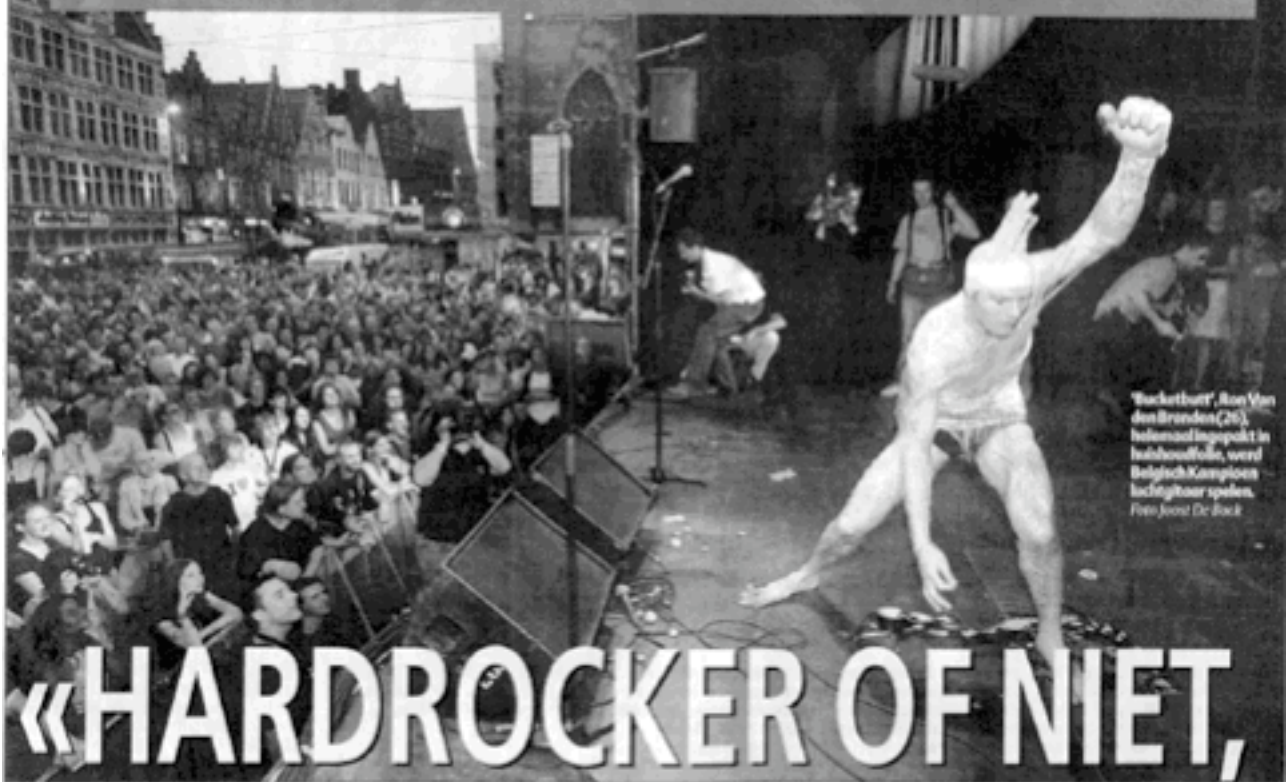


4.000 KIJKLUSTIGEN VOOR BELGISCH KAMPIOENSCHAP LUCHTGITAAR



'Bucketbutt' Ron Van den Branden (26), helemaal ingepakt in behoudende, werd Belgisch Kampioen luchtgitaar spelen. Foto Jozef De Back

# «HARDROCKER OF NIET, DIT IS PURE FUN»

JAN CLAEYS

**GENT** — De tijd dat luchtgitaar spelen enkel thuis hoorde op een puberkamer of na vier uur 's ochtends in een dampend hardrock-café is helemaal voorbij. Met pakweg vierduizend — mannen, vrouwen en kinderen — stonden ze zich donderdagavond te vergapen voor het Belgisch Kampioenschap Luchtgitaar. Bucketbutt, naast het podium wetenschappelijk medewerker Ron Van den Branden (26) uit Mortsel, werd de winnaar.

