included all artists, but also pictures from spontaneous interventions along the road (for instance when we lost a car of the caravan and had to wait in the middle of nowhere) or pictures taken in the rare free time hours in different places.

The first presentation was somehow a welcome ceremony with which Park Byoung Uk reminded every body that they are here to do artistic work on the one hand and to create a platform for the exchange between the artists. I have to explain perhaps that the Nine

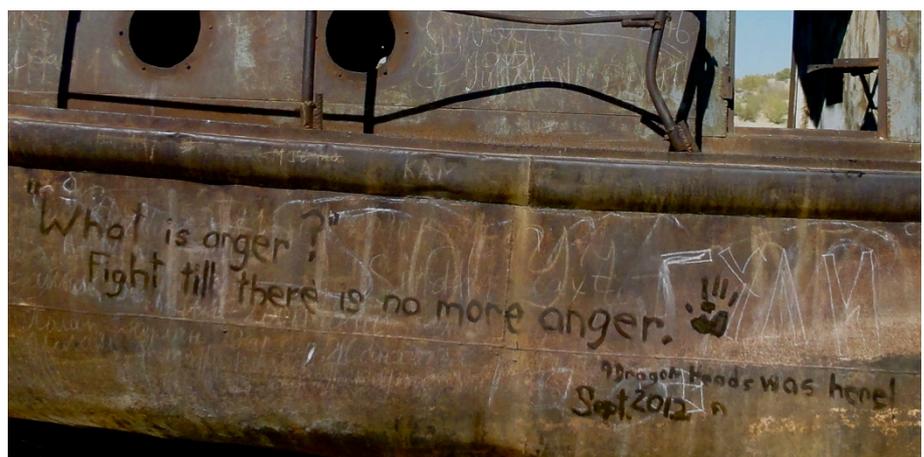
Dragon Heads are a network of artists that gather in various configurations for Nomadic Parties or Symposia held in a limited area. So more or less half of the group knew each other from earlier events the rest met for the first time.

Suzanne Bartos of which we see photographs here, is an Australian based artist who works with a rich knowledge of the Australian nature, but also the history of the country and above all the treasure of the culture of the Aborigines. So the bird she created with her blouse – I always had to laugh afterwards when she has worn it because I thought she would fly away any minute – anyway it has the whole tradition of mighty birds in it but at the same time a narrative maybe even a fairy tale aspect in the poetic installation with the tea service from the hotel where we stayed in Samarkand and where we did this first presentation „from room to room“.



Also the second intervention of Suzanne Bartos – this time in the graveyard of the ships in old Aral Sea Town of Moynaq tells us of this parallel lines of history, philosophy and

presence in her work. The sentence we see refers to an old fisherman in Moynaq who lost through the drying out of the lake the base of his existence, but who tries to overcome his faith within himself.

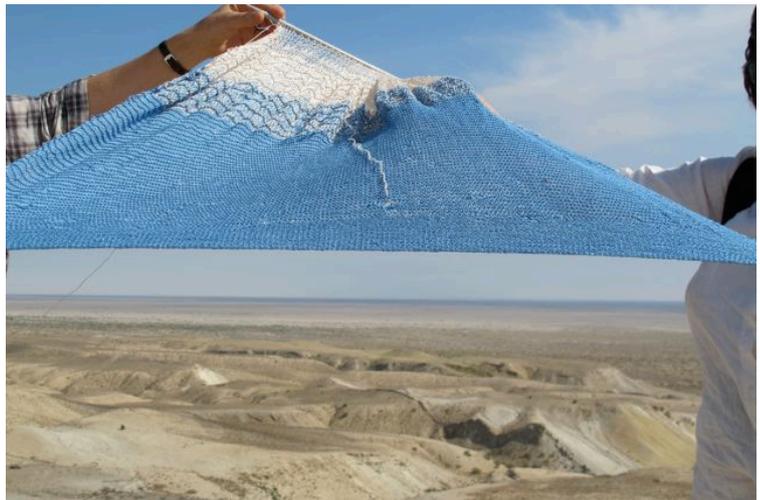


Sim Jea-Bun is a Korean based artist. Korea is somehow the homeport of the Nine Dragon Heads. Not only Park Byoung Uk is a Korean artist and curator, but also all early Nine Dragon Head Symposia – which means from 1994 onwards - took place in South Korea. The Korean artists very often have a subtle and poetic language to express themselves. Sim Jea-Bun took the possibility of the first presentation in Samarkand to explain this to us.

