Zamienimy miasto w galerię

We'll turn cities into galleries

Interview with AGATA DROGOWSKA and MIROSLAW KACZMAREK, the initiators and organizers of the Art Bench Action, founders of the Inter City Association

— The Art Bench Action starts on May 9th. On Friday, the benches-sculptures were presented on the square in front of the Polish Theatre. Where did this idea, which is adding colour to the streets of Poznań this spring and summer, originate?
- More than a year ago, we proposed to the Foundation for the 750th Anniversary of Poznań /Fundacja 750-lecia Lokacji Poznania/ the idea of preparing an art action in the city, addressed to all Poznań residents. Initially we thought about creating sculptures, which would allude to the city's landmarks, such as the goats of Poznań. But ultimately we decided on the idea from Piotr Voelkel, who proposed installing colourful, artistic benches in Poznań. They are a functional form, and therefore more useful in the city, than lifeless sculptures. They also give more freedom to the artists: a bench is a more general theme, allows for greater variations. In case of the goats, there would be less area for interpretation.
— After Friday's premiere, the benches will be located in various parts of the city and remain there until the end of September. Will they survive the whims of the weather?
— They are made with plywood, very heavy and solid. We asked artists to make them as durable as possible.
- Are the benches the first joint project of the Inter City Association and the Foundation for the 750th Anniversary of Poznań?
— We have already worked with the Foundation on the International Exhibition of Artists from Various Media, "Stigmata" in 2010. The exhibition was a success, received some very good reviews, so we have put a foot in the door, so to say, and it was easier for us to talk with the Foundation about a new project. In June 2002, all the contracts relating to the Art Bench Action were signed. Work started in September last year.
—This action is a powerful project involving many people.
- On the side of the organizers, the main roles are played by the Inter City Association, the Foundation, for the 750th Anniversary of Poznan, and VOX - a company which made the bench modules. Several Poznań companies that have bought the benches, and artistic institution are another participants. For the latter, the CEO of VOX Piotr Voelkel sent 18 modules of benches free of charge. These include the Academy of Fine Arts, Poznań theatres and art galleries, the National Museum, "IKS" City Publisher, CK "Zamek".
— Are all the benches based on modules prepared by VOX?
— This was not a requirement. Those who wanted to go beyond the modules we arranged with VOX prepared them themselves.
— For companies involved in the action, the benches are advertising opportunity. Has anyone tried to take advantage of that at the expense of artistic merit?
—All participants were asked not to overdo it with company logos, the more that each of the benches on the side features a plate stating the artist's name, company name and logo. Unfortunately, not all participants of the action had enough imagination and courage, to entrust the artists. Fortunately, companies that required rigid adherence to their logos from the artists were few. As a result, most corporate benches express the spirit of the company by referring only with certain symbols to its business, and there are also a lot of those that are totally independent works of the artist. Benches made by the artistic institutions are even more crazy.
— What do you expect after this action?
— We hope to awaken people, bring them closer to art. Very many people have a psychological resistance to enter a gallery. Here are the gallery will come to meet them, in the open air, in the city centre. We hope that Poznań residents will look at the benches, will encounter them in their day.
—Did you find cultural institutions to be appreciative partners?
— They responded in a very positive and spontaneously way, added their ideas and interesting locations, made use of meaningful names. The creator of one of the benches at the National Museum, which will be placed on the Hill of Przemysł, is Professor Wojciech Muller. It is more a sculpture than a bench. Another bench, a museum was done by Mariusz Kruk. The New Theatre will set their benches before the entrance, and the Polish Dance Theatre is preparing a dance action with the bench, which they will use as a setting for a ballet.
— Which of the benches are your works? You are both artists, graduates of the Poznań Academy of Fine Arts.
Agata Drogowska:
- I designed a bench for the Advertising Agency "Stokrotka", but it came out like a bed, which be placed in the corner of the Old Market Square in the vicinity of the new fountain, and will be permanently illuminated.
Mirek Kaczmarek:
I, in turn, designed a bench for the company Centertel, which used the theme of a mobile phone, as well as a bench of Celina Kareńska's Precort Fitness Club and the Polish Theatre's bench, which is a variation on the seats in the theatre.
— What happens to the benches after the action?
—Most companies will keep their benches. They will be transferred to their premises, where they will be displayed as a work of art demonstrating the company's involvement in the art action. The bench of the Foundation for the 750th Anniversary of Poznań is however so heavy and solid, that it will stay in front of the Polish Theatre. They benches of the National Museum and on the Hill of Przemysł are likely to remain in their locations. Also, the New Theatre would like their benches to stay there for longer than 30 September.
—Art benches in the city almost provoke other interesting artistic activities.
— That is something we are counting on, especially during the Malta Festival. We are only scared by the suggestions of some companies that would like to organize advertising campaigns around the benches. That we do not want, but we are open to all artistic activities.

Interview by MAGDALENA SZTOLBERG