

CELIA PRADO & JOHAN POUSETTE CURATORIAL STATEMENT

WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD

The 2009 Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art aims to present a generous, poetic and sensual portrayal of human diversity and the human capacity for wonders as well as failures through the gaze and works of contemporary artists.

What a Wonderful World we recognise as the title of a song written by Bob Thiele and George David Weiss in 1967 specifically for Louis Armstrong. Intended as an antidote for the increasingly politically and racially charged climate of the 1960s, *What a Wonderful World* conveyed an optimistic tone with regard to the future, in line with the aspirations of the young generation for a fairer society and a better world. The title also referred to Louis Armstrong's love of the simple things in life and his belief in the human capacity of acting for the common good.

Significantly, *What a Wonderful World* has been used in a number of films with multifaceted messages, as for example *Good Morning, Vietnam*, 1987 (humour / civil disobedience), *Twelve Monkeys*, 1995 (time-travel, madness, memory and prophecy) and *Madagascar*, 1995 (an animated movie that metaphorically parodies animal rights and environmental issues). However, "wonderful" may also be read as "wonder-ful", that is, "full of wonder" as in awe-inspiring, astounding or perhaps even frightening.

Someone has poignantly claimed that, "*Our past is tragic, our present is catastrophic, but fortunately we have no future,*" meaning that the future is our hope precisely because we do not have it, we do not possess it. We have to create it, intentionally or unintentionally, inevitably guided by utopian or dystopian visions. The fact that we do not possess the future opens for the possibility to make the world anew. So *Quo vadis?* Where are you going? What world and what future will we create?

Action and interpretation are intimately interconnected and interwoven in ethical deliberations as well as political deeds. In our complex age where there is little faith in absolute truths, cultural and moral legitimacy play a crucial role. Understanding does not always refer to firmly established affiliations or communities, but, in an ever-increasing degree, to fluid, nomadic and temporary identifications without fixed roots grounded in mycelium-like networks. In such a reality, artistic depictions and approaches become important contemporary references and pointers to the future.

The selection of artists will be made in relation to our practices as curators and to the international art scene context. Quality will be the guiding principle of the selection process. Well-established international and Swedish artists will rub shoulders with younger, untested names. The artists will be invited to participate with existing or new works.

The artists that we wish to bring to the fore in the 2009 biennial are all committed to social and political issues, which, importantly, they depict in works of striking visual power, poetic or sensual presence. We aim to develop a biennial comprising multi-faceted works that communicate on several levels, offering both a direct address and deeper, underlying layers of meaning to confront and be absorbed in. Among the artists that have already accepted our invitation, we are very happy to announce internationally acclaimed names such as **Amar Kanwar**, **Susan Hiller**, **Candice Breitz** and **William Kentridge**.

Susan Hiller (London) takes conceptual command of the interspace between the visible and our translation of it, creating a poetic space. Since the 1970s she has orchestrated her work with occult mythologies about parallel worlds; a collection of such attestations are part of works such as "*Witness*".

Candice Breitz (Berlin) explores the impact of commercial popular culture in a global context. With the point of departure in her childhood in South Africa, she works with photography and video installations, focusing on the relationship between the individual and the collective and the importance of spoken language in relation to how we are perceived as individuals or as groups.

Amar Kanwar (New Delhi) works with films that take their starting-point in simple, tangible images, emanating in poetic meditations on the origin of violence and the passing of time. His works are a peculiar compound of documentary, poetically-laden travelogues and animated essays. Kanwar has received numerous international awards, including the San Francisco Film Festival and

Documenta XII.

William Kentridge (Johannesburg) is a well-established, internationally renowned artist who works with a kind of animated charcoal-drawings focusing on issues of oppression, history, cultural identity and collective/individual responsibility.

In addition to the international representation, there will also be collaborations with Swedish artists, some of whom have a connection to Göteborg.

As a continuation of the previous biennial's discussion on "the condition of the political", this biennial will present reflections on "the conception of the political" by elucidating various aspects of individual versus collective choices, democratic participation, and the power of art to depict, interpret and convey observations and movements in society. With *What a Wonderful World* we hope to present an exhibition for contemplation and discussion that reflects its time by illuminating utopias and dystopias as well as history in an ethical and political perspective.