

I started the three evening presentations, all open to the public, with a slide lecture that expanded on the preparatory readings by considering the paintings and careers of Guston and Motherwell as well as the characteristics of the larger New York School (Abstract Expressionism) within which they worked (and which is, in a way, part of the history of the upstate New York area where we were meeting).

I explained how the New York School artists experimented with the spontaneous, the indeterminate, the dynamic, the open, and the unfinished in their artwork. The pioneering Abstract Expressionists extended the “automatic” drawing techniques of non-representational Surrealism as a way to try to bypass the artist’s conscious mind and reveal more archetypal or “mythic” content, symbols from the inner mind.

The new approach to artistic creation launched by these artists in the mid-1940s was characterized by critic Harold Rosenberg in 1952: “At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act – rather than as a space in which to reproduce, redesign, analyze, or “express” an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event.”

The most important aspect of the new American painting was the activity of self-exploration – the opportunity given by painting to realize a more genuine self-knowledge as a result of the difficult, open-ended challenges of finding each correct painterly gesture to add to previous gestures on the canvas. These artists refused to preconceive particular meanings or styles, believing that a significant resolution would grow out of their total involvement in the act of painting. This occurred through a series of existential choices or “moral” decisions involving much contemplation, anxiety, doubt, and passion, out of which a hard-won order and wholeness would be constructed.

Viewing the painting as a spontaneous improvisation (similar to the jazz music most of these artists listened to), the gesture painters favored the broad brushstroke that seemed direct and honest, rather than artificial and thought out. They employed a variety of devices as signs of the artist’s active presence: the stroke, the brush, the calligraphic mark, the splatter, the drip, and even the pour – as well as a general emphasis on the qualities of the paint itself as substance and the surface of the canvas as texture.

I then characterized the two basic directions of the New York School: 1) Gesture or Action Painting (using the example of the energetic, environmental paintings of Jackson Pollock) and 2) Color-Field Painting (using the examples of Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman). It is interesting that both Motherwell and Guston were often seen as “hybrid” painters with qualities of both directions. We then considered representative examples of the paintings of each man.

First, Motherwell’s carefully balanced color fields energized by smaller gestural strokes (also collages) that sought to condense “the infinite background of feeling” into meaningful images, especially in his more than 150 *Elegy to the Spanish Republic* paintings created over 30 years; then Guston’s unique path from early representational “social conscience” paintings to his mature



Philip Guston Painter in Bed 1973 oil on canvas 60 x 104”

“Abstract Impressionist” clustered works that seemingly combined the gesture and color-field streams (see *Dial* on p. 16), then finally to the surprising crude and cartoon-like autobiographical figurative work of the 1970s that helped inspire the New Image Painting that was the immediate predecessor of the postmodern New-Expressionist paintings of the 1980s and after. I concluded with a brief consideration of why the Abstract Expressionist moral, process-centered approach can still be attractive to anthroposophical artists and why it was more or less rejected by the succeeding generation of American artists that emerged in the 1960s.

## 2. The 2013 “Philmont Open” Thrennis Event, of The I MAN-UAL Tour – Immanuel, Sampsa Pirtola, and Laura Summer

This audience-participation performance piece on Thursday night first began to develop months earlier out of a series of back-and-forth email and Skype communications between Laura Summer in New York and Sampsa Pirtola in Europe. Beginning in November 2012, this 9-month exchange started with the question of “What is collaboration?” What is it that is actually moving between us when we influence each other and can we experience this “activity” or “substance” itself? Laura would execute paintings and collages related to their conversations (9 in all, mostly dealing with themes of turning inside-out and outside-in and what happens in the area of exchange between these two states) and send photographs of them to Sampsa, who began to feel involved in their creation. For example, Laura would discuss painting as a learning to step out of herself into the laws of creation, and Sampsa replied, among other things, with quotations from Dag Hammarskjöld’s book *Markings* as well as Bob Dylan and others. In the process they altered each other’s questions.



