

Kate Bush, 'Provisional Authority', *Artforum*, XLVI, 1 (September 2007)

SMALLER AND MORE SUBDUED than its last incarnation, in 1997, Skulptur Projekte Munster 07 is also, perhaps, more thoughtful. Indeed, it holds its own in the context of the show's distinguished history, and each previous installment has proved a fair barometer of its times. Thirty years ago, the very first Sculpture Projects was dominated by big American sculpture in the tradition of Land art. Monoliths by Claes Oldenburg, Donald Judd, and Carl Andre still dot the city and are now much loved by this Catholic Westphalian town's initially recalcitrant citizenry. Bruce Nauman's impressive Square Depression, a sunken inverted pyramid unrealized in 1977 and finally constructed this year, hovers like a ghost from that period. The second installment, in 1987, the "year of the figurative," was characterized by the furor surrounding Katharina Fritsch's yellow Madonna and by the then-fashionable concept of site-specificity, which had grown out of Land art. By 1997, Sculpture Projects was even larger and more exuberant, with a roster of memorable sculptures by Jorge Pardo, Ilya Kabakov, Huang Yong Ping, Martin Kippenberger, Roman Signer, and some extraordinary unrealized works, like Gabriel Orozco's half-submerged Ferris wheel and Charles Ray's turning tree. These iconic sculptures complemented works (by the likes of Rirkrit Tiravanija, Jef Geys, and Tobias Rehberger) that reformulated "public art" in participatory terms--an approach typically in tune with the times.

Skulptur Projekte Munster provided an early blueprint for art programs set in urban spaces, and that blueprint has been adopted widely in the past decade, with small to midscale metropolises the world over grasping how useful visual art can be in forging a civic brand and, with it, a strong tourist economy. Munster helped give birth to the proliferating biennials, triennials, and quinquennials that define the contemporary global art world, and, like any parent, it faces the prospect of being exhausted by its clamorous brood. But what Munster lacks in youthful energy it makes up for in experience, and this year it was evident that, although on its own terms it is modest in scale, it has succeeded in preserving its difference from an increasingly homogenized biennial offer. Each Munster installment is like the latest volume in an expanding history of sculpture conceived for public space. Longevity, focus, and the ten-year cycle give it a unique value. The intervening decade is essential in order to clearly register the evolution of this history: If the event were any more frequent, the continuities would eclipse the changes.

A frighteningly clean, bourgeois town, one of the most prosperous in Germany, Munster has as its only distinguishing features its tastefully ersatz architecture (reconstructed after World War II following the almost total destruction of the city's historical center) and the fact that here, in 1648, the Thirty Years' War was brought to an end, as much of Europe sensibly decided to separate itself into self-determining Protestant and Catholic states rather than go on fighting. Apart from that, and the bleak chapter of the Second World War, not much has happened in Munster. Unlikely fodder, then, for artists seeking to catalyze new works from loaded sites or situations--certainly when compared with towns like Berlin, Istanbul, or Ljubljana, perched, as they are (or were), on historical fault lines between world orders and rife with cultural tension. The curators warn of the creeping privatization of the public sphere in Germany, but twenty years after Reagan and Thatcher's radical free-marketsteering and following some dramatic sell-offs of public assets, it is hard to see this as a stirring issue, even if it is relatively new to Germany's civic experience. Munster's canvas--as a ground for oppositional art--is pretty blank.

Whereas biennials tend to be defined curatorially a priori, and the artists who participate in them jet in to respond to the locale or to illustrate the concept, the whole feel of Sculpture Projects is less frantic, less predetermined, somehow more artistic. Munster--when viewed retrospectively--comes to reflect or define its art-historical moment precisely because it has never set out programmatically to do so. The curatorial approach is low-key and artist-centered. As with any program of totally new art--particularly when you mix, as Munster typically does, very young artists with the very experienced--there is a high percentage of slight or unresolved work. But Sculpture Projects has also been consistently blessed with a great deal of resolved work. And in Munster, on a sunny day and on a bike, the whole is always greater than the sum of its parts.