At the graveyard SIM collected bleached bones of dead animals that lay around in the sand. In a gentle rhythm she let them fall out of a ship's eye, signalling time and death.



Juliet Fowler Smith is an Australian based artist with a long and ongoing work in the field of environmental art as it came up in the 70th when the theses of the Club of Rome told us clearly that nature is going out of balance. So it is not astonishing that the artist put her finger on the fatal relation between the water intensive cotton production in Uzbekistan and the drying out of the Aral Sea. During the whole journey she was knitting with a cotton thread and shows in this marvellous photograph (made by her partner, Graham Cochrane) the correlation between the two. Even going further in two other photo settings and culminating in the struggle of the unravelling of the knitted cotton work (with Suzanne Bartos).



Channa Boon is an artist from the Netherland. She is a filmer and therefore thinks in terms of filming. So I would like to ask Ali to show us all four pictures Chana gave for this presentation in a sequence and then going back to the first. The Georgians in the room here may think – why on earth is she combining the ship graveyard of the Aral Sea with our elections....one is in Uzbekistan, we are here in Tibilisi....but then perhaps we become all silent because neither the catastrophe of the Aral Sea nor any other environmental disaster is a local story.....

Alois Schild is an austrian based artist and one of the veterans of the Nine Dragon Heads. He gave us four pictures with four different topics. I am going to give you some comment on two of them. The first comes out of Alois' personal friendship with Park Byoung Uk. He took from the Tirol area – where he lives – a dry and old branch with a lot of life energy in it to Uzbekistan and gave it to Park in a ritual ceremony in order to transfer the energy to Park and – indirectly – the future off he Nine Dragon Head Project.

The second and third photograph you may interpret yourself taking Alois' tendency towards the absurd with you. Because we need it as well for the fourth picture with the „Wappentier des Grössenwahns“ (the heraldic animal of the megalomania) that shows us its poor and cowardly face, telling us the miserable behaviour of any blind plans that do not take in consideration the consequences of a ruthless order. The word „Chide“ behind was already there – as far as I could find out it is a word coming out of the graffiti scene.

Christophe Doucet is a french artist. In discussions he points out that he is not a performer but a sculptor and so he gave us two photographs that might



illustrate his thinking. On the first one we see drawings on stone that are said to be prehistorical. They show animals. Animals are an important topic in Christophe's artistic work – animals that also come out of an unknown time. The road leading through the desert might trace time from the ancient drawings to the studio of Christophe.

The second photograph shows more of a Nine Dragon Head situation than a mirror. The picture is taken in the rough wind at the Aral Sea. Park asked us all what we feel, what we think face to face to the drama of this lake and obedient as we are, we all made our statements. Not all of them had the same colour.



Daniela de Maddalena is a Swiss artist. You cannot see it exactly, but I can tell you that the Usbeki man on the photograph has a Swiss army knife in his hand. Daniela started during the first Silk Road Nomadic Party a barter project, will say she offered to different persons, above all merchants, a swiss army knife in exchange to some goods they offered in their shops. As it was common during the high time of the Silk Road. And just as once upon a time, Daniela wanted to do good bargains!! This project was continued now in Usbekistan. And again the base was not an easy english conversation, but an attempt to communicate with hands and feet.

The second photograph does not illustrate a specific action of Daniela, it shows rather a Nine Dragon Head mentality – camera, camera, camera. On the picture we see Lee Gun-Soo & Park Chan-Min from the Korean MBC-TV who film Daniela how she is filming a little water spring....



