

Nimis, Arx, Omfalos and the micronation Ladonia

Nimis

In 1980, the artist Lars Vilks started working on his *Nimis* (Latin: "too much") in the Kullaberg nature reserve in south of Sweden. *Nimis* is a construction of driftwood and rests from the cutting areas. Since the area is hard to get to, *Nimis* was not discovered until 1982, when the County Council decided that the artwork should be removed. This was the start of a remarkable chain of court proceedings and unpredictable developments that are still going on and seem to be without end.

During these fighting years *Nimis* expanded to a huge piece. More than 100 meters of lengths, towers about 15 meters and 25 tons of wood, *Nimis* became an impressive sculpture, attracting thousands of visitors who climbed down the slope to explore the construction. *Nimis* was bought by the German conceptual artist Joseph Beuys in 1984, the price was set to USD 1500:-. In 1986, the estate of Beuys sold *Nimis* to Christo & Jeanne-Claude who still owns the sculpture. The purchase meant that a decision by the Swedish government of removing *Nimis* was no longer valid. The trial had to be taken all over again with the new owners.

Arx

In 1991 Vilks started another project next to *Nimis*: *Arx* (Lat. "fortress"). This time he was using concrete and stones, the concrete had to be carried down to the place in a rucksack. He was rather unsure of what he was doing when he met the publisher David Stansvik who claimed that the whole piece was a book in stone. This quite unconventional book made of 150 tons of concrete and stones was published at the publishing house Nya Doxa in August 1993. The book has 352 pages and some texts and signs.

Also this piece was taken to court by the authorities and in 1995 the Supreme High Court sentenced the artist to pay fines. The quite high sum was financed by the artist as he sold the pages to the public and thus gave *Arx* about 300 owners.

Feudal wars

Omphalos was created in 1999, a stone and concrete sculpture weighing a ton and measuring 1.61 metres in height. The name refers to a small sculpture in the Greek Delphi temple, which marked the centre of the earth in ancient times. The Gyllenstiernska Krapperup Foundation reported Vilks to the police for building Omphalos. In August 1999, the district court ruled that the sculpture must be removed. The court ruling was nevertheless a victory for Vilks. The Foundation, formed to promote

art and culture, had demanded that Nimis and Arx also be removed, but was overruled. The Foundation turned to the court of appeal, which concurred with the district court's ruling, and then went on to the Supreme Court, which turned down their appeal.

The police investigation was unable to determine who was the actual perpetrator behind *Omphalos*. Nevertheless, Svensäter, Senior Judge of the District Court, identified Vilks as the artist. In this way, Svensäter challenges the art world's prerogative to declare something to be art, and makes Art history.

A craneboat arrives

The Krapperup Foundation contacted the enforcement service to have *Omphalos* removed. The authorities were keen to effect at least one of the decisions they had made since 1982. The Swedish artist Ernst Billgren, who had bought *Omphalos* from Vilks, had told the enforcement service that "*Omphalos* must not be damaged." Despite this request that the work be handled with care, the DYKMA company's craneboat was sent to the site at dawn on 9 December. The staff caused serious damage to *Omphalos* with their careless handling. This led to the enforcement service being pronounced performance artist of the year 2002. The bill for the removal, SEK 92,500, was sent to Vilks.

After *Omphalos* was released from custody of the authorities it was almost immediately transported to Moderna Museet in Stockholm. The incorporation of *Omphalos* in the Moderna Museet collection could be seen as the result of a unique collaboration between two government bodies, the enforcement service and Moderna Museet. One could say that the official actions of one body expelled what the other integrated.

Vilks has sued the government for the damages *Omphalos* sustained when it was removed from its site. He has, after all, been proclaimed its artist, and must; therefore, defend it as its creator.

8 centimetres

Vilks also applied to the County Council for permission to place a memorial where *Omphalos* had once stood. The County Council granted permission to raise a monument that did not exceed 8 centimetres in height. The monument was inaugurated on 27 February 2002. Thus, the permitted height of public sculptures in Sweden for which no special permission is required had been officially confirmed.

The process goes on...

Today Nimis and Arx has over 30 000 visitors every year and it is one of the most famous land-art projects in Europe. And each year different

episodes contributes to the making of the history of *Nimis*; i.e. concerts, pyromaniacs, marriage ceremonies, official state visits, etc. Vilks still spends most of the summer days working on improving the structures of *Nimis*. Lars Vilks has also over the years been invited to create large constructions in wood in other places around Scandinavia.

The municipal of Höganäs, where *Nimis* is situated, uses *Nimis* as an attraction in the marketing, despite its still illegal. Not long ago, it was discussed in the municipal council in Höganäs if *Nimis* should be in the official and public funded tourists guides. It went to a vote in the council and with a remarkable majority the council decided they still want to use *Nimis* in the marketing.

Ladonia

The Nation of Ladonia was proclaimed on 2 June 1996, on the site where *Nimis* and *Arx* are standing, as a consequence of the blatant inability of Swedish authorities to implement their decisions and their lack of control over their territory. Since Ladonia is constantly manifesting its existence and getting broad publicity, it has grown increasingly real to many people.

Ladonia, in turn, has given rise to numerous events and incidents. Ladonia embodies many of the factors that characterise and maintain a nation, not least the continuous regeneration of the relationship between the legal system and the nation as a historical construct.

Lars Vilks is the Ladonian Secretary of State. The continuity and activities of Ladonia, with its 13,000 inhabitants from all over the world, are maintained via the Internet. The Internet makes it possible for the cabinet to have daily discussion. Many people also contribute with material and events to Ladonia, i.e. images, arrange concerts and happenings, and occasionally even create Ladonian colonies. Thanks to the Internet, Ladonia gained even more international media attention in 2002, when thousands of Pakistanis applied for Ladonian citizenship in the quest for a better life.

In the 5th July 2003, Ladonia declared war towards Sweden, a war that still goes on. The victory will be manifested then every Swedish flag is transformed into a Ladonian flag. The Ladonian flag, green cross on a green bottom, is the result of a boiled Swedish flag (yellow cross on blue bottom).

More news about Ladonia could be read in the "Herald News" at www.ladonia.com.

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