

's-Hertogenbosch is a pleasant small town with a central square. That square and its immediate surroundings will play host to a special international performance art program called Street Level. I much prefer to present art in a familiar public environment, one which is easy to reach for all residents, rather than indoors, which usually attracts only the enthusiasts. But art is meant for everyone, and it benefits everyone. In this nice case it is also free to everyone. Public spaces such as streets and squares are a kind of no-man's land and at the same time they belong to everyone. It is up to us and up to society as a whole how life manifests itself in such places. On the one hand, the street is an area in the wild, one where there are sometimes direct confrontations. The street is an environment where we are vulnerable; we may feel particularly so at night. On the other hand, it is sometimes a place to meet people to celebrate or to demonstrate; but most often it is only the space between point A and point B. The way life manifests itself in a public environment such as streets and squares says a lot about society. At street level, the measure can be taken of the values of a society. Above all, at street level we are just human beings. This human being-ness is my focus (hmm, very nice, the word human being-ness is not in my dictionaries). Well, anyway, human beings are neither animals nor robots. I consider human beings to be sensible creatures. "What?" you may ask. I agree, sometimes it seems that the behavior of human beings doesn't really make any sense.

So what does make sense? A performance art festival in a public place is a challenge to art and artists as well as to the audience. These works of art will not contain an appeal to the crowd; they will not try to influence the audience, nor to select it; nor do they aim to achieve open and effective externalization, direct communication, or any other immediately observable meaning. Rather, these works of art will arouse emotions through secret communication with the self; they will show people an image of themselves and make people conscious of their own individuality. These works of art will not manifest professional skills and impressive tricks but will be based on that which people have in common: the ability to empathize, to imagine, to feel, to think and to evaluate. These artists will challenge the audience by taking them seriously as human beings. This festival takes part in the processes of the world by focusing on human actions, therefore including the ontological dimensions as well. The original and natural low-tech software of a human being seems to be more and more rare these days, lying low in art that has been extended by high-tech equipment. I have taken happiness from all the inspiring art I have been able to see and know during the past decades in the world. Such art has encouraged me in my own life and work. It has been my pleasure to present such art and artists in my country (Finland), but so far with poor results. There seems to be no room in my country for this type of intellectual culture and art, which I consider the most relevant.

When Anet van de Elzen invited me to curate a performance program in 's-Hertogenbosch, I was both surprised and pleased. This was a chance to get together artists who have inspired me so much. I hope I am not the only one who feels this way. This kind of art is definitely of the greatest importance today and it makes good sense.

Roi Vaara, 2002 Helsinki