Within the same topic Daniela is – a few days later - throwing a water resistant camera into the Aral Sea as if it would be a fishing pole.... maybe it is one...!! ? The aim: to get a video of the water of the Aral Sea from an unexpected point of view. The result is not yet known.

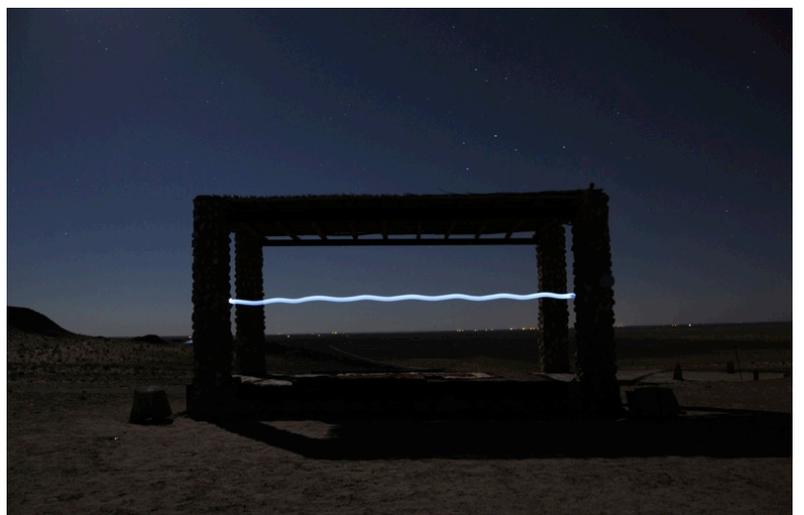


Last but not least we see the solar ballon that should have elevated the rusty ship and bring it back from Moynaq to the Aral Sea.



Enrique Munoz Garcia has grown up in Chile and came 14 years ago to Switzerland. He is a photographer in the professional sense of the word. One morning last week he said to me: „That I leave the house in the morning without shoes is possible, but without camera – never.“

His choice shows different aspects of his photographic language. Reportage-Photography in the best sense of the word in the first picture – the technical player that uses his





iphone to draw a light-line into the dark and last but not least the „Charmeur“ who can establish a communication with anybody within shortest times and get the permission to take photographs in addition. Look how the pride grandfather is posing his grand-son!

And then we come to the collaboration between Bruce Allan and Enrique Munoz. The title of the multi-part Essay is „opposite“ – what is not to be understood as a profound conceptual process but a visual sign of being together on the same way.



The photograph of the Aral Sea in 1998 and 2008 combined with a slogan of Soviet times is more of an illustration than a shot with the camera.

An important intervention by Bruce Allan was the RIP at the Aral Sea graveyard. You can take it as the abbreviation of „Rest in peace“, but Bruce (and myself) prefers „Requiescat in pace“. Important is of course that human beings of today wear the T-Shirts.





angel off he north“, situated in eastern England. „For me an angel cannot be made of steel, the sign has to be a human being“, the artist told me.

In a certain sens typical is the next photograph as Denizhan often refers to the once very big turkish empire by wearing an ottoman cap. Here he pours out some water as restart of the filling up of the Aral Sea. Unfortunately it took only a few minutes to make it disappear...futility that was to be shown of course.

Something completely else are the photographic documentation of a Aral Sea setting by the turkish artist Denizahn Özer. He refers expressis verbis to a hughe steel sculpture by the well known british artist Antony Gormley, called „The



Some sort of infiltration is the following picture. It is a typical usbekian jewellery made by one of our caravan drivers, who is – as can be seen - only a driver from time to time. Paul



Dunker invited him to be the special guest of the presentation „room to room“ in Samarkand and Denizhan smuggled in the photograph in this presentation. That this driver engaged himself very much more in the special atmosphere of the Nine Dragon Heads expedition is

easy to understand. He was also an assistant of Paul at the graveyard.

