

Landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock. It is... difficult to think of a single natural system that has not, for better or worse, been substantially modified by human culture. The cultural habits of humanity have always made room for the sacredness of nature. – Simon Schama 1

## **HOME IS WHERE The ART IS**

### **6<sup>th</sup> Land Art Festival Fundacja Latająca Ryba**

**- John K. Grande**

Land Art events orchestrated by the Fundacja Latająca Ryba now have a history and the year 2016 marks the 6<sup>th</sup> edition. The land itself, a kind of no-man's land along the river Bug that follows the border between Poland and Belarus has witnessed occupations, invasions, wars and such human tragedy, not once but several times. Populations shifted, were displaced, and still nature bears witness to it all. The German invasion of 1941 resulted in occupation with a semi-autonomous state known as Belarus Central Rada in existence from 1943 until the Soviets regained control in 1944. Belarus settlements destroyed by the Nazis numbered over 5000 and some 380,000 were deported for slave labour while hundreds of thousands were summarily executed. With such a traumatic, endless history, nature becomes a healer and nature provides us with sustenance.

The theme of the 6<sup>th</sup> Land Art Festival is HOME, and home in Polish can likewise be the word dome. Under the dome for the event drummer, musician and artist **Jerzy Sloma Slominsky** performed with musicians in a celebration of "Home" at the opening event July 9<sup>th</sup>. As Slominsky says, in Polish the word Home can also be the word "Dome" a roof of sorts, something that shelters. For the event a geodesic

Buckminster Fuller-like dome was hand built and became a focal point for the drumming and musical intervention.

The artworks in 6<sup>th</sup> Land Art Festival bring art actions into a process that is part of the flow of life – seen and unseen. Questions of historicism, modernist aesthetics, and sculpture as a social and public event and avant-garde actionism (land art as situationism) are raised from the point of view of human interaction in a living ecology. Art's place is no longer in the conventional museum or gallery exhibition site. Here, nature plays the central role, and art follows and becomes a detail in the land. Some works are healing gestures that seek to bind and link broken, shattered and divisive memories from other times... Nature makes this healing possible. The physical and tactile experience of the land and art interaction generates a different dynamics in today's art world that challenges the dominance of the web-based world. The Land Art dynamic causes us to re-evaluate what identity, or culture is and can be, inventing with imagination. Artist's actions are rituals, and the installations are affirmations of our place in the living theatre of nature - the cosmos. Not just a physics of interaction that acknowledges place, but here memory and identity are in flux, an ever changing intertwining of nature and culture in an elusive moment in all of time.

Born in Michałów in 1959, **Jan Gryka** now lives and works in Lublin. With his main media being installation, performance and spatial intervention, Gryka sited a series of vivid and brilliant floral "islands" in two ponds at the entrance to the Zamek Castle. Gryka's Pink Islands have a Baroque flair to them. While they look "natural" these visual devices are completely artificial, a way of staging art in the environment that animates the space. Welcoming us to a proverbial or mythical home or the Zamek, Gryka's pink islands move ever so slightly when the wind

blows, conjuring up a very visual and environmental welcome feeling, an introduction to what home is or potentially could be, when love is all around.

With a background in painting, modern design, scenography, costume and sculpture, **Ewa Chacianowska's** bridges theatre, nature, human culture using 3-dimensional assemblage and site-specific installation... Old hand made windows from an abandoned carpet and textile factory in Suprasl are the main material for Ewa Chacianowska's installation. Over a hundred years old, they form a long line along a route through the field. Like time, these windows are placed in a linear fashion, and evoke memories of the standardization of our industrial history, this being an oversimplification of the great range of experiences and feelings humans have. The geometry and shape of a window is a link and a bridge that references human memories of inner and outer worlds. Chacianowska's collectivity of windows follows the path by the river Bug, and they become part of a walking experience. It's ever changing according to the intensity of light, the weather conditions and time of day. Eventually, these windows will return to nature, completing the cycle of their life, the entropy built into the art parallels human life, the brief time we spend on earth. As part of the history of this place, a no-mans land between Poland and Byelorussia, the window is a household feature that describes a place between the external and internal self, the individual and society. The window is a potential, centuries old forum for social exchange even more than the house door. It is said the curtains of a window are transparent in this region, and are never closed or hidden. Dating as far back in time as 1834, and recycled into an art installation these windows are silent witness to many lives, many conversations over time, experiences we no longer can know. Only the window knows...

