

The Traveling Donkeys

... A Migratory Studio

1999-2019

Prelude



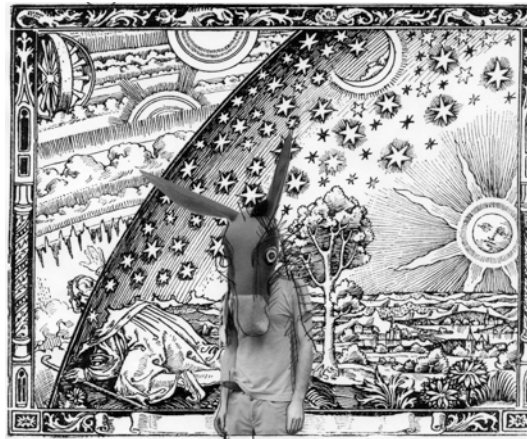
Quand un voyageur a demandé à la servante de Wordsworth de lui montrer l'étude de son maître, elle a répondu, « *Voici sa bibliothèque, mais son étude est à l'extérieur.* »

foreward

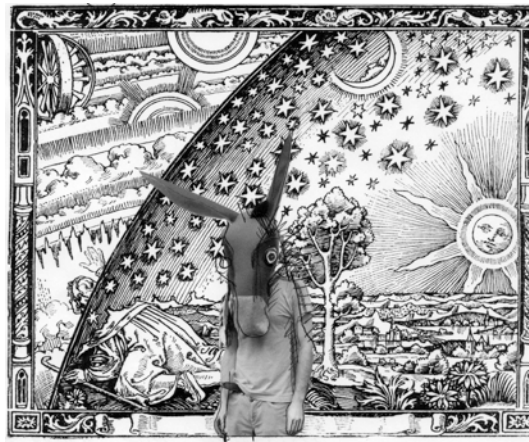
The traveling donkeys are infused with inspiration principally from literature , films and everyday encounters .

The situationists , surrealist deambulations, Chaucers canterbury tales , Animal Farm, Robert Louis Stevens’ “Travels with a Donkey”, Robert Bresson’s “Au Hazard Balthazar”, The Torah, Bilaams Donkey , The Zohar , ... Apuleus’ “Golden Ass” Aesop’s fables charlie chaplin , pantomime , morris men , Tarkovsky and essentially early childhood memories on the Somerset coast . In one way or another all those influences have ebbed and flowed into the development of the story in some way.

These multifarious references have been woven with personal encounters to create a parallel universe akin the wayfarer who journeys through many stations and cities during the search for enlightenment , and amusement ... extending the frontiers of ones own consciousness during the course of ones own burlesque , and more-often than not melancholic meanderings.



