

# qualitalk

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Kassel heavily destroyed during World War II got its first color spot in 1955: the Federal Garden Exhibition. As an extra, Arnold Bode, Professor for Fine Arts at the University of Kassel, created an exhibition called Documenta, primarily showing art the previous Nazi regime had designated and derided as »Degenerate Art«, i.e., most if not all modern art. Documenta took on a life of its own: since 1972 it is being held every five years in Kassel and for one hundred days Kassel becomes the epicenter of temporary art. However, in 2017, Kassel shared this honor with a parallel exhibition in Athens, Greece.

Come and see, and let yourself be impressed, says

*Oliver Schuster*

Page 2

## documenta14

With the motto:  
learning from Athens

Page 4

## Freedom – beyond Art or The Other Way´Round?

WComments by  
the creators of d14

Page 5

## Picture Gallery

Page 6

Impressum



Marta Minujín, *The Parthenon of Books*, (steel, books, plastic sheets; erected at Friedrichsplatz in Kassel. Behind it Fridericianum Museum smoke rising from Daniel Knorr's *Expiration Movement* inside the museum's Zwehren Tower.

# documenta14

Athen 8.4.–16.7.2017  
Kassel 10.6.–17.9.2017

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With the motto:  
learning from Athens



... Athens' Mascot: The Owl

For the first time ever, Documenta opened not in Kassel but in Athens staying there for one hundred days, and then, partially overlapping, pitch its tents for another one hundred days in Kassel. Now then, after Athens, the 14th World Exhibition of Fine Arts, generally shortened to 14d, is back where it originally started, in the German Province of Northern Hesse, welcoming visitors like every five years.

The question arises: keeping in mind the motto of d14, *learning from Athens*, what lessons could visitors have drawn from the part of the exhibition in Athens? There were probably not too many visitors who could have been able to compare in situ the Parthenon temple with the temple made out of books on the (Nazi) index created on Friedrichsplatz in Kassel. And a goodly number of people probably are of the opinion that in these days, Athen's attribute »cradle of democracy« has been hollowed out.

Or was the curator of d14, Adam Szymczyk, thinking of bringing owls (the exhibition's mascot) to Athens? One hopes, not. The idea is not really very clear.

In any event, d14's part in Athens drew 350 000 visitors, the majority non-Greeks, and most of them from Germany. The exhibition didn't seem to resonate very much among Greeks. Maybe the »German show« wasn't sufficiently introduced to them. On the other hand, it maybe was a wise decision to advertise the exhibition not too heavily which could have led to interpret a heavy-handed approach as indicative of Germany's big power attitude.

## The Art of Burning Flags Without Being Punished for It

People who also had visited the Documenta exhibitions in 1997, 2007, and particularly in 2012, wouldn't have been surprised to notice an ever increase in number of pavilions throughout it, and that the theme of exhibitions have got an increas-



*Kimsooja: Korean bottari (bed cover) filled with second-hand clothing.*

ingly political-ethical slant; words like capitalism, fascism, dictator and the like were used abundantly.

The artists' belonging to certain population groups have been highlighted more and more – it seems that so many indigenous artists and ethnic minorities chafing at capitalism feel like having to present political messages.

Watching the digital video »Le fort des fous« (Fort of the lunatics) by Narimane Mari Benamer, it became clear only towards the very end of the video of 2:20 hours that it dealt with Algeria's colonization. Additionally there were sequences at sea, with escape and death, also interview with a fugitive, probably a Kurdish insurgent, during the war in Syria. The presentation was in the former ball-and-court game hall of Wilhelmshöhe Palace in Kassel, up on a hill, somewhat removed from the action of the main



*Situated in the beautiful park around Wilhelmshöhe palace, the Hercules Monument is Kassel's landmark attracting visitors for over 300 years.*



*It would have been helpful if the opening credits of the video „Le fort des fous“ had included a brief introduction and runtime of over 2 hours*

venue, the Fridericianum and adjacent pavilions; besides the hall there are no further exhibits but one has a wonderful view of the Hercules monument nearby. In the hall, there were lots of comfortable cushions where to sit down to watch the video. At the start of the video one counted twelve people; at the end, just two.

### **Antikatalog: The Daybook**

As a visitor with a 2-day ticket (at € 22.00), it is difficult to soak in all the exhibits of the huge exhibition, and it is made even more difficult if one intends to get more information of something like a description or catalog. There were no brochures, no catalog with easy references. The so-called Daybook doesn't attempt to be such a thing, it is not a help to understand while being there, much less so if one would want to consult later on. Daybook seems to have the purpose to confuse the visitor, not to inform him.

If one wants to find out more about one of the artists and look him or her up, even the Daybook's index is a challenge straining one's eyes: entries in black upper-case letters on dark blue plastic cover of the publication, with very tight line spacing; no refer-

ence to pages, just to dates maybe important to the artist but with no hint to the reader. The publication looks like one of the low-quality publications of former communist East Germany; even the smell of its plastic cover and the touch remind one of it.