We come to Gabriel Adams from the US – who is a master of presenting himself in humorous, sometimes absurd or paradox, but at the same time very precise situations that turn through their double-egging easily from anecdote to art. In „Plan B“ (Samarkand) we do not see himself, but it is his language behind.



In this photograph Gabriel presents himself as a traditional „Bek“ with a striped coat, the owner of a camel-caravan.



Last but not least we see Gabriel with a plastic shark, here in the Aydarkul Lake, later at the bank of the Aral Sea and finally in the Artisterium.

Yoo Joung Hee is a Korean based artist – you remember what I said about the poetic and fine language of many Korean artists? – Looking at the „Letter from Tashkent“ she presented in Samarkand it shows up again.



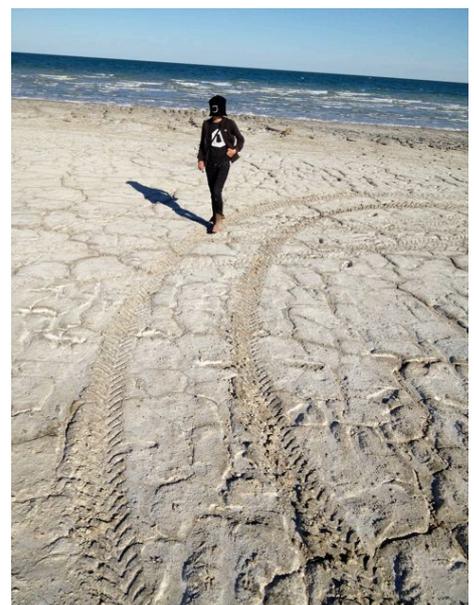


Yoko Kajio is a Japanese artist living in Australia. Behind her working is also this very subtle visual language we find in Korea. I do not know exactly why, but I like the word „blowing“ – in the poetic sense of „blowing in the wind“ – when I think of her work. In this sense the somehow astonishing photograph of an Uzbekian woman almost worn by the ornaments of the wall could have attracted Yoko by her own feeling of life. The second shows herself.

Very interesting is the combination of an action, a setting and a drawing by Susanne Muller – a Swiss based artist. It might be that no one else has been on so many Dragon Head Symposia as her. „I am a nomadic“, she says. The sketchily character of the drawing is somehow a mirror for it. But very often her drawings are integrated in narrative settings. Such as here, where Susanne made a drawing on a Sum-note (Sum is the currency of Uzbekistan) – a drawing that shows what is to be seen from this point of view in Khiva. The paper, the drawing and the view come together as if they were a new form of landmark or map.



The second photograph shows on the one hand a black masked person, that easily refers to death, to a criminal background. It has been taken in the Aral Sea desert, that explains everything. But at the same time we see that the artist is walking in a trace. You can interpret it as a trace of investigation, but you can put it as well in another context of the artist with the „brand“: „Warning of arrival“ – a somehow paradox slogan that means for her, you are never allowed to stand still.





Harold de Bree lives in Den Hague in Holland. He is an Audio-Artist, which means that we should hear sounds when looking at the stage of the presentation in Samarkand. Important for your imagination is to know that his sounds are often a kind of signals, come out of a rather technical

world. Tbilisi with its ongoing construction noises must be a paradise for him – But in the graveyard of the ships his language turned into a very touching performance. You see him in the cabin of the captain, working on a little typing machine. No, it is not SOS that the morse-code signals broadcast into the air, it is the beginning of the novel „The old man and the sea“ by Ernest Hemingway. His famous novel concentrates in the sentence that you might be killed, but you are never allowed to give up.



Bram Thomas Arnold is a british artist who is actually working on a theme that combines walking (traveling), words (writing) and performance. Here we see him talking, but he is not trying to sell us a guided tour through Samarkand. He says:

Bukhara is brownish; it is the color of day baked in the sand.

