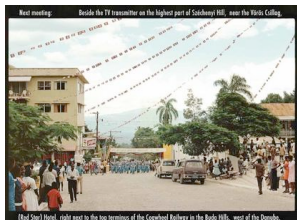


Theatre of the absurd, for art's sake

18 Oct 2010 by Stella Sevastopoulou



One of the 'Next Meeting' posters which was fly-posted on Esperidon Square in Glyfada

ADAM Chodzko is perhaps best known as the British multimedia artist who let loose nocturnal animals at the Frieze Art Fair in 2004 in order to trace their "alternative" art tour via maps and photographs in a work he titled *Nightshift*. Now Chodzko has been invited to let loose his imagination at Els Hanappe's new art space in Glyfada, which opened its doors with a show of the contemporary artist's recent works.

Hanappe's art space, previously situated in Psyrri, is now called the Siakos.Hanappe gallery. The aim of its owner is to provide the southern suburbs with a programme of exhibitions with an international focus, kicking off with Chodzko's penchant for the theatre of the absurd - but for art's sake.

Born in 1965, Kent-based Chodzko has exhibited his work in many shows, fairs and biennials around the world, while his art has also made its way into various private and state collections - including those of the Tate and the British Council.

He explains to the Athens News how 2004's *Nightshift* remains one of his favourite projects, while art fairs still make him uncomfortable.

"The idea that you could follow the route of a wolf or python etc through the fair's architecture for me was almost a way of 'coping'," he says. "I was also hoping that people would empathise with the creature's obliviousness to the status of 'art' over any other object in the world and that that perception would clarify their vision within the art fair. For me the skunk was a personal favourite."

Bizarrely playful

Chodzko's show at the Siakos.Hanappe gallery, which runs through to October 30, presents the versatility of this artist in terms of media, his bizarre imagination and playful spirit.

Take, for instance, one of his *Next meeting* posters, which announces where a meeting will take place in Budapest - "Beside the TV transmitter on the highest part of Szechenyi Hill" - while the poster's photo depicts another place altogether, one situated in Haiti.

A series of such posters created in 2010 by the artist, each one of them presenting bizarre mixes of places and countries - which furthermore never state the time or date of the "next meeting" - were fly-posted in various public spaces, including Glyfada's Esperidon Square.

There's an element of surreal child's play in Chodzko's work, which he describes as "a sincerely felt but performative 'innocence' ". This is balanced by his penchant for using historical archives, albeit in tricky ways.

In the Siakos.Hanappe show, the work *Arc Ark* (2010), for example, is a perfectly polished, sealed, waterproof, wooden container, or vessel, within which the artist has placed 117 DAT audio tapes containing BBC interviews with members of parliament. In order to reach them, one would have to break the work of art. The piece is a kind of "message in a boat", which can be sent out to sea.

In the video installation *The Pickers*, 2009 (also on show), Romanian strawberry pickers in England are filmed at work, but also while they edit archival footage of 20th-century British migrant hop pickers at work.

Economic impact

Chodzko explains how he was partly influenced by the recession for this project. It led him to think about the role of labour and of the migrant. Via this work, the Romanian workers identify with British hop pickers, while the viewer is encouraged to perceive the world from the situation of the Romanians. But Chodzko also goes a step further.

"I also like to undermine expectations," he says. "So it is unclear whether *The Pickers* is set in the UK or Romania. Is it a Romanian work or a British one. Above all it seems perverse to be 'allowing' foreigners to have some power to edit an archive of our [British] culture. And this generation of knowledge by a group who 'doesn't belong' is precisely my point. We might learn more about ourselves from others rather than being complacent in the assumption that we know best about how to evolve our own culture."

Other works in the show include his *Ghost* project, which involved the creation of a handcrafted kayak/sculpture that resembles a coffin. Part of the project is the video installation (on show at the gallery), which documents the viewer who becomes the work's 'passenger'. Whilst lying down in the work, the viewer/passenger is ferried to the island of the dead (Dead Man's Island, near Queensborough).

Although the recession in England has influenced Chodzko's latest work, the artist also feels that there has been a good side to the whole crisis.

"I found the excessive materialism of the boom years aimless and sickening. It was paralleled by the art world's shift towards art fairs as, apparently, the most important way of engaging with art which prioritises the marketplace over the act of careful looking. I hope the recession will allow people to reclaim the quiet - and often free - act of viewing."

A little perspective

He also points out that in the UK "art has responded to the recession by becoming more thoughtful and more political". Furthermore, we should "get a sense of proportion. It's a recession in the UK. There are plenty of places in the world that are in a permanent state of poverty and chaos."

Back in Greece, looking beyond the doom and gloom might sound a tad optimistic for some, but those who dare to, might well be the winners in the crisis. Take Hanappe for instance, the young Belgian gallery owner, who despite the recession decided to move her art space from downtown Athens' central cultural hub of Psyrri to Glyfada.

Times change, argues Hanappe, who is well aware of how the southern coast of Athens has attracted a more cultural elite and an international crowd in recent years. Faliro is now the home of the international Art Athina fair and the Athens Biennial, for example.

Hanappe believes there is also a new cultural perspective developing for Glyfada, and she could well be the early bird on new ground.

- *The Siakos. Hanappe Gallery is situated on 16 Maragou St, Glyfada. Tel 210-898-2510. The Adam Chodzko show runs through to October 30*