



Concept

CIVIC VIRTUE GRAND TOUR is a collaborative project initiated by artist collective CIVIC VIRTUE in collaboration with W139 (Amsterdam), Kunstverein (Milano), After the Butcher (Berlin), and Hinterconti (Hamburg).

As a band of artists traveling across Europe, CIVIC VIRTUE will conduct research and produce artworks in a variety of historically significant locations. In reference to the 18th and 19th Century “Grand Tour”, the artists are to be sent upon a journey across classical ruins and neoclassical monuments, past picturesque landscapes and through culturally diverse contexts; ultimately re-evaluating their notions of European classical history and solidifying a collective identification between themselves, the classical, and the contemporary narratives and artifacts of European historical development.

This historical reenactment of North-Europeans traveling South to absorb classical residue is intended to not only function as a homage to bygone neoclassical revival traditions, but also as an active critique of the historical-revisionist tendencies in which cultural motifs have been subjected to romantic appropriation.

The group’s artistic production within the context of the journey will not only function as ‘evidence’ of their passage, but also as an integral part of their contributions to the exhibition programming of partner institutions. Through a process of collaboration and presentation with other artists from different backgrounds, CIVIC VIRTUE will expand the scope of their ideas and working methods over the course of the tour.

As an organizational principal for the topics, ideas, collaborations and locations encountered along the way, the artists have chosen to produce a film. As part documentation strategy, part focal point for production, this work will enable a semi-scripted, semi-improvised survey of their tour’s activities as well as a concise outlet for the presentation and development of their visual-language. During the stay at Kunstverein Milano, After the Butcher



and Hinterconti, CIVIC VIRTUE develops works on site, exhibits and performs new works, gives presentations, exchanges ideas with artists on site and works on a hand made publication.

When returning to Amsterdam at the completion of the tour, the group will present their documentation, artworks, film and active collaborations as an all-encompassing exhibition at W139.

Each 'band-member' of CIVIC VIRTUE will develop his or her played character and define its role in both the group as well as in the film. Brian McKenna will direct his artistic practice towards the production of film and music. Geirthrudur Finnbogadottir Hjorvar will focus on the spatial presentation of moving image. Ruchama Noorda will develop site specific performances and sculptures. Gijsbert Wouter Wahl will focus on the visual presentation of the philosophical and cultural context of the Grand Tour, such as the visited places and the various historical themes. These starting positions will be supplemented and challenged by the variable fifth member in the visited town (Kinga Kielczynska, José Miguel Biscaya, Natalia Dominguez Rangel, and Katrin Mayer).

CIVIC VIRTUE IN MILAN

During its Grand Tour through Europe, CIVIC VIRTUE takes on the subject of historical representation and its relationship to official propagandas by looking at the malleability and consistency of meaning as it applies to form.

In the context of the tour, Milan represents a gateway from the Alps towards the great antique monuments of ancient Rome: a transitional node between the sublime and barbaric prehistory of the north and the stoic Classicism of the south. Taking up a temporary residency in the Milan offers a site-specific research and experimentation period from which to further develop CIVIC VIRTUE's process and visual language in direct relation to the physical and historical placement of the city. By drawing upon Medieval iconography, Milan becomes a conceptual middle ages



and historical nodal-point for CIVIC VIRTUE upon which their works will be based.

As a large part of their exhibition and residency at Kunstverein Milano, CIVIC VIRTUE will create monuments to forgotten ideologies of Medieval Europe. These monuments will form a sculpture garden of concrete gargoyles (the water-spitting monsters generally found at the roofs of gothic churches). In combination with this sculptural composition will be a musical composition as well as fragments of an in-progress Grand Tour film, also produced on site. This film – parts of which have already been shot in Hamburg, Bamberg, Berlin and Amsterdam – representing an ongoing process of collaboration and collection for the Grand Tour is to be eventually woven into a specific narrative structure known as "The Hero's Journey" and will chart both the progress of CIVIC VIRTUE as well as a personal-collective history of Europe. (for extra information see film script).