Skulptur Projekte 07, which was organized by Kasper König, Brigitte Franzen, and Carina Plath and includes contributions by thirty-six artists, certainly had no shortage of engaging parts. On the banks of Munster's famous Lake Aa, I almost mistook Tue Greenfort's *Diffuse Eintrage* (Diffuse Entries) for a piece of abandoned agricultural machinery. A huge liquid-manure truck, it pumps a constant jet into the lake, as if it were a public fountain stolen from some horribly dystopian city. In fact, it is a sculpture that encapsulates complex layers of ecological investigation, as well as being, itself, an activist intervention. The truck spews iron chloride into the water in a symbolic attempt to neutralize the effects of quantities of phosphates washed into the lake from the surrounding area's many meat farms. These phosphates generate algae that compromise the quality of the water in which Munster's population comes to boat and swim. According to Greenfort's research, the water, if ingested, could cause serious bodily damage. While it is hard, standing on Lake Aa's elysian lawns, to register this as an ecological catastrophe of global proportions, it will nevertheless give immaculately green Munster something to ruminate on. At the farthest reaches of the lake, biennial darling Susan Philipsz contributed one of her signature self-sung sound pieces. *The Lost Reflection* made good use of the space underneath the long bridge that straddles the water. Philipsz doubles herself in singing both parts of a duet, the barcarole (a gondolier's song) from *The Tales of Hoffmann*, Jacques Offenbach's opera inspired by the classic gothic fiction of E. T. A. Hoffmann. She then splits the two parts, mezzo-soprano and soprano, into two recordings that call back and forth to each other across the water. This vocal mirroring in turn reflects the visual mirroring that is a feature of the site, as the bridge reflects in the water's surface and vice versa. Doubling, splitting, mirroring: All are haunting qualities, but I'd have wanted to be here alone on a dark night to see whether the work has hidden gothic depths to balance its charm. Like Philipsz's *Lost Reflection*, Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset's *Drama Queens* was memorable but only mildly "situation-specific" (a term the curators have deployed, cognizant that the "site" of "site-specificity" is too narrowly identified with a sense of physical location to encompass the full complexity of art's context, or at least to fully capture the way in which we understand that context today) in that it could easily, and deservedly, be shown elsewhere--in alternative situations, as it were. The live performance had a short-lived outing at Munster's Municipal Theater; thereafter the work was put (and remains) on view on a plasma screen in the Landesmuseum's foyer. If you had read a synopsis before experiencing the performance, you would have worried that you were in for half an hour of ponderous, art-theoretical dissertation. In fact, the piece is a hilarious dramatization of the history of modern sculpture, brilliantly written by Forced Entertainment's Tim Etchells, in which iconic works--Barbara Hepworth's *Elegy III*, 1966; Sol LeWitt's *Four Cubes*, 1971; and Alberto Giacometti's *Walking Man*, 1947, for example--are automated to move and scripted to talk to one another. Each personifies art-historical characteristics or

qualities, and functions as a stereotype of the national identity of its creator. Thus, Giacometti's *Walking Man* is a soft-spoken, melancholic Swiss, who can't stop moving as he frets over every aspect of his existence, including his exile into museum storage. Jeff Koons's *Rabbit of 1986* is a hyperactive cynical wise guy, all parties and showtime, headed for "the great padded packing case in the sky." Sol Le Witt's *Four Cubes* is a down-to-earth, macho American who bores everyone with his endless recitals of banal, important-sounding axioms. *Drama Queens* was the most entertaining contribution to Munster in 2007, with the possible exception of Mike Kelley's *Petting Zoo*, a menagerie of salt-loving, hoofed animals made available for stroking. But if one were to single out the most Munster-ish pieces, the most essential in terms of carrying forward *Sculpture Projects'* ongoing inquiry into art and its potential in the public realm, then one would be forced to look elsewhere--to choose those works that challenge the viewer to think about art's relationship to space, and place, in simultaneously formal and conceptual terms: artworks that understand "sculpture" both as volume (something that physically delineates or occupies a space) and as idea (something that interprets the space it defines or refers to, whether in philosophical, political, or poetic terms).