**F**antastisch dat we eindelijk een groot publiek kunnen bereiken», zei organisator Kris Achten na het kampioenschap. «Vorig jaar ging het feest nog door in een kleine club in Diksmuide voor een paar honderd man. Maar op de Gentse Feesten kunnen de

deelnemers hun kunststommen aan mensen die normaal nooit de verplaatsing zouden maken voor zo iets 'onbekend'».

#### GROOT PUBLIEK

Achten legt er de klemtoon op dat luchtgitaar spelen helemaal niet belachelijk is. «Natuurlijk is het om te lachen. Het is humor,

maar het is allemaal niet zedig. Op de Koornmarkt merken we dat perfect. Iedereen amuseerde zich en maakte plezier. Hardrocker of niet, dit is gewoon pure amusement. Hopelijk kunnen we ons ding volgend jaar opnieuw tijdens de Gentse Feesten voor een groot publiek tonen.»

#### HURSHOUDFOLIE WINT

Uiteindelijk was het Bucketbutt, de Antwerpenaar Ron Van den Branden (26), die de titel mee naar huis kreeg. Hij zorgde, helemaal ingepakt in behoudende en met een emmer aan zijn achterwerk gebonden, voor de grootste show. «Vooral de kleur van de gitaar is belangrijk», grapt hij. «En ik winst dat ik zou winnen, ik ben een geboren kampioen. Schrijf al maar op dat ik binnenkort ook wereldkampioen zal worden.» De exponent van de populariteit van de

luchtgitaar is de groep Air On Maiden, een stel vriend's uit Transalbanie rond het gezin Stan Kreich. De groep gaf woensdag na het kampioenschap een concert. Ondanks het hevige onweer dat tienduizenden bezoekers uit de feestzone wegjoeg, bleven een paar honderd mensen toch staan voor het concert. «Een bewijs dat we serieus genomen worden», vond de zanger. Voor Air On Maiden zijn het drukke tijden. «We hebben gespeeld op Werchter en op het Dour-festival. Volgende maand zijn we al zeker te zien op Pakkeipop.» De mannen van Air On Maiden spelen behalve luchtgitaar, -bas en -drum ook op echte instrumenten. «Zo hebben we onze eerste single 'Bus is Waiting' opgenomen. De luchtgitaarclip die erbij hoort, wordt nu al door Jim TV uitgezonden. Het kan enkel nog beter voor ons, en voor de luchtgitaar in het algemeen.»

## OPEN STUDIOS, PART 1: AIR GUITAR

FOR THE OPEN STUDIOS AT THE HIGHER INSTITUTE FOR FINE ARTS IN ANTWERP (BELGIUM) I DECIDED TO INVITE THE BELGIAN AIR GUITAR CHAMPION 2004 A.K.A. "BUCKET BUTT" TO MAKE A PERFORMANCE WITHIN A GROUP EXHIBITION PRESENTING WORKS OF THE PARTICIPANTS FROM THE FIRST YEAR.

