



Square Depression, 2007. Münster Sculpture Project. By Bruce Nauman

A 'Grand Tour' of Europe

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The largest visual art event of this century to date, was held in Europe during last northern hemisphere summer. Promoted as the 'Grand Tour' – in reference to the art pilgrimages of the Romantic age - the event linked the three largest and most prestigious international art exhibitions: the Venice Biennale, Documenta and the Münster Sculpture Project. It is very unusual for these three shows to run concurrently, since the Münster Sculpture Project is held only every ten years and Documenta every five.

While the three exhibitions are similar in their global scope and monumental scale, there are significant differences. The Venice Biennale is by far the oldest of the three and follows the traditional model of the international expos, with nations participating in their own pavilions and competing against each other for attention and prestige.

Located in the rather anonymous town of Kassel, in central Germany, Documenta does not include separate national representations but consists of a huge, single curated exhibition. Its ambition is to offer a unified picture of the international art scene that is based entirely on the vision of its curator(s).

The show started in the mid-1950s as a side event to a gardening exhibition but proved so successful that the town authorities decided to continue it on a regular basis.

The Münster Sculpture Project is the most original of the three events. Held every 10 years, it presents site-specific works, often permanent, located in public places. Each exhibition emerges from a collective organisational effort involving organisers, town authorities, artists, local residents and the curators. It is a project that energises the town creating and encouraging a dialogue between artists and the local residents.

The Münster Sculpture Project's origins are very revealing. It started in the 1970s as a very imaginative response to a local controversy. The local museum and the town council had commissioned a new modernist public art work that, as it is often the case with these commissions, was badly received by many local residents. Instead of kowtowing to locals complaints the town decided to encourage a better public understanding of modern art by inviting dozen of artists from all over the world to create sculptural works all around the

city centre. Their broadminded and forward looking approach paid off and the Münster Sculpture Project is now a source of great civic pride.

Interestingly all three exhibitions are held in relatively smaller, provincial towns, (although Venice's status as a major international tourist centre sets it apart from the other two) with populations varying between 60,000 and 270,000. While the cultural scope of these shows is global, the social and economic benefits for the local communities are staggering. The data speaks for itself: last year's Venice Biennale had 319,332 paying visitors and Documenta an incredible 754,301 (a third of which were from outside Germany). The Münster Sculpture Projects is a free event but it is estimated that it attracted around 575,000 visitors from out of town. It is easy to imagine the huge impact on the local economies if one considers that many visitors would have stayed overnight since the shows are too large to be visited thoroughly in one day. The Grand Tour proves beyond dispute that it is possible to develop outstanding artistic initiatives that also deliver substantial social and economic benefits, as long as the events are unique, of the highest standard and on a grand scale.

DCA supported Marco with \$6,600 to attend these events.

For further information on

The Venice Biennale please visit www.labiennale.org/en/

Documenta please visit www.documenta12.de/

Münster Sculpture Project please visit www.lwl.org/LWL/Kultur/skulptur-projekte