

Quadra Medicinale

Take as a starting point 'terroir', thus: a place where everything is able to take place or, perhaps better, has taken place, something broader than 'biotope': bio, nature, greenery and everything thereabout, everything that floats in the air and everything that sucks, is so hackneyed and milked dry by apparently sincere people who are 'committed' and swindlers who want to earn money by playing on their friends' guilt feelings and afterwards exploiting them. This all makes being occupied with it horribly difficult and maybe even dangerous or 'counterproductive'.

But because, in a peculiar way, I am attracted by hackneyed, milked dry, everyday things and situations, I am making an overview here in Venice, of my fatal march since 1934. It begins in Leopoldsburg with my wanderings around the 'Leopold II quadrants' of the military camp and its civilian annex blocks. In the 'Kempens Informatieblad', I will try to give an overview of the items that, according to me, make up the 'Quadra Medicinale' (medicinal quadrant), amongst which are the paintings that have as their subject 'seed packets' with a caption stating the Dutch and Latin terms, and the year: a notion of a dream that is always different than what one will have us believe. About the map in my colouring book for adults where I shoved Great Britain under Vietnam. About the transformation from a gallery (the one where I was first asked to exhibit) into a shop selling bread and vegetables, in Antwerp. About the sowing and harvesting cycle in my garden in Balen, and about touring round Belgium with my cabbages on the backseat of my Citroën 2CV: showing the landscape to the cabbages (with the clumps of ground packed in plastic). About the brussels sprouts that I planted in the refuse dumps on my return, where nobody dared harvest. About the permission I requested to plough the ground and sow seeds in part of the Middelheim Park. About the letter I wrote to Chirac, to change a park 'pelouse' (lawn) in Paris into a jardin potager' (vegetable garden). About the quadrants in the Middelheim Park where dried plants, 'corporate images', and classic erotic pictures, yielded another form of cultivated sculpture park. About the research by a Dutch student to give the homeless a foldable cardboard house and the multiple-choice question: what is a house? About New York Camouflage where I 'organically' arranged block forms on a square surface covered in a camouflage of colours, and about the project in Riem (München) where I want to realise the colouring book map idea in large format, as a 'völkergarten' (people's garden). About the painting of my house black if my neighbours insist that the old trees at the boundary be chopped down. About the floating gardens that the local Balen firm Jansen-Baeck would like to design for me. About the project 'Cradle to Cradle' from Braungart and McDonough who I lauded as super-chefs a few years ago when they changed the façade and windows of the restaurant Hertog Jan. Michael Braungart now wants to collaborate in researching whether edible paper and certain inks can be produced. The task is to print an 'edible and digestible newspaper' in which the homeless can find images and recipes, and which indicates where in their 'quadrant' the 'street plants' are. The pressure on the people from the 'Cradle to Cradle' project is so immensely great, mainly due to all those who have eaten from the Al Gore pie and have done nothing about it, that I put my hand on my heart whenever I see all those 'ticks' that are going to be occupied with 'Cradle to Cradle'.

For a few years now I have been busy asking a number of people in the city to draw a square of approximately 1 to 2 kilometres on the map, with their home or workplace at the centre. They have to search for 12 plants within that square that definitely grow on the street (so-called 'weeds'): Photograph the plant, harvest it, dry it, attach it, supply the necessary information, 'family', etc. And importantly: What can a homeless person who has toothache, for example, chew on to ease the pain, and to eventually cure the problem?

To start with, 4 places are provided: Villeurbanne, New York, Moscow, Brussels. Of course everyone now comes to tell me that there have already been photos taken of plants in the city, that there are even postcards of these, that in the 11th century Benedictine monks had already cultivated 'healing plants' in the "Giardino Dei Semplici" or "Giardini Dei Semplici", I don't know the correct way to write it. Of course I know that there have been unbelievable paintings made of a bunch of asparagus.

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