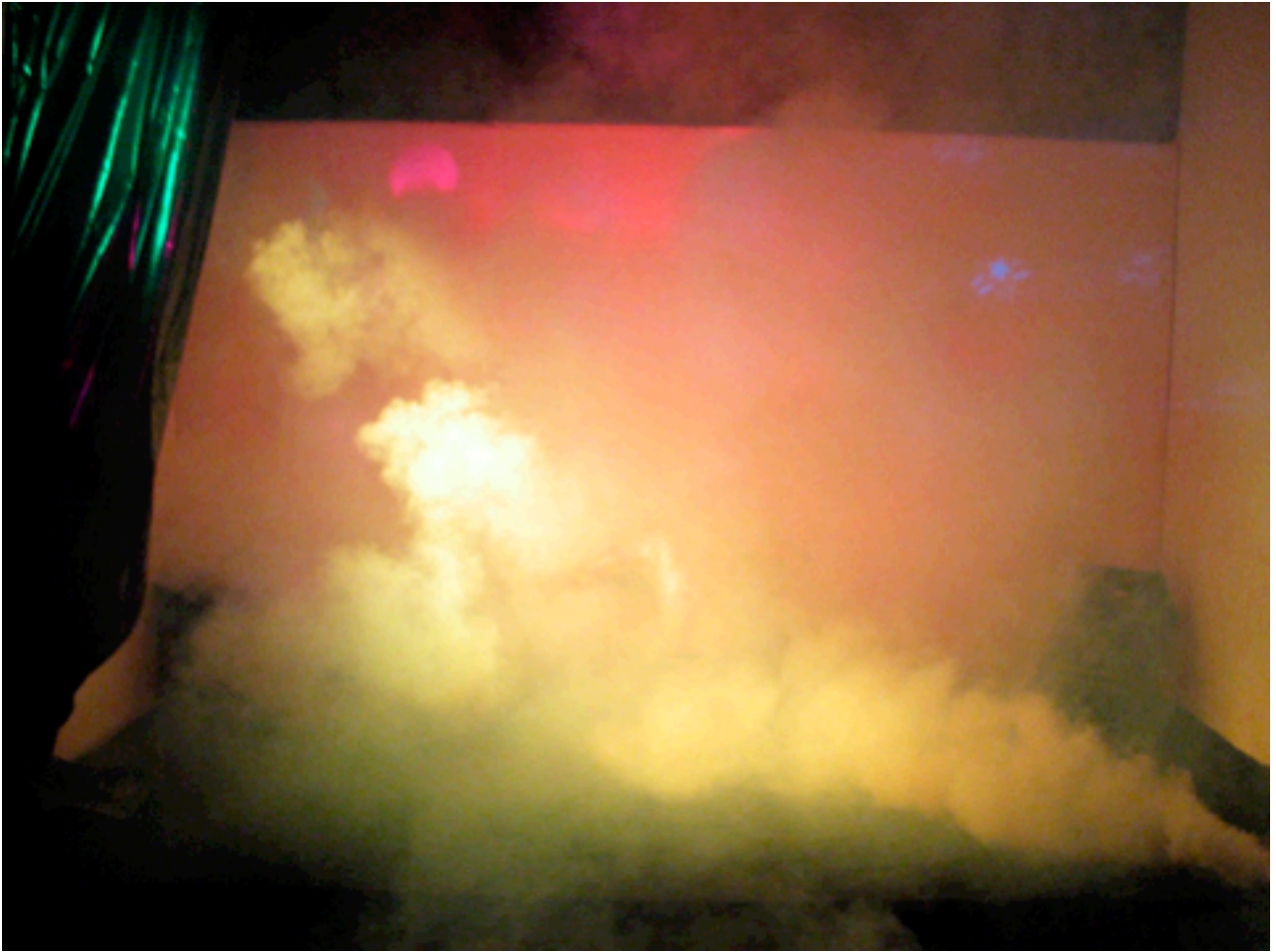
I DISCOVERED THE HIGHLY INTERESTING AIR GUITAR PHENOMENON ONLY RECENTLY, WHEN A FRIEND ASKED ME IF I HAD ASSISTED TO THE AIR GUITAR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS 2004, AS THEY TOOK PLACE IN FINLAND. AFTER SOME RESEARCH I FOUND OUT THAT BELGIUM HAD A VERY ORIGINAL AIR GUITAR REPRESENTANT, WHOM I IMMEDIATELY CONTACTED.