One of the more effective negotiations of situation-specificity is veteran radical Gustav Metzger's *Aequivalenz--Shattered Stones*, a typically ephemeral--typical, that is, for an artist who has written five manifestos advocating autodestructive art--and human piece. Every day for 107 days (the duration of the exhibition) a man drives a forklift to the Westfälischer Kunstverein and goes inside, where a computer provides him with a set of randomly generated instructions. He is to go to a specified location in the city, where he will deposit from his forklift a certain number of stones, which he will then photograph. The stones will vanish at the end of the project. A similar exercise was to have unfolded simultaneously in the English Midlands town of Coventry, but mayoral approval is still pending. The Luftwaffe razed Coventry in 1940, and in retaliation the RAF intensified its bombing of German cities. One of those, Munster, was decimated by the end of the war. Metzger's randomly dispersed stones echo the fall of bombs throughout both cities. But whereas bombs signal instantaneous violent destruction, Metzger's stones accumulate slowly only to quietly disappear: a gentle monument to devastation and reconciliation.

Mark Wallinger's *Zone* is similarly dematerial yet spatial, constructed from what seems a gossamer thread strung high in the air to demarcate a five-kilometer circle around the inner city. You know it is there, but you rarely see it. *Zone* follows the construction method of an eruv, a device that orthodox Jews use to cleverly bypass certain of their own Sabbath restrictions. An area of a given city is delineated with wire carried aloft on poles in order to claim it as private rather than public space, thus enabling the community to, for example, carry objects from house to house on the Sabbath. The eruv is, Wallinger says, the opposite of the ghetto, in terms of the spatialization of religious community: It stands for freedom, the ghetto for its absolute loss. Wallinger isn't heavy-handed with the politics, although the ambiguous wartime history of Catholic Munster's relations with its Jews is referenced in the catalogue. *Zone* simultaneously refers us to the fourteenth-century English concept of the pale, a defined physical area in which the controlling power permits itself to suspend or enforce law at whim, as most egregiously demonstrated at Guantanamo Bay. This relates *Zone* to State Britain, 2007, Wallinger's recent installation at Tate Britain, which highlighted the one-kilometer exclusion zone that the British government has drawn around the Houses of Parliament, in abrogation of the fundamental democratic right to protest in public space.

Wallinger's *Zone* shares with Metzger's *Aequivalenz* a light-touched approach to weighty--both in physical and political terms--subjects, a quality that also inheres, albeit in very different ways, in two other works I particularly admired in Munster.

Projected in the Atrium of the Landeshaus, *The Head* is a well-judged piece by an important Baltic artist, the Lithuanian Deimantas Narkevicius. Ostensibly, it is a purloined documentary film about the socialist realist Lew Kerbel, sculptor of a ridiculously large, forty-ton head of Karl Marx, made in 1971, which graces the parade ground of Chemnitz (formerly known as Karl-Marx-Stadt), in eastern Germany. In fact, *The Head* is a multilayered conceptual piece that triggers myriad questions about how we should approach the past: Is socialist realism, as an art in the service of an ideology, to be obliterated, critiqued, or curated? What, ultimately, is the difference between a monument and a sculpture? Narkevicius, who himself trained initially as a socialist-realist sculptor, wanted to transport Kerbel's Marx to Munster, on temporary loan, as his contribution to *Skulptur Projekte 07*: It would have looked extraordinary in the verdant lakeside glades. What would happen in dramatically deracinating this "monument," freighted as it is with associations of a repressive, artistically stifled era? Would those associations be emptied out, Narkevicius wondered (whether hopefully or ironically), thereby transforming the work into a mere "modern sculpture," an autonomous object divorced from aura or original ritualistic purpose? Presumably the plan was shelved on the grounds of its sheer absurdity. On April 24, 2007, Chemnitz's Lord Mayor likewise rejected Narkevicius's plan B--the making of an exact plastic replica of Marx--arguing that Kerbel's work could be fully experienced only in its intended context. In other words, it is a site-specific piece, at least as site-specific as its contemporaneous Western counterparts set on the banks of Lake Aa. The Lord Mayor, mindful of her civic brand, nevertheless warmly invited all *Sculpture Project* visitors to experience the work firsthand in Chemnitz.

