

2388 年 CONNECTING VOCABULARIES

Art Project by Stefan Umærus & Chely Depablos



Museo de Arte Moderno, Santo Domingo, 2000.

“2388: Connecting Vocabularies”

“2388: Connecting Vocabularies” is an art project about Beijing, China in the time just before the Tiananmen Square massacre on June 4, 1989.

“2388: Connecting Vocabularies” recreates the seventeenth century French court painting series “Seven Arts and Seven Virtues” by Sebastien Bourdon, in a post-modern format.

The museum scale art project consists of fourteen paintings - Seven Arts and Seven Virtues - each measuring 106" by 20", twelve poetry panels, each 22"x20", an Artist's Book - Stefan Umærus' diary and poetry from Beijing, 1989 - 14"x 8", and a video-loop.

First shown at the New York Academy of Sciences in 1992, “2388: Connecting Vocabularies” has also been shown at the Brauer Museum of Art, Indiana, USA, and at the Museo de Arte Moderno, Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic.

Based on Stefan Umærus' personal experience as a language student in Beijing 1988/89, “2388: Connecting Vocabularies” is an art project by Chely Depablos and Stefan Umærus.



Beijing, 1988/89. Photo: Stefan Umærus



2388: Connecting Vocabularies, The Poetry

Poetry written day by day in Beijing, 1988 - 1989.
Selected poems by Stefan Umærus .

LET THE DAYS TURN COBALT BLUE

There is a crack outside my door
I look to the East and I wonder:
Is this the continental rift?

I look to the West and I wonder:
Is this the future, past or present?



ETAT

Boy soldier, lucid as night



7.12.1988.

To see, to learn
To hear, to speak,
To be lucid and double
like an arrow from a bow



Chilly nights, crisp mornings,
Conveyor belt simplicity
Whitewashed walls
19th century classrooms.



HEI AN LI

Darkness exploding
Silver points like arrows,
dancing the Big Dipper.



27.12.1988

MOON DOOR AJAR

Bright lights illuminate
Eastern skies.

Arrows set in diamonds
against
gray brick walls.

A thousand doors
open.



*Introduction to "2388: Connecting Vocabularies"
at the New York Academy of Sciences, New York, 1992*



Addressing a future 400 years from the present, much like an alchemist, Stefan Umærus has created a poetic visualization of connecting worlds and melded vocabularies told in painting, poetry and reportage. And it is an eloquent elixir.

The amalgamation began when Swedish-born Umærus arrived in the People's Republic of China in 1988, as a student of Chinese language at Beijing Foreign Studies University where he witnessed the events leading up to Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989.



Stefan Umærus potent aesthetic, utilizing the methodology of an observer in the distillation of thousands of photographs and infusion of text, encompasses subtle references to astronomy, geology and historical pasts - recording, remembering, and forwarding in lyrical interpretation.

Madelaine Netter



The exhibition 2388: Connecting Vocabularies begins with fourteen elongated architectonic panels made of copper-leaf and paint installed in the Entrance Hall to the New York Academy of Sciences and the Little Hall. These and other diverse components of Stefan Umærus mixed media presentation sets the stage for the artist's unfolding journey which coincided with the Student Democracy Movement in the People's Republic of China. An installation in the Main Hall comprised of seven double-page enlargements of the artist's diaries, recaptures the confusing and chilling occurrences stemming from the Tiananmen Square period. The format of "handwritten messages" on bulletin board is reminiscent of one of the primary methods of communication used during the information black-out. Umærus actual diaries and additional documentary artifacts are also on display, further evidence of the artist having been there. A series of fourteen elegantly crafted paintings, each brush-stroked in copper leaf with touches of aluminum gilded on mahogany plywood, are inlaid with rosewood. Silk screened with emblematic drawing and poetry, they proffer a compelling visual vocabulary.



"May 22-June 4, 1989" a ten minute video collage of photographic documents, located in the Study, documents the heightened activity of the Student Movement and provides a narrative thread for the exhibition. Fusing the personal with the personal, Stefan Umærus uses materials forcefully and poetically. Resulting textures, color and images seemingly fragmented form a psychological whole.



In revealing his own perception of the events, Umærus conveys the complexity of his impulses and, in doing so offers us his vision of a future memory of a specific time in history.

Betty Wilde



Stefan Umaerus: 2388, *L'arithmetique*, 51×270 cm

Chinese apocalypse

“In Haidan, the district in northwestern Beijing where universities and institutes are concentrated, housing students by the thousand in squalid dormitories, the whitewashed walls are black with fingerprints, cement floors are constantly dirty, trash piles up along the rows of thin doors, all numbered. In austere cellarlike rooms Chinese students live, often five to six in one small room, where they share a table. Laundry dries on zigzag wires strung between the beds. The squalor stands in sharp contrast to the postmodern

architectural masterpiece along the road to Beijing University: in black and white, luxury apartments are built for retiring army officers.”

In New York City in *Stefan Umaerus'* apartment two years later, the artist and collaborator, *Chely Depablos*, designed an installation composed of 14 paintings, wall hangings, and music. That quote at the beginning of this review reflects the story Umaerus is telling in his paintings. While a scholarship student of Chinese at Beijing University he witnessed poverty, the massacre at Tian-

nanen in June 1989, and as he says, “the euphoria” of that revolution.