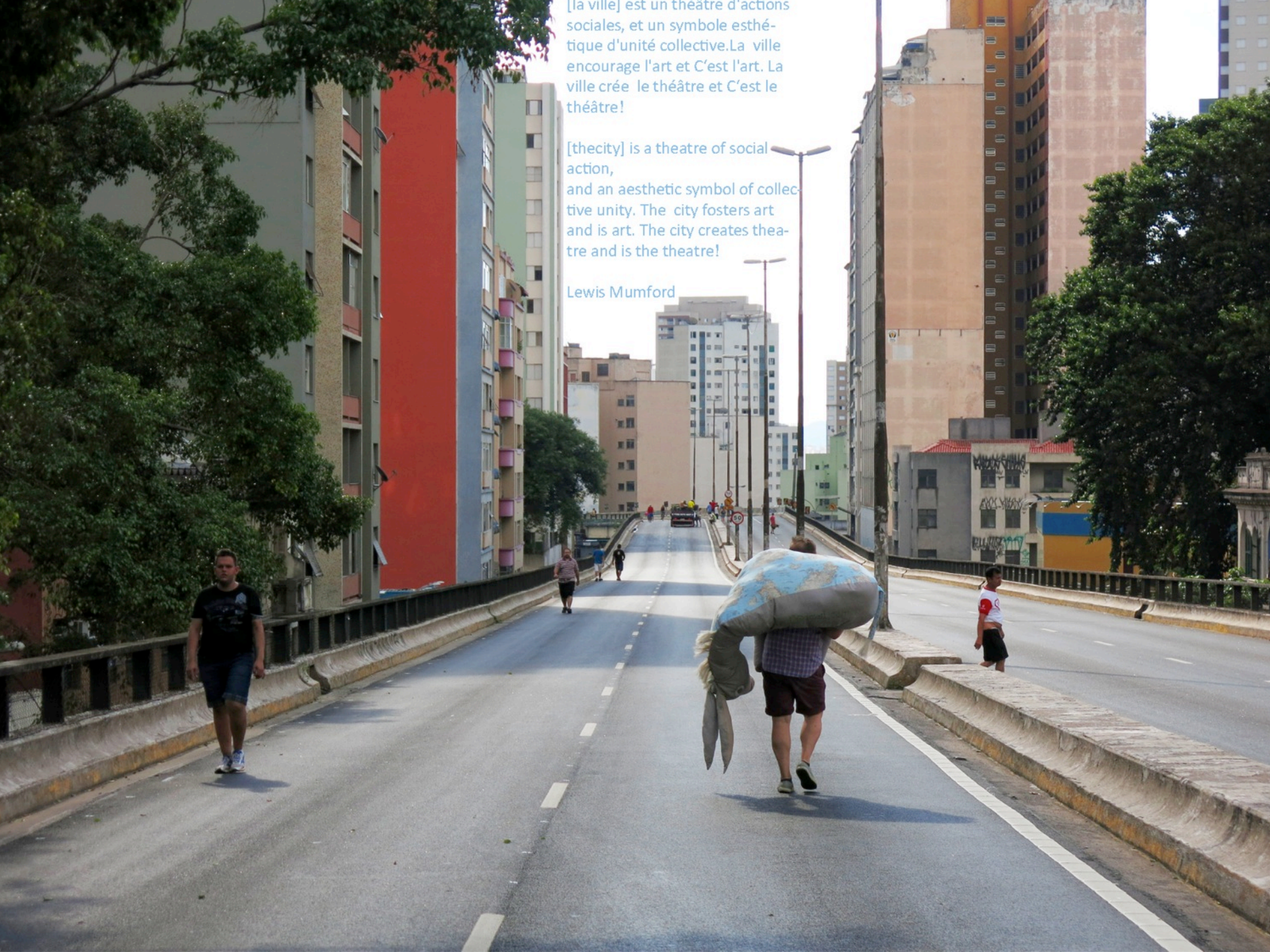
A Parallel Universe.The Wayfarer



[la ville] est un théâtre d'actions sociales, et un symbole esthétique d'unité collective. La ville encourage l'art et C'est l'art. La ville crée le théâtre et C'est le théâtre!

[thecity] is a theatre of social action, and an aesthetic symbol of collective unity. The city fosters art and is art. The city creates theatre and is the theatre!

Lewis Mumford



Chapter 1

You Go Out ! Lech Lecha!

The desire to create a traveling artwork had always been a personal goal ...to find a form and idea for an autonomous vehicle or vessel , which moved across cities and amongst people lives.

The aim was an itinerant object slipping in and out of private and public space.

The wish began to manifest itself in the form of the Traveling donkeys in 1999

This was a time to step out of the boundaries and parameters I had been used to, it was time to leave what I had been accustomed to in the art world and take a leap in the dark.. Lech Lecha!

I could never have envisaged how the work would evolve into its present form.

The initial steps of Donkey Story (I prefer to refer to the work as a story) were literally stitches and steps : walking through the city of Berlin with a life sized, felt donkey on my shoulders.

The first donkey which I painstakingly sewed together during a frozen Berlin winter, was intended as a burlesque and provocative street action, with no specific audience in mind. What interested me in the initial excursions through the city with my donkey, were the spontaneous reactions and direct exchanges with a public at large, away from the hermetic spaces of the art world.



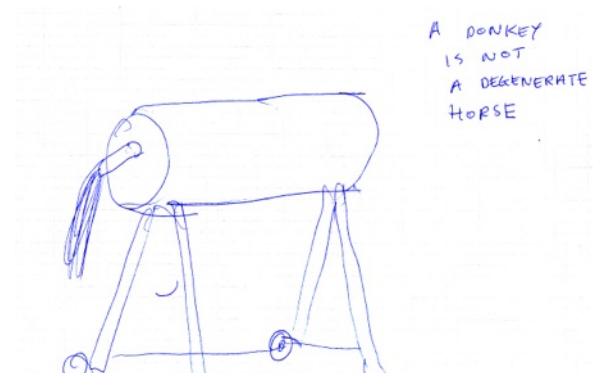
Lech Lecha!
You Go Out !

