

Preservation is Future

Moodeung Museum of Contemporary Art*

Gwangju

3rd September - 16th September 2013



Notes on the exhibition and the works of the Nine Dragon Heads artists and artists invited by the museum for this specific exhibition

Annelise Zwez

According to the spirit of Nine Dragon Heads the title "Preservation is Future" is above all to be understood under environmental aspects. Although it could - in the Asia of today especially - be interpreted in an urbanistic sense just as well. In the works presented by the artists we find a wide range of associations to the title. It could be shortened to: "Be conscious of the roots of what you see and experience - be it nature, history, society, philosophy and so on.

This "being conscious" gives many artists the possibility of creating works that are at the same time a homage to the beauty and never-ending miracle of the world's visual richness and a critical or sorrowful position on behalf of it at the same time.

There are however also works that do not really fit in the topic - which does not have to do with the quality of the works. The reason can be that they come out of the NDH-collection or - as to the Gwanju-artists - that they brought works out of their actual work.

We also have to have in mind that most works were brought by the artists from their ateliers. Some of them refer to Nomadic Parties of the last years such as China, Biel/Bienne, Usbekistan which is - for the insiders - especially enriching.

The artists and their works:

Gabriel Adams: Nine Dragon Heads know the ice machine - most of them have eaten ice cream made by it in the context of a performance - be it in Seoul, in Tibet or in Biel/Bienne. The social aspect of the object and its function was then in the foreground. Here it is however shown together with three charcoal drawings that each show a "exploding" ice cream cornet that makes everybody think - even before they recognize the ice cream - a missile on its way to a hostile target. This suddenly gives an irritating dimension to the work. Is it just humorous or a joke on a similar form? Probably not. Gabriel says it could be a warning on behalf of the kind of products that are used for making ice cream and that the decision what ingredients are chosen is up to the consciousness of each of us.



Bruce Allan: The spider web photograph out of the video "entrapment" has a beautiful background story. Bruce decided to reactivate an old garage next to his house as a depot. When he opened the door he saw a lot of spider webs, which was to be expected. But then, just



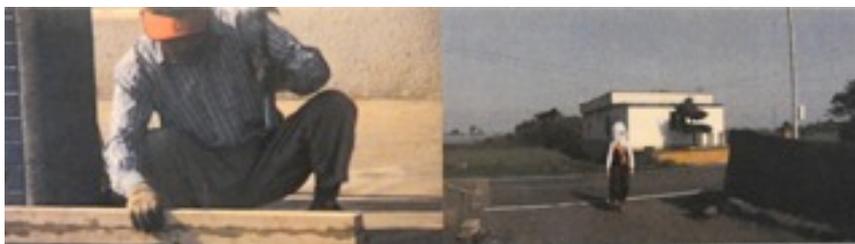
in that moment, sunlight enters the window and transforms the threads into a light show and invites to a lot of associations. One is concentrated in the poem "Tattoo" by Wallace Stevens that Bruce integrated in the work . As often in his oeuvre - a surprising visual experience is combined with a poetic image from literature and makes a whole of it.

Channa Boon: In the centre of her presentation stands the 25 minutes-film "Et in Arcadia ego". It combines in an intellectually challenging way film material taken in three Eastern Europe countries that were during a long time Soviet provinces. Within the film we can make out

different events, such as the catastrophe of the dried out Aral Sea (Uzbekistan), a film festival in Odessa (Ukraine) and the new experience with democracy after the communist period (Georgia). It is a political film, but not a documentary, there are fictional combinations of film and text-inserts, allusions to art and literature and there is space for individual associations. What comes out clearly is however: the repeated sequence of the old Odessa men playing chess does not only mean sport; it means the chess play of



power politics and ideologies. Convincing is, among other aspects, the way the artist integrates propaganda films by Stalin (shown at the film festival) and combines it with slogans of the communist plans to increase the harvest of cotton plantations in Uzbekistan by irrigating them with the water of the river Amu Darya, that led in the end to the drying out of the Aral Sea. With this switching between history and actuality the artist points out that history is not just an entertaining story of the past, but something on-going that has to be consciously kept in mind.



Opposite the one-channel-projection the artist shows in a film-like small sequence the "story" of a man with a piece of wood that he is fixing to an

unfinished construction in an anonymous surrounding. Following the pictures we see now and on a woman with a white gauze-scarf that seems to dance through the court yards nearby. Is she the dream of the man? Maybe. (By the way: the video for the stills has been realised on Jeju Islands in Korea).

Paul Donker Duyvis: He combines a photograph showing - in a very brilliant print - the view through a very green hedge to a reddish brick wall and - to the right - a full body suit made of rabbit fur (inside out) with the a connecting fur hat, gloves, a whip and on the floor a long blue (textile) "river". It is the view on enchanting beauty where nobody would expect it (taken in China 2005) on the one hand and objects for a performance giving an irritating background to the picture on the other hand.