The scandalous »infantilization« of the public had to absolutely be avoided at d14, said the curator and his crew. Hmm, not bringing owls to Athens? The text of the publication, so in the preface, should be »a polyphonic anthology of authors from



*the various parts of the world. They are the curators, poets, reviewers, historians, colleagues in the arts.«* The German text shows the contorsions the writer of these lines ended up in. □

*Daybook listing (double page) for Emeka Ogbob, artist from Nigeria. It can be retrieved under the date:*

**July 10, Monday.**

*On the left margin of the photo, partial view of the index: black lettering on dark-blue background (plastic).*

### **documenta 14 : Daybook**

*Quinn Latimer (publisher)*

*Adam Symczyk (publisher)*

*Hard cover w/dust jacket*

*344 pages*

*20cm x 29cm (7.0" x 11.4")*

*224 color photos*

*186 b/w photos*

*Prestel Publishing*

*€ 25.00 (at the desk)*

*German, English, Greek*

# Freedom – beyond Art or The Other Way´Round

Comments by  
the creators of d14



*Marta Mimujin: The Parthenon of Books, steel, books in plastic foils. Detail view of forbidden books*

A quote out of their newsletter of July 27, 2017 presents some insight into the line of thinking of the curators, beyond their understanding of „artistic license«, expressed in a monstrosity of convoluted sentence: »The efficacy of a realizable political gesture in the realm of the arts can be seen in its capacity to stimulate discussions beyond its exclusive field; therefore ‚documenta14‘ got itself involved in discussions which proved that our questioning led to increased resonance, questions that embody the principal curatorial, organisational and political decisions which were taken in a very early stage of developing our project – a decidedly anti-essentialistic approach that is contrary to – and utterly rejecting – today’s prevailing method of producing spectacles and the part the spectator plays therein.« Huh? Got it? Got it??!!?

## Picture Gallery

After this Visitors’ Manual for d14 it doesn’t seem to be recommendable to interpret oneself the works of art displayed, at least not in earshot of others. Moreover, outside one’s subjective impressions, one would be hard pressed to try to pass on background information as d14’s concept lined out above would have wanted. Therefore, without any commentary here some pictures.

One suggestion: despite the many critical reviews in media, the overwhelming amount of incomprehensible works, a visit to the exhibition is recommendable to exert one’s visual and intellectual capacities every five years at Kassel’s documenta exhibition. □



*Hirwa K: Installation at Friedrichsplatz – refugee shelter in sewer pipes.*



*Antonio Vega Macotella: The Mill of Blood – Bolivian silver mill to be driven by slaves.*



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2



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- 1 *Beau Dick: indigenous art mask from Canada*
- 2 *Dimitris Alitinos: A Happening*
- 3 *Stefanos Tsvopoulos: The Precarious Archive (digital slide projections)*
- 4 *Costas Varotsos: obne Titel Without Title (digital print on glass)*
- 5 *Vlassis Caniari: Installation of 6 human figures, 9 suitcases, birdcage*

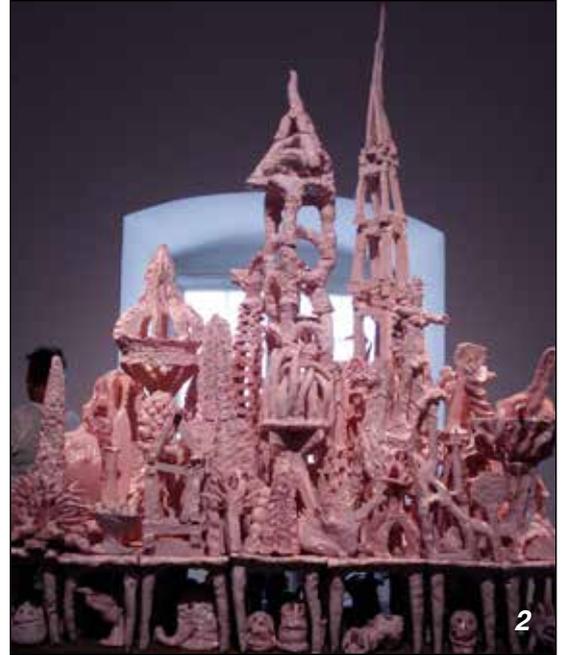


4



5

- 1 *Jannis Kounellis:  
Obne Titel (coal,  
sacks, steel)*
- 2 *Nikos Tranos:  
A Glacier at Our  
Table*
- 3 *Installation near the  
entrance to the docu-  
menta hall*
- 4 *Stanley Whitney:  
Painting (oil on linen)*



## Impressum



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*Photo by Maurice de Chlourignon*

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