

GROWL, GREETING, GROTTO; KWAT, TOET, SOP

Artists' collective 7090 presents an absurd, colourful and abstract world at Cultura Nova, Gaudeamus and NDSM OPEN. Jan Nieuwenhuis took a look at the first try-out.

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ABSTRACTIONPARK7090: 1 large pyramid, 7 monumental columns, 3 gigantic balloons, a bunch of organ pipes, 4 helicopters, 5 composers, 4 sound artists, countless mirrors, 1 painter, 2 designers, 3 performers, 1 sound technician, 1 lighting technician, 3 ceremonies and 1 complaints office. These are more or less the building blocks of 'ABSTRACTIONPARK7090', one of the most remarkable and exceptional performances of the coming season. It's an amazing world that artists' collective 7090 has built.

In 2015 Koen Kaptijn and Nora Mulder created the absurd and truly beautiful performance Huldebiet, together with Bert Hana. That trio is also the brains behind ABSTRACTIONPARK7090. Although the title immediately evokes associations, I did wonder for quite some time what an Abstraction Park is. Is it a flying swing ride without the swings, because it's about the flying? Maybe it's a haunted house where all the supernatural things suddenly become natural? Or a roller coaster that really is infinite? Actually these are all not so far from the truth, if it wasn't for the fact that reality first has to be made abstract before an Abstraction Park exists.

'ABSTRACTIONPARK7090' is filled with abstract attractions or installations. The abstraction is actually an extract, a simplification of an existing form that through multiple symbolisms acquires a dual function. That duality produces a vague disquiet, which in turn creates a constant transformation in the very foundation of the Abstraction Park.

7090 reveals hidden relationships between various historical worlds and anchors them in a wholly contemporary combination of available resources. A stream of associations rather than dogmatic art beliefs, it's more in the spirit of Fluxus theorist, book maker and artist Dick Higgins than in that of the great avant-garde composers of the twentieth century. Though they are also not far away, lurking among the abstractions.

The ambiguity of 'ABSTRACTIONPARK7090' is an uncertain space that never comes to rest. That is not say that it's unclear. It above all means that 'uncertainty' is a fundamental element of the Abstraction Park, precisely because the abstract is never a simplification but always a duplication, displayed as a multiple world – a world that from a different perspective continually takes on a new shape. By realizing this world through installation-attractions and ceremonies, 'ABSTRACTIONPARK7090' is also a ritualization of a familiar language of form turned inside out, giving access to an empty, hollow and completely enigmatic space. A musical space that is infinitely blue, or cracked pitch black, a space into which Yves Klein already once dared to leap in his *Saut dans le vide*.

Joining the Abstraction Park is also taking part in the ritual of art experience, not from a dogmatic or cerebral point of view, but rather in order to get to that point that will always be elusive and unnamed, but is nevertheless palpable. To enter the enigmatic you have to dare to take a leap, not a frightening one into the unknown, but a leap into an emptiness that has the potential to be filled and where you can float.

1. The Growl

One of the Abstractions, The Growl, consists of seven brightly coloured four metre high columns. They stand apart from each other in an open space and exude an antique monumentality. Sound comes from them, a constantly changing collage of various musics, made by Yannis Kyriakides, Bart de Vrees, Eric de Clercq, Ji Youn Kang, Huba de Graaff and Han Buhrs. The public is invited to walk between the columns, to touch and listen to them, and above all to influence the music themselves. Pressing a button, turning a wheel or opening a flap changes the sound collage. 'The Growl', writes 7090 on its website, 'is about the primal scream: the ultimate cry from which all sound emerged.'

The seven columns of The Growl evoke a kind of primal harmony of the spheres: a sound that is always there, that always surrounds us and that has moved through the universe since the beginning of time. At the same time the columns evoke a Greek mythology, but then an antiquity cast in the modern steel of Richard Serra. It's almost as though the columns are abstracted from a Greek temple created by the gods. Only they support nothing, they're uncrowned, without a frame. There is no physical representation of an epic story carved into a pediment above the columns. Rather The Growl, like Atlas, holds up

the firmament. It supports something more abstract: an ultimate emptiness from which everything originated. But it's an emptiness that can be experienced and filled, an emptiness that, analogous to the steel constructions of Serra, gains meaning through intervention in the public space. In Serra's *The Matter of Time*, for instance, space takes shape by its accentuation with gigantic curved steel plates. There's an interaction between the steel and the space: it's not just about the steel, and the emptiness is nothing without the installations.

