

The Great Communicator

WEBSR2 UPGRADE PROJECT: "WIND ENERGY ART"
RONALD REAGAN PARK, GDANSK, POLAND

Oscar Guer mouche and Staffan Strindberg

In our collaborative process, we have focused on the specificity of the site. Our aim has been to create a work – built on our personal experiences and perspectives – that comments on today's society, contemporary forms of expressions, architecture, and public art in general.

The Great Communicator consists of the sentence "A tree's a tree. How many more do you need to look at?" – a Ronald Reagan quote (while Governor of California), cited in the *Sacramento Bee*, opposing expansion of Redwood National Park, March 3, 1966. The sentence will be cast in white cement and marble, in the same font as the iconic Hollywood sign. The words are 100 cm tall, 30 cm deep and 35 m long in total, and follow the topography of the site.

Contemporary art provides means for reflection and retrospection. Art can expose and give life to occurrences in our existence that are not otherwise articulated. Art creates spaces, real or imaginary, where ideas, objects or images meet in new constellations allowing new meanings to surface.

Aim of the project and the related international competition is to initiate an EU-wide campaign that will attract the peoples interest in and sympathy for wind energy by creating positive symbols to be put in relation to this energy source. For this purpose, the contest "Wind energy art" was initiated by the project team, based on joining the technological and artistic competences that are represented by our special partner structure. Combining these two perspectives and ways of working will not only lead to interesting art objects, but also involve very different networks, thus reaching a new dimension of public awareness - for the competition, the objects and, via all this, for wind energy.

WEBSR2 Upgrade Project: "Wind Energy Art"

In the outset of this project our intentions were to plant a tree that would function as a natural intervention in the room that the park establishes. It would be placed in the middle of the field like a growing and dynamic work and fulfill our vision of a contemporary artwork. It would have been something to look at, something to sit under, something to lean on. The wind could be heard and seen in the movement of the leaves and the swaying of the branches. It would turn the park into a space with the potential for greater understanding but also estrangement.

We wanted to tie together our collaborative ideas while, at the same time, adhering to the guidelines of the competition as well as the wishes of the neighbors. Considering the fact that the park is named after the former Hollywood actor, President of the United States, and Governor of California, Ronald Reagan, we decided it would be inappropriate to plant a tree on this site considering his aversion to trees and preserving natural resources. He is also known to have claimed that "air pollution comes from trees".

Site-specificity is not of value in itself. Works which are built within the contextual frame of governmental, corporate, educational, and religious institutions run the risk of being read as tokens of those institutions. One way of avoiding ideological cooptation is to choose leftover sites which cannot be the object of ideological misinterpretation. However, there is no neutral site. Every context has its frame and its ideological overtones. It is a matter of degree. But there are sites where it is obvious that an art work is being subordinated to/accommodated to/adapted to/subservient to/required to/useful to... In such cases it is necessary to work in opposition to the constraints of the context, so that the work cannot be read as an affirmation of questionable ideologies and political power.

Richard Serra, "Tilted Arc Destroyed" *Writings/Interviews*, The University of Chicago Press, 1994

Reagan lost the battle in California when the bill creating Redwood National Park was signed by President Lyndon Johnson on October 2, 1968. The Save-the-Redwoods League and other entities purchased over 400 km², which were added to existing state parks. In 1978, 190 km² were added to Redwood National Park in a major expansion.

All the world's a stage
And all the men and women merely players
They have their exits and their entrances
And one man in his time plays many parts

William Shakespear, "All the World's a Stage" *As You Like It*, 1599

Ronald Reagan played many roles in his life's seven acts: radio announcer, movie star, union boss, television actor-cum-host, governor, right-wing critic of big government and President of the United States. While historians still debate his ultimate legacy as Chief Executive and First Magistrate, the fact is this amiable man played the biggest and most important role ever limned by a actor, and pulled it off with grace and aplomb as befits a great headliner.

