



PRESS RELEASE

DOING THE CITY

Interventions, community and participation

Tony Conrad

Opening: Friday, March 8, 6.00 p.m.

March 9, 2013 – April 28, 2013

Press Preview: Friday, March 8, 11.30 a.m. – 1.30 p.m.

Curator's introduction

and artist's presentation: Friday, March 8, 7 p.m.

PRESS OFFICE

Genova Palazzo Ducale

Fondazione per la Cultura – Ufficio Stampa

telefono +39 010.5574012/4047/4826

ufficiostampa@palazzoducale.genova.it

staffmostre@comune.genova.it

Doing the City is the first Italian survey devoted to **Tony Conrad**, a legendary pioneer of the American underground scene. The exhibition presents a series of works realized in the 1960s and 1970s exploring the urban dimension of public space and the interactions that take place therein. Perched in the New York's underground scene, Conrad observes urban masses in the metropolis, records expressions of dissent, organizes community rituals, and dismantles the tenets of documentary cinema. Lewd and constructive at the same time, the title deliberately reflects the artist's own ambiguity towards power structures and their degenerate relationship with the mass media. Such sexual implications disguise a lascivious approach to the city marked by an experimental and desecrating attitude with a strong utopian edge, a quality not so current in today's art world.

Although diverse and composite, Conrad's artistic production always walks the fine line between innovation and provocation, his contributions ranging widely from avant-garde music to experimental film to video art. Born in Concord (New Hampshire) in 1940, he moved to New York in the early Sixties and joined the most radical scene of independent music and cinema. He was a member of the Theatre of Eternal Music – which included La Monte Young, John Cale, Angus MacLise, Maria Zazeela among others –, a group that produced minimalist music based on sustained and mesmerizing sounds in the wake of John Cage's and Fluxus' innovation. They experimented with what they called dream music through improvisation and the displacement of the composer's role.

If Tony Conrad's musical contributions are well-known and highly appreciated by music lovers, *Doing the City* focuses on a lesser-known aspect of his artistic production: films, videos and audio works revolving around the theme of community and public space that question the role of the media apparatus in contemporary society. Forming a kaleidoscope of sounds, colors, and images, the exhibition provides a "virtual" journey into the New York City of the 1970s, eschewing any nostalgic yearnings. *Doing the City* is animated by the vital beat of a city right on the verge of becoming the cultural capital of the West seen through the eye of an artist who intentionally stayed at its margins.

Works on view

Bryant Park Moratorium Rally (1969) is a two-channel audio installation. It juxtaposes two different perceptual engagements with a political rally against the Vietnam War that took place right opposite from the loft where the artist lived. From the vantage point of what he defines the perfect place for an artist to be, that is "amid the democratic bustle", Conrad placed a microphone out of the window overlooking *Bryant Park* and directed a second microphone at the TV set to pick up live news coverage of the event. The channels diverge in such a way that the rally appears more "real" on TV. *Bryant Park Moratorium Rally* records the gap between the real and the media and the spectacularization of protest.

Although originally produced in 1972, the film projects *Waterworks* (1972–2012) and *Loose Connection* (1972–2011) were transferred to HD and premiered to the public only in 2012. *Waterworks* is a feature-length film about a summer solstice celebration organized by Conrad and his wife Beverly Grant in Times Square. Produced as a neighborhood event, *Waterworks* shows an eccentric and extemporaneous community in the act of reclaiming the vibrant centre of New York as its own spiritual territory. *Loose Connection* is "a conceptual revisitation of the idea of documentary", a subversion of cinematic codes realized at the height of structuralism. Conrad devised a special shutter for his Super 8 camera that would affect the viewer's spatial orientation. In this way the artist's family ordinary trip to the grocery store, the film's subject matter, takes on an almost psychedelic haze.

Studio of the Streets (1990–1993) is a more recent collaborative project of social activism realized in the city of Buffalo where Conrad has been living and teaching in the last twenty years. Started as a demonstration to obtain public funding for the creation of a public access TV station, *Studio of the Streets* soon grew into something different: a vehicle to "animate" the voices of the community. For three years, each Friday passers-by were interviewed at the entrance of Buffalo City Hall and asked to voice their desires, needs, and ideas. Barely edited, the interviews went on air on a regular basis and became a popular program on the local cable TV. A precursor of participatory information sharing systems like social networks and web TVs, Tony Conrad managed to create an "interpersonal feedback loop", the transmission of the community's image back to itself. *Studio of the Streets* was first shown in Europe at Documenta IX in 1992.

The only works that do not make direct use of technology, the *Yellow TVs* (1973) – tied to the more famous series *Yellow Movies* shown at the Venice Biennial of 2009 – turn to painting in order to question the conventions of structuralist filmmaking perceived as authoritarian. The interest in long duration first developed in the artist's music practice is here transposed in the visual field thereby introducing the issue of temporality in the perception of painting. By the end of the 1960s, Andy Warhol had already achieved impressive results in this regard with his films *Empire* (485 minutes) and *Four Stars* (1500 minutes). As a consequence, Conrad ventures in the production of a potentially eternal, ever-changing film whose duration extends even beyond a human lifetime. He used coatings of paint, demarcated by dark frames shaped to evoke TV screens, that are very slightly sensitive to light and grow dark so slowly that the process is not visible with the naked eye. Then, it is an intended paradox if the *Yellow TVs* are more "legible" today than they were when first exhibited.

Villa Croce inaugura un innovativo modello di gestione pubblico-privato grazie alla collaborazione tra il Comune di Genova, Palazzo Ducale, Fondazione per la Cultura e un gruppo di privati il cui supporto finanziario permette la programmazione artistica

MAIN SPONSORS



Fondazione Edoardo Garrone



SPONSORS



MEDIA PARTNER

IL SECOLO XIX

Museo d'Arte Contemporanea

di Villa Croce

via Jacopo Ruffini 3, 16128 Genova

t +39 010 580069/585772

staffmostre@comune.genova.it

**Museo d'Arte Contemporanea
di Villa Croce**
via Jacopo Ruffini 3, 16128 Genova
t +39 010 580069/585772
staffmostre@comune.genova.it

Villa Croce inaugura un innovativo modello di gestione pubblico-privato grazie alla collaborazione tra il Comune di Genova, Palazzo Ducale Fondazione per la Cultura e un gruppo di privati il cui supporto finanziario permette la programmazione artistica

MAIN SPONSORS



Fondazione Edoardo Garrone



SPONSORS



MEDIA PARTNER

IL SECOLO XIX