A Donkey Is Not a Degenerate Horse

Deconstructing the representation of power

The donkey is a complex character. Despite being renowned for their apparent stupidity, they are as we insiders know very astute animals. Although their presence in everyday life (in most of our cities and countryside) is on the wane, the cultural place in our collective consciousness retains a profoundly significant place . As animals Donkeys are invariably associated with serfdom , humility , burden , libido and oppression as opposed to the symbol of the Horse for example which evokes nobility, finesse and most significantly the projection of power and status .

Carrying a donkey is absurd , nevertheless the idea gives rise to the notion of the reversal of Power turning the world upside down.



A Donkey Is Not a Degenerate Horse

Deconstructing the representation
of power

The Reversal Of Power





Balthazaar. Berlin. 1999

The Beast Of Burden

“The donkey as an itinerant beast of burden, an animal entity associated with the poor and the impoverished, is given a dominant role throughout his recent body of work. The autobiographical component of the work, is the idea of an association and identification on the part of the artist, a seeing the world from the position of 'other' as a reversed viewpoint. If it appears as humour so much more so in that it is critical of the unjust conditions of our contemporary world.”

Mark Gisbourne

excerpt from written text about the traveling Donkeys

“All The Fun Of The Fair”

The Beast Of Burden

Chapter 2

Neighbourhood Watch

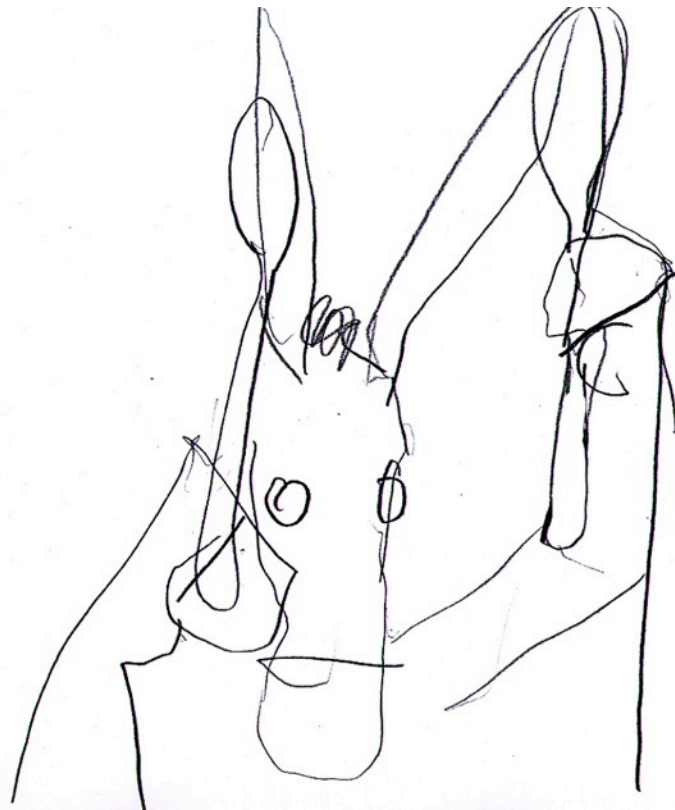
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The Keiz or neighbourhood in Berlin Mitte , was the designated enviroment in which the first excursions and encounters took place



Local networks From Ear to Ear

The initial excursions were mostly confined to a few streets, but the people who took the donkeys into their homes shared their experiences and slowly by word of mouth an increasingly wider spectrum of the community became involved.



community





Chapter 3

A Stitch In Time

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A Stitch In Time



Chapter 4

The Trojan Donkey

The initial encounters with people I met in the street with the cloth donkeys led me to the idea of the '*Trojan Donkey*'. Hosts who were intrigued and surprised enough by our encounters to take the donkey back to their home were able to keep the donkeys for extended periods and create situations and use them for their own purposes either at home or taking them out themselves into the city.