The young German artist Clemens von Wedemeyer, like Narkevicius, relates sculpture to the idea of civic space, through the medium of film. *Von Gegenüber* (From the Opposite Side) was conceived for the defunct Metropolis Cinema, which sits next to Munster's train station. Cinemas generally take you elsewhere, into reverie inspired by other places and other people's stories. The conceit of *Von Gegenüber* is that it takes you only as far as the cinema's doorstep. Shot in the adjacent station, it is an accomplished, surprisingly gripping piece of filmmaking--an artful combination of verite footage and acted scenarios seamlessly stitched together in what appears to be one breathless take. Stylistically, it is like a documentary film rendered cinematic, in an opposite thrust to the cinema-rendered-documentary mode that has been so prevalent since the advent of Dogme more than a decade ago. Wedemeyer's film piece is also, arguably, a piece of sculpture, in that it delineates a spatial relationship between the viewer (sitting in the cinema) and the work's subject (the station, a few feet away). The artist refers cinema back to its early spatial roots in evoking the model of the camera obscura, a darkened chamber in which the outside--a view of the city beyond the walls--is thrown back into the room as an image, projected through a small opening in the wall. *Von Gegenüber* connects interior space to public space, and the mind of the viewer to the messy life of the city, played out around the station.

In testing the limits of what constitutes sculpture and in closely rooting that inquiry to a local public site, Wedemeyer's *Von Gegenüber* is related to existing Munster icons such as Jorge Pardo's *Pier*, 1997, or Thomas Schütte's *Kirschensaule* (Cherry Column), 1987. But in common with many of the contributions this year, and to the chagrin of the local people I

spoke to, Von Gegenüber will have a short life, in a Sculpture Projects characterized by provisional interventions rather than visually decisive objects. From Pawel Althamer's path-to-nowhere down by the water to Isa Genzken's raggedy collection of dolls and strollers outside the Überwasserkirche, from Hans-Peter Feldmann's refurbished public conveniences in the Domplatz to Jeremy Deller's local gardeners' diaries, I suspect we will look back at Skulptur Projekte 07 from the vantage point of 2017 as a homogeneous encapsulation of its art-historical moment. But we'll have to wait till then to see what comes after the formally modest/conceptually rich paradigm of "situation-specificity."

Tim Griffin, 'Framing the Question', *Artforum*, XLVI, 1 (September 2007)

AT FIRST, to me, it seemed a civic project, the kind of celebratory tableau one imagines a branding agency might dream up at the behest of a few municipal officials' casting a desiring eye toward cultural-tourism revenue. On a broad, open slope of lawn along the promenade in Munster was arranged a selection of miniature replicas of artworks produced for the city's Skulptur Projekte since the once-a-decade event's beginnings some thirty years ago: Here, for instance, was a dollhouse-size octagonal pavilion fashioned after one created by Dan Graham in 1987; somewhat distant on the grounds behind it were renditions of iceberglike "islands" made ten years later by Andrea Zittel. The scene was genuinely amusing--a grand show turned divertissement or, better, amuse-bouche, with a single, sparkling patch of grass conjuring a sense of vast expanse in its play of scale. But it was poignant by the same turn.

For as an exhibition with only the most general directive to consider art in relation to the public--it disavows any claim to a more specific, discursive curatorial thesis, allowing the mere passage of time to create new contexts and meanings--Skulptur Projekte Munster is steeped in questions of spatiality and place. The city inflects the sense of any work, and vice versa. Yet this place set along the promenade, with its Alice-in-Wonderland prospects and scales, was no longer a place, precisely, so much as a suspended microcosm with no bearing on its immediate surroundings. Indeed, the sculptures were no longer sculptures, asking less for any serious formal consideration than for flashes of recognition: That's an Oldenburg! That's a Serra! Stripped as well of any wear and tear their models might have incurred in the time since their making, they seemed more like little emblems of their models--summoning them in memory but emptying them of all their history (i.e., their real functioning in context). And so at the very location where the idea of Skulptur Projekte Munster should have been most condensed, with so many of the exhibition's historical manifestations brought together in one place, it was instead wholly evacuated. Or, more accurately, this array of duplicates seemed to put forward an idea of the show's idea--a picture, figuratively speaking--and then, as more people were, say, lounging together here on a miniaturized Jorge Pardo pier than on the real one some six hundred yards away, the appeal of the appeal.

