



Marketing: artistic advertising messages

Even on first sight, an event of this sort opens a wide gamut of possibilities: one can combine the material, in our case: natural stone, with the positive image of art rather than ecological issues, and the artworks can remain in place affording a lasting public-relations effect.

We are talking about sculptors' symposia. Hardly a horticultural show, world fair or Olympic Games comes to pass without commissioning artists - but only in a hand-full of countries does the stone industry make use of this fact for public-relations purposes.

Particularly France and Italy are exceptions to the rule. Public places serve as an open atelier for sculptors all summer incidentally passing on knowledge of local stone to potential consumers.

2009 marks an important anniversary, reason enough for *BusinessStone.com* to jump on the bandwagon. 50 years ago next year, in the summer of 1959 the very first sculptors' symposium took place in Austria. However, those who are not already bound into the celebrations are probably to late. Experienced organizers agree that the preparations take about 18 months.

Back then in a quarry in the town of St. Margarethen in Burgenland, the event was quite plain: Karl Prantl, the initiator, wanted sculptors to produce their art at the site of provenance of the material they used.

The project gained momentum as it became clear that the artists profited from working in close proximity of one-another and often helped each other. And the artists were fascinated by the effects of sunlight giving the stone new life compared to the studio lighting.



Fascinating how a sculpture ensues from raw stone. Fotos: Bertram Feld

Soon, the inhabitants of the town and surrounding areas caught wind of the event taking place in the so called Roman quarry. Visitors were fascinated to watch how a sculpture emerged after peeling away the surrounding rock. And they appreciated the opportunity to speak with the artists.

Later, symposia left the quarries and were transposed to the countryside as forerunners of land-art. A symposium, which took place in the 90's in Norway, deserves special mention: An artist polished a solid rock, which impressively reflected light far and wide into the countryside. Others recreated waste tips or erected monoliths with a relief of drill-ridges.

Beginning in the 60's the symposia moved to the inner cities, giving them the ambiance of a big event. Some artists were unhappy about this

development, complaining about the constant besiegement by the public. Symposia have one thing in common: „The first day is usually chaotic - artists come, take fits and later calm down“, says one experienced participant in *Sculpture Magazine*.

The 70' and 80's saw a regular boom with events taking place on all continents. Most continents saw yearly symposia, some of which later developed to an institution.

Now that the boom has subsided somewhat, there is a niche for those who want to pick up on tradition. This time, stone-producing companies, and stone retailers should take on a more central role presenting the material as operators and organizers. Particularly countries presently experiencing a building boom such as China, Brazil or the East-European countries now have

a unique opportunity to promote local stone.

Planers should consider various aspects. As a rule, symposia are only successful when prepared professionally. Preparations include the choice of artist, invitations, lodging, media relations and even a documentation in form of a catalogue or a videopresentation for the internet.

Such action requires time and money. As mentioned earlier: 18 months of preparation time is the norm, whereby the last three or four months are a full-time occupation for at least one person.

How does one go about finding suitable artists? Organizers report that they collect information at art exhibits often for many years prior to such an event. There are compilations of addresses in the internet (see below).

Taking a decision for or against a particular participating artist requires special effort: the organizer must pay a *personal* visit. „The chemistry between the two has to stand a sort of litmus test“, as an insider reports, „otherwise much can go wrong during the symposium.“

Contracts with detailed description of liability and obligation of the contracting parties is an absolute must. Non-committal understandings regarding lodging, e.g., often lead to disputes - it should be said at this point that art-production is work, that a successful artist knows his worth and is entitled to adequate remuneration. Also: the cultural aspect should stand in the foreground. The organizer should hold back with his mental image and projection of ideas.

Equally important is paying the artist. Usually the sculptors will receive a staggered expense-account depending on the length of journey to the final destination. Whether or not the organizer pays an honorarium is negotiable. Many organizers attempt to circumvent the issue by allowing artists to display and sell other works of art at the symposium.

Sculpture Magazine contains detailed progress reports: in one instance in Italy artists were given but a block of stone, a place to work, and a warm lunch; some symposia in China are praised for „their opulent meals and opportunities to profit from assistants“; a four-week event in France „offers a remuneration

of 2,500 € for participants as well as food and lodging and three bottles of local wine, a medal of the town and two or three other goodies on top“; it is reported of one event in Taiwan that the costs of the flight, first-class lodging, and a remuneration of \$ 7,000.00 were assumed by the organizer. In return, the piece of art reverted to the organizer's ownership.

Maintaining an open atmosphere is advisable. It is not a good idea to keep artists on a short lead, e.g. by dictating the moto of the sculptures that are to ensue. An experienced participant notes underhand that artists do not allow others to meddle in their work.

Artists are understandably put off if an organizer demands models of the work but is unwilling to pay for this service. Organizers are well advised to be content with projections or photos of previous works.

Incorporating other branches

Organizers can cut costs effectively by soliciting sponsors. This can be the local tourist office, or a producer of tools for stone-masonry. Costs of the raw

Everything revolves around stone - when an artist explains his work, implicitly the material stands in the foreground



material can be reimbursed when the sculpture is sold. Local restaurants can provide sustenance.

The very first symposium in St. Margarethen was sponsored by a large electric company, which later bought one of the sculptures. A small source of income during the preparations was achieved by selling 1000 little stone cubes for 30 shillings each.

Whether or not the symposium should stand under a certain theme, is of secondary importance. Opinions differ as to whether a competition among participating artists is a good idea. In the end, the question will be, whether the funds allow for a sizable prize to be paid out to the winner.

Some symposia last a few weeks, others over a period of several months during which artists participate for as long as they wish.

Some symposia are accompanied by colourful anecdotes. In 1961/2 in Berlin, shortly after the Berlin Wall was erected, European sculptors got together and voiced their protest with a symposium-project entitled „Against Tyranny“.

In West-Berlin the American Allied Forces supported the action and had the monoliths transported across the city by means of cranes and flat-bed-trailers. When the actual hammering and sculpting began, they turned night to day with the help of powerful flood-lights in front of the Reichstag just at the wall. One observer commented on „the sudden appearance of cranes, catterpillars, loud motors and flood-lights on the border between East and West!“. For a while, the Russian forces observed the proceedings from far with apprehension.

Then they approached with three large trucks to observe what was happening. „That was quite dramatic“, the observer wrote - an unexpected turn of events in the Cold War.

Symposia (a selection)

Stanstead, Canada
(<http://www.stansteadgranite.com>)

Southern Downs, Australia
(<http://sculpturess.com>)

Sprimont, Belgium
(<http://www.sprimontsculpture.be>)

Sur En, Switzerland
(<http://www.sur-en.ch/index.php?id=19>)

Junas, France
(<http://www.rencontresdelapierre.org>)

Freiburg i. Br., Germany
(<http://www.stein-festival.de>)

Sculptors:

<http://www.sculpture-network.org/>

<http://www.sculpture.org>

<http://www.aiesm.com/>

<http://aboutstone.org/>

<http://www.zuzuku.de/>



Youths and children can be addressed as future consumers