An internal pocket bag was sewn into the belly which served the purpose of storing any notes pictures or sovenirs people wished to add as traces of their encounters.

Successive hosts were able to delve into the burgeoning belly space and see what had been left or donated beforehand.



The Trojan Donkey



The Trojan contrivance unlocks feelings, it unlocks the imagination of the individual. During the journeys, their bellies are filled up with notes, photographs, sketches. The encounters, the memories, the individual realities are transported along with the continuity of travel. The donkeys turn into mediators and producers of social intersubjectivity.

The stuffed donkeys have such power to provoke situations, modes of behaviour and feelings that one is involuntarily reminded of the roles played by similar figures during childhood. And yet one should not forget that this is a matter of cunning on the part of the artist, this embodiment of the donkeys has a purpose: to penetrate into people's private spheres, lending wings to their imagination and feelings in order, ultimately, to sound out the power of art's symbolic reality.





The Great Escape

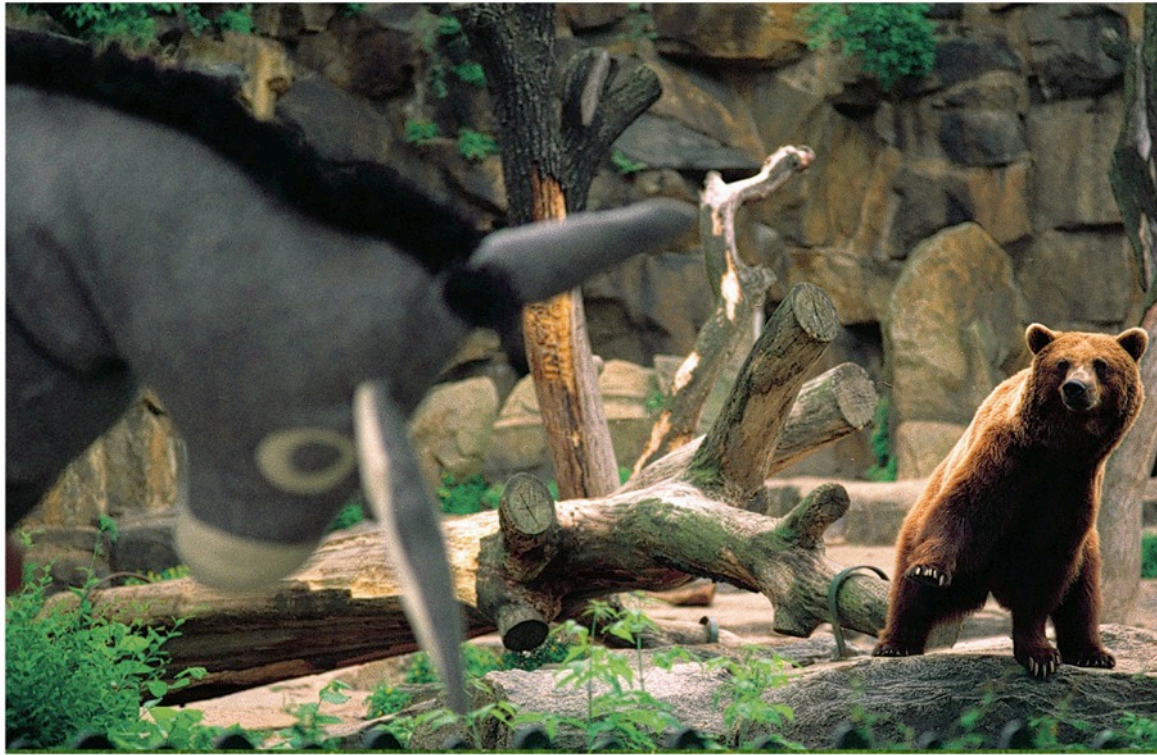
Just weird innocence carried on you back, quite the contrary of showing off, a weird silent look, a character, a figure you both are, from far out, people saw me from far out, that's what you say, they had the image of a man with a donkey on his shoulders and it moved a lot of people, that image, from far out, without being able to touch it, and, closer, it made encounters, spontaneous encounters, and that's when, you say, I had the idea of having it come into people's homes, let people take care of it for a while, the idea of intrusion, Trojan donkey, the reversed double of power and war, you could have said my war donkey, you say my craft, going through the borders of people, slipping art into the fortress of people, and it worked. Donkey went into squats, donkey passed from hand to hand, into the homes of people that had nothing to do with contemporary art, donkey went into women's homes too, like a stuffed Priapus toy, donkey went through, you'd like to say all social borders