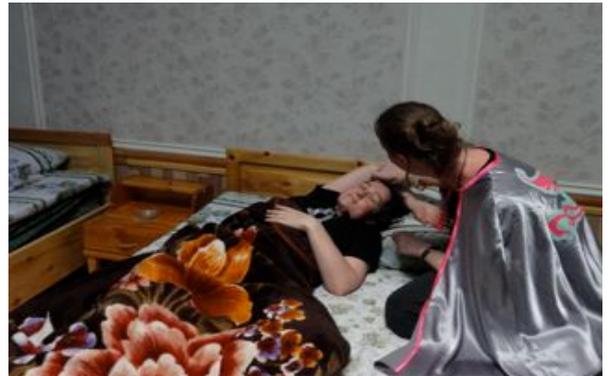
Samarkand is intensivly blue; it ist he color of sky water.

Tashkent is golden, it is the color oft he sun crystalised in a thousand grains of sand.



The second photograph is a documentary photograph of his performance in the graveyard, where he draw with blue pigment (that could also be used for writing) a shoreline of the Aral Sea when it still reached Moynaq.

Lisa Benson and Kylie Bakker come from New Zealand. The first photograph has a very simple background. Kylie was the first one to get some nasty bugs and felt very bad when we were in Samarkand.....



The second image is almost a brand of the Nomadic Party#2 as Lisa and Kylie often worked with the flags they brought with them from New Zealand. I would like to call them love flags as they do not have to do with a manifestation of power. On one of them is



written „kiss the sky like a falcon“ – an obviously poetic expression, but when I started to think what it really means, I did not come further. So I asked the two and Lisa said: You have to dream the answer.

The third one shows us the word „sorry“ made from cotton on the dry ground of the Aral Sea. It does not need an explanation – I think.



Ali Bramwell is also a New Zealand based artist, although you would not find her there all the time. Each time I have her seen doing a performance, I was astonished about the radicalness of her acting. The Scotch tape she always uses has the character of a rope to

enchain someone, be it herself or someone else. Laughing does not mean the whole thing of the little struggle in the entrance hall of the hotel in Samarkand. But in discussions the artist very often uses the word „absurdity“ and „effect“ – which says that she searches for strong pictures. Unfortunately her performance in the graveyard could not be executed because the car she was in went a wrong way and did not show up in Moynaq. But also there she would have worked with Scotch, tightening herself at a boat, signalling this way the co-responsibility of us all for the enviromental disaster at the Aral Sea.



Paul Dunker Duyvis is an netherland based artist and as Ali, Alois and susanne an artist of the inner circle of the Nine Dragon Heads.

The interdependency between the irrigation of the cotton fields with the water that sould keep the level of the Aral Sea and the base for the existence of the people of Uzbekista n was Pauls topic right

from the beginning and so we meet him here already in Samarkand as „cotton king“. At the graveyard of the ships Paul lined out a spiral – symbol for the element water.



Erika Batdorf is a Canadian artist who is at the base an actress, but integrated along her career educations in dancing, singing, choreography and more. We see her in the cabin of one of the rusty ships. What we do unfortunately not hear is her beautiful voice. „It was not a performance I did at the graveyard“, she told me, „it was a prayer in form of a song“. The title tells to many people what is meant, it is „Amazing Grace“, a song that tells of an American slave trader that came into a storm and promised God to bring all the people back to Africa when he would be saved. And he did! It is a song, so says Erika, that keeps hope alive.



The last photograph of this presentation shows a bit more about singing and fortunately Denizhan has song and recorded at the same time when four artists – Christophe and Channa were at their side – gave a spontaneous little concert in some sort of shadow hall in the semidesert along the road when we had to

wait for two temporary lost cars. Denizhan can you let us have a short sample??
(remember!)

And then – there we are... I hope you enjoyed the tour and agree with us all: The Nomadic Party#2 was a great event we will never forget and that will spread out in the individual works of the artists who took part.

Annelise Zwez

The photographs come out of the portfolio of azw. Some of them Enrique Munoz allowed azw to take over from his collection. Some come directly from the artists. Many thanks.