On this grassy bank brimming with families, couples, and individuals at leisure, in other words, there was also the palpable unreality of the copy, the stand-in: an exhibition's collective memory, as it were, filtered through the prism of commerce, rendered legible via the lexicon of the museum-store collectible and the modern design knockoff. (The Vitra Miniatures Collection--tiny aspirational totems in the form of Breuer Wassily Chairs, Gehry Wiggle Side Chairs, Saarinen Tulip Chairs, and Rietveld Zig Zag Stools--specifically came to mind.) In turn, if Skulptur Projekte Munster asks implicitly for some consideration of art's relationship to both the public sphere and the urban landscape, here one couldn't help but wonder about the implications for democratic space and access. Or, to put a finer point on the question of this show's--and its host city's--posited image of itself: If these objects were copies, summoning an exhibition's memory only to empty it of all history (thus making it more manageable), was the social space they created not a copy as well?

Of course, my impression was merely a case of mistaken identity. The outdoor installation was, in fact, the work of Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, who conceived the piece for this

year's exhibition as a "novel" where visitors, as if turning the pages of a book, "will be able to go from one sculpture to another without having to wait ten years or walk for kilometers." Yet these words only underscore the fictional quality of her setting and its dramatic contrast to the exhibition in which it appears. If it were a work of literature, this tale of the city would fall into the category of the *nouveau roman*, devoid of psychology, with space and time compressed to become a world of pure surface.

In a real sense, *Skulptur Projekte Munster* takes up history as its elemental substance, with its various permanent works, situated throughout the city, providing audiences with a veritable registry of shifts in attitude and ethos within recent art production. But it affords this temporal vantage only when those audiences move out into space and, seeking the present (an unmarked path by Pawel Althamer, a tall hedge rendered passage by Rosemarie Trockel), inevitably stumble upon the past (a stone engraved by George Brecht, a striped gate by Daniel Buren) in a way that creates a pervasive sense of contingency both in the exhibition as a whole and in the experience immediately at hand. This feeling is perhaps strongest when, in the course of one's fruitless search for a particular artwork, the past suddenly arrives on the scene with a sense of vertiginous transport--as when one rounds a slight bend in a deep, wooded path behind the palace gardens to discover the dark heart of Jenny Holzer's *Benches*, 1987, which the artist placed beside an aging, slightly overgrown memorial honoring German soldiers who served in the world wars. (The power of Holzer's own ambiguous summoning of the past is amplified by an abstract, concrete poetry describing the horrors of battle, which the artist has inscribed on each of her sarcophagus-like objects.) Or, riding along the Aasee, one might come upon the shipwreck of Donald Judd's untitled sculpture from 1977, a concrete ring-within-a-ring whose open-and-shut case for the autonomous art object has since acquired a funereal air. The ground within its circumferences is patchy and unkempt, while pale hues of weathered graffiti line its interior rims--such that the object as we find it now is hardly a pure reflection of the artist's notion of self-sufficiency. (Judd's statement about his sculpture, made for the very first *Skulptur Projekte Munster*, is noteworthy in this regard: "The categories of public and private mean nothing to me.... The circular piece in Munster could just as well be on a ranch." Of course, one thinks today, if the sculpture were on a ranch, it would change the ranch--making an artwork of it as well.) In such instances, and however anachronistic it might seem to apply the term to Holzer and Judd, the past is rendered picturesque. The phenomenon is no doubt partly indebted to the fact that permanent works are most often executed on the outskirts of this city, in parks and preserves, where they sit largely by themselves and, over time, become part of the landscape. On occasion they even become literal ruins, signaling in their dilapidated states a simultaneous presence and absence, seeming--like the picture of a different time and place in situ--at once near and far, proximate reality and distant notion. (It is something we rarely see in the contemporary-art world: Works that are esteemed enough to appear on a map yet allowed to age; works valued for the way they are "lived in," the way they persist in the world, rather than for appearing "like new," as they are in a museum.)

