

Community Art Projects

Iris Honderdos & Arno Peeters

Introduction

Iris Honderdos (installation-art, video) and Arno Peeters (sound designer, composer, multimedia) are what could be called 'community based' artists and they have a widespread experience in this field. Iris has been working extensively in former Yugoslavia (right after the war), in Russia and Korea. Since 2003 they live and work together. They have been working in Czech Republic (with former miners and their wives) Ukraine (during the Orange Revolution) and over the last two years in Vietnam (HIV infected women and ex-drug users).

In their method of working, they cannot know upfront what it is that they will create, since they need to 'tap in' on the emotions of the community they will work with. After a process of research, followed by a period of meditation on the subject, sketching and modeling, the actual work on the installation and/or performance itself can begin. Up until now, the results mostly consisted of installations that sometimes are accompanied by sound or video and are presented to the audience during a performance or concert. The final result will in all cases be a gift to the community and is there to stay.



Finland 2008

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Turning to Raseborg
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Raseborg in the making

In 2007 we applied for the Artist in Residence-program from the ProArtibus-foundation in Swedish speaking town of Ekenäs (Tammisaari in Finnish) in bilingual Finland and were invited to work there in August and September 2008.

After two weeks we have found our topic: starting 2009, the new city of Raseborg (aptly named after the famous castle near Snappertuna) will be formed as a merger of the existing municipalities of Ekenäs, Karis and Pojo. The reasons for this merging are both economical and practical, since the government of Finland aims to decrease the number of individual municipalities with less than 20.000 inhabitants nationwide by merging them into bigger ones. The newly formed Raseborg will have over 26.000 inhabitants.

The building of the new town has not been without some wrangling. Politicians from Ekenäs, Karis and Pojo have had to decide where the new administrative units will be placed and who will get the top jobs. As a consequence of the merger, street signs in Pojo will be renewed to place the Swedish text above the Finnish. Also some 300 duplicate street names will have to change, in order for police, fire brigades and ambulances to get to the right place in case of an emergency. Independent Pojo has a Finnish-speaking majority (59,5%) but Raseborg will have a Swedish-speaking majority close to 67%. Also a new shield had to be designed, which sparked a lot of debate. Other than that, the operation seems to be going smoothly, almost invisible, according to the local media we've been talking with (YLE Västnyland and Västra Nyland) and politicians involved in the process like Mårten Johansson, currently mayor of Ekenäs and future city manager for Raseborg and three local politicians of each town (Camilla Grundström, Tuula Huuhtanen and Maarit Feldt Ranta).

It's obvious that most of what's described here seems to be a fairly administrative process and indeed, although it's definitely a widely discussed topic among the people in all three cities, most of what will really change for the 'commoners' has yet to be revealed. But the citizens of Ekenäs, Karis and Pojo will have to vote together in municipal elections for the first time already in the autumn of 2008, so politicians will definitely bring new issues to the public debate to reveal more of what until now has been unclear or invisible; which schools will have to close as a result of too low a number of pupils, what will happen to local healthcare systems, what about job opportunities in the near future? Building, permits, law, local folklore?

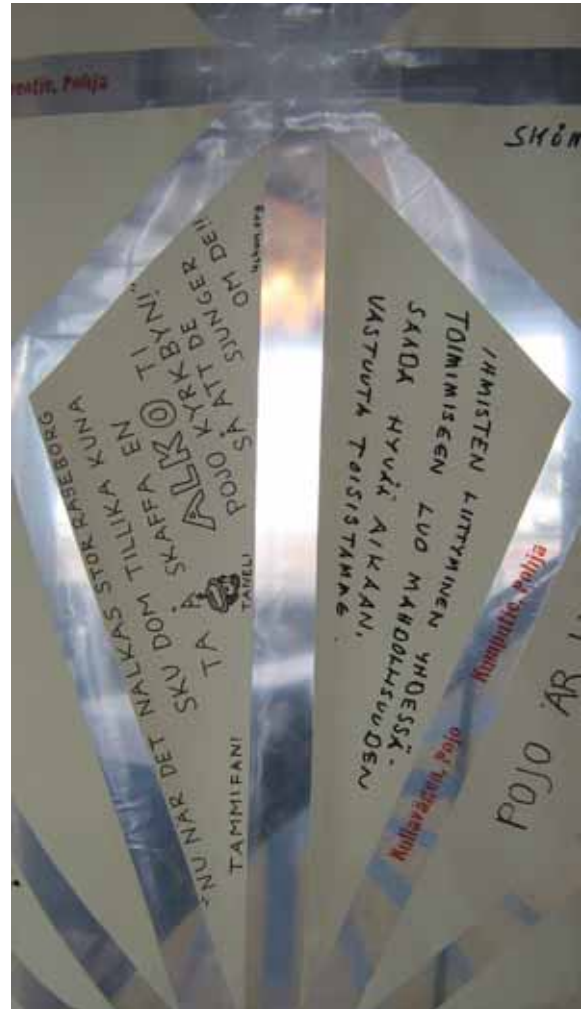
As impartial artists it is this more emotional side of such a process that is of interest to us. It seems most people (especially the younger generation) don't care much about the new city to be, as long as all stays the same, which obviously is impossible. So what will affect them in the near future? What advise would they give to the city-board that now will rule over them? What fears could become reality? What do they covet most and are worried to possibly have to give up?

