

RIVER

Marie Julia Bollansée

Performance with the Audience @ S.M.A.K. September 19 2021, 1PM-5PM

A straight white knitwork runs over blue tarpaulins. This long band was knit by my mother in pure white sheeps-wool that I spun by hand. My mom embedded all her devotion and wisdom in it during the knitting. And for me spinning the wool to thread was meditation in which this work awakened.

RIVER: the installation is build outside S.M.A.K. on the grassfield. The river is white, the landscape it cuts is Tarpaulin blue. In its visual shape the work may refer to Giotto whom I admire for being the first Renaissance painter who fell in love with blue. He painted the entire ceiling of his Scrovegni Chapel in Padua in the magical Lapis Lazuli blue from Afghanistan, and let golden stars shine in it. Beneath this Lapis Lazuli heaven the biblical stories of the lives of Jezus and his ancestors (from mother's side!) pass by in long bands.

We all meet 'rivers' in our lives, literally and methaphorical. Sometimes we have to cross rivers, and sometimes we go with the flow. Rivers, the veins of the Earth, transport our indispensable vital water from its sources to the seas. When the veins clog or break our lives are in danger.

In the flow of my artistic practice this joint performance 'RIVER' has its origin in Benares (IN) and Kathmandu (NP). Benares, or Varanasi, is one of the oldest cities in the world, although Jericho must even be older. Benares is the city on the banks of the river Ganges in the North-East of India. The Ganges is a holy River; all Hindu people aim to go on pilgrimmage to Varanasi at least ones in their lifetime. Most of all, when the time comes, they want to die in Varanasi and have their corpse cremated on a funeral stake on the banks, and have their ashes strewn in the River Ganges. When they can do so, their soul is set free and reaches Nirvana.

After Benares I traveled to Kathmandu. In Pashupatinath the same funeral ritual happens on the banks of the Bagmati River, that flows into the Ganges.

Hindus and Buddhists both have great faith in their rivers. The waters of their sacred rivers have the power to purify them spiritually. Being there, I saw and smelled how terribly polluted the Ganges and the Bagmati River are nowadays.

In Benares, I created a joint street-performance: I spread my blue tarpaulin on the banks of the River Ganges, and invited the people passing by, the ones walking barefoot, to walk over the tarpaulin. Walking barefoot is the natural behaviour of people in India. The direction of their walk followed the flow of the River Ganges.

In the performance 'RIVER' you are invited to walk barefoot through the long narrow white 'river'. I ask you to take off your shoes (and socks) and walk barefoot. Please concentrate, don't speak, don't look back, and go alone and slowly. While walking through the 'river' you will be filmed and photographed (unless you don't want it).

After your performance, you can celebrate your passing with a free glass of Trappist beer, sponsored by the Trappist Abbey of Westmalle.

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