At the opening reception the performance was given: Referring to the childhood remembrance when he helped his mother to coil loose wool into balls, he did the same now - wrapped in the warm survival suit - in two directions: First he dissolved the blue textile "river"-ball, symbolising here some sort of reservoir, by

connecting the present public one by one and turned it afterwards around himself and ended with the words: "Let the blue river never dry out". Maybe the message would have been more clear by saying: "It is in your responsibility that the blue river never dries out." Most of the Nine Dragon Heads in the public knew that the artist referred to the Aral Sea in Uzbekistan, that the NDH had visited in 2012, but the message of the performance is valuable for many more possibilities of course.



Magdalena Hlawacz, Aleksandra Janik: Their photographic work consisting of two parts and is entitled "The competence to travel". It shows on the one hand a photomontage referring to a body feeling and in the repetition film-like landscape with mountains wrapped in clouds on the other



hand. "It was our preparation for the journey to Mongolia", the two say. And point on the Haiku by the Japanese poet Kyorai written on the wall: "Even in my own town I now sleep as a foreigner". Going abroad means, so her work

seems to say us, to get out of the every day costume and jump into another and allow the clouds to bring you in new fields...which is however often not so romantic as it sounds. We feel the ambiguity, get aware of the underlying scepticism in the subtle body picture and become conscious of the fluffy and unstable material of a cloud.

Daniela de Maddalena: "The never ending protest" is an on-going project, that started in a one-woman-show of the artist in Switzerland, but already in view of the "Artisterium", an exhibition in Tbilisi a year ago, curated by the also here present Magda Guruli with the same (original) title. (The Nine Dragon Heads were part of the show and all present). It was then however continued



in different places in Switzerland and this year already in Finland, in Ulaanbaatar and now at the opening in Gwangju the 3rd of September 2013. It is an interactive project. Every visitor of one of the mentioned exhibitions had the opportunity to form out of a prepared bit of clay (all the same size) an imprint of his fist and write a sentence to the background of his protest in a booklet. "I still have a dream", someone wrote, "in the mean time I protest." "Ich protestierte gegen die Abholzung des Regenwaldes". "Pour que l'amour triomphe", but also "Nothing to protest!" (that was surely a Swiss!).

Unfortunately I cannot quote the Georgian inserts, because I cannot read the Georgian alphabet....

The fists shown in Gwangju are at the mean time only a fraction of the entire work. But for the first time the artist integrated some stones and even dry yoghurt-pieces and made a little hill of sand on the table, all from the Mongolian trip before and so integrating an aspect of time and context.

susanne muller: To be on the move is the artist's essence of life. To stop would mean to die. It is however not a restless moving, but one of a life-long experience that she tries to communicate in video-installations (and drawings). We feel its rhythm when we virtually sit (the face to the back) on the riding cushion of the camel and start to move in the jog trot of the animal "chain". The video-specialists would probably find out how she managed to install the



short loop in the way it is! On the floor the artist spreads out some little references to the title, "Beyond Mongolia", such as her scrap book, a rope used for binding together the camels, a "Chingis Khan"-Picture, marvellous little stones of the desert, a map and more. The floor however - who would divine it without a hint of the artist? - is a sequence of photographs of a crumpled white paper - a Swiss imagination of the desert .

Park Beyung-Uk: "Participate" he titles the little package with a bundled yellow/black outdoor jacket and a stone with writing all over on it. The size would easily fit in a hand. The enigma is the grey stone - is it the stone of an old sage or has it the function of a chip with all information available on the world? Maybe it means both, just as the vision of the Nine Dragon Heads, the life project of the artist himself.



Denizhan Ozer: The four C-type color prints (shot 2012 in the Usbekistan) show four Nine Dragon Heads - most of them present here - as "angels in the desert". The artist refers with the



shape and the scenery to a huge steel sculpture of the well-known British artist Antony Gormley, situated in north eastern England. "For me", he says, "an angel cannot be made of steel, it has to be a human being". Most of us would probably say it has to be immaterial, but the artist says "a human being". Yet in the desert, the widest nothing we can imagine, the field of Fata Morganas, the pictures of

the three men and one woman far away and all alone become signs and start dissolving, become their own shadows and evoke the Greek philosopher Plato....

