

## **The Journey of A Story**

The staging of a performance and action for the oral transmission and transmigration of culture. Props for the project by Jesus Palomino, *Samen im Wald, Gold im Fluss* at Villa Concordia, Bamberg, Germany 2014.

*In the center of the room is a pedestal with an elegant plexiglass box. On the floor a carpet with posters which say 'Samen im Wald, Gold im Fluss' (Seed in the Forest, Gold in the River). A handmade wood wall billboard with staggered posters cuts the space. A gold date pit sits in a matchbox. It is 24K, 15 grams. It was originally bought from a Turkish grocery in Bamberg eaten and spit from the artists' mouth and then cast. It is recycled from a ring in Palomino's previous exhibition at the CAC Contemporary Art Center Malaga. There is a Golden Ring shown by the guide. The Ring is 8 cm x 1 cm. It is accompanied by a pamphlet, a map of the river Regnitz with a proposal for seven rings to be dropped into the river, each from a different bridge, by a citizen of Bamberg. A performer tells the story of the seed and the ring, while the public moving through the space in groups and passes the golden objects from hand to hand.*

## **The Gathering and the Aura of Form**

During the performance at Villa Concordia, small groups, each with a number, were ushered into the exhibition space to gather around a wood pedestal with the casting of the golden date seed situated under a plexiglass box in a cardboard matchbox. A quiet, almost monkish young man who leads the ceremony took the seed from the box and showed it quietly to the crowd. They silently passed it from hand to hand, saw its shape, felt its weight, observed its golden luster, whispered to each other, laughed, intrigued, made jokes and asked questions. In the poise of the moment the guide described the project: the seed was to be planted in the Bruderwald (Brothers Forest). The proposal for the rings to be dropped in the river Regnitz. Each person was given a pamphlet with a map of the river, marking the seven bridges with the names of the professions of individuals from Bamberg chosen to drop the rings, the mayor, a school teacher, a seven year old girl, a volunteer, a house wife, a dignitary of the city. Seven for the seven hills around the city like in Rome. Then the people passed the ring around the circle from hand to hand, placed it on their arms like a bracelet, held it between their fingers. The action became an intimate sculptural event energized by the aura of the forms (Walter Benjamin). A group of unknowing initiates formed a circle around the relics, demystified by the matchbox, a house containing, "the seed of self".

While walking and talking with Jesus Palomino, along the six kilometer stretch of the Regnitz on a late November night, following the rivers twists and turns and visiting the different bridges, he said to me:

**"I try to express intimacy in public space as politics".**

Beyond the rivers' end where it meets a canal there is the forest, where the seed will be buried in January 2015. The participants are part of the staging. So is the city of Bamberg and the river Regnitz. Many things in Bamberg have golden and yellow color: statues, soap, wines, stones, stucco, beer, honey etc. The river was the site of gold mining in the past. Mud and nuggets flowing down to the city became form.

## **The Time Traveler**

The rings and seed conceptually move freely between the sacred and the profane, the banal and the mythological, the performative and the theatrical, the ecological and the historical.

For Palomino, the golden ring is always connected to water. As in his previous project in Spain at the Sierra Centro de Arte in Santa Ana La Real, Huelva, Spain, entitled 'Gold', 2010, where the ring was conceived as a public sculpture in a community irrigation project as part of a natural cistern in the rocks. The water flows through a small ring from the mountains.

In his later project 'Gold, One To One', at CAC Contemporary Art Center, Malaga April 2013:

1. Two golden rings of 8 cm diameter were exhibited for two months.
2. A performer presented 2 golden rings to the audience during the time of the show.
3. At the end of the show the rings were installed at the main space of the museum as discreet art pieces hanging from two nails.
4. The rings were installed at the museum for 1 year, present but absent.

One of the rings was melted down in Seville for the golden date seed in Bamberg. The mold for the casting is made from pressing two sepia squid bones together over the seed, taking an imprint, then pouring the gold directly into the bone. An old Roman technique. The seed also comes from the sea.