The seven columns of The Growl rise up and give off sound. They resonate in the space and make it palpable. They are sounding memorials that invoke the omnipresence of this paradoxical emptiness, filled with sound and meaning. Yet the Growl is not just an imposing monument far off in time and space. With their bright colours, their grandeur and the sounds they emit the columns have an attractive power. They are approachable. As a member of the public I am part of the primeval harmony they produce. I myself derive from it and can influence it.

2. The Grotto

Then there's The Grotto: a four metre high pyramid, exuberantly painted by Marcel van de Berg. The inside of the pyramid is completely covered in mirrors. 'The infinite reflections turn the Grotto into a place for abstract self-reflection,' according to 7090. That is intensified by an object in the middle: 'a telephone whereby people can make contact with Abstraction Park's Complaints Office and lodge a complaint. Of course the complaint can also be a secret wish or a prayer.'

At first sight there doesn't seem to be much room for abstraction in a pyramid, there's little to remove from the form. Yet there is hidden symbolism in the geometric form. Pyramids usually function as burial tombs, a safe place, hidden deep inside metres of stone, from which to make the journey to the other side. That practice has diminished in the twenty-first century, yet the Abstraction Park pyramid has a similar function. Just as in the maze of dark passages where orientation is impossible, the palace of mirrors inside is a space where it's impossible not to get lost.

Like Yayoi Kusama's *Infinity Mirror Rooms* all the sides are covered in mirrors. There is also music, or rather a soundscape, a surprise set compiled by Kaptijn and Mulder. There's a playful mix of static, ground up bird noises, sinus-like sounds and recordings of compositions played by 7090 as a trio. It's a type of auditory mirror that they hold up to themselves and the listener, the sound history of 7090 on repeat.

Inside the Grotto I initially pay attention to my infinite self, to the infinite reflection of my infinite self. The Grotto displays an unreal reality: every aspect of yourself in infinite variation and reflection. But that's digging your own hole: the confrontation with the self in all its possible facets also means the end of your own existence: there is no more discovery possible, no development. Just as with the Egyptians, the pyramid of 7090 is a burial tomb, offering a journey through the unreal.

Still there is a way to escape this reflexive, visual and abstract death. The interior palace of mirrors invites self-reflection and via the Complaints Office offers the opportunity, in the guise of a telephone, to express yourself in an absolutely private experience. The telephone rings, I pick it up and hear an option menu. I listen and press buttons, and take a playful and labyrinthine journey through my own subconscious.

3. The Greeting

The Greeting looks like an inside-out organ. Three gigantic balloons hang over a stage on which stand strange revolving and ticking machines, designed by Yuri Landman. The balloons are connected by hoses to taps with organ pipe ends. By letting air out of the balloons through the organ pipes the public hears a minimal and fragile music. 7090 describes The Greeting as a 'comical, cheerful fountain of sound, and an ode to the magic you feel when you experience a sound for the first time. It's exactly that playfulness that can be found in Abstraction Park, the happiness you feel at a new musical discovery, a band, a wonderful composition or a fantastic improvisation. The sound tapestry that comes out of the organ pipes sounds like a Morton Feldman composition gone awry, the music is wonky, it sputters, rambles, peeps and whines.

Landman's analogue machines, kind of miniature helicopters, tap out crooked rhythms like stammering drum computers. It's a relief, as if Philip Glass and Steve Reich finally lost their constant foolish pulse. The thin sounds and crooked rhythms are incongruent and exist by that grace alone. It's a baroque and grotesque pairing. They cry out to be merged, to adjust the tapping and tinker with the sound so that the organ pipe sound tapestry weaves together with the rhythms.

I have the opportunity to operate The Greeting, a fabulous musical instrument/hot air balloon or perhaps an alien fig tree. I decide on the composition, adjust the rhythms until I hear what I want, and the music starts to float. The Greeting is an invitation to ascension, it lifts you up. I can alter the music by touch: it's not aloof. The organ displays the incomprehensibility of music and makes it comprehensible. The Greeting is welcoming and demonstrates that incomprehension has no place in music, no matter how strange that music may be. 'Listen,' whispers The Greeting, and heaven opens and is filled with sound.

