



ANN VAN DE VYVERE AND PABLO CASTILLA: SALLE DES PAS PERDUS

A Walk through the city of Brussels as an "Act" (manifestation) of solidarity between artists, citizens and *sans-papiers*.
A visual investigation of the meaning and the consequences of a community's forced disability.



“The world is for everyone” is a nice thought, yet one that is increasingly being contradicted by the closure of the borders in rich countries. Not everyone is welcome everywhere. This atmosphere explains the lack of documentation of the illegal’s struggle to integrate in Western countries. *БНА-ВБОТ*, *Bruxelles nous appartient – Brussel behoort ons toe* (Brussels belongs to us), invited Ann Van de Vyvere (Irma Firma vzw) to carry out a project on this issue. This fits into the organisation’s intention to create an original yet true view on the capital by collecting conversations by Brussels residents and encouraging artists to process this in their own creations.

Salle des pas perdus (Hall of Lost Steps) has become a project in which research is conducted on moving in the city. A city consists mainly of arranged space and of people moving within it. The latter aspect is precisely where undocumented individuals, known as *sans-papiers*, are restricted due to their continual risk of being arrested. This research study resulted in a performance in May 2008, known as the “Act” and

in a photo album of which this portfolio in EXTRA is a fragment.

Ann Van de Vyvere described “Act” as an “artistic demonstration”. *Sans-papiers* and their sympathizers have been demonstrating for years with decreasing results. People are no longer moved by the form of demonstration, although the content remains important. That is why she decided to look for a different, *artistic form of protest* in order to broach the problem.

Ann Van de Vyvere invited Pablo Castilla to go for a walk through the city and exchange ideas on the *sans-papiers*, which resulted in a series of telling photos that visualize the hidden problematics. Images have the advantage that they tend to suggest rather than dictate; to ask questions rather than condemn. Images leave everything open, yet point to many ways.

The images were accompanied by an audio CD compiled by Wim Lodts with fragments from interviews, demonstrations and conversations with *sans-papiers*.



Pablo Castilla: "The pictures were my visual interpretation of Ann Van de Vyvere's project. I was asked not to portray immigrants as individuals with their own stories but rather to interpret and translate into images their situation as illegal aliens who face challenges to their mobility, visibility and functionality.

I wandered with Ann to the outskirts of Brussels searching for images to challenge the meanings of home, privacy, disability, alienation, mobility and the lack of it. We looked for the unusual and sometimes absurd interaction of objects with their surroundings and with each other. We started to collect material like de-contextualized objects that don't belong to the new setting they have been attributed to, signs or hints of an unseen reality, traces left by a forgotten and anonymous presence, situations that are not what they seem to be... We accepted the accident as a creative force in our choice, as if to question the notion of normality or to prove that wrong might turn right in an unexpected new context. While

exploring the city's limits, we passed construction sites, hung around industrial areas, entered warehouses and crossed highways. We observed this peripheral reality of settings that temporarily borrow an identity (or remain forever undefined) and kept our eyes open for an unpredictable arrangement of elements within this no man's land.

Human figures, objects and landscapes were brought together in the way things are gathered accidentally in a Lost and Found box."

Salle des pas perdus has been presented in the exhibition *Kunst op straat: van Provo tot nu*, in CC De Werf in Aalst (Belgium) in November 2008. This exhibition gave an overview of the presence of social involvement in Flemish art from the Provo movement until today and examined how this kind of art actually affects society and the artists themselves.
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