Phillip Ripoll Donkey step/stop



The Great Escape





Balthasar. The Zoo. Berlin Tierpark. 2000

As In the case of any relationship that becomes too close , at a given moment it becomes necessary to let go



Clandestâne





A story within a story The green Donkey

In 2003 The Green Donkey was sent in a package to Andrea Nusse a German Journalist and correspondent in Jordan.

Tensions were running high as the seeds of conflict had begun to develop again after the Gulf War period and were rapidly deteriorating with the invasion of Iraq on the horizon.

After some initial encounters the donkey was led into a situation whereby it was confiscated by the secret police.

From hearsay we understand it was found in a prominent public place donning a placard around its neck criticising the American President at the time.

From that time on, all trace of the green donkey was cut.

Five years later I received a email from a Dance company in Alexandria, Egypt.

They informed me they had the green Donkey which they were working with.

The thread was taken up by „chambre 21 „ a group working in Morocco, who proposed reuniting the donkey and myself in Marrakech, Morocco.

A Story Within A Story
The Green Donkey

The **handover** was made in a marakeesh suburb through the intermediary of some french artists living and working there.

Touring marrocco and making workshops with student i made my way to Tetoujan in the mountains and then embarked on a trip to cross over the border enclave of Ceuta into spanish mainland.

The donkey was embroidered with the words „Nothing To Declare“

During ist trip the green donkey had aquired hundreds of letters drawings and objects .

I left for Berlin and thet green donkey continued ist way in Sevilla.

From sevilla the donkey managed to travel northwards to France through Belgium passing th etablissment d en Face and then arrived in Amsterdam.

The greendonkey is now part of the Kunstmuseum collection in Bielefeld .

There are to date 13 donkey traveling or part of collections in various parts of the world.

The network extends as far or as near apart as China, Morocco, Spain, Mexico, the Middle east, India, Brazil, Japan, Great Britain , France Belgium, Holland and Germany .

Most of the donkeys are on the move , and are traceable for the most part each donkey has made its own way. And each has its own history. The photos, writings and drawings collected in each donkey recount a particular story, composed of the traces each person has left inside, in some way ...the “Donkey’s Memory”.

Current projects include two donkeys to Africa (Malawi and Ghana) , a collaboration with the Bundeswehr to bring donkeys to children in conflict zones. A donkey in Mongolia and the carousel in Pallazzo Roviga In Italy.

In discussion are Workshops with austistic groups in wuppetal, Pina Bausch dance group and in the making A possible collaboration with extinction rebellion.

Traveling donkeys that have returned to the studio in Berlin are always ready for new proposals and trips

13

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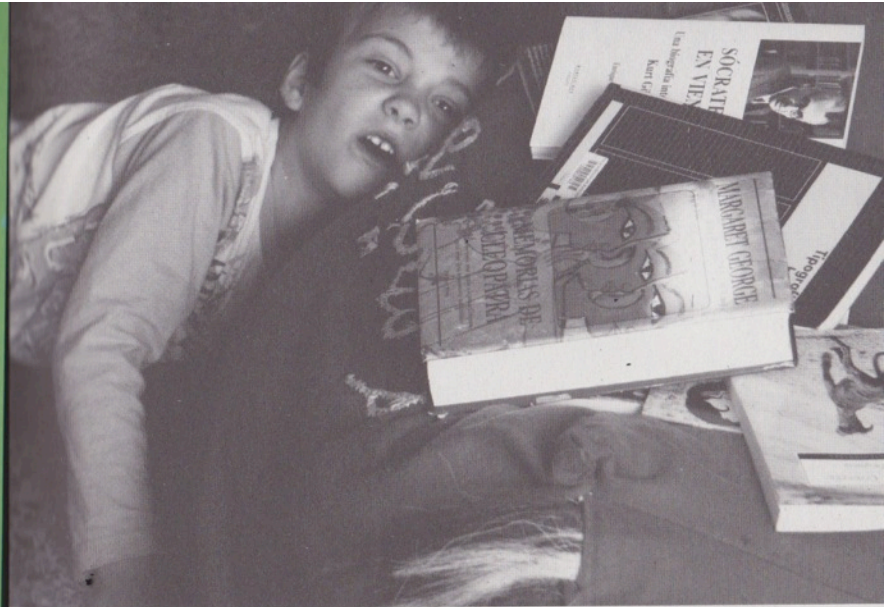


The Traveling Donkeys 2013 with David Medalla..