Laura and Sampsa Hold Up the “Outernet”

As Sampsa, who has described his creative process as combining themes from high culture with popular culture, stated, “The

back-and-forth between us gave me a feeling of the game of tennis.” By July 7, when things began to come into focus, Sampsa suggested, “It’s tennis, elevated tennis, passing the ball



Laura Summer “Outernet,” detail, paint, ink, collage on canvas

changes the substance.” Laura’s hanging coll ge-paintings on long strips of canvas relating to different previous conferences could be assembled in a row into a kind of “tennis-net,” which Sampsa called an “outernet” (punning on “internet,” also mentioning “inner net” and “alter net” – perhaps the first of several puns or multiply-meaning-names he used relating to the digital world, the means of their communications). This began to lead to other tennis- and art-related reflections and comparisons, as follows: Their exchange is like “artists managing each other.” “Culture has gone towards: business, sport, etc., being better, beating the other to be the better/best. But it is the same activity, but it has the potential to turn [in]to something else, besides the competition.” “There are times the creative activity in one person really seems to exchange places or locations with the other person.” Sampsa wanted to “have the essence of the process shared in the Convergence.” The process of collaboration began to become observable as a movement back and forth. “Perhaps the most important thing is, in the midst of the activity, to learn to disappear.”

Once Sampsa arrived in Philmont a week before the Convergence, the content of the performance piece began to take more detailed form. Laura described their collaboration as “a strong experience of entering into another’s creative activity.” The idea of tennis metamorphosed into “inner tennis” or “deep tennis” and the name then became either “frennis” (freedom + tennis) or



Sampsa speaking to the crowd

“thrennis” (threefold + tennis), depending on when you asked Sampsa about it. However, in the end, the term thrennis seemed to stick the best. Yet the ideas and concepts behind “thrennis” remained somewhat fluid and improvised – by both Sampsa and participants. As myself a weekly tennis player, I could appreciate the interface between this game and the collaborative artistic experience as well as the competitive motivations in the mainstream professional artworld. Sampsa commented that the word “tennis” is from the word *tenez*, meaning to take hold and receive. It also seems

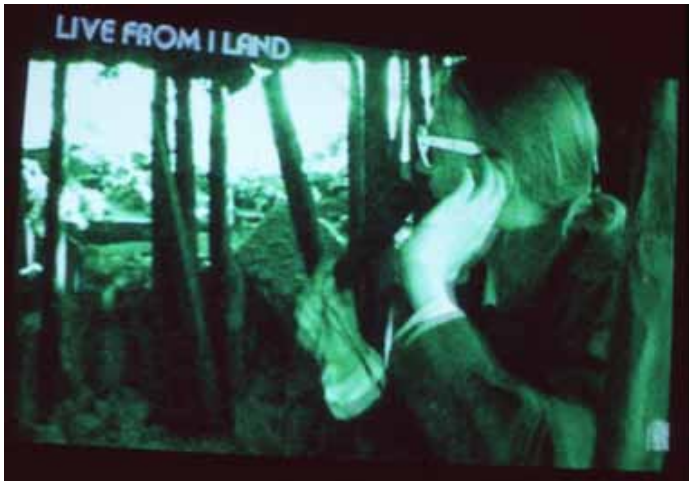
to have been an activity of the medieval knights.

To begin the Thursday evening performance piece, Sampsa stepped forward before the floor-to-ceiling hanging screen (made of white sheets) as both impresario and participant. He described himself as an Art Manager, a subject in which he recently completed a formal training in Finland. Although the Art Manager does not produce objects, Sampsa thinks “management” in the fields of art is the real future of art. He said he wanted to request the presence of a special individual (Immanuel,” Sampsa’s performance alter ego) who “was probably coming,” but for now to leave this open and free for him to feel if it was the right time to come. Most of Sampsa’s opening presentation, which included showing a number of projected video clips, filled in the elaborate backstory of his relationship with Immanuel and presented the I MANUAL Tour. He began: “In 2005 I was working in the National Gallery in Finland as a museum assistant. I was getting bored with this computer work and wanted to work directly with living artists. I’d like to be the one who helps the artist to develop. But no artists in Helsinki sparked my interest.”