**Ala Savashevich**, who comes from the region called Polesia, which has been part of Ukraine, Poland and Byelorussia, creates a metaphor for the way the river has always played a role in the lives of the people. The people of Polesia had a long history of living in the hills but their second home was the boats they used to travel up and down the river, trading, exchanging and trading materials and foods. For the people of Polesia, their house is their boat, and the boat was a nomadic feature central to the economy of their home life. The words ecology and economics derive from the same Greek word, oikos, which means household or home. Nature is our home, as much as the houses we inhabit. Nature's resources give us what we need. Ala Savashevich's house-like boat forms of which there are five, have leafy branch appendages on top. Installed close to the river Bug in the lands that now designate the border between two countries, but for which the river has no discernable difference, whichever side you live on these installed forms are a metaphor for cultural self reliance, which builds a sense of home. The river is the lifeblood of this region, with so much history.

**Kamil Stanczak's** Aeolian, wind-powered sculptures move by chance and wind is the active element. The movement of the attached "wings" of this sculpture and the painted colours of its supports echoes the colour of the storks that migrate to these fields seasonally. The colours the artist uses likewise recall the colours Kasimir Malevich used in his paintings. As Stanczak says "My sculpture alludes mostly to the storks, who migrate through this region, and for whom there are no borders between countries." All the world is home to these storks. Existing as it does in this no-man's land between Poland and Byelorussia, propelled by the wind, just as the winds guide these storks as they migrate, nature of which we are a part guides our lives, is indeed our home, a primary home, that precedes the houses we build to live in.

With over 30 years experience creating installation art in many countries, **Marie-Helene Richard** created Love, Death, Life using recycled plastic to make a spatial installation of roses in France in 2015. For Fundacja Latająca Ryba's 6<sup>th</sup> Land Art festival, Marie-Helene Bertrand has created Wood Village, a series of miniature house structures that symbolically explore the dynamic interface between nature and culture. Each "shaped" house is a small-scale rendition of a home and is ever so neatly integrated into the branch sections of a tree. Painted a uniform white, these habitats in miniature and the entire assemblage – the trees and the houses - stand out dramatically in the landscape by the river Bug. To build a biodynamic of geometric and organic "natural" shapes "found" in the growth forms of branches, Richard's Wood Village explores the tension that exists between "rational" and "intuitive" forms and shapes. We look to visually "read" and interpret forms that are more complex and interesting than "built" or "manufactured" shapes. The organic and natural meet in Marie-Helene Richard's Wood Village. Collaging and combining tiny tree and branch sections becomes 3-Dimensional drawing. The image structures all painted white, form a frieze-like pale white outline seen from afar in the landscape. With its sense of play, Richard's art engages our imagination. Her installation by the river Bug makes us all the more aware of how wood - what we build our homes from - is part of nature just as we are a part of nature.

Seen from far off the pixelated words on tree trunks by the Bishop's Castle in Janow Podlaski, **Jarek Lustych's** Cage is easier to read from far away than close up. The word phrases you see on the trees are commonly used by people as greetings at their homes. And these phrases express sentiments that can designate acceptance or rejection. These phrases express habitual worldviews, and ways of seeing that exclude not only the visitor but also the host. The artist designed the phrases as if they were part of a mesh, a grid structure, suggesting the phrases are part of a structural continuity that we cannot see. The colour silver he uses is also used

traditionally in religious icons and belongs to a spiritual world. Unlike the colour gold, silver is neutral and reflects the surrounding natural environment at Park Zamku. The silver phrases can be seen on trees at a height comparable to the height of a house. As a collective of standard spoken word phrases, now sited on tree trunks they describe a conventional way of seeing the world. The suggestion is that just as the idea of home is culture specific, our comfort and familiarity with home may stop us from seeing the world in unfamiliar ways. Lustych's Cage builds bridges between the natural world and the human built cultural world. Our home is both cultural and natural, Lustych's site specific installation seems to say, though we are often unaware of the links between the two. Nature and culture, and the way we "structure" value, is the great challenge of the future, just as to escape one's "story" is to enable the capacity to see the world with fresh eyes, anew. The artist is a medium moving in, through and beyond the limitations of the cage of familiarity that home can be.

**Tomasz Sikorski's** body land performances bring home back to a bio-deterministic point in time – the artist's body - upside down merging into the land. It is a kind of living way of presenting what home is performatively speaking. In the middle of a forest area close to a red and white Polish border land marker, Sikorski has set up overhead banners that declare a START, a place of entrance to the forest. At the other end, we can read a second banner that simply has the word META on it. Once we are on our way in the centre of this "conceptually delineated space", we become aware that seen from inside, the signs read META at both ends, as if we were metaphorically trapped by this "state of being". Sikorski's installation suggests our notion of Home could as readily be a meta-state as it could be a concept. It is all in the way we interpret it all. Or is it possible nature was (and still is) our real primordial Home, one that existed (and still does) before all the constructs and ideational interpretations came into being? At another secluded sanctuary-like site,

Sikorski's *Never Now* presents a grave with a mirror facing upwards to the skies. Death as metaphor for home, or for our unpreparedness for death when it comes, Sikorski's modest yet powerful action recalls his late father, who escaped from Warsaw during the 1944 uprising through the sewers of the city, and so Sikorski's *Escape*, a blue circle that circumscribes a patch of ground as a point of connectivity to other places, other times, other world, is contemplative, searching, a gesture of acceptance and letting go.