### Could-be Mythologies

The rings of gold proposed to be dropped into the river could be an offering to Poseidon, the Greek god of seas and rivers, part of the Olympian triad of Zeus and Hades. There's a statue dedicated to the God in town. Maybe it is the ring of Theseus, Poseidon's son, slayer of the Minotaur in the labyrinth, who dives for the ring thrown into the water by king Minos of Crete...

The imagination of the artist flows from eating a date to the river like Ariadne's golden thread of logos. Psyche also sorts through her seeds to accommodate consciousness. The rings are interesting in relation to German mythology and its mythotropic fusion with Greek and Roman stories, *The Divine Comedy* of Dante and the rings of paradise, purgatory and hell. Gold has a theological connection to the quality of Apollonian light and sun. Christ is often depicted in front of churches in a tympanum, a womb or seed. Palomino is interested in these intercultural aspects of digestion. He eats the Jordanian date, and keeps a souvenir that maps the location. He is a conceptual collector of the trans-migratory nature of cultures.

A golden date palm stands at the gate of paradise, its palm leaves swaying in the northern forest, marking the place it was planted by saying its name. Perhaps the Turkish date seller is actually a tricky protagonist. Persephone was tricked by Hades to eat the pomegranate seed. After she had tasted the food of the underworld, she had to remain there for three months of the year. This seasonally change allows the earth to rest. The underworld is brimming with the powers of rejuvenation.

The river is the main artery of the city. It was used for fishing and gold mining. It brought commerce and culture to this area since Neolithic times. The Allemanni and Thuringians and Slavic peoples had settlements here. They fought the Romans and in 5-6<sup>th</sup> century were conquered by the Franks. The lands became Franconia and later part of Charlemagne's Carolingian empire.

*Gold im Fluss* is a map of the river but also a demographic time line. It reflects in its submerged rings the cultures that have lived here before.

How do we as peoples identify ourselves? As the celebration of place and tradition as architecture, pop culture and foods? What have we forgotten? Do we want to remember? The sinking feeling of amnesia and displacement settles in.

In the Kaisersaal in the New Residence of the Bishop of Bamberg my guide quoted Virgil, who said to the Romans: "Spare the conquered, but subdue the proud. Those are my guiding principles".

Rome was victorious over Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Hebrews, the peoples of the golden date palm. Rome handed over the imperial eagle to the German nation whose mission it was to continue the Holy Roman Empire. They battled Byzantium and the Ottomans and each other. Did the artist intend the rings to be a reference to the medieval poem, the Song of the Nibelungs (Nibelungenleid), or "The Rheingold" and the "Ring Cycle" by Wagner?

Is the date seed a symbol of oriental culture and a reference by Palomino to the absence of the Jewish people of Bamberg since the Second World War? Is he reminding us of the Holocaust? Never forget to remember, to identify and to empathize. The seed of memory is a memorial.

The first synagogue was built in Bamberg in the 14<sup>th</sup> C. The Jewish historical presence was much older. Just take a walk down Judenstraße in town. The Jewish people are an essential part of the history of the place.

"The seeds triumph over dogmatism and dystopia, is the reading of the seeding. You cannot and never want to stop the mixing of cultures," says Palomino.

These references are the darker side of Palomino's associations and commentaries. Is the artist trying to tell us something about the tragic history of culture as transmigration and oral transmission? We must remain vigilant and focused against forces of prejudice and totalitarianism.

Is Palomino a social activist? His last project in Malaga was entitled: *'Creative Inquiry Preparing an Educated Electorate with the Will of Social Justice Rather Than Self Interest,'* written by Mrs. Gayatri Spikak, CAC, Malaga 2013.

