

The bakhnoug, a book, woven

curated by Paul Vandebroeck

03.09. ————— 14.10.2016



You and your friends are cordially invited to the opening of the exhibition on the occasion of Open Studios on Saturday, September 03 at 7.30 pm.

Opening performance: Pé Vermeersch, dancer-performer-visual artist, and cello player Arne Deforce.

Opening hours: Tuesday to Friday 2 to 6 pm and on appointment

Traditional Mediterranean – North African – rural areas. Illiteracy. Economy of subsistence (agriculture, pastoralism). Gender inequality. Absence of personal freedom. Absence of aesthetic creativity? Through the ‚female‘ art of garment weaving, a sense of beauty and even of the sublime, a desire of personal and intimate expression is fulfilled. Abstract and nevertheless legible, open though encoded.

Paul Vandebroeck, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp, and Research Group IMMRC, KULeuven, has studied North African textile art since 1991. Although initially trained as an iconologist, specialized in late medieval figurative art from the Netherlands, he got fascinated by these anonymous but unique weavings from Morocco to Libya. Especially the Moroccan carpets in their ‚chaotic‘ style, and the Tunisian/Libyan bakhnoug with their sense of emptiness and their microscopic motifs, heavily laden with multiple meanings (non withstanding their almost complete abstraction), have retained his attention. Although there is no discourse about textile art in North Africa, and although their makers were always illiterate rural women without any form of schooling, this art is bearer of an encyclopedia of feelings, ideas, passions, fears, moral maxims, and, yes: ‚philosophy‘. The contents of this art are highly complex and almost unutterable on a verbal level. The weavers have managed to express everything that was important to them in a purely abstract way. No art-historical ‚reading‘ (iconographical, semiotical, etc) is able to decode these ‚woven books‘. Vandebroeck tries to ‚decipher‘ this abstract code through its psycho-corporeal ‚energetics‘; he does not eschew intuition, but always checks such ‚felt knowledge‘ through a holistic study of the culture in which this art originated.

Villa Romana will display some 25 unique pieces of textile art from the collections of Paul Vandebroeck and especially of Renata Anna Menzel (Vienna), who has gathered during two decades the largest, and most important, museum-quality collection in this field.

Performers:

Arne Deforce is a Belgian cello player of top level, displaying an unusual delicacy in the execution of contemporary compositions and an extreme inventiveness in the search for new possibilities in playing the cello.

Pé Vermeersch is a dancer who, trained a.o. by Japanese legendary masters like Akira Kasai and Min Tanaka, has strived for a long-standing and intensive delivery to the ‚layered‘ experiential body and to the extreme strengths of its related psychic force; hence, she embodies an outspoken sensibility which is ‚projected‘ in space.