Gargoyles originally developed alongside Gothic-era architecture, a highly communal style in execution as well as conception. It's organic shapes and it's intermingling of various different crafts evolved in a way that was collective as well as intrinsically interdisciplinary. The history of the gargoyle is said to have been derived from the folklore of dragon mythology. When the villagers had killed a dragon, they burned its body, however, the head and the throat would remain intact due the monsters' ability to breath fire. These heads and throats were then attached to the stone walls of the churches so as to ward off potential enemies. The word "gargoyle" (derived from the word "throat") may well refer to the gurgling sound made by rain passing through the statue from church drain gutter systems. As such, the mythology as well as the practical and physical functionality of gargoyles makes reference to the voice of the monster – the voice of a defeated nuisance or enemy. The polemics of propaganda are thus brought forward through a most visual and auditory symbolism.

CIVIC VIRTUE invites a sparring partner artist for every city they go to. In Milan this is Natalia Dominguez Rangel. She will develop a new music composition in Milan, which will be executed with Milan based musicians and music students.



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This new musical composition by CIVIC VIRTUE's resident composer, Natalia Dominguez Rangel, will accompany the sculpture garden – providing voice and atmosphere (among other things) to its inhabitants. Historical references to specific stylistic motifs and structural considerations, particularly Medieval and Baroque, will be written for an ensemble of (Milan based) instrumentalists and a vocalist. As a vocalization of texts written by CIVIC VIRTUE, the composition essentially helps to function as an interdisciplinary & propagandistic exploration of form, style and content. Lyrically, these texts make dutiful reference to the conventions and propagandistic potential of Ambrosian Hymn form – music whose original birthplace and development was in Milan.

By interweaving the aural sensations of Baroque style with visual referencing of the Gothic, CIVIC VIRTUE seeks to delve deeper into the paradoxical dichotomies existing between style, content and form. Both Gothic and Baroque styles came to be historically frowned upon for their swirling motives and patterns as well as their predilection for collective assemblies over individual styles or philosophies. CIVIC VIRTUE will investigate and recuperate such systems through the development of a 'chimerical mode': a process of assembly through which different systems can be merged. This comes through the identification and exploitation of the compatibilities and affinities between such systems: a joint force towards new identities that could never exist within any singular system, but may prosper as connection points between several.

OVERVIEW OF IDEAS AND PLACES TO VISIT NEXT TO THE MAIN PARTNERS

Research locations for discovering different modes of reconstructing history and collective memory within Europe.

To visit from the Netherlands:



1. Xanten - An archaeological theme park with partial reconstructions of the Roman colony Ulpia Traiana

From the Berlin-base:

2. Dessau-Worlitz Garden Kingdom - The excavations of Pompeii and the Herculaneum in the 18th century mark the beginning of classical archaeology and inspired the architecture and landscaping of the Dessau-Worlitz Garden. The garden is an expression of the Grand Tour experience: displaying reconstructions which inspired the neoclassic style of North-Europe for decades thereafter.

From the Augsburg-base:

3. Walhalla Temple & Befreiungshalle - These monuments are the culmination of romantic urges at the end of the neoclassic era and have since come to represent idiosyncrasies 19th century national romantic style.

4. Neuschwanstein - The impetus for construction of the Neuschwanstein Castle was motivated by Ludwig II's personal drive to reconstruct historical motives as an imagined totality for which to escape reality. Ironically, the castle has since been mistaken as an authentic representation of feudal Europe - notably by Disney's construction of Disney-World.

5. The Alps - Traditionally the roughest part of the Grand Tour, by which travellers would pass through mountainous regions and meet the Sublime before reaching the warm climates of Italy and the rest of South Europe.



From the Milan-base:

6. De Rubicon, Cesena - An imaginary boundary (as opposed to an actual landmark) at whose crossing, Caesar was reported to have uttered those famous words: "the die is cast" - essentially a declaration of war and effectively ending the Republic of Rome.

7. Vesuvius, Pompeii & Herculaneum - At the foot of Mt. Vesuvius, Pompeii and Herculaneum are conserved by volcanic lava from the eruption of 79 AD. They were among the most important places for the rediscovery of classical civilization and have had a huge impact upon scientific enquiry of history through archaeology.

8. Paestum - The location at which artists would go for making sketches of Greek Temples. These architectural ruins have formed recurring motifs for the traditional education of European artists throughout the ages.