The rings will sink in the river. The gold is spent replacing what was taken from the natural environment. The sinking is a silent plaintive call, an asking for an act of contrition. The journey of the story begins with this conundrum as public art. The seduction of something precious and expensive, only to be discarded, thrown away, made invisible, in order to remind us to participate in an act of sharing and of dialogue. There is a desire of the artist to talk about his social awareness, the rights of man/woman and confront the displacement of cultural communication, the sharing of place and the trauma of loss. How mythology can be played with for good ends or turned into destructive ideologies with catastrophic consequences.

I write this not as a scholarly exhibition text, but as an evocation, a freely associative exchange of poetry between artists in a process of discovery, to uncover meanings and to understand action. The story begins before domesticated civilization, from hunter-gatherer to farmer. The transmigration of seeds, of genes and of dreams. From migrant culture to cities, from neolithic caves to post-modern humans. The seed drops from a tree with its fruit. It is eaten by an animal. The animal leaves the pit or passes it through its body map as part of its mulch, digesting from mouth to ass, passing nutrients and knowledge. The seed drops. But to intend a dropping, to choose a place, to harvest the fruits, is the act of eternal return. The seed becomes a place in time. To choose a place is a moment of awareness. The mind gathers knowledge by differentiating, by counting, by seeing differences and understanding qualities. The phenomenology vegetates and grows inside the skull shell, absorbing nutrients stored there from the earth and stars. Shakespeare writes in Hamlet: "O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself a king of infinite space - were it not that I have bad dreams." The awareness of seeds could be seen as the beginnings of urban architecture, the ability to sustain, transform and manipulate mud and nature, directing evolution and creating our concept of time. To plant and to name the planting.

Jesus emailed: "Well, the seed that was born in Jordan and ended up in Bamberg as a golden presence at the woods... Migration, or even more accurate, transmigration??? From Jordan to the hands of the farmer, sent in a box to Germany and then to my mouth, eaten, spit in the forest as golden mini-sculpture... how many times has this seed migrated, transmigrated ??? Well, I got a very funny image in my mind out of this idea, an idea full of humor: after some years we will have a golden palm tree in a German forest; a palm tree in a German forest is like a Bedouin in Alaska!!! Anyone acknowledges that this is not its natural environment!!!"

### **Fertility – Asking for a Date**

There have been many fertility rites and rituals to replenish the earth. The Mayans let heads rock and roll to save the seed and bring down the rains. The insanity of humanity has always been its sacrificial lamb. The idea that nature will not provide without a human leftover. But nature, when it is not genetically modified, always provides. It's the irregularity of its perfection. The seed does not need a planned hydroponic petri dish or a deplorable sacrifice. It merely needs to be eaten, to fall, to be transported, to land in a fertile place and grow. The earth vegetates with myriad exchanges of organic energy.

### **Ring Ring Ring**

Per-se-phone calling on De-Meter with her cells from the underworld to tell when she will arrive with spring. Palomino told me about a kids' game: a telephone line. Whisper in the first ear and by the last, the story is totally changed. Communication through imagination.

### **A Brief Typological History of the Date Palm according to Wikipedia**

The Palm Tree was sacred to Ishtar, it is seen on the Babylonian Ishtar Gate. It is both sky [top of the tree] and earth [trunk]. Roman coins represented Judea with the palm tree and is seen in Judaism during the Sukkot for example. They discovered a 2000 year old date seed from Judea and planted it and it flowered. The date was the main food staple and export from Judea. Eighty percent rich in nutrient sugar, it is preserved naturally for years and remains edible without disease. In the story of Jesus, Mary reclines under a date palm after the Immaculate Conception. It is the symbol of peace and is represented on the current Saudi flag. Palm means *Phoenix*

*dactylifera* because the seeds of the date can recover after many years. The tree of rejuvenation, where the Phoenix lays its egg and ignites.

Based on a genealogical research project conducted by the University of Hasselt, Belgium, during the art-event *Hotel des Immigrantes* in 2012, Palomino discovered he is a 'Type J Sumerian'.

