

Not Quite Under_Ground

2017

Michael Smith

* 1951 Chicago, lives in New York and Austin, USA

Installation with mixed media and activities

Location

Tattoo studio Hansaring 38,

Action and temporary installation for the duration of the exhibition

Owner

After *Skulptur Projekte 2017* the work was purchased for the collection of LWL Museum für Kunst und Kultur, Münster and will be shown in temporary exhibitions.

Project Credits

Tattoo crew Tätowiersucht: Sascha Achilles, Elli Beike, Tanina Palazollo, Frank Zimmermann

Research: Kate Scherer Design: Jesse Cline 3D visualization: Bill Haddad, Blue House Design

Poster: James Scheuren

Production support : Dan Gunn

Film Cast

Sascha Achilles, Annegret Diehle, Heiner Diehle, Gerda Esser, Uschi Kniewel, Manfred

Kruenkamp, Gilla Pitz, Tanina Palazollo, Michael Smith, Friedel Werner

Film Crew

Script: Michael Smith • Produced by: jae kunst und medien • Director: Lejla Aliev • Director of photography: Jan Enste • Coordinator: Julia Jung • Soundtrack: Kevin Bewersdorf • Editor: Lejla Aliev, Jan Enste • Gaffer / camera assistant: Gunar Peters • Visual effects: Adnan Alorbeni • Set-runner: Anna Viehoff • Equipment: cineOne Dortmund, Kunstakademie Münster, Filmwerkstatt Münster e. V.

Special thanks to all the artists who designed tattoos for Not Quite Under_Ground.

Michael Smith is a performance, video, and installation artist who often adapts media formats and

trends from popular culture. Since the 1970s, his performance personae, Mike and Baby Ikki, have inhabited familiar landscapes infused with tragicomic elements. Most recently, Smith has used Mike, the average naive American, to address timeworn themes such as aging and the cult of youth.

Setting up Not Quite Under_Ground (the official tattoo studio of Skulptur Projekte Münster 2017), as both an installation and a fully operational tattoo shop offering deep discounts to seniors aged 65 and older, Michael Smith linked this particular thread with aspects of urban and cultural tourism. Visitors were invited to get tattoos, designed by past and present participants of Skulptur Projekte Münster, as well as Smith's personal friends and local tattooists. The spectrum of tattoos ranged from miniature visualizations of Skulptur Projekte Münster projects, to stand-alone motifs. In addition, a video was embedded at various tourist attractions and on sightseeing buses, dramatizing a spirited elder group's journey into a brand new world bonded by tattoos.

Smith's project was the result of combining local and general observations of everyday life. It not only caught his eye that a large number of culturally interested senior citizens were heading for Münster, but also—irrespective of this realization—that tattoos, as a form of symbolic body language, have become increasingly socially acceptable, since the 1990s. Long tainted by prejudice, tattoos have now become prevalent lifestyle brands and means of self-expression that have lost their provocative potential, especially for younger generations. Tattoos, as a painful remodeling of the membrane separating the internal from the external, not only serve as physical decorations but also confer a certain identification with the selected design. Smith's work underscored this moment of transformation, which is inherent to the medium, and touts rejuvenation—not without a touch of irony—by helping people conform to a more youthful appearance. Not Quite Under_Ground was also linked to the history and format of Skulptur Projekte: in contrast to the temporary character of the exhibition, tattoos can provide permanent souvenirs of an art experience, leaving physical marks in the storage medium of the skin, long past the closing date of the show. The cooperation between artists and tattooists did not merely eliminate singular artistic gestures in favor of a collective authorship; it also blurred the boundaries between exhibition art and the visual media of popular culture. The ambiguously humorous title referred not only to the fact that tattoos have been part of the mainstream for some time, but also to the growing popularity of the exhibition in Münster, and the advancing age of the target demographic to which Smith himself belongs.

Andreas Prinzing

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