**Ryszard Litwiniuk's Gate** opens up into the landscape, and presents the entire environments of this no-mans land by the river Bug as a kind of preternatural home, and one that has been occupied by a wide range of families, peoples, cultures over time. When you look through the gate you can see an official borderland mark for Poland, designating what symbolic and real country you are in. When you look through the gate the other way, you can see a Byelorussian land marker on the other side of the river. The act of entering and exiting through this "nature gate" signals arrival and departure. You are leaving and you are arriving. Where is home? It is inside ourselves, in the way we interpret acceptance and rejection, and what the essence of life is or can be. Like a "nature wall" Ryszard Litwiniuk's Gate has an opening that represents the artist's true cultural action... As Litwiniuk says, "For me travelling and crossing any border like this one between Byelorussia and Poland is like coming home. So for me borders give me a feeling of home, even if home is far away." Culture becomes a way of healing, of opening, of removing barriers. The bio-dynamic and synergy in this sculpture exists at the level of interpretation. What surrounds the sculpture environment is as important as what it is. The two are interdependent – culture and nature. Culture is less something we protect, preserve, and guard, than something that passes from generation to generation by word of mouth, invisibly, an heirloom of life that lives and cannot be contained,

preserved, and like the air, moves transparently, and for all the forces that seek to suppress, force, shape, home is a place where freedom lives and will always...

**Lucia Loren's** blackened and charred oval egg-like wooden shapes exist in the fields like found elements that have rolled there by chance. The reference, here, is to the Easter ritual of rolling painted eggs along the floor to inspire regeneration and fertilization of nature after winter. In curvilinear patterns, drill roots from plants in the fields are set into the surface of each egg. These root systems of local plants suggest new growth and a resurgence of the energy of life anew out of the protective shell, or cover of these metaphoric and symbolic eggs. A sort of homage to the cycle of life, to the regenerative power of nature, and also an affirmation of the ancient egg form, Loren's art goes to the heart of what makes a home, a sense of the continuity of life. Culture and nature intertwine, overlap, co-exist and fuse in Loren's playful artwork.

**Aneta Misiaszek's** home has an oven, and like traditional bread ovens, but this home sculpture icon exists out of doors in the open environment. It's a gesture that expresses the links between our food sources, our sustenance out there in nature and contemporary life. Aneta's installation is ever so slightly humorous for it exists out of context, with no house, no village, and no community to connect it to anything. The links with the past, and suggestion that nature itself is a kind of endless kitchen we draw on for survival reaffirms the ecological links between humanity and nature. Nature art like Aneta Misiaszek's affirms a continuity between past, present and future. The healing links are there reaffirming the elusive and eternal character of what makes us human.

As **Katarzyna Krzykawska** says "My exchange with the children from this region, is about information and emotions from our first house... Where we are from? I always



carry memories of my first home, on different levels... emotional, understanding of space, of relation to space, favourite places, my first touching experience with nature... even smells. It is for always. Sometimes we want to cut that connection but I think it is very hard. It formed us in many ways. Childhood experiences stay with us. It is more significant in this region. People had to decide where their home is, and on which side of the river Bug. House is less about the physical house, and more about the home in your heart.” Krzykawska’s installation by the river Bug titled *The Swing One Cannot Swing On* is a painted red and white and speaks of the tensions surrounding nationalism, for this swing cannot move forwards or backwards.

Mirosław Maszlanko’s *Opus reticulatum* (reticulated work) is an ever-ascending structure whose repeated patterns reference a brickwork style used by the ancient Romans in their architecture. The diamond-shape bricks called *cubilia* by the Romans were set around a core of cement. *Reticulatum*, in Latin means net-like, and *opus* is a work of art, and so with the web-like weave, and undulating wood assemblage shape, this is a site specific sculpture that weaves in space, creating a 3-dimensional web in an age where synthetic dimensionality, and the world wide web, presents us with parallel realities, one physical and the other intangible and screen-bred. As an assemblage, *Opus reticulatum*, with all its patterned unfolding in space becomes a metaphor for interconnectedness, and suggests our real home is in the physical world, on this earth, a place we are familiar with, and that we can identify with.

