



Navigare 1996 (Roberto Fortuna)

Navigare – The Inauguration of Arken in 1996

By Erik Exe Christoffersen

Navigare (1996) was specifically created for the inauguration of ARKEN - *Museum of Modern Art* as a ‘baptismal’ act in the name of art in time and space. The 25-minute performance is an illuminating example of how Hotel Pro Forma enrolls many different elements in a work. The museum building is shaped as a ship, and the performance is based on metaphors related to the architecture, which is reminiscent of a wrecked ship ‘stranded’ on the edge of the sea. The performance uses the architecture, which is a long, open space, where lines meet to form the stern and bow of ‘a ship’. *Navigare* is a concrete staging of a room as a metaphor and as a place. But finally, the show also inscribes time as a performative inauguration with the audience as participants together with Queen Margrethe II and the museum’s director Anna Castberg. (The same year the latter was forced to resign as director of the museum. She was not ‘real’ but took on a ‘role’ and more seriously she had severely ‘romanticized’ her c.v. Retrospectively this gives the entire construction a further tinge of drama. First the performers arrive: two singers, a female officer, and fifty rowers dressed in orange coveralls. The ship is baptized *Arken* and the rowers sit down and take hold of the transparent, luminous oars. The long row of oarsmen are rowing rhythmically, while the mate is counting in a low, monotone voice, only interrupted by the oarsmen’s internal roars and the solo singing. The rowers come from a local club nearby but are also individuals. Each rower is wearing a small slide projector strapped on like a rucksack with a personally selected photo projected on the wall that follows his rhythmic movements. The rowers do not move from the spot, but get the high-ceiling room to form a cradle like a boat on waves. The light from a blue laser beam is refracted by the transparent oars and reflects the architecture as flashing stars.

Through this baptism the ark is assigned a sort of authority to open and present the art. It is a performative act, an image, and a living sculpture. The spectators can choose different perspectives on the stage by moving along with ‘the boat’ or viewing it from both ends. *Navigare* combines the spectators’ walking about the pictures with the theater’s spatial action. It is a transformative act that creates access to the art without a central perspective, but instead the action moves the relation to the spectators with different perspectives without a symbolic overview. It is an example of the judgment of taste as a process in which the subject is considering the question: Is this art for me? It is a general socialization of the sensuously qualitative taking place in the affirmation: ‘This is art’. *Navigare* is installed in a museum where the performative and the visual art are exchanged. This is a complex statement, in which “real” performers are included: rowers, singers, Hotel Pro Forma, Arken and the visitors to the museum. The passage from *I* to *We* takes place in the formal and disciplined construction of the work, where the “boat” is transformed into art and becomes a metaphor through general recognition. But this recognition does not last forever and continues to be negotiated amongst art critics, artists, philosopher, researchers, art historians, etc.