

# ART AT RIJKS - AMSTERDAM

## THE INSTITUTION

The art in the Rijksakademie voor Beeldende Kunsten (State Academy of the Visual Arts) located in Amsterdam reflects a breakaway from the traditional idioms of high-art practice and also concretizes various conceptual realities. Along with painting... video art, installation art, digital art, photo-realistic art and various kinds of speculative arts are the forms for artistic expressions.

How do all these diverse art forms go together? At what premise do the different ways of thinking, various narratives, conceptualized differently, negotiate/fit comfortably within a supposedly singular ideology inherent in an institution?

Supplying straightforward answers to these questions is not my prerogative. My position accumulates the gaze of a visitor/‘art person’, who frequents the campus for duration of one week (mid-June 2003). Based on my impressions, I attempt to answer this query by ‘constructing’ a hypothesis that, the structure of the building and the environment surrounding it has a large contribution in ‘equipping’ the diversity of the art created here.

The present building of Rijksakademie was previously without steel. It was first built using brick and stone (which is still retained on its façade), in 1864 by the Dutch ministry for a cavalry regiment and its horses.

It was in 1992, that architect Koen Van Velsen, (a notable figure in Dutch architecture), transformed this structure by synthesizing the old and the new. He stated that ‘it is very important to respect the building as it is’.

The material used in the re-construction of the new building was steel. This metallic somber material gives a tactility of manual work. Glass footbridges connect the different parts of the building, reducing unnecessary weight. The structure is an arrangement of a permanent material like brick and a temporary one like steel, a resultant of the industrial revolution. The concept bears that the artists are working there. The large spaces, which previously housed horses, serve as ideal places for workmanship. In addition, there are the “resident peacocks” and on the either facade of the campus are the notorious canals of Amsterdam that do not allow work to be too strenuous.

What needs to be emphasized however is the ensuing production of different art objects/ideas. Each artist gets his own place, a large separate room; facilitated with a window and a computer. A large steel door shuts the room, stressing on a private space if required by the artist.

But apart from having separate closed rooms, all studios are located in the same building, with common project rooms; thus interaction between the artists is inevitable. Also recurrently important art persons of international acclaim, visit studios on prior appointment with the artists, allowing exchanges and eye-opening sessions between them. Therefore where congeniality is definite, seclusion is also retained if desired by the artist.

## THE ARTISTS

Out of the sixty participants at the Akademi, thirty of them are from Holland and the other artists are from all over the world. The Rijksakademie mostly funded by the Dutch Ministry, selects practicing artists after a personal interview mid-year and the work period starts in January each year lasting for duration of two years.

Erick Beltran an artist from Mexico 'designs' our daily newspapers. He attempts to regain the possibilities/experiences of mundane reading. Imagine reading a paper without the letter 'u'. Is it a type error? Or is it a gimmick? Whatever its reasons might be; it definitely shifts the response of the reader, replacing the purpose of the written matter itself. Also substituting the typeface with pictures adds another dimension to this media. The signified becomes the signifier and vice versa. This newspaper unmistakably maintains an artistic presence in the most 'contemporary' sense.

Be it Erick's not so 'mundane' newspapers or Teske's mixed 'realities', is the prevailing mainstay of questioning set notions. Teske Clejsen from Holland creates multiple realities. Using a model from virtual reality, her photographs depict real forms in their real spaces, dealing with the (non)reality of time and the (non)reality of the physical world. A photograph portrays three 'visions' of time. A car before and after an accident, with a road in between. The damaged car is clean and shining like before the accident, (just like in a video game) and the accident, represented by the road.

Brenda Kemphius does drawings on a 'vertical expanse' or on the wall. But her wall drawings squat on the floor, fabricating/confusing another surface for the two-dimensional wall.

Ivan Grubanov, an artist from Siberia considers Art as a registering Act. In one such case Ivan regularly visited the trial, of the former Siberian president in the International Court in Hague. He made drawings of the proceedings, which were juxtaposed with the actual photographs of the trial. These simple drawings trace the various dilemmas relating to Art. The facility provided by the camera, recording the limitations of the human hand against the swiftness and fullness of the cameras but also the personal experience of the artist illustrated by his hand. Secondly shifting the authority of an image according to where one sees it...meddling art and politics/law.

A photograph of a 'posed' Ivan with his Chinese wife can be portrayed just as a masquerading act by the artist. But in China, the photograph serves as a legal document affirming marital rights to both the parties. Registering and 'de-registering' accordingly.

Where Ivan challenges cultivated notions; Dominique Ghesquiere encounters the notions of physics. The references to speed/sound and weight in her video '*Le Salon*' are debated. Defined tactile experiences of objects are disregarded as in her crumpled magazines.

Tjebbe Beckman does photo-realist paintings, which don't have the graphic simplifications of photography. The multiple planes allied in his work toy with expectations of a 'plain' photographic surface; abstracting the image.

To conclude- the international nature of the Rijksakademie has also attracted artists from India. Shibu Natesan, Monali Meher Sharmila Samant & Tushar Joag have worked at the akademi formerly.

Since the previous year, there are four artists from India -Sonia Khurana, Anant Joshi, Kiran Subbaiah and Praneet Soi. These four artists from different parts of the Indian sub-continent also produce works rendered in varied forms and ideas. Video Art, painting, installation, photography and digital art... in consequence to the spirit of Rijks!