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Art Festival on High Level in Uppsala

The Performance Art Festival in Uppsala was an artistic triumph, Cristina Karlstam writes.

The performance with a huge stone hanging a couple of centimetres over artist Boris Nieslony's head could not take place. The cautious Swedish authorities would not give permission to perform the famous piece. Instead the Saturday strollers on the Celsius promenade could watch Nieslony's Sisyfo's work performed by using his body to move nine big stones, each of them weighing 15 kilogrammes, along the pedestrian street.

The artist balanced these - metaphors for the burden and pain of life - using his head, neck, chest, arms and back, rolling on the pavement, jumping over the other stones or crawling with the weight of the stone on his neck, until he ran out of strength and the impressive performance ended with the nine stones placed like a barrier across the street.

The International Performance Festival that ended on Sunday turned out to be an art festival with a series of highlights. The friendly performance on Saturday morning in one of the shop windows facing a pedestrian street offered quiet food preparation ("Mature Woman" by Vlasta Delimar, Croatia), while a dramatic bodily installation about pain and loss of life was held at Västgötaspången ("Gravity Eight" by Hiroko Tsuchimoto, Japan). Video shows at Uppsala's newest art gallery Konsthuset, Artist Talks there and at the Art Museum were also on the festival programme.

The Art Museum was also the venue for one of the Festival's top events, artist Jason Lim's performance "Duet with Honey", that took place on Saturday evening. In Venice in 2007 Jason Lim was responsible for one of the Biennale's most memorable contributions with his smashed Venetian chandelier at Singapore's Exhibition in one of Venice's splendid palaces.

In Uppsala Lim performed his work with great concentration and in deep silence and solemnity. As it were floating over the floor, sitting on a chair stood on glasses turned upside down, the artist slowly let himself be drenched in dripping honey pouring down like melted gold over his face and body. The work became a living formation of sustainability in time and space, inward listening and serenity; a performance in praise of the slow and quiet. Lim's co-actor in this magical duet was a small snail that slowly moved itself and its house over the artist's hands and body while the golden honey continued to pour down from the ceiling.

Performance Art with its close relationship to other art forms such as dance, theatre and sculpture, had with this festival a great public impact in Uppsala. Many were the visitors who came to see how the artists with their bodies as a medium created moving, living sculptures here and now.

Artistic director was Butoh artist SU-EN in collaboration with Uppsala Art Museum. On Sunday morning she carried out, together with Jason Lim, the latter's performance "Red String" at Lycksalighetens Ö (Island of Bliss) in the city park. It was a quiet, aesthetic investigation of the inevitable passage of time and of the mutual relationship of bodies, performed by two important artists in a sensitive collaboration.

Cristina Karlstam