4. Ceremonies

Finally there are three ceremonies, Kwat, Toet and Sop. Abstracted from existing pieces by Samuel Beckett (*Quad II*, 1980), Dick Raaijmakers (*Vier fanfares*, 1995) and Allan Kaprow (*Soap*, 1965), they are performed by Kaptijn, Mulder and Hana between the abstract attractions. The three ceremonies share similarities with the sources from which they are derived, but *Quad II*, *Vier Fanfares* and *Soap* function above all as guidelines to be unravelled. Here also, abstraction looking for the essential holds sway: what remains is a sound, an action, a movement or a public interaction. They are moments of passage, initiation rites if you will, where the casual passer-by is welcomed to and initiated into ABSTRACTIONPARK7090.

The ceremonies also commemorate three protagonists who each represent a different facet of the twentieth century avant-garde. Each ceremony is a tribute as well as a ritual procession, almost a solemnity, like an interment. This is not because it's time to bid farewell to Beckett, Raaijmakers and Kaprow, but rather because it's time to dust off the cultural heritage of the twentieth century, appropriate it and destroy it productively.

That's not with evil intent. It is mainly something like Walter Benjamin's destructive character: a productive, vital destruction. In the words of Benjamin: 'The destructive character is young and cheerful. For destroying rejuvenates, because it clears up the traces of our own age; it cheers up, because every clearing away means, for the destroyer, a complete simplification of his own condition, even to the uncovering of its roots.' Destruction as abstraction and as a cheerful voyage of discovery, because the result is unknown. Benjamin continues: 'No moment knows what the next will bring. It ruins the existing, not for the sake of ruination, but for the sake of the path that it makes through it.'

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The Grotto, The Growl, The Greeting, Kwat, Toet, Sop, Greek mythology, the Egyptian kingdom of the dead, steel, metal, telephones, cats, horses, organ pipes, garden hoses, light, thin air, infinite mirrors, columns, balloons, a fountain, taps, rhythms, sounds, clear sky, magic, Complaints Office, music, colour, paint, etcetera, and so forth, and so on... It is telling for 7090, a collective that emerged from contemporary composed music, that they should focus on an art practice that is radically different to that from which they come.

Whereas 7090 won fame at the beginning of the twenty-first century treading the relatively known paths of the post-war composed avant-garde, in recent years they have developed a radically different performance practice. The new of so-called contemporary music turned out to be actually quite old. Steeped in a dead-end music tradition, 7090 looked for new resources, a new language, new media, new performers, new thought patterns, new sounds, new images, new audience, new problems and new instruments and broke out of the music world. That furnished collaborations with painters, actors, graphic designers, programmers, writers, welders and carpenters. Just as important as the composers are Joris Speelman and Rodger Dignum, responsible for the design and construction of ABSTRACTIONPARK7090's metre high installations.

Performances take place in unconventional places, often in public spaces. Instrumentalists play their instruments less and less and are more often versatile performers. The score is definitely not holy. The score is often not even a starting point. What doesn't fit on the page is created instead. Neither the one nor the other: dogmas do not exist; there is not *one* absolute art. Borders are breached and turn out to be fluid: music flows into image, texts solidify and burst open into paint and colour. Everything is possible in 'ABSTRACTIONPARK7090'.

The world of 7090 is unreal and abstract, yet at the same time the abstract attractions have an enormous pull. They are rock solid. From a distance they attract attention, they compel the visitor to slowly come closer, to enter a world that bewitches, confuses and abstracts, but is ultimately accessible and crystal clear. 7090 simply opens the door to wonder. Behind the abstraction, in the simplification of certain forms, concepts and art works, lurks a symbolic world of form that is open to interpretation. A world of form that unfolds and evokes every possible association. The closer I come, the more there is to discover. It's striking how easy that actually is and how much pleasure there is in it. Above all, how much pleasure it gives to enter Abstraction Park, to let yourself be carried away by 7090 and to confront the unknown. The unknown is not scary, it is above all curious about who you are and what you bring with you.
