

## **BAROQUE SURREALISM: VENEZIA**

A Research and Exhibition Project by Hans Hs Winkler.

In Collaboration with The Emily Harvey Foundation and Nuova Icona, Venice

Opening and Book Presentation / Vernissage and book presentation:  
Saturday 26 October 2019, 6 pm / Sabato 26 Ottobre 2019, ore 18  
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Archivio Emily Harvey

San Polo 387

Venezia

<https://emilyharveyfoundation.org>

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Within the specific setting of Venice, Hans Winkler has developed a group of art pieces and interventions in public space that visualize certain connections between the Baroque and Surrealism. These are to be found in the movements' aspirations and on a formal level.

Similarly to the Surrealists, the avantgarde artists and literary figures of the 17th and 18th centuries vehemently stood up for political change as well as for the development of fresh and independent art. The Baroque protagonists developed new representational forms with a strong partiality for illusion, transience, and concepts close to nature. A striking example of spatial illusionary effects is found in the work of the Italian artist and Jesuit brother, Andrea Pozzo (1642-1709). On the other hand, the rebel melancholic painter and poet Salvator Rosa (1615-1673) considered ethics to be the only guide and saw nature as his only true role model. As a fervent advocate of the Cynic philosophers, he preached the virtues of a simple life free from all possessions, and propagated sexual freedom and the consumption of mind-altering drugs, such as mushrooms and opium, thus supplanting rational and linear thought with new forms of perception.

In Baroque, artists and writers extensively thrashed out the imaginative potentials of fictitious worlds. "The reason for this was the discovery of new microscopic and telescopic worlds which increasingly question the boundary between the factual and the fictive." (Csaba Nicolaus Nemes, "End of a Long Night; The Cultural History of Anaesthesia", DCS 2012) In consequence, the

moon comes into fiction and in 1634 Johannes Kepler's posthumous Utopian novel "Somnium" deals with a journey to the moon, its geography and its inhabitants, and the movement of the planets in our solar system. Kepler's spacemen are given opium to send them to sleep and save their bodies from being torn apart by the forces they are exposed to at start off.

A further remarkable fantasy novel is the prose satire "Simplicius Simplicissimus" published in 1668 by Hans Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen. The book which is regarded today as being one of the most influential works of Baroque prose was considered to be without order, and a strange hybrid lacking tradition. Through the instruments of satire and caricature, the author reflected the social upheaval of the times and revealed the influence of opium.

Around 1600, the development of mankind started running more rapidly than ever before. Magellan was the first person to circumnavigate the earth and triggered among other things a "scientific revolution" and a burning interest in the discovery of the world. This led to a loss of power of the absolute supremacy of religious world views. For the first time, trade spread across all the seas and continents, and European ships sailed the oceans, establishing a thriving exchange with the markets of Eastern Asia... and, according to Howard Haggard ("Devils, Drugs and Doctors", New York 1926), the spice trade was in reality the drug trafficking trade. Trade with opium was actually under the control of Venice, the lagoon city being at the epicenter of European trading. All over Europe, opium was highly estimated and widely used as a universal remedy for all kinds of ailments. Opium was also a component of Theriaca fina in Venezia or Venice Treacle.

According to Walter Benjamin, the intention of Surrealism is to put an end to the autonomy of bourgeois art and its alienation from life practice. Through the collective practice of automatic writing, the movement questions the concept of the autonomous creative subject. This brought with it the exploration of the new world: the confrontation with psychoanalysis. André Breton, the most important theorist of Surrealism, worked for a few years in a psychiatric institution, and studied in detail the writings of C. G. Jung and Sigmund Freud, whom he visited in Vienna in 1921. It was foremost the Surrealists who experimented "with the consciousness-expanding or consciousness-changing drugs, in addition to intoxication and ecstasy, to explore the boundaries of toxic effects in self-experimentation" (André Breton).

In his poem "Le Poison", written in 1857, Charles Baudelaire, who was one of the great inspirers of Surrealism, remarked that rather than being evoked by man, surreal imagery and the images created by the rush of opium are both submitted to him spontaneously, even tyrannically.

In his essay "General Security: The Liquidation of Opium" (1925), Antonin Artaud writes: "You will not be able to prevent the fact that souls exist who are destined to poison themselves, regardless of which [type], the poison of morphine, the poison of reading, the poison of isolation..."

The metaphysical painter Giorgio de Chirico picks up Nietzsche's idea of "radical emptiness" in his images with the aim of cleansing art from everything that it had represented so far: eliminate every object, every idea, every thought, and every symbol.

Following these examples, it would seem that avantgarde elements from the Baroque period and Surrealism owe their novelty and change of perspective to an affinity to experimentation with drugs.

2014, 2016, and 2019 Hans Winkler was a resident guest of the Emily Harvey Foundation in Venice.

Nuova Icona also supported the intervention "Un incidente in gondola" (2002), and the exhibition "la Gabbia di Ezra Pound" (Ezra Pound's Cage), at the Oratorio di San Ludovico, during the Venice Biennale in 2007.

C.V.:

Hans Winkler lives in Berlin and New York. He has been realizing actions and interventions in public space since 1984. His projects are interventions concerning the reality of daily life and the perception of popular symbols. From 1988 to 2000, he worked in collaboration under the label "p.t.t.red" (paint the town red) on urban public space installations such as: "how much red does the statue of liberty bear", New York, 1996. Since 2000, his Interventions and actions include "Un Incidente in gondola", Venice, 2002, "Gabbia di Ezra Pound", 2007, or "The Escape of the Iceman", Bolzano, Italy, 2008. He has also curated exhibitions, including "Legal/ Illegal" at NGBK in Berlin, 2004, and "Looking for Mushrooms" at the Museum Ludwig in Cologne, 2008. His Walking Newspaper project has been published in Istanbul, Johannesburg, New York, Havana, and San Francisco.