

PRESS RELEASE

La Biennale di Venezia – 50th INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION

Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer

Preview: 12 (Press)-13-14 June, 2003 – Open hours 10.00-20.00

15 June - 2 November- Open hours 10.00-18.00, Closed on Mondays (except 16 June)



ESTONIA

John Smith goes to Venice with "Marko und Kaido"

Inauguration cocktail 13 June at 4pm

Palazzo Malipiero (first floor), S. Marco 3079, Venice

(Boat station S. Samuele, vaporetto n. 82 front Palazzo Grassi)

4th official participation of Estonia

Artist: John Smith Project: "Marko und Kaido"

Curator: Anders Härm; Commissioner: Sirje Helme

Organized by Center for Contemporary Arts, Estonia

Co-organized by Arte Communications, Venice

Yes, you are not mistaken - **John Smith** is the artist representing Estonia this year at the 50th INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION La Biennale di Venezia and the project is called "**Marko und Kaido**". Instead of videos, Estonia will this year show a narration about the life of Marko and Kaido in painting and installation. This story is actually the story of provincialism and provincial dreams, our answer to the concept of 50th Venice biennial "Dreams and Conflicts" suggested by the curator **Francesco Bonami**. The exhibition takes place in the conceptually proper apartment and yard **near Palazzo Grassi**.

John Smith, of course, is a fictional character. He is the constantly changing **Conceptual Persona** of two artists, **Marko Mäetamm** and **Kaido Ole**, who have for years shared a studio. Under these circumstances - working side by side - the third guy John with a third point of view was born. John is an ... Idiot as if Deleuze's and Guattari's description of the notion "Conceptual Persona" has been taken literally.

As an artist John is a freshman, he started to participate in the exhibitions only few years ago. In Venice John's mysterious and permanently shifting persona becomes fixed at least for a minute. He reveals his secrets in form of autobiographic short story: John is a German immigrant with Polish roots (*sic!*) who after long studies at the Goethe Institute in Stuttgart has become a gene technologist (sick?). The institute dispatched him to study "average people" in Rapla, in provincial city in provincial Estonia (back then a provincial county of the Soviet Union and now rapidly becoming the province of the European Union). Working as an art teacher at the local secondary school he discovers two completely average boys - Marko and Kaido, who are strikingly similar with artists Mäetamm and Ole and who become the objects of his studies. He follows them for almost 40 years throughout their tremendously boring life. Smith becomes more and more



suspicious of the meaningfulness of his work, and at some point he stops sending his reports to the institute in Stuttgart, where he has been in fact forgotten a long time ago. But soon after that something strange starts to happen in the backyard of Kaido and Marko's house, where the boys live together. They embark upon building a rocket. Like some freaky brothers of David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust, like Wallace and Gromit, they plan to leave the dusty Rapla behind and "run away to the stars". Standing side by side with great men like Martin Luther King, Marko *und* Kaido could say as proudly: *We had a dream!* There is no need to mention that their attempt was a failure...

The "**Space program**" of Kaido and Marko is just as optimistic, infantile and idiotic a project as John Smith itself. We might even say that they form a conceptual whole. But behind that conceptualized "village madness" semi-autobiographical material of Mäetamm and Ole is brought out. Although alienated from it they are both small-town kids and very familiar with provincial perception and ways of life. (Isn't an art project a great way to get in touch with your roots, or what? They should have been already in Documenta!)

John's themes are everything but cool, his style of painting, again, is nothing but the cool. His pictures have no quality we are used to call "painterly"; it is pure image that counts. John's pictures are painted by two artists, but they never reveal their "real" author. The cool of John's paintings is in constant conflict with the subject, but the pathos of them could be that with some technical skills everybody could do them. So we might say that the art of John Smith is "everyman's" art in every way.

Anders Härm

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