As an outsider, Umaerus looked at another culture with the “objectiveness” of a stranger searching for clues. These paintings are about the lives of a people in turmoil. Blue sky rests above. The press release says, “2388 is that point in time 400 years in the future. It is intended to connect different spaces in time and space — to set pictures and poetry documenting and interpreting a contemporary period in time in relation to epochs of the past.”



Stefan Umaerus: *L'astronomie*

The China paintings are beautiful. Copper foil carefully layered over canvas, acrylics, oil and gouache creates a textural richness of Oriental scroll paintings. They stand 170×51 cm high, about one and one half times human size. Each canvas is sectioned into grids designed by the artist's calculations to represent celestial proportions. Stenciled on each grid are images of soldiers, citizens, lorry trucks, telephone poles and street scenes. Background colors range from skyblue to a sooty grey-black. In *La Musique* the dopperleaf foil rests on a dark Chinese blue abstract sky. The layers of foil correspond to strata of the earth and this image evokes a deeper examination for underlying messages or symbols.

La Geometrie is divided into mathematical sequences so that the desk which falls off to the right is easily visible, other passages are not as easily identifiable. The newspaper on the bottom half may be the discarded student newspaper. In another, a parked lorry truck signals that something is about to happen. A sense of looming danger is present from the armed military.

In all these works the beauty of the appearance is not what the reality is, the political chaos and confusion of China today. Like the film *Apocalypse Now* by Francis Coppola 1979, which depicts the horrors and absurdities of the Vietnam War, Umaerus paintings remind that evil can seduce with its beauty. Coppola's film tells on a variety of levels of the absurdity of America's involvement in the Vietnam War. Yet in viewing the film this reviewer found the combination of imagery, music and rhythm of the film absolutely seductive in visual richness. This is not a new story however, as art history is full of examples of beautifully paintings which depict man's inhumanity to man. Look at the masterpieces of Goya, Picasso, Titian, Kollwitz, Delacroix.

The development of an idea and experience into a technical exhibition of this quality is a tour de force today not only in terms of its social and political significance — something Americans are too naive about — but also in view of art history and aesthetic concerns.

Too bad it was not open to the public at large which a commercial gallery suggests.

Annie Markovich



Stefan Umaerus: *La musique*



Stefan Umærus. b. 1951. *La Magnificence*, 1991, oil, acrylic, gouache, copperleaf on canvas, 107 x 20 inches

2388 年
CONNECTING
VOCABULARIES

THE PAINTINGS AND POETRY OF
STEFAN UMÆRUS

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VALPARAISO
UNIVERSITY

**2388: Connecting_vocabularies,
Brauer Museum of Art.**
Valparaiso, Indiana, USA, 1995.



- ◆The Seven Arts and Seven Virtues - left.
- ◆2388: The Book, Installation view - left.
- ◆The Poetry Panels - below.



- ◆The Seven Arts and Seven Virtues - above



Museo de Arte Moderno

Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic,
2000



- ◆ The Poetry Paneles - left.
- ◆ The Seven Arts & Seven Virtues - below.

*Photos from Stefan Umærus' one man exhibition
"Anatomía del Mundo, Documentos para la Vida
Pública, 2000"*



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About Stefan Umærus & Chely Depablos

Stefan Umærus

Stefan Umærus has initiated, created and exhibited cross-cultural art projects since 1985, with one-man gallery and museum exhibitions in painting, poetry, diary, video, and digital formats in France, United States of America, Sweden, Venezuela, Cuba and the Dominican Republic.

Born in Uppsala, Sweden, in 1951, and educated at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm, KKH, Stefan Umærus is represented with works in the collections of the Moderna Muséet, and of the National Museum, Stockholm, and in a significant number of other private and museum collections.

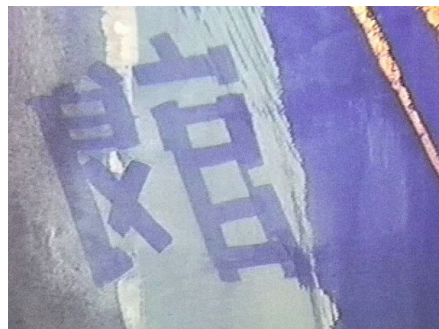
Stefan Umærus is based in New York City, since 1990.

Chely Depablos

Chely Depablos has organized numerous art exhibits and cultural events. In addition to the exhibition of "2388: *Connecting Vocabularies*" at the New York Academy of Sciences, Chely Depablos has organized concerts at the Carnegie Hall, and at the United Nations, New York. Chely Depablos opened a gallery: CDP (Chely Depablos Productions) at Broome St, Soho, New York, in 1990. Chely Depablos is included in "Who is Who 2007-2008" .

More about Stefan Umærus' and Chely Depablos' art projects on the Internet at:

- ◆ <http://connectingvocabularies.com>
- ◆ <http://stefanumaerus.com>
- ◆ <http://chelydepablos.com>
- ◆ A short video about the "2388: *Connecting Vocabularies*" is on the web at:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RsKCRDfW83M>



Details from "2388: *Connecting Vocabularies*", *The Seven Arts and Seven Virtues*.