

matthaei & konsorten

SHOW ME YOURS I SHOW YOU MINE

A research for a politico-artistic pentathlon for different generations
at Kanuti Gildi Saal in Tallinn

People in Tallinn talk about their situation in terms of historic rupture and acceleration. Survival under occupation, Deportation and Relocation, Expropriation and Restitution - the history of repression under changing political power structures has been a long one as well as the struggle for independence. The last fundamental changes were marked by the inception of the constitution through a referendum in 1992 and by the introduction of capitalism. Since then many things seem to have improved for many people. Though not for everybody. How is the situation for the arts and the artists? It depends: There is the Cultural Endowment of Estonia (Kultuurkapital) supplied by taxes for alcohol, tobacco and gambling, which offers grants and project funding for the arts besides other public funding by the Ministry of culture, local governments and the cities. Estonians are well known as a theatre loving nation: 1.3 million Estonians match around 1 million sold theatre tickets each year. Some people say this is because theatre is the only place to watch Estonian actors as Estonia has only a very small filmproduction.

Tallinn has a beautiful new Museum for Modern Art but it has no domestic art market. Strangely the Academy for the Arts was destroyed in order to make space for a car park. Tallinn has a lot of empty space, huge old industrial areas some of which have been occupied by artists or have been turned into hubs for the creative industries and media technology. Others like the huge Linnahall - built for the 1980 Summer Olympics and meant to host sporting and cultural events - have been standing empty for several years now. The nicer parts of the city attract foreign investor's money mostly from Scandinavian countries. Not to mention the prices for real estate inside the old town. On the outskirts of Tallinn you will find some of the biggest satellite cities which were built under Soviet occupation. This is where the Russian population lives which is with 25% the biggest minority in the country. When the news spread that Russian troops had occupied Crimea people immediately went to the streets and demonstrated in front of the Russian embassy in Tallinn.

Kanuti Gildi Saal is based in an impressive historic building right in the heart of the medieval Old Town of Tallinn surrounded by all kinds of touristic hot spots - just opposite the Russian Embassy and a shop with Estonian designer's jewellery and next to a gallery space and a famous traditional coffeehouse. There are two entrances at the front of the building, one for the people who come here to work, accessible twenty-four-seven, the other opens only during public performances for the audience. Inside a warm, colourful and lively working atmosphere is welcoming the visiting artist, lots of posters and other traces of former performances. Smoking is allowed. There is a larger performance hall with an amazingly clever construction of the audience stand under which the foyer and the wardrobe finds space, and a smaller studio on the ground level. The production office is upstairs, another studio in the basement as well as a recording studio. Around the corner from Kanuti Gildi Saal you will find Von Krahl Theatre, the first private theatre in Estonia operating since 1992, where people working at Kanuti Gildi Saal like to take their lunch break. And by the way: next to their theatre Von Krahl is running another restaurant and is planning to open a third one soon.

Priit Raud, the artistic director, who founded Kanuti Gildi Saal in 2002 as the first performance space in Tallinn for contemporary dance, is happy about a growing young audience. But he would also like to bring back the audience from his generation. What happened with the audience with whom he started out in the early 90s? An audience which is now in their 40s or 50s. Have those people lost their interest in contemporary performance?

Or were the exceptional political circumstances in the 90s producing an exceptional interest in public performance? That's how matthaei & konsorten, based in Berlin and one of the collaborating artists collectives at FFT Duesseldorf, got interested. Obviously it was impossible and also not interesting for them to carry out an audience survey. But if it would be possible to involve artists

from the older generation together with young artists in a project at Kanuti Gildi Saal – could that be a first step to attract an intergenerational mix of audience?

In order to involve artists from different generations matthaei & konsorten developed the concept of a playful „pentathlon“. Picking up the motive of the Olympic Games they envisioned to set up challenges in which artists from different generations would enter a kind of “sportive” exchange based on their different artistic practices. Instead of talking to each other about their work they would perform together and thereby show some of their artistic experiences, strategies and positions to an audience.

With the support of Priit Raud and Maijrika Plakso matthaei & konsorten met some of the pioneers and protagonists of the Estonian Performing Arts Scene from the 90s who are still active and successfully working in the field. – Of course their work has changed over the period of the last 25 years. And they met young artists in their twenties who are at the beginning of their career. Most of them graduated from an art or theatre academy and have found an artistic home at Kanuti Gildi Saal or are mentored and supported by Priit Raud and his team.