### **A Mouth Planting**

By eating, you take the fruit into the earth. The underworld of your underwear. Then you spit out the pit. There is a relation to the spitting as a form of rejuvenation. Shitting too. Spitting the seed from the mouth and head. Sex and reproduction is different from the loins. The mouth eats, chews, mashes and rips the world apart. It pulverizes the elements and extracts nutrients from the mulch by mixing and digesting. Words are spoken from the mouth, the cave of knowledge where consciousness echoes. The spitting of language from the entry to the underworld. The location of oral transmission. Below the animal headed gods await Theseus, to slay the Minotaur. The triumph of language, identity and logos as part of the return.

### **The Labyrinth of Language**

Language is always created inside language framed by context, place and meaning. The seed word becomes anthropomorphic, existing within its cultural awareness. It becomes an image in the minds' eye, a part of human memory. We understand that the reduction of image to a concept with duration, the contingency, is merely the trigger. What seems arbitrary or coincidental is really part of a much larger personal and collective pattern, culminating in a moment of focus in the present.

In this digital age we replicate rather than reproduce. The golden seed is a remake, a casting, a golden clone of the original, a simulacra. It is with this irony and humor that Palomino creates this transmigration. The performativity is not staged in belief or fear of gods or even death but as a contemporary personal story. It is not a theatrical reenactment but a poetic intervention, a passion play of Eros and Thanatos, which embraces the notion that a simple date seed, eaten in Bamberg, can trigger the imagination, to trace a migration through time, history, culture, and continents. The world seed will be planted in the German forest in January but shown in the autumn rites. A notary and lawyer will be there to sanctify and legalize the location of the sacred grove. The trees will speak to it, and later the art world will discourse and speculate on its value. They may even try to dig it up, sell it, or replicate it. But they can never reproduce it.

From the hands of the Turkish date seller, picked by unknown workers on a farm in Jordan. Who are they? Where are they from? Are they refugees or local villagers? How many generations have they been farming dates? Packed in a box sent to Germany via where? Sold at the Turkish shop. To the mouth of the Spanish artist in residence at Villa Concordia and spit from his mouth, back into his hand, back into the land.

From earth to tree to hand to hand to mouth to hand to hands to land, that is the cycle: consumed and extrapolated as art and language, performed at the opening for the public, as a passing of the making.

### **Bring Your Flash Light and Shovel**

When I mentioned the project to different artists, they told me to bring a flash light and shovel and return after the planting to dig up the seed and sell it to a jewelry store in Munich. Others suggested to create a fake seed and exchange it for the real one. You may see scuba divers and snorkelers in the Regnitz river trying to retrieve the rings. Yet another said: "why doesn't the artist just made the story up".

This detective, Tarantino-like part of the story's economy is connected to the sharing of capital and the media. Artist, banker, north and south. The golden pit of the economic roulette wheel. Today there are many misunderstandings in social and economic relations. Palomino told me he had a dream of a volcano spitting gold! A bankers' dream or the Midas touch for all! ... Symbolic capital. (Pierre Bourdieu).

There is a lot of complexity in Jesus Palomino's work. We can discuss it from many angles of view. But it is important to realize the simple potential of seeing in the moment of language, to name it, allowing the imagination to tell the journey of the story. The geometry of the seed is not only its evidence-based structure but its flowering existence in time, its cycle and unpredictable discovery. This is not controlled by culture or technology, nor is it only simulacra. It is a more fundamental impulse, from singular seed to diversity.

## **Making A Ring**

The people form a ring, a community circle in the sacred grove game show. They exchange their understanding and misunderstandings and differences. A ring and seed of diversity and dialogue. They confirm their otherness and togetherness. They wear the ring, they pass it on to the river to enable the transmigration of identity, a human ecology. They plant the seed of a culture of diversity. The otherness of the other is ourselves. The journey of our story. Eating a date and walking along the river.

We dedicate this essay to the memory of Jesus Palomino's father José Luis Palomino, who passed away suddenly September 12 while the artist was preparing this project.

Charlie Citron, Amsterdam 2014