Sampsa continued: “I missed all the performances of this one person (Immanuel). Usually when I came to see a show, he happened always to perform right when I was not around the stage. Mikael Hakkarainen, a studio producer, told me I have to send him an i-mail (which is not internet or mobile phones). For this, you write a note, roll it up, and send it by pigeon, and it finds this artist. I did it and told him, ‘I want to work with you.’ Fortunately, he was looking for a manager. He wanted to do a kind of test drive, a concert performance in the main ice hockey stadium in Helsinki. I told him that was out of my range, but he responded, ‘I want to play outside of it, on the periphery.’ So I organized a performance for him in the parking lot of the ice hockey stadium. There is a documentary film of it that I will show you an excerpt from.” (see film still above)





Sampsä Pirtola video stills (whole page)

interest.’ We did a ‘Back from the Dead’ tour in 2010 across Europe. While in the Phillipines, he met Nicanor Perlas, his idol. Immanuel is the President of his own country, I-land, and as everything there is related to threefolding (Perlas’s specialty),

“After this, I started getting documents from him, while he was performing all over the world. We then set up a comeback tour, since as I told him, ‘No one knows you, and a ‘comeback’ will raise audience



he thought Nicanor would want to meet a practical implementer of the theory. There also is I-TV, Immanuel’s own television channel (see video stills of programs and tour performances over 2 pages).

“For the next tour, The Birth of the Transmodern” in 2011, I wanted to create a DVD of all the film material about Immanuel. So I gathered all of the materials and asked him how many copies he wanted. ‘Only one,’ he replied. He wanted me to travel around the world with him and show it in each place. He didn’t want any of his films on the internet as he is allergic to virtual reality and gets symptoms from it, so he is difficult to promote. This doesn’t seem bother him since he is so famous in his own country, I-land.

“Peculiarly, he was never allowed to clean before age 21. . . . He had a secret dust cleaner. His mother grew angry when she found out about it. This caused trauma. . . . Immanuel lived in Hollywood as a kid. His

mom was the world’s most known cleaner, a “celebrity cleaner” for the houses of various famous people. So cleaning has a deeper meaning for



him, concerned with inner growth.” Sampsä showed another video clip of Immanuel cleaning a subway platform.

“Then during the Car Nation Tour in 2012 the mood changed. This last tour was way too much, too demanding, and I fell down, taking a long time to recover. I started to wonder, ‘Does he still need me?’ . . . Then he told me he wanted to do this ‘I MANUAL Tour’ in 2013, but I didn’t know what it was. He sent me the next clip concerning it. Among other things, he wanted me to come to Hawthorne Valley for thrennis, which is the most popular sport in I-land. The ‘tour’ is just a smokescreen; really it’s all about thrennis, which is his passion. Sampsä showed another video clip.

Narration by different persons of ideas about creativity and its impact on societal, cultural, and economic levels continued during the extended clip showing various Immanuel performances using different props (chairs, large balls of yarn, a guitar) on stage before enthusiastic crowds, although I was only able to record



parts of what was said: “Every human being is creative, not just middle-aged white men, as in the 1950s. Creativity comes in all forms – in music, in speaking, in bikes, or in chairs.” (Richard Florida) “We must stop the helplessness covering the planet ... We must insert ourselves in this distorted world.” (Ser Tankian) “Advertising is used to distract us.” (Noam Chomsky) “What if America was a dictatorship, helping the 1% to get richer, ignoring the needs of the poor ... rigging elections? Is this about why you go to war ... using the media to own people, ... to support policies other than their real interests?” (Sacha Baron Cohen) Real, relevant change must come from the bottom. Then they are empowered and can do a lot.” (Tom Morello) “Art doesn’t take the world for granted or see it as truth. ... It sees reality as a construction. Reality can change, can be renegotiated. ... We must find the true source or center of our being and our deep connection with the world.” (Olafur Eliasson)



Suddenly in the middle of the this, Immanuel appeared in person holding a raggedly assembled “thrennis racquet” to take part in the “Philmont Open.” He spoke Immanuel-ish (his own language) with an exaggerated Italian-like accent with many words ending in “chi.” Introducing himself as the 12-time winner of the I-land thrennis championships, he showed a video clip of an outdoor thrennis match between himself and



Laura, provided with an ongoing “commentary” recorded from two professional tennis sports broadcasters and cleverly synchronized with the action we were seeing on the screen (see video stills).

