LAUDATIO

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I'd like to preface this laudatio to Frank Geßner's artistic work: in keeping with the artist's invitation to you, I will also interweave fact and fiction, and, in the next few minutes, present you, dear visitor, with puzzles and concepts that are elements of the exhibition itself.

In 2011/12. Frank Geßner, Professor of Theory and Practice of Visual Arts at the Film University Babelsberg KONRAD WOLF (former HFF "Konrad Wolf" Potsdam-Babelsberg), staged the multimedial – and monumental – hybrid project ALIAS YEDERBECK at the Schinkelhalle and the Kunstraum Potsdam. The exhibition was organized on the 10th anniversary of the death in 2001 of the artist Paul Yederbeck, who had been working on his massive ALIAS YEDERBECK project, a large-scale cinematographic installation intertwining elements of the visual arts with media art and film, video, animation, and sound in a metafictional performance. Berlin-Brandenburg's TESTE FOUNDATION then took on stewardship of the dead artist's studio legacy, which includes countless pictures, plans, sketches, film/audio and video recordings, notes, and contextual material. Important for the public was the inclusion of precise instructions for performing, setting up, and operating his still and moving image artworks.

Four years after Potsdam, in the Dresden DIAF exhibition, that originated in discussions between the artist and former DIAF Director André Eckhardt, FRANK GESSNER: PANORAMAVISION

now revisits and reconfigures Yederbeck's artistic legacy. As self-appointed 'curator' and 'assembler' of Yederbeck's archive, Geßner employs an archival system that is rhizomatic in the Deleuzian sense. He interlinks contextual material into bodies of images, which are then composed as blocks and ornamental series that follow various relational systems.

An ongoing project for more than twenty years now, of which the current exhibition is the most recent composition, the relational nature of its elements raises a number of complex questions. Who is the artist here? What is 'identity'? How is the line blurred between hubris and self-focused creativity? Is Yederbeck a real historical figure? What insights, if any, do the video performances and documentary QU'EST-CE QUE MONSIEUR TESTE? provide about Yederbeck, or do they reveal more about Geßner and his (and our) own arts culture, philosophy and politics? Who is Paul Yederbeck, and why do we care?

A spoiler alert … – some visitors may gain the impression that Yederbeck did indeed exist and that the exhibition provides a rich history of a long forgotten, resurrected artist. Yet, others who take their time to explore the multiple elements may think otherwise…?

I will now briefly explore and elucidate a few installation elements, which include a 12-screen moving image panorama installation, a knee-high circular 12-sided stop motion model with small reproductions of original painted portraits, a 'documentary', and a wall of images whose organization is simultaneously mathematical and philosophical, architectural and narrative.

Frank Geßner works with a central conceptual method: the conceit, an extended metaphor that is imbued throughout the work of art, whether painting, literature or cinema.

The imagination [conceit] of the artist Geßner is the alias or 'alter ego', and through it we are invited to compare the figure of Yederbeck in his role playing games, through a hybrid aesthetic of the (self-) portraits, in the video performances, and in Yederbeck's documented 'biography'. This is also evident in the portrait paintings in the knee-high stop-motion installation. In these Frank Geßner complicates the literary heteronym – a term coined by Portuguese author Fernando Pessoa to describe many of the seventy-plus fictional personas he created as authors of his texts, with their own biography and style – by applying it to visual arts as what I call 'heteronymic painting'.

Many of the 252 portraits share physiognomic (facial) resemblances – look closely yourselves and you will see this. Comparable to how an author creates a fictional character who then 'writes' in a specific style, each of Frank Geßner's portraits bears a distinct visual style, many of which are recognisable from the histories of art and culture. They are grouped in 12 sets of 21 portraits that share a color theme, and each of these 12 groups is also assigned an 'author' and a 'perspective'. PANORAMAVISION

continues with the heteronymic method in all elements of the installation; a fusion of extensive knowledge and experience takes on tangible form in figures from literature, philosophy, cinema, and art history; sketchbooks, reproductions, drawings, paintings, letters and notebooks; (semi-)autobiographical vignettes (the video interludes), 'shards' of theories of film, art and philosophy, digital data files.

It is clear that Frank Geßner's project is as much about megalomania and creativity as it is about unravelling, and wittily deconstructing male hubris in the self-reflexive, ironic multiplicity of styles. The elusive figure Yederbeck is both a universal 'Jedermann/everyman' (a 'Jedefrau' features rarely in the exhibition) and a technical, performative, artistic virtuoso who modernizes the tradition of the 'Renaissance man' – a man of unquenchable curiosity and "feverishly inventive imagination"[1] – with conceptual, graphical, painterly, photographic, plastic, and performative multimedia imagery.

I have attempted to contextualise but a few of the many techniques and concepts at work in PANORAMAVISION, and in conclusion I return to Frank Geßner's central conceit, the alter ego, and the intertwining of fact and fiction, the real and the fake. In the creative fabrication of PANORAMAVISION, he creates an ironic multiple story about himself and 'everyman' – via Yederbeck – and about art and identity, and it is the artist's own very specific version of the human condition as a comédie humaine.

The concept of 'Jedermann' means that each of us, in his or her own unique way, will find the narrative and conceptual strings, the connective links of fact and fiction that form this labyrinthine multimedia tapestry. And you may, in time, find an element of that other historically significant artistic figure, the "Doppelgänger".

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from Cape Dorset. Her most recent books include the edited collection Pervasive Animation: An AFI Film Reader (2013) and The Quay Brothers: Into a Metaphysical Playroom (2011).

[1] Gardner, Helen (1970). *Gardner's Art Through the Ages,* pp. 450–456. New York, Harcourt, Brace & World.

FURTHER READING
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