

Overtures

A North-South Expedition Dealing with Water

Water has been wasted so recklessly and for so long! In the wake of growth on a global scale, this scarce resource of vital importance has become the quintessential symptom of our present crisis.

Early warning signals motivated artcircolo to undertake this north-south expedition designed to do research of great importance for the future on the changed status of this natural resource. The methodology calls for close cooperation among artists, curators, technologists, scientists, MBAs and media experts. On the basis of foreseeable scenarios, some of which can be regarded as the consequence of processes that are already in progress, the 3rd *Overtures* project is coming up with new prospects for the way mankind deals with water.

The international project staff's caravan set off in 2006 from Iceland, a volcanic island blessed with water aplenty, and headed south through Europe to conduct on-site research in the Alps, Turkey and Spain. At the 2008 Ars Electronica Festival, project staffers will present preliminary conclusions that can be drawn from this long-term experiment.

The unorthodox approaches contemporary artists take to their subject matter seem to make them positively predestined to go beyond narrow, particularistic interests and bring into play communications strategies that prove to be very fruitful for business, science and technology alike. Since art, ideally, is capable of offering human beings a sensory pattern of identification, it is perhaps the best of all ways to impart meaning in a way that makes an issue—and even a difficult, highly complex one like the economy of water and the consumption-oriented spirit of our age—accessible to the general public.

Displayed via the high-contrast foil of a work by Icelandic artist Rúri, for instance, the delicate balance of the global ecosystem becomes clearly visible. Her photographic and sound installations document how industrial interests have led to the flooding of a unique highlands landscape. Even when Rúri is aiming her camera and mike at Icelandic waterfalls, her series entitled *Endangered Waters* is simultaneously focusing on global factors.

The entire artistic spectrum that has been created for *Overtures* during this two-year expedition has been documented by filmmaker Frank Sauer: *Calling the Glacier* by Kalle Laar (D), *Intrigue_E* by Silver & Hanne Rivrud (NO), *City Concepts for Istanbul* by Silvia Erdem (Turkey) and *Former Farmland* by Wapke Feenstra (NL) shed light on societies' dealings with resources, mobile technologies and local cultural heritage on multiple levels of experience. *Agua Benita* by Cuban artist René Francisco brings these investigations into our endangered hydrologic balance to a positively fairy-tale conclusion. His film shows us Benita Rivera, a poor old woman suffering from rheumatism, and her ramshackle Havana slum dwelling that doesn't even manage to keep the rain out. As if via *deus ex machina*, there appears an angel under whose supervision the artist and a team of artisans repair the roof and the completely shot plumbing system too. In reality, it took several months until construction work was completed and Benita Rivera could move back into her renovated home featuring running water where it's supposed to be running.

In real life, though, we can only hope for the appearance of such for a fairy-tale savior.

A New Cultural Economy, this year's Ars Electronica theme and rallying cry, provides an excellent opportunity to take stock of these activities.

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