GRUPPO78
international contemporary art trieste

"PUBLIC ART"

INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTARY EXHIBITION

Palazzo Costanzi, Albo Pretorio, Trieste
Ugo Carà Museum of Modern Art, Muggia (Trieste)
curated by Maria Campitelli, assisted by Elisa Vladilo

As part of the comprehensive **"Public Art Trieste e dintorni" (Public Art in and around Trieste) project promoted by Gruppo 78**, this exhibition – at Palazzo Costanzi and the former Albo Pretorio in Trieste and the Ugo Carà Museum of Modern Art in Muggia – is a major source of information on the project's chosen theme. On display is a series of examples of public art by some of the movement's most important artists from Italy and around the world. Quite naturally, the exhibition is not comprehensive; that would be impossible. Above all, it attempts to highlight the differences between the way "Public Art" is received in Italy and, one might say, in the Mediterranean area and Southern Europe generally and how it is received in a number of Northern European countries, Great Britain in particular. In fact, in the North, and especially in Britain, the concept of Public Art has been totally accepted, to the extent that universities have "Public Art" departments and that the regeneration of run-down areas is often the subject of open competition. Indeed, the involvement of the public and/or the use of "Public Art" competitions to improve the quality of the environment is sometimes carried to excess, with the serious danger of "doing too much but not getting it right" as, for example, in the case of the A13, the main trunk road between London and Essex. This is the opinion of the artist **Alberto Duman** and is borne out by his project entitled "people live here", planned specifically for the A13, in which he directs attention to the people who live in the areas bordering the main road – often foreigners or "transients and drop-outs", whilst other projects preferred to concentrate on intrusive (and pointless) objects in the numerous shopping centres that surround the residential areas designed according to a "disastrous model of peripheral urban planning". This is a long, complicated issue that cannot be contained in a short introduction to an illustrative exhibition.

By contrast, in Italy, recently and – I would say – ever since the success of the "**Oreste**" programme at the 1999 Biennale, the emphasis has been on communicative and socio-relational interpretations. Italian artists opt for direct interaction with the public, bringing them into the creative process, in certain instances with an obvious socio-political impact, in an attempt to change things. In Northern Europe, programmes are more site-specific. **Münster's Skulptur Projekt** – which we are fortunate to have as part of the event in Trieste – demonstrates this admirably. In Italy, we make more efforts to raise public awareness of problems that affect people directly, by providing conscious criticism intended to help improve the environment and the quality of living, as is done, in Italy and elsewhere, by **Bert Theis, Osservatorio in Opera, Paola Di Bello (Milan), AnnaLisa Cattani, Emilio Fantin (Bologna**) to mention but a few. The first three were mainly involved with the problem of the Stecca degli Artigiani art centre, the decaying building in the midst of a vast area of waste land in the Isola Garibaldi district of Milan, which artists and various groups occupied in an attempt to

save it from developers and speculators. Unfortunately, they failed and the building has recently been demolished.

Emilio Fantin and Giancarlo Norese were among those who promoted the "Oreste" programme; at the 1999 Biennale they, and other artists, were responsible for a large meeting and networking area for the exchange of information, creating the "*live* art that stems from radical performance", as Lorenza Perelli wrote in *Public Art. Arte, interazione e progetto urbano* [Public Art. Art, Interaction and Urban Planning], FrancoAngeli, 2006.

Fantin carries out his own independent research into interpersonal relationships, "extreme relational frontiers" and "interior encounters". Indeed, this can be seen in his videos, including the documentary record of trekking from one peak to another in the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines; somewhat evocative of Richard Long and "Apocalypse", this is the incredible adventure of an artist working as a public service provider in order to get into the Biennale.

The photographs by **Giancarlo Norese** bring us back to the creativity quotient, to the unspoken promise of other meanings that exist in things as they are, though always with a backdrop of unshakeable situationist culture. One needs only look for other interpretations to discover new perspectives.

Annalisa Cattani tells the story of performance adventures aimed at getting to know other people and to understand their hidden problems; or she illustrates artistic actions, "the engine that rediscovers paths of sense and memory" ("venti, trenta, quaranta metri" [twenty, thirty, fourty meters], Rocca Stellata di Bondeno, Ferrara, 2006).

