

ArtGenda 2000

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ARTGENDA AS A MEETING PLACE

Every big international exhibition creates a lot of movement around it. Every big international exhibition is visited by people willing to find something extraordinary. The rumours going around sometimes provoke inadequate reaction, which only reflects the complexity of contemporary culture. The contemporary art world is an unstable, shaky construction,

mainly due to the constantly accelerating change in information technology. One gets messages about events on a daily basis - especially if one works for a cultural institution, meaning that one is a direct part of this system. So unconsciously we start to perceive large shows as concentration points, where boundless contemporary art could finally appear as a clear structure.

When you visit an exhibition like

ArtGenda it is worth imagining the possible attitude of the organisers of such event. ArtGenda Biennial is one of the best promoted and largest art exhibitions of so called 'young art' in the Nordic and Baltic region, and it already has a long tradition. So its curators should feel special responsibility even before beginning their work. It seems that they have the privilege of formulating some important definitions on contemporary art du-

Aarhus, Denmark - Mads Wahlberg, Morten Constantin Lervig, Peter Tagesen, Inge-Line Jessen, Henrik Corfitsen, *Motorised carpet*, multimedia installation, an illuminated computer con-trolled flying carpet, Sanoma House, Helsinki, 2000



ring certain periods of time. What aims of this exhibition may they foresee? It is not difficult to find a few possible variants. For example, the aim of the event might be to define precisely the condition of contemporary art, in our case that part of it which is associated with the adjective 'young'. These efforts could be directed both at the present and the past, because the spectator would be expecting an explanation of what has been happening recently and what we currently see. The evolution of art would be evoked, and the curator would act as a critic-interpreter. I suppose 'young' is even more oppressive than 'retrospective', because we believe that the 'future belongs to the young'. I don't intend to write any more here about the ideology of the 'young', who have been the driving force of Western capitalism since its birth. The fact is too evident.

In the other situation curator would feel more free and think of himself as someone more important than an interpreter. He would try, using his knowledge of the actual situation, to present possible forms of future art. Not only would the curator think he sees what others are unable to see (critic-prophet) but would also initiate new directions in art (critic-manipulator). Let us not forget that the international significance of the exhibition presupposes such a global attitude. And again, the young and prophecy are too well related and this provides

one more reason to overestimate similar art events. Visitor might feel the same pressure

ArtGenda exhibitions already have a history, although the Helsinki Biennial was the first one I actually visited. I remember the show in 1996 (Copenhagen) was organised in a rather chaotic way: nobody in my city (Vilnius) knew what it really was. There was a competition to select the Lithuanian participants, a great number of people went and came back with mixed feelings. On the other hand, at that time the possibility to go abroad was much appreciated. The 1998 event (Stockholm) didn't create much of a stir in the Lithuanian art world either. Although the selection of artists and works and the intentions of the organisers seemed to be much clearer.

The impression made by the 2000 (Helsinki) exhibition was much stronger. Though perhaps that was just my personal feeling because, as a result of my participation in 'Mare Arcticum', I had to get much closer to the event. First of all I went to Copenhagen in the summer of 1999 to see ArtGenda's Summer school. I was not a part of the school; I was in the comfortable position of the observer. The very idea of a summer school was extremely inspiring. It is always inspiring to see a lot of artists just being together. That is one of the most important and traditional ways of cultural development: direct exchange

between artists is one of the strongest impulses. So my enthusiasm was natural and was not theoretically pre-conditioned - the main reason for going was to spend a few days in the company of happy people. The first two exhibitions left a bitter taste. Although they were well-promoted and organised with a lot of political interest they had no way of provoking a natural continuation: future collaboration between the participants, city organisers, etc. The last day of the show came and it ended. And that was it.

The people of Helsinki proposed a different frame. As the introduction to what I was thinking that time in Copenhagen, I wanted to remember another important Finnish art event that took place a few years ago: the opening of a new museum of contemporary art in Helsinki - the Kiasma museum.

During the museum's many presentations one slogan was constantly repeated: 'Kiasma is the meeting place'. These words were meant to express the intention of this art institution that appeared at a time when art museums have been extensively criticised. The main reason of this criticism is simple: it is normally stated that the traditional museum is not a good place for a contemporary work of art. The diversity of contemporary art practices, relationship strategies with the user/spectator exceeds the presentation capabilities of the mu-

Bergen, Norway - Bjorg Taranger, *City Angel*; Mona Eckhoff Sormo, *Paradox*; Ellen Sohlberg, *Treasury of Memories*; video triptyche *Sound of the urban soul*; sound and video editing: Kjetil Hoydal, Jostein Dahl Gjelsvik; Gallery Jangva, Toolonlahti Warehouses, Helsinki, 2000



Bjorg Taranger, *City Angel* installation