



Rainer Ganahl: Uber Capitalism Burg

For the occasion of the Bruges Contemporary Art and Architecture Triennial 2015, eighteen internationally renowned artists created works in the centre of Bruges. The Austrian artist Rainer Ganahl has installed a chocolate sculpture of the world's first stock exchange, the Bruges *Huis Ter Beurze*, on the Burg. His work refers to both the roots of capitalism and to its seductive, modern manifestation. Students of the Bruges gastronomic school Ter Groene Poorte were involved with the execution of the sculpture.

Uber Capitalism

'In capitalist terms, crisis not only stands for demise and obliteration but also for new beginnings,' Rainer Ganahl explains. 'We also see this in the social, technological and economic changes that occur in the real world. Inefficient, unsustainable economies and modes of production vanish and new ones arrive. Today, even sustainable economic and non-profit reasoning can open new avenues to riches. With the help of our revolutionary digital tools, a new sharing economy has arrived, which is epitomised by the word UBER.'

UBER is a German superlative that means *super*, *hyper* or *beyond*. It also carries negative connotations through its use by the Nazi regime, which deformed Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch*. But Ganahl also makes reference to *Uber*, the popular and controversial app that allows anyone with a car and a smartphone to start their own taxi company. This app is posing a serious threat to the taxi industry, with European regulators uncertain as to how they should tackle its overwhelming popularity. The same applies to other sharing apps, such as those for housing, dating, dog-walking and so on. These apps transform our daily commercial and social interactions. Although certain aspects of our non-stop online culture are useful, helpful and entertaining, such as the positive impact of user-ratings on commercial performance, the flip side of the coin is that this digital tool also traces, chases, monitors and analyses us at all times, wherever we are. Those of us who are not online and cannot afford this infrastructure are thus excluded from its benefits as well as its disadvantages.

Against this background, Rainer Ganahl installed a chocolate sculpture of the medieval *Huis ter Beurze*, the first stock market in the world, on the Burg. The words 'UBER CAPITALISM' rotate above it, echoing the star-shaped Benz logo that used to be ubiquitous in so many German cities. Bruges was a global economic hub in medieval times, until the silting up of its harbour put an end to the city's dominance. The people felt powerless to stop it, much as we seem to be helpless spectators of rising sea levels and climate change. In this context, Ganahl's choice of chocolate is pertinent: in the public space, the sculpture is exposed to heat and vandalism. The temporality and perishability of chocolate reflects our growing ambivalence towards the new capitalism that arose from a digital culture of entertainment, diversion and consumption, and which we can barely control.



It is illegal for a private individual to earn money from *Uber* and similar apps in Belgium. However, it is precisely the underlying digital infrastructure and culture that enable such things as cloud computing, software, information and data sharing, remote working and communicating, that provide the wealthier residents and tourists the tools to better manage their trade, investments and companies. UBER CAPITALISM is, therefore, also a metaphor for the timeless, cyclical and intangible phenomena of affluence and impoverishment.

Today, Bruges is a beautiful, high-end tourist destination that also attracts second home buyers. In Ganahl's view, the city has taken the cosmetic, Disneyfied route in its presentation of its idyllic medieval core. It is so lovely and quiet that a visitor can easily forget about time and context. The lack of a significant immigrant population suggests a homogenous, nostalgic harmony that belies the actual situation in the country and Europe at large, where cultural, religious, racial and language tensions rage on. Europe continues to cling on desperately to its notions of whiteness and Eurocentric intolerance. It is, therefore, to be expected, Ganahl believes, that while chocolate is mass-consumed, few of these consumers are aware of the dark underbelly of chocolate production. Chocolate is a quintessential byproduct of colonialism and could not be manufactured without the cocoa beans that grow in former European colonies. Ganahl considers it ironic that Bruges is the world centre of chocolate production, responsible as the industry is for child labour, human trafficking and slavery. The harvest and processing of cocoa involves hard labour and dangerous working conditions. But it was the proximity of Bruges to the Belgian chocolate industry that enabled the 80,000 euros worth of chocolate for the UBER CAPITALISM sculpture to be obtained and cast in its complex mould.

The finishing work on the chocolate sculpture was undertaken by apprentice chocolatiers from the gastronomic school Ter Groene Poorte, Bruges.

Bio Rainer Ganahl

°1961, Bludenz (AT)

Photographer, video and performance artist Rainer Ganahl studied at the *Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien* and at the *Academie van Düsseldorf* under Nam June Paik, from 1985 to 1991.

Ganahl examines the relationship between the teacher and the public, a reference to Karl Marx' theory of education and upbringing, in an ongoing photographic series *Seminars/Lectures*. In stark contrast to what Marx believed, in Ganahl's photographs the unidirectional nature of the practice cheerfully continues.

Since 2007, the conceptual Marxist Ganahl has been creating 'social sculptures' that reflect his disgust at the manifest global collapse of the banking system. His work is replete with contradictions. Both the references to literary, philosophical and ideological inspirations and the performances repeatedly unbalance the viewer. At the Armory Show in 2009, he was driven around in a stretch limousine as he read Marx. But appearances are deceptive: he shattered the image of explicit ostentation by making the point that only the middle classes use this form of transportation and not the jetset that they look up to.

Ganahl recently turned his attention to the fashion industry, an equally undemocratic environment, where non-fair trade garments recall the time of Marx. The Occupy Wall Street movement has also attracted his interest. In New York's Spanish Harlem and Chinatown neighbourhoods, he bought fake silk scarves and turned them into fashion statements for his series *Marx 99 cents*. He also silk-screen printed communist symbols on



to iconic Hermès pocket squares. Ganahl thus destroyed the value of consumer goods by elevating them to artworks.

Ganahl represented Austria at the Venice Biennial in 1999 and again in 2007. He was appointed as professor of sculpture (conceptual and new media) in 2006 at the *Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste* in Stuttgart.

www.ganahl.info

Visitor information

20.05 - 18.10.2015
Burg, 8000 Brugge
Accessible 24/7

Further press information

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Bruges Contemporary Art and Architecture Triennial 2015 20 May – 18 October 2015

What if the five million tourists who visit Bruges annually were to stay? What if a small, preserved, historic city should suddenly become a megapolis? This is the premise for the Bruges Contemporary Art and Architecture Triennial 2015. Eighteen international artists create new works that form an art trail through the city centre. Three indoor exhibitions provide the opportunity to further explore and contextualise the topics. Bruges will be transformed into URB EGG: the Triennial cracks the egg of Bruges in order to reinvent the city from the inside out.

Information and programme: www.triennalebrugge.be

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