The Internet Movie Database: Biography for Ronald Reagan

In a society that is becoming all the more secular, religion is being substituted by the devotion to nature. Along with this devotion comes the demand for the protection of the environment and the development of renewable energy. Wind turbines have proven to be a reliable source of alternative energy for a sustainable society, but no one seems to want them in their own neighborhood. With their delicate, white rotors slowly turning in the sky, they are monuments of our environmentally-conscious modernist society. Like magnificent kinetic sculptures, their towering figures decorate the landscape, reminding us of mankind's ability to control and exploit nature's powers for the benefits of modern civilization. One could see them as works of public art in rural settings, but they are not often appreciated for their aesthetic values. Claims are made that the turbines are noisy, even dangerous. But, maybe they are just like trees. How many more do you need to look at?

Initially, from the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s, public art was dominated by the art-in-the-public-places paradigm - modernist abstract sculptures that were often enlarged replicas of works normally found in museums and galleries. These art works were usually signature pieces from internationally established male artists (favored artists who received the most prominent commissions during this period include Isamu Noguchi, Henry Moore, and Alexander Calder). In and of themselves, they had no distinctive qualities to render them "public" except perhaps their size and scale. What legitimated them as "public" art was quite simply their siting outdoors or in locations deemed to be public primarily because of their "openness" and unrestricted physical access - parks, university campuses, civic centers, entrance areas to federal buildings, plazas off city streets, parking lots, airports.

Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another*, The MIT Press, 2004

The Hollywood sign was first erected in 1923. Its purpose was to advertise the name of a new housing development in the hills above the Hollywood district of Los Angeles. The sign was designed to stand only eighteen months, but over the course of almost a century it has sustained a wide array of damage and deterioration. Standing tall, there is something hypnotic about the letters of the sign. They have become a visual icon symbolizing a collective idea of Hollywood as a major film industry rather than a mere suburb of LA. The image of the sign immediately speaks about obsessions, failures and ambitions. It is a magnet for contradictions.

Ronald Reagan's famous nickname "The Great Communicator", was not earned but was requested. Reagan asked for it during his farewell address in 1989.

US President Ronald Reagan imposed economic sanctions on Poland, which eventually would force the Polish government into liberalizing its policies. Meanwhile the CIA together with the Catholic Church and various Western trade unions such as the AFL-CIO provided funds, equipment and advice to the Solidarity underground. The political alliance of Reagan and the Pope would prove important to the future of Solidarity. The Polish public also supported what was left of Solidarity; a major medium for demonstrating support of Solidarity became masses held by priests such as Jerzy Popiełuszko.

Wikipedia: History of Solidairty

Oscar Guermouche, artist and writer, was born 1977 in Stockholm. He received his MFA from Konstfack University College of Art and Design in 2009 and currently resides in Kalmar, Sweden.

Guermouche's work is focused on the social values of words utilizing quotes, compilations, or the displacement of existing texts. The structuring functions of the language are examined in relation to the biography and the construction of the subject. All his works are more or less text-based, though the works themselves can be depicted in a number of different techniques such as painting, photography, objects, video, print, and tattoos. His work has been shown at for instance Nationalmuseum in Stockholm, Kalmar konstmuseum, Lokal 30 in Warsaw, Moscow Museum of Modern Art, Sleepwalker Projects in Toronto and Shoshana Wayne Gallery in Los Angeles. He is also the author of the books *Sent Items* (Bokbål Förlag, 2009), *Connecting the Dots* (Undantag Förlag, 2010) and *Vad gör du just nu?* (Flamme Forlag, 2011), and of several published essays.

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Staffan Strindberg, architect (SAR/MSA) and musician, was born 1952 in Kalmar, where he still lives and works today. He graduated from the School of Architecture at the Royal Institute of Technology in 1981 and set up his own practice in 1992.

Strindberg's work varies from city planning and commercial buildings to housing and interiors. He wants architecture to be an expression of its time and to be clear in its intentions.

Since 1972 Strindberg is a member of the Swedish progressive rock band Ragnarök.

www.strindberg.se