Which leads us back to Gonzalez-Foerster's duplicates: What, after all, does it mean in this context to present the idea of the idea of *Skulptur Projekte Munster*, summoning memory without retaining history? What might be the underlying significance--intended or not--of her work's obtaining a sense of loss within the experience of Munster (readily grasped, if only by our contrasting a prospect on her grassy knoll to the experience of moving through the city in search of the actual works) even while generating some feeling for its appeal? To answer these questions, we might do well to look beyond the city limits and think of the French

artist's roman in light of a farther-reaching journey by contemporary-art audiences this summer, one that, like her work, suggests a paradoxical entwining of historicity and atemporality: the so-called Grand Tour.

It is tempting, of course, to simply dismiss the revival of this outmoded term as an empty gesture, an overblown commercial ploy--this one, without a doubt, the work of a branding agency--to garner more attention, from a broader public, for the Venice Biennale, Art Basel, Documenta, and, finally, Skulptur Projekte Munster. Certainly, the contemporary experience of traveling along this circuit would seem far removed, at least at a glance, from that phenomenon first described by British author and Roman Catholic priest Richard Lassels. In a 1670 travelogue, Lassels introduced the phrase "Grand Tour" specifically to denote excursions across the Continent by aristocratic men who--seeking to put a "finishing" touch on their education--would spend time among peers in the Parisian courts and journey into the Italian countryside to study antiquities, their journals and sketchbooks supposedly in hand all the while. But it is, I think, curiously productive to take the term's usage today at face value. And lest we romanticize an earlier time, note that the actual Grand Tour, when it expanded in popularity during the eighteenth century, was available as a package deal replete with hotels, meals, and a vetturino for hire to ensure that the tourists and their luggage made it safely from site to site. (In this sense, the online booking options for this summer's tour seem faithful enough to its precursor.) Almost from its inception, the Grand Tour was enmeshed in the question of the original and the copy, the unique experience and the imitation: Individuals would go abroad, yet more often than not they would visit the same locations as those who had gone before and undertake the same activities--seeking, in effect, to discover what was already known. No less a figure than Sir Philip Sidney participated in this project of cultural replication, writing in the 1570s that "A great number of us never thought in ourselves why we went, but a certain tickling humour to do as other men had done. "It should perhaps come as no surprise, then, that this moment--of conventions confirmed even in apparently new experience--coincided with the maturation of the picturesque as an aesthetic concept, as youths scoured the outdoors for settings whose ruddy fields and scudded skies adhered to that which their masters had declared the fitting subject of art.

This linking of the unique and the imitation is, however, completely antithetical to the thinking underlying two of the major exhibitions on this summer's Grand Tour, the Venice Biennale and Documenta. Indeed, using the picturesque as a kind of theoretical foil for these shows reveals a bond between their respective directors, Robert Storr and Roger M. Buergel--the latter bringing his partner, Ruth Noack, on board as curator--where otherwise they would seem to have little in common. (Who would ever equate the neat professionalism of Venice with the haphazard lighting schemes and fancifully hued walls of Kassel?) Specifically, Storr and Buergel pursue the notion of experience unfettered by theoretical devices--which, they both go on to suggest, would subsequently provide the means by which grand shows such as their own might attain the status of truly democratic space. For his part, Storr asserts in a catalogue essay that "the actual flux of experience far exceed[s] the power of systems, theories and definitions to contain [it]. The imagination is the catch basin into which this overflow spills." And further, he says, any biennial with this spirit may provide a "relatively democratic substitute for missing cultural infrastructures," where the polyphony of potential meanings in artwork gives rise to a polyphony of exchanges among its audience: "[Biennials] are places in which virtually anyone within reach can restore the aura that some have feared art has lost forever but which those who are alert can still summon for themselves in the