Jessy Rahman: His contribution brings in a welcome humorous aspect: In the object hanging from the ceiling as well as in the performance he gave together with the Gwangju based photographer Shin, Jang Yong. The object - a tunnel made with pink foam fabric, strong yellow paper wrapped with some sort of sleeping bag open on both ends - has in its inside (what a



surprise!) a comic scenery with little clay figures, made by the staff of the museum. "Cave talk" is the official title of the work, but I prefer the unofficial (told me by the artist): "Love tunnel". What does he want with it in the context: The artist is not a superficial thinker, so there must be a subversive aspect. Maybe it is just his love of Korea (the figures resemble to the little girls and

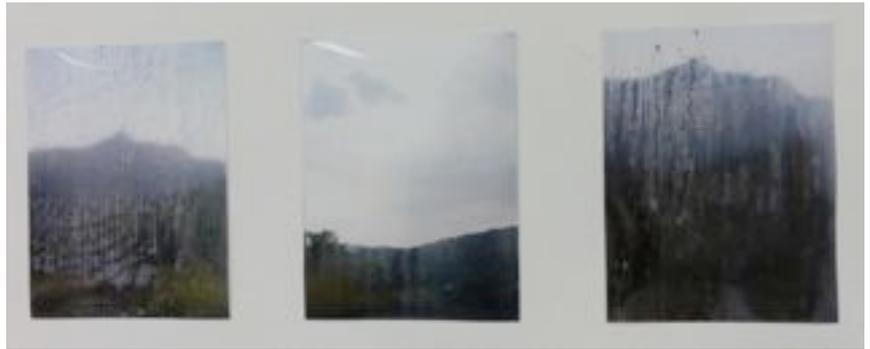


boys on thousands of posters all over the country). Love that gives the subliminal hope that we can understand each other better than we allow on the surface.

This aspect could also be felt in a spontaneously developed performance for the vernissage: A Korean (representing Asia) and a Surinamese (representing the African and the American continent) meet each other in Gwangju, slip in a soft carpet

tunnel and sing in a precious dialogue traditional songs of their countries. Touching how much more music can communicate in such a situation compared to language.

Thom Vink: He shows a series of small photographs directly pinned to the wall. He shot them a few days before through a misty window, so that we have only a vague idea of the landscape behind. "It reminds me



of paintings of old Chinese or Korean artists", he says. The great masters often tried to show the visual and the hidden side of the world at the same time. In the work of Thom Vink the photographs easily answer what an art critic has written on the artist's widely spread out work: "He lures us into his incomplete system, which is governed by the laws of uncertainty...it's all about searching rather than finding".

Iliko Zauthasvili: "The Decline of the West" is the title the artist gave to the tent covered with textile prints of different sort of pictures coming out of a western European magazine of the 1950s. Radiant faces of young girls in some sort of Marilyn Monroe-style, cars in the design of the time, binoculars out of an advertisement and so on. Originally the tent should have been a "yurt" to point out the clash of cultures we have in our global world today. But as Magda Guruli,



the artist's partner and curator of his work, told me, this was not possible to realise for the show, so the pictures refer less to a cultural crash but to a past time in western Europe that was full of hope and visions 10 years after the end of the second world war.; pictures in a spirit we hardly find in western culture today. At first

we react with joy, but quickly the feeling turns into melancholia and uncertainty.



All other works presented in the exhibition were either older works of the Nine Dragon Heads collection, such as the ones of Ursula Stalder, Jusuf Hadzifejzovic, Christina Bagnal and Kazunori Kitazawa or sent to Park Byung-Uk or the museum to be shown in the show, such as the video-animation of Diek Grobler that is based on a work and a performance the artist presented together with Marinda du Toit two years ago in Biel/Bienne in Switzerland. Or the "Golden Leaf" applied to a tree, similar to the work that Christophe Doucet presented at ARKO in Seoul in 2010.



Last but not least the Gwangju on the occasion



museum invited some local artists from of the exhibition, such as Kim Gyeng Ran,

Kim Hye Cheol, Oh Sun Yeong, Lee Ho Dong, Cho Gwang Seok, Chol He Won, Hong Won Cheol. And also the director of the museum Jung Song-Kyu** honoured Nine Dragon Heads with a special outdoor installation for the event.

* The museum was built in 2007. Director and owner of the private museum is the painter Jung Song-Kyu (*1944). Originally she wanted to build an atelier-house, but as one story buildings are not allowed in this area, she decided together with her husband, Dr. Pa (see picture), to build a two story-house and use the ground floor as museum. Curator is Kim Byung-hun together with a few secretaries and/or assistants. But it looks as if she would decide on the artists having exhibitions here.



** Jung Song-Kyu is a professional painter for a long time. Her work starts in the late 1970ties. She then painted in a figurative way. By painting the topics closer and closer, abstraction came nearer and nearer. In the 1990ties she switched definitively over to vibrating compositions with hundreds of little rectangles in sublime colours full of light. There are variations of yellow, red, blue, green and more in reduced combinations, such as red and green with bright and dark spots within the landscape- or flower-like flow of the composition. In the last years she added a more experimental chapter to her work by using Lego-Bricks for "drawings" that evoke architectural plans of large cities seen from above.



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