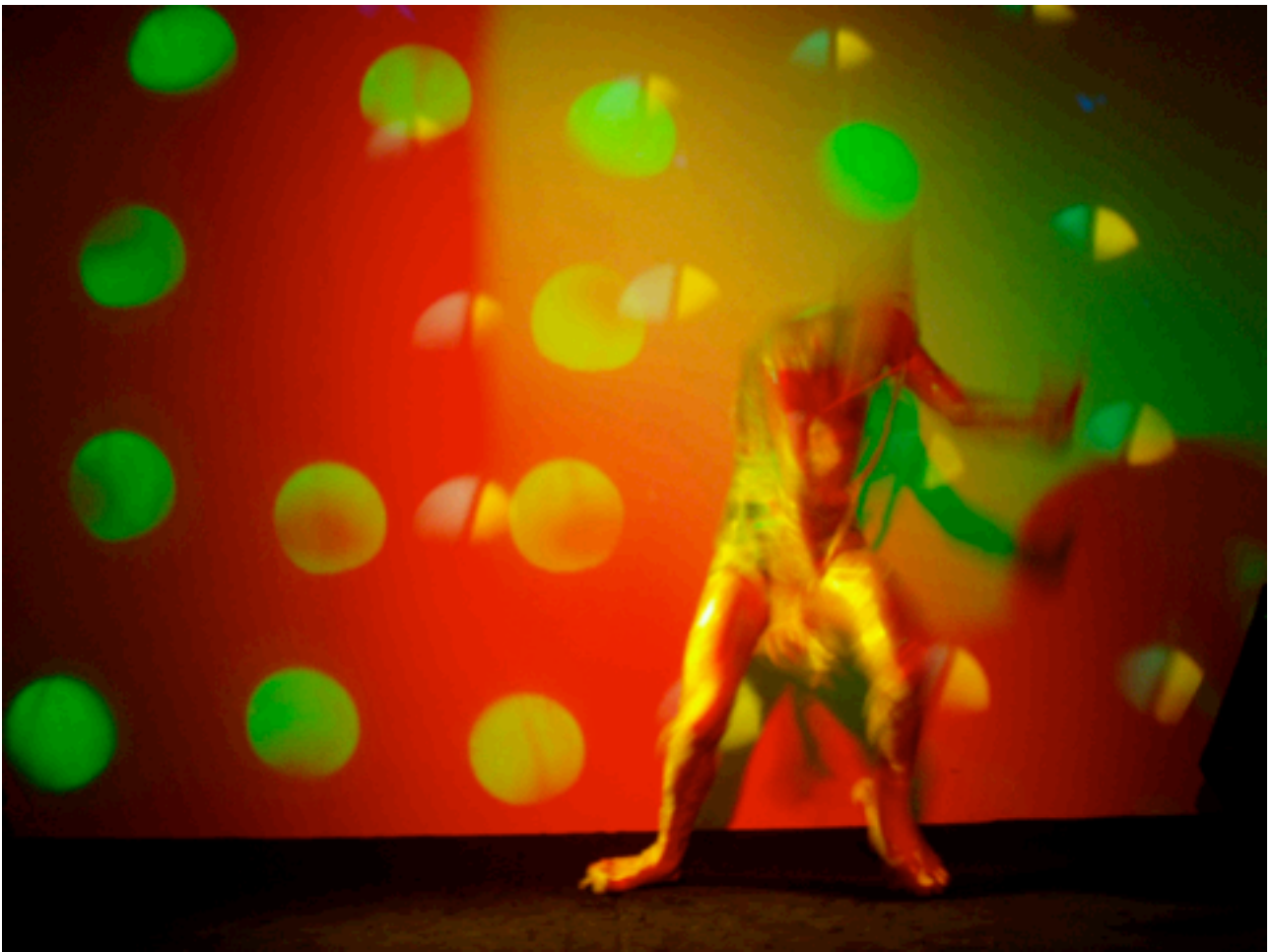
**BUCKET BUTT, ALIAS RON VAN DEN BRANDEN – ALTHOUGH A VERY BUSY UNIVERSITY RESEARCHER IN HIS DAYTIME – IMMEDIATELY ACCEPTED THE CHALLENGE OF PERFORMING WITHIN THIS SPECIFIC CONTEXT AND SHOWED A GREAT SPIRIT OF COLLABORATION REGARDING MY IMPROVISED AND AMATEURISTIC APPROACH TO THE SHOW BUSINESS.**