presence of a unique image or form." (The matter of aura aside, this statement is also striking for the phrase "within reach," which inevitably leads one to think about those who aren't in reach--or who couldn't afford to be.) Buerger, on the other hand, has declared an interest in the "gift of an unpreconceived gaze," elaborating more concretely on the potential of such unmediated experience when writing in the first Documenta 12 magazine about the inaugural Documenta, which took place in 1955: "Within the context of documenta, the public constituted itself on the groundless basis of aesthetic experience--the experience of objects whose identity cannot be identified. Here there was nothing to understand, in the true sense, no preconceptions, which is precisely why it was possible and essential to talk about everything, to communicate about everything. The exhibition was, in short, an act of civilization." [For a more detailed discussion of Buerger's text, see Tom Holert's "Failure of Will," pp. 408.]

There was, of course, no shortage of communication at the Venice Biennale and Documenta this summer. But here again, one needs only to look back through history to see how our age often might conform to type. Consider, for example, a description of a prerevolutionary Paris Salon by the French painter and architect Louis de Carmontelle:

The Salon opens and the crowd passes through the entrance; how its diversity and turbulence disturbs the spectator! This person here, moved by vanity, wants only to be the first to give his opinion; that one there, moved by boredom, searches only for a new spectacle. Here is one who treats pictures as simple items of commerce and concerns himself only to estimate the prices they will fetch; another hopes only that they will provide material for his idle chat.*

The Italian pavilion in Venice and Messeplatz in Basel immediately come to mind (as do a few individuals). But of greater importance to my comparison is the character of the dialogue in and around contemporary art on occasions like this summer's Grand Tour and, more precisely, the ways in which those occasions might allow or disallow discursive space, engendering in turn a culture steeped in either productive self-reflection or else purely the establishment of consensus. What could it mean to operate without "preconceptions," or that an audience might be able to retrieve some unique moment, some real experience that sits beyond any prior encounter and thus resides exclusively in the "imagination"? To return briefly to the example of the picturesque centuries ago, here the singularity of an experience in the world was, in fact, recognizable only by virtue of one's preconceptions: The landscape was figured, if only for a moment, in such a way as to match one's aesthetic or, simply, to match one's idea of what was there. And so it is by grasping one's preconceptions, acknowledging their unbudging reality (never pretending that they may be set aside, entirely or even in part), that one takes hold of the simultaneous proximity and distance of any experience at hand--and so actually has one's experience, regardless of whether it is novel.

The most pertinent question for our time, then, might be whether there is a picturesque that acknowledges its own frame--and, further, whether it is more productive (or interesting) to accommodate preconceptions than to pretend there can be a situation in which they may fall away. I think in particular of Documenta 12, where objects and images from different times and places are brought together as transhistorical and transcultural "forms," connected in likeness but emptied of all but the most sparing information about their original contexts. Is this not a situation in which, in fact, what one believes oneself to be seeing is what,

ultimately, one decides to believe? Contrast this kind of encounter with those of Munster, which might succeed, however inadvertently, where the Biennale and Documenta fail, whatever their grand claims to set aside grand claims. For rather than seek some imperative view or crystallized vision, Munster seems merely to shrug its shoulders--keeping history present simply by showing its own age, inevitably underlining a procession of ideas through art and cultural history by providing audiences with such picturesque moments as a defunct Judd by the lake or an oft-missed Holzer in the woods. There is also, by virtue of Munster's curatorial repose, always the viewer's sheer frustration of searching, of getting lost, of not knowing precisely what one is looking for (or at)--and of knowing that, even when a work is finally discerned as such, it might well signal nothing, or else fail to resonate with our present moment. The history that fills memory always reveals its own erosion, or its potential loss, here.

And it is perhaps this erosion that is the real subject of Gonzalez-Foerster's Roman de Munster, a fiction that announces itself as such. Like Documenta, it, too, is a dense constellation of objects gathered from across space and time; but it does not present itself as dilating outward to contain, or even merely to reflect, our moment and world. Rather, it draws attention to the images, the copies, the conceptions already in our heads, marking the distance between memory and history--paradoxically, even, since it conjures travel by allowing one to stand entirely still--and making apparent the implicit risk of confounding the two. It's a story bound to be familiar to anyone who took this summer's Grand Tour.