Centrally placed in the open fields where the festival is taking place Jarek Koziara’s performative installation uses wood in a series of transformative shapes. The tree itself is live wood; the trunks that form a support around the tree are wood. And the horizontally cut tree sections that act as a continuous patterned surface

surrounding the tree are wood. Emphatic, expressive, Koziara's installation heightens our awareness of the living tree as a bio-structure. Narratives and myths of the tree of life and of the world tree Yggdrasil referenced in the 13<sup>th</sup> century Poetic Edda from earlier sources as well as the prose Edda from the 13<sup>th</sup> century by Snorri Sturluson. The immense tree Yggdrasil, considered very holy, is a place the Gods go to assemble their thoughts. Yggdrasil's branches go high up into the heavens. Similar legends of the tree's symbolic continuity and connectivity, between the worlds of the living and dead exist in many world cultures. Jarek Koziara's installation moves beyond sculpture as object, and directs us to understand that home may be light as air, or dense and primordial, or both. Not so far from this tree, in an area that has fruit trees near to it, a series of human-scaled vertical forms made from wood recycled from old homes in the immediate area project an aura of memory and mystique. The wood these forms are assembled together out of, are like witnesses, or identity markers... The wood has a memory. As humanistic spatial markers, Koziara's pieces recall Arte Povera's use of recycled materials, and integrates soulful traces in a freestanding set of sculptures in a field setting.

A veteran of the Land Art idiom, **Jan Rylke** has a lot of experience working with and in the medium of the earth. The earth is a home we emerge from at birth and return to when we die. For this event Rylke, has dug his own grave, with a sense of the inner and outer dimensionality of art's place in the cosmos. Undressed, entering the grave, Rylke, made a symbolic return to the earth, our origins, our home, and a trumpet sounded far off. Polish vodka was served to bystanders. From body art to bio-art to earth art to land art, Jan Rylke has an enduring vision, the persistence of memory makes Housewarming, as he titles this action of self burial all the more ironic, philosophical, mimetic, immediate, textural, tactile, a merging and fusing of

self with other... In the words of Stéphane Mallarmé, “A roll of the dice never abolish chance”<sup>2</sup>

As an event that personifies the social and cultural dimensionality of change the 6<sup>th</sup> Land Art festival evidences art’s enduring changeability, as process replaces process, undoing or remaking the essence of art. This year’s event proves art is at its strongest when it remains an open story and like nature, art can never be contained. Land Art removes the frame of containment, and enters into nature’s processes, and culture’s processes also. It is an infinite enigma, this nature key uncontains history, binds time, unframes the landscape, brings art actions to a point where we can see ourselves fleetingly in a mirror continuum, in timeflow continuity... Dot Dot Dot... Freedom, the breath of life, the essence of spirit, all this a very human story. The parentheses of culture intertwine with nature poetically building a universal language, an eternal ephemeral hybridity, a vision that like the flight of the stork, who seems to be the real “owner” of this land, exists in a contextual infinity.

#### Footnotes

1. Simon Schama. (n.d.). AZQuotes.com. Retrieved July 02, 2016, from AZQuotes.com Web site: <http://www.azquotes.com/quote/778985>
2. Stéphane Mallarmé, (translation by Jeff Clark), *A Roll of the Dice*, (Seattle, Washington; Wave Books), 2015

#### Biography John K. Grande

Author, poet and curator John K. Grande has been a part of the international arts community over the past 30 years. Specializing in art and ecology he has produced such seminal publications as *Balance: Art and Nature* (Black Rose Books, 1994), *Intertwining: Landscape, Technology, Issues, Artists* (Black

Rose Books, 1998), *Jouer avec le feu: Armand Vaillancourt: Sculpteur engagé* (Montreal: Lanctot, 2001), *Art Nature Dialogues* (SUNY Press, New York 2003), *Dialogues in Diversity; Art from Marginal to Mainstream* (Pari, Italy 2007) and *Homage to Jean-Paul Riopelle* (Prospect Press /Gaspereau Press, 2011). JohnGrande has published countless catalogue essays on artists and exhibited and read his poetry in Ireland, Belgium, Hungary, Canada, Poland, and the United States. Books include *le Mouvement Intuitif*; Patrick Dougherty & Adrian Maryniak (Atelier 340, Bruxelles 2003), *Natura Humana*; Bob Verschueren (Editions Mardaga, Brussels, 2010), Roger Rigorth (Kerber Verlag, Darmstadt, 2014), Nils-Udo; *Sur l'Eau* (Actes Sud, France, 2015) and *Gates of Perception* (T3, Transylvania, 2016)

John K. Grande is co-curator of *Small Gestures* at the Kunsthalle, Budapest, July 2016