Paola Di Bello contributed to the "action" to save the Stecca degli Artigiani with "un ritratto del quartiere Isola" [a portrait of the Isola district], snapping entire families against the background of tower blocks framed by the windows of the Stecca building, an impending and invasive threat to spaces that were still open and accessible to the local inhabitants.

Bert Theis is here too, the driving force behind the whole movement, not only with his "OUT" (the Office for Urban Transformation) material, which also takes into account parts of Mexico City and Tirana, but also with documents from other projects: the so-called Platforms, used in a number of different situations, from "Arte all'Arte" to "Skulptur Project", in 1997 in Münster. These are "philosophical" platforms, places to stop and think, for quiet reflection, designed to improve the quality of life in public spaces.

For its part, **Osservatorio in Opera** – including artists **Piero Almeoni, Paola Sabatti Bassini** and **Roberta Sisti** – contributed to the Stecca initiative with videos and "Bulletins" 1 and 2. The first issue examined violence against works of art and places where art is performed and/or shown; the second created a compendium of wishes and complaints expressed by the inhabitants of the Isola Garibaldi district in regard to building speculators and political authorities. Both were displayed, along with the enchanting "Souvenir of Milan" snowglobe, at the exhibition held at the Stecca in April 2007, just prior to its demolition.

Bastiaan Arler, a Dutchman who has relocated to Italy, also creates "art performances" leading to existential reflection. "Syntax Error" is a paradigmatic work which, through a group of masked performers in a designated area, traces a symbolic model of the daily movements of millions of citizens going about their routine in an unwittingly accepted and shared conformist lifestyle. Here, inspired by computer language, the artist has pre-programmed and controls their movements but... a number of "Syntax Errors" escape him.

Vienna's **Steinbrener – Dempf** partnership operates in urban settings, exploring the relationship between art and the city. Their very effective summer 2005 installation "Delete", which they set up in the Vienna 7 [Neubaugasse] district, is documented here. For two weeks they covered all the information, advertising and slogans that make up the signage of a city thoroughfare. They annihilated the insistent, "deafening"

commercial messages whose repetitive omnipresence in any case goes unnoticed by the citizen. Two unexpected weeks of "silence", with the signage gagged by yellow tape: it was certainly a new way of seeing the street! Another artistic partnership, that of brothers **Maik and Dirk Loebbert**, also works with architecture and the urban environment. Photos of their "Anonymus" project illustrate a strange event: indoor signs such as "Cloakroom" or "Dressing Room" (in the spirit of recycling, they were made of waste materials) were removed from their normal settings and erected in the streets. These mini-installations were then abandoned to the effects of the weather and allowed to decay naturally.

The young architects from Studio **Topotek 1** in Berlin give a new slant to our image of space in the way they use parks and scenery. Indeed, they call themselves "landscape architects" and organise open spaces into formal and structural arrangements, considerably enhancing the aesthetic value. Nonetheless, they do not reject opportunities to create architectural installations in "contained" spaces such as the one designed for the courtyard of the Bayer Pension Plan Building on Unter den Linden in Berlin, which they transformed into a "carpet, an antique tapestry, a brocade"; indeed, the title is "Broderie" ["Embroidery"]. Equally important are the round gardens they created at Wolfsburg for the horticultural exhibition in 2004 or the austere arrangement of a monastery garden for the ancient Carthusian monastery in Padula.

The Belgian **Lieve van Stappen** presents a work which hinges on the recovery of memories of the First World War, which left so many traces of the tragedy of the "Western Front" in her country; a reminder salvaged from the oblivion to which it has been consigned by the new generations, unmindful heirs of a historic legacy coming from their remote forefathers.

Finally, **Elisa Vladilo** brings the current exhibition to an end with a series of works associated with various experiences: from the house that hosted an artistic stay in Sinji Vrh, Slovenia, which she transformed with brightly-coloured squares on the façade, to the recent "pioggia di musica in via delle ombrelle" [the rain plays tunes in umbrella street], with multi-coloured canvases stretching from end to end of the street, to the "striscie pedonali rosa" [pink pedestrian crossing] she created in Genoa and the display in Milan's Fabbrica del Vapore art centre. As usual, this artist's playful use of colour splashes into the places she has chosen for her work, reinvigorating them, truly replenishing them with the sap of life.