Kunsthalle bielefeld

I would like to host for the wednesday afternoon



I think I have a very different imaginary around Homer than you and most others. I really wanted to give him a home and integrate in my life (not just be a vehicle for more perennial wandering). Rather than showing photos of travel and being on the move, he was sleeping with me in my bed, cooking, etc. It was homely homer. CAIRO 22/11/08



Villa Arson. 2013

SAMEDI 25 JUIN AU SAMEDI 9 OCTOBRE 2005

The Travelling Donkeys, exposition de Stephen Wilks au Centre National d'Art Contemporain de la Villa Arson, Nice

Le jour du vernissage une marche festive accompagnée d'un orchestre de jazz débute au Parc Chambrun. Autour de trois ânes voyageurs réalisés par Stephen Wilks, elle réunit les principaux partenaires de ce projet et un nombre important de participants aux ateliers qui se sont déroulés à Nice. Là encore, le vernissage débute à l'arrivée du cortège. Cette exposition est une pause dans le parcours de l'Âne bleu. Elle présente le parcours et la totalité des productions des ateliers depuis octobre 2004, accompagnés d'autres travaux récents de l'artiste et d'autres ânes venus le rejoindre. Textes, dessins, découpages et objets laissés dans le ventre de l'animal durant son parcours en région deviennent les supports d'un récit d'expériences partagées. Ces productions très diversifiées - puisque libres - relient l'ensemble des rencontres et des ateliers pour établir une réflexion au delà des situations personnelles et du lieu de la rencontre.

Saturday 25th June 2005, walk from Chambrun park to Villa Arson, Nice. Saturday 25th June to Saturday 9th October 2005, *The Travelling Donkeys* exhibition by Stephen Wilks at Villa Arson national contemporary art centre, Nice. The day of the preview, a joyous walk accompanied by a jazz band began in Chambrun park. It brought together three travelling donkeys made by Stephen Wilks, the main partners in the project and a large number of the participants from the workshops that had been held in Nice. Again, the preview began with the arrival of the procession. The exhibition constituted a pause in the *Blue Donkey's* journey. It presented the route followed and all the workshop creations dating back to October 2004, as well as other donkeys and other recent works by the artist. Texts, drawings, cut-outs and objects left in the donkey's belly during its journey became the supports for a tale of shared experiences. The creations are of a very diverse and free nature and provide a link between all the encounters and workshops to establish ideas that go beyond personal situations and individual locations.





Sagrada Familia. Barcelona. 2008





White Donkey, Japan.2004





The Red Donkey, Villa Demoiselle, Reims France, 2012







each image becomes an integral part of a city's narrative.

It's this that is carried across into one of his most evocative and innovative projects in which life-sized cloth donkeys travel from house to house, city to city, country to country. China, Jordan, Germany, Morocco, Netherlands, India, containing sketches, stories and notes added by men, women and children from local communities. In effect, a work of art that, by its autonomy, becomes a constant work in progress connecting people across cultures in ways only they can imagine.

Each Image Becomes An Integral Part Of A
City's Narrative







ギラリ-A5







Pour le rendez-vous, je pense à un lieu très simple et très facile à trouver : à l'entrée du Musée des Beaux-Arts, c'est dans le château en plein centre de Caen. La direction est indiquée partout dans la ville et il y a même là une cafétéria avec une terrasse.

Par contre je vais m'arranger avec quelqu'un de Caen pour le rendez-vous le 7,

je vais à un vernissage à Caen le 4 (vendredi) donc je te donnerai toutes les infos le 5 : le nom de la personne et son tél.

Je récupérerai Homer à Cabourg le 11.

CAEN 30/06/08

carousels