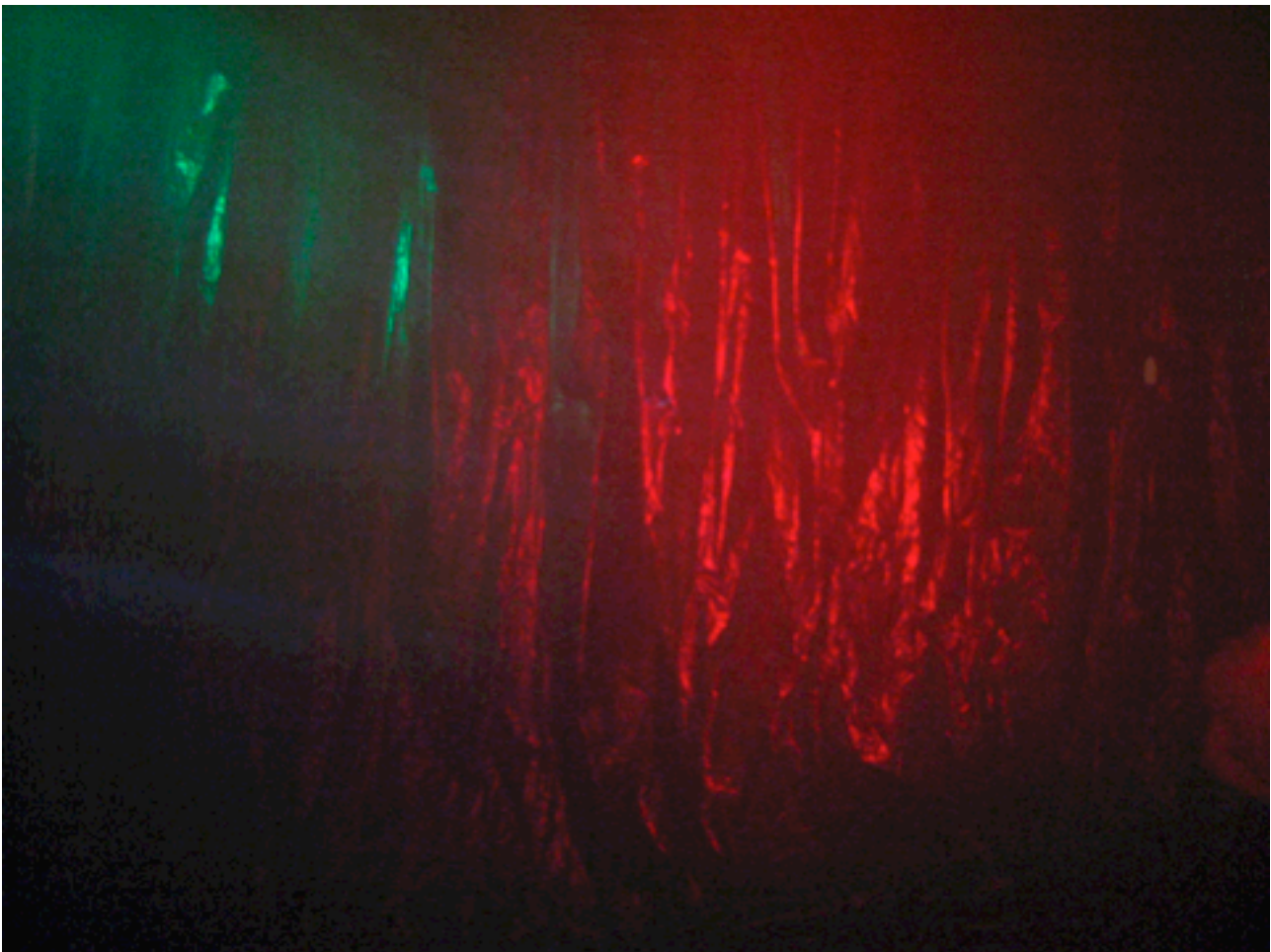


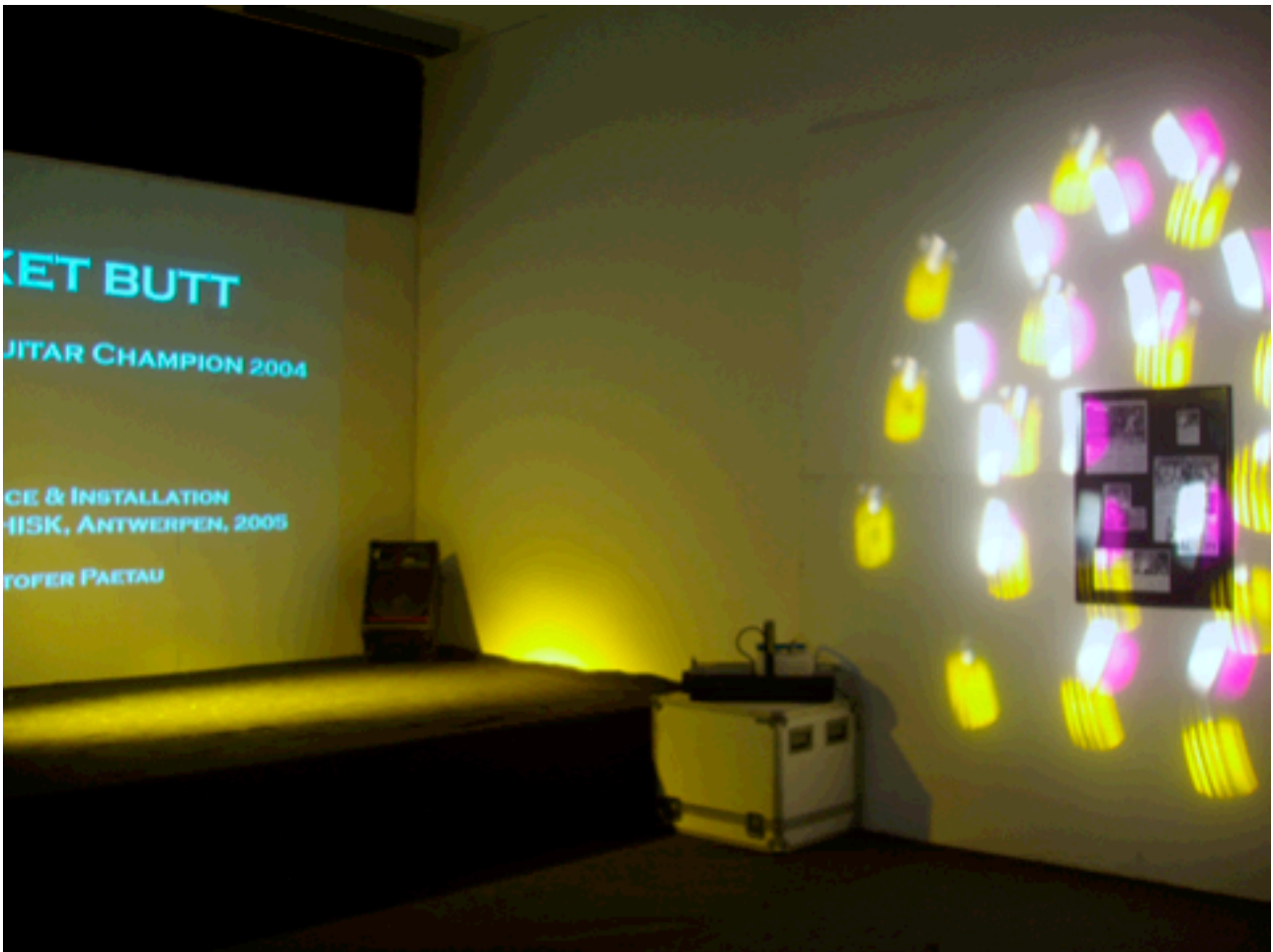
**AT THE OPENING OF THE EXHIBITION KATE MAYNE, A FRIEND OF MINE, INTRODUCED THE SPECTACLE IN DUTCH AND IN ENGLISH TO THE PUBLIC. ABOUT 50 PEOPLE ASSISTED TO THE PERFORMANCE WITHOUT KNOWING WHAT TO EXPECT AT ALL. KATE CHARACTERIZED BUCKET BUTT AS “AN ARTIST BEYOND CATEGORIES, UNIQUE IN FLANDERS AND IN THE WHOLE WORLD...” AND THEN THE 3 MINUTES LONG PERFORMANCE STARTED.**