The process and art form

In order to gather the answers to these questions, we started first by thinking of an object or symbol in which to incorporate it. We made an artwork that could be seen as a 'moral beacon' for the course of the new 'vessel' Raseborg.

Incorporated in the artwork are 144 triangular 'tokens' cut from cloth (75 x 50 x 30 cm) with wishes, dreams or warnings written on them by the locals themselves and of all three towns, in their preferred language.

We started offering these triangle cloths to people in central places in each town like the libraries, well-known café's and community centers and were supported in this by the media with announcements in both radio and newspapers. People were invited to write their words right then and there, but they were also allowed to take it home if they wished to think about it first. Anyone could join, no special skills were needed and age and sex are of course not important: whether a child makes a nice drawing on it, or an elderly woman uses it to express her complain about her forced 'change of address', all was welcome, even if someone chooses to leave it blank: "no opinion" is still worthwhile



to be taken into account. It's a "people's artwork" after all. Also we opened a "PEK-telephone Hotline" where anyone could leave a spoken message which recordings Arno used in a composition. (More about that later.)



When the collection was complete, we combined the cloths in a mathematical order in three large triangular 'sails' (one per town) with transparent spaces in between. In these 'lanes' of our 'virtual map', we've printed current personal addresses scanned from actual post that we've collected door-to-door from people that will have a brand-new address as of 1-1-2009 (whether they like it or not).

The three sails were curved and attached to a centre pole and suspended in a metal frame to become a vertical windmill, making the sails 'chase after each other' in the wind.



Presentation and Final Float

The artwork was presented to the audience for the first time on September 27th at 7 PM on a floating terrace that belongs to the 100 years old Restaurant Knipan in Ekenäs, which would close its doors for the winter that same evening. After that, the installation will be transported to Pumpviken in Karis and Gumnä in Pojo and finally to the centre point of Raseborg, in the water of Pojoviken, as a final restingplace. The presentation was accompanied by a 5.1. surround composition

by Arno that could be seen as a kind of hymn: to the disappearing street names and shields, but incorporating the feelings of its inhabitants at the same time: spoken in sound and written in the artwork. Also the composition made use of the directions in which each city lies, by marking them in local sound on an 'auditory map' of the area: the church bells of Pojo, the Karis railway-station to the right and the military Nylands Brigade and the ships in the docks of Ekenäs in the rear. Also directions are spoken by a car-navigation-system: "*Turn Left Here*" (in Swedish) "*Turn to the right*" (in Finnish), "*You are off-route: please turn*" (in Swedish), "*You are driving too fast*" in Finnish etc. contradicting each other in finding the right way.

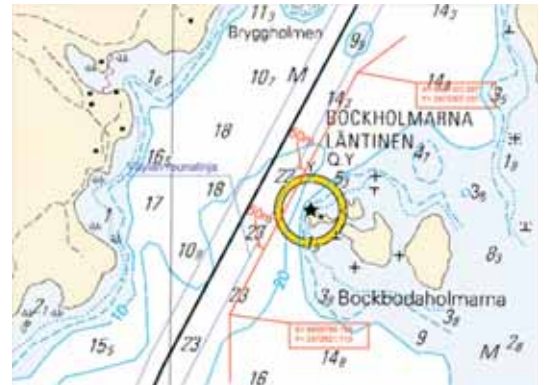
Near the end of the composition, three vocalists that were (up until that time) just part of the audience started to shout the street names that have to disappear, followed by soprano Eva Comet, singing the new street names in different fashions from small papers and handing these to members of the audience.

The advantage of Knipan as a place for the presentation is that it is situated on the water and in the harbor of Ekenäs so that our 'beacon' can be set to a raft in the water and towed to the other locations and from there to its final resting place at the beginning of 2009.

The fact that the artwork will be largely invisible after that and difficult to access by the public is a deliberate decision: the phase this area goes through now is a temporary one; in a few months from now, most of what's been said (or described on the tokens for that matter) will have lost much of its

importance, since different, all new topics will be the talk of town. Also its inhabitants are well aware that they have only a limited influence on what goes on at the political level and they seem to resign in it. So why not set it afloat amidst them and let go of both worries and wishes in the form of a memorial that serves as a beacon as well?

But still it can be an option to install a remotely controlled wireless webcam on one of the Bockbodaholmarna-islands (charged from a long life battery) to still be able to not only see the artwork, but also keep an eye out on its whereabouts and condition.



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(Photocollage)