

Olga (Gehr-) Zimmelova

Olga Zimmelova, Swiss of Czech origin, proposes a video-installation “Quadro veneziano” (Venetian painting): the artist filmed one of her canvases painted with Venetian colours that lets itself be taken away by the current of the canals, endowing it with rhythm and movement.



Olga Zimmelova was born in the Czech Republic in 1945, took a degree in Pedagogy in 1957. In 1968 she moved to Switzerland, where she studied till 1972 at the School of Art in Luzern. She attended the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera in Milan, Italy for six months. She did several study trips in different European countries, in Egypt, Tunisia, Israel, Lesotho and Canada; 1985 she stayed in the Institute For Women’s Education, Banasthali Vidyapith, India.

From 1982 to 1984 she lived in Italy as a member of the Swiss Institute of Rome, then in 1984 she moved to Ventotene island, and in 1987 to Sardinia. In 2006 she stayed in the Swiss Institute of Venice where she created the outdoor Project “Quadro veneziano”.

Her work gained an award from the Federal Department for the Swiss Culture in 1980, 1983, 1999, 2003. She did several personal as well as collective exhibition in Switzerland, Italy, Czech Republic, Germany, Israel and Lesotho. During these exhibitions she presented different works in different art categories: paintings, drawings, installations, direct execution in open spaces and happenings, film Super 8, Videos, Texts.

Olga Zimmelova, Video-installation ‘Quadro veneziano’ (Venice 2006 and Basel 2008)

For this exhibition, Olga Zimmelova presents a video-installation, created by filming her artistic project ‘Quadro veneziano’, created in Venice in 2006. The project is part of the series ‘Lavori all’aperto’ (Outdoor works) begun by Zimmelova during her stay in Rome in the Swiss Institute (1982-1984). The brush-stroke is the fundamental concept in the artist’s painting and installations. The primary aspect of painting - and in a broader sense of art – it represents for Zimmelova a way in which to fix the simple pictorial gesture of the hand, independently from any figurative aims. In her paintings this concentrated and meditative gesture becomes fixed with an always changing dynamism and direction. During the Roman period, she brought this element from the studio outdoors.

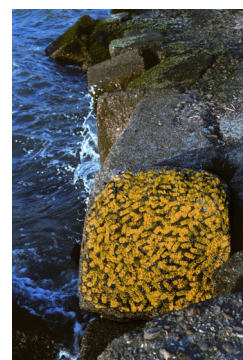
Zimmelova uses brush-strokes for painting breakwater structures and the deserted bathing-huts of the beach Stella Polare in Roman Ostia; in the centre of the city, on the Tiber embankment, the artist offers the river a painting which the current can carry to the sea. In this sense, the work of art is reconciled with nature.

One constant factor remains in the artist’s work: she always considers the character of a particular setting and tries to catch its essence. Alongside the natural aspect, she is interested in signs of human presence, which animate even the most desolate places by expressing despair and vitality. For her the artistic gesture assumes an existential connotation, which goes beyond the purely aesthetic; in the meantime, the powerful structure created by the brush-strokes gives a sense of order.

By setting her work alongside ephemeral expressions of other people’s lives – a context which at first seems strange – Zimmelova tries to point out how art, in its primary element, can be the closest to their realities. As a result, the brush-stroke is organically integrated with the surrounding environment, becoming one with itself and its fate, as happens for instance in her work on the breakwater structures, where the strokes initially cover the rock but over time are washed out by the waves.



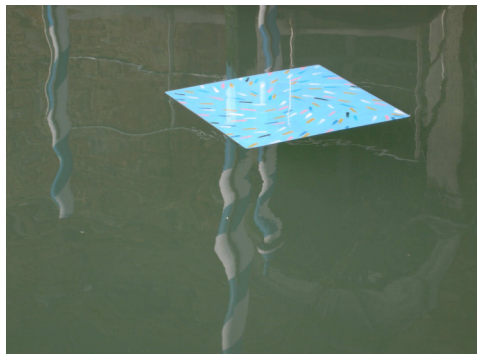
O. Z., *Quadro per il Tevere*, Roma 1983



O. Z., *Senza titolo*, Ostia Stella Polare (Roma) 1983

These ‘interventions’ also allude to the poetic side of a reality which continues to work on art even when the artist has left. It could remain unobserved or give pause for thought to casual passers-by. Set in the context of other signs of civilisation and then left, the work of art enters complete unity with the original setting.

Zimmelova returned to Venice, a city she visited many times, in 2006, and spent a long time studying its features. This place, which appears so fragile in her eyes, ‘reflected’ and ‘upside-down’, represents in itself a work of art and for this reason it should not be touched. Adopting this angle, the artist looks for an opportunity to insert directly in her work local elements like colour, water and reflection. Besides these phenomena, she also focuses on the chromatic qualities of paintings by Giovanni Bellini and Paolo Veronese. For the ground, she uses the blue-green tonality suggested by the mirror-like properties of the water, and ever-present in the works of Veronese. The surface moves in rhythm with brush strokes in those colours most commonly found in reflections – gold ochre, pink, venetian red, green-black, black and white.



O. Z., *Quadro veneziano*, Venezia 2006.

The floating painting, as has been used in Rome, represents the solution to placing the work of art within the city. Zimmelova rests the work on the water’s surface, leaving it to become one with the reflections, at times even a mirror of the city, a painting inside a painting. Conceived to lie on the water, the work is exposed to the world, the brackish basins of the water channels polluted by the traffic boat. It is consigned to the currents which bring its brush-strokes to life and create an infinite number of new paintings thanks to their chromatic variety.

Throughout this exhibition sounds overlap through the simultaneous video reproduction to create a truly Venetian sound painting. As Zimmelova observes, every Venetian place has its own distinct acoustic features: around Ca’ Dario a rich blend of languages, near the Rio delle Romite the rhythmic echo made by feet, by San Barnaba the ‘choir’ of Venetian people at the daily business. Noises, sounds and tones do mix with voices which in the Venetian dialect often express their own colourful feelings. All this makes the soundscape unique, a ‘sound-mirror’ of a reality which remains invisible in the reflected images, but which is amplified by the water, the main mediating element of this work.

In January 2009 Olga Zimmelova will present in the Swiss Institute in Venice her book ‘Venezia’, which she wrote on the basis of her studies for ‘Quadro veneziano’. The text will focus primarily on the artist’s observations on reflections and will be accompanied by a selection of photographs taken by Damaris Gehr during her stay in the city (1996-2003).