Laura in her thrennis outfit then appeared in the room in person also holding another, different thrennis



racquet. Both Immanuel and Laura wore on their outfits various “team” patches showing the word “LOGOS” in different configurations. Unlike sport tennis, here *both* contestants were playing for team “Logos.” They said they would demonstrate for us



one game of thrennis. This will take place behind the large, backlit sheets separating the audience from the thrennis court (and upon which the video clips had been projected). The mostly hidden “court” surface was a blue vinyl tarp that also reached up vertically to form one sidewall with Laura’s painted canvas “outernet” (inner net, alter net) in the middle (see photographs).



*Samps Pirtola & Laura Summer Thrennis Racquets*

Immanuel explained that his ornamented, multi-layered, partly metal assemblage-racquet tied with red and blue strings wasn’t a dream catcher (although it looked somewhat like the Native American “dream- or spirit-catchers”) but rather a “nightmare catcher.” The handle of Laura’s somewhat lighter-weight racquet was made up of 3 dowels lashed or taped together with a rounded, pentagonal-tending head filled with red and blue



*Thrennis Match between Immanuel and Laura Summer (behind screen)* 24

strings or yarn running in all directions (see photographs). Immanuel added that *this* was the “dreamcatcher” racquet. The threefold principles of the thrennis game (and racquet) are the “framework,” “bodhi building,” and “get a grip.” On their feet the players wore “souls.” To begin the match (which the audience only saw as moving shadows on the



sheets), Immanuel served the (invisible) i-ball (or eyeball, highball; a punning reference to both ego and vision). After a short match involving elaborately mimed movements behind the screen, I Manual and Laura emerged from behind the screen panting and puffing.



*Martin Summer Holding Up Immanuel’s Thrennis Racquet*



They then announced that anyone who wished could participate in playing thrennis. The play would take place with a three-stage rotation of players, one stage on each side of the court and then ending by playing the role of referee. Laura became the first referee, passing her racquet to the first audience member who volunteered to play. People from the audience then



took turns enthusiastically playing. We heard both the cries of performers – some less shy than others – and the frequent laughter or exclamations of the audience as they watched the players’ antics as moving shadows on the screen. The I-ball seemed to defy the laws of materialistic physics. It could be hit very hard on one side of the net and became very slow on the other side. Some players dove at the “i-ball” behind the screen. When his



turn came to play, Nathaniel extended the unspoken rules by reaching through the outernet and even crossed over to the other side of it, that of his “opponent.”

When a player rotated out of the thrennis play behind the curtain, he or she had to serve as the referee until the next player rotated out. The referee climbed a tall step ladder (bolstered by a railroad tie below) in order to just see over the top of the screen and then recorded the match on pieces of paper with crayons, as a kind of drawing or work of art (see photograph of examples). In his emails before the Convergence Sampsa described the ego figure of the referee (the judge) as “the most interesting character” who takes no side and is “above sympathy and antipathy.” He represents the artist’s attempt to go beyond the rules or perhaps renew the rules.



*Laura Serves as the First Referee*



*David Takes a Turn as Referee While Laura Holds Ladder*



*Some Examples of Thrennis Referee Drawings/“Scorecards”*

Sampsa quoted Bob Dylan: “To live outside the law you must be honest.” The referee represented “the rules in us” and must remain neutral, must rise above sympathy and antipathy.



*What Thrennis Looked Like Behind the Screen on the Thrennis Court*

After about 20 minutes or so of thrennis matches, Immanuel announced that we had to switch to “fast thrennis,” where “lightning round” matches were much shorter (less than a minute). Finally, Immanuel cut the wires holding up the sheet/screen to reveal to the audience the thrennis court with its painted and collaged “outernet” and how the action was actually taking place, with the players then seeming more like dancers. I began to think of the net as a “logos-net,” intended to capture not thrennis i-balls but experiences, memories, meanings, and reflections. Somehow, before the last match was finished, Immanuel had disappeared, like the i-ball. The audience departed after an exciting and fun evening.



*Immanuel and Laura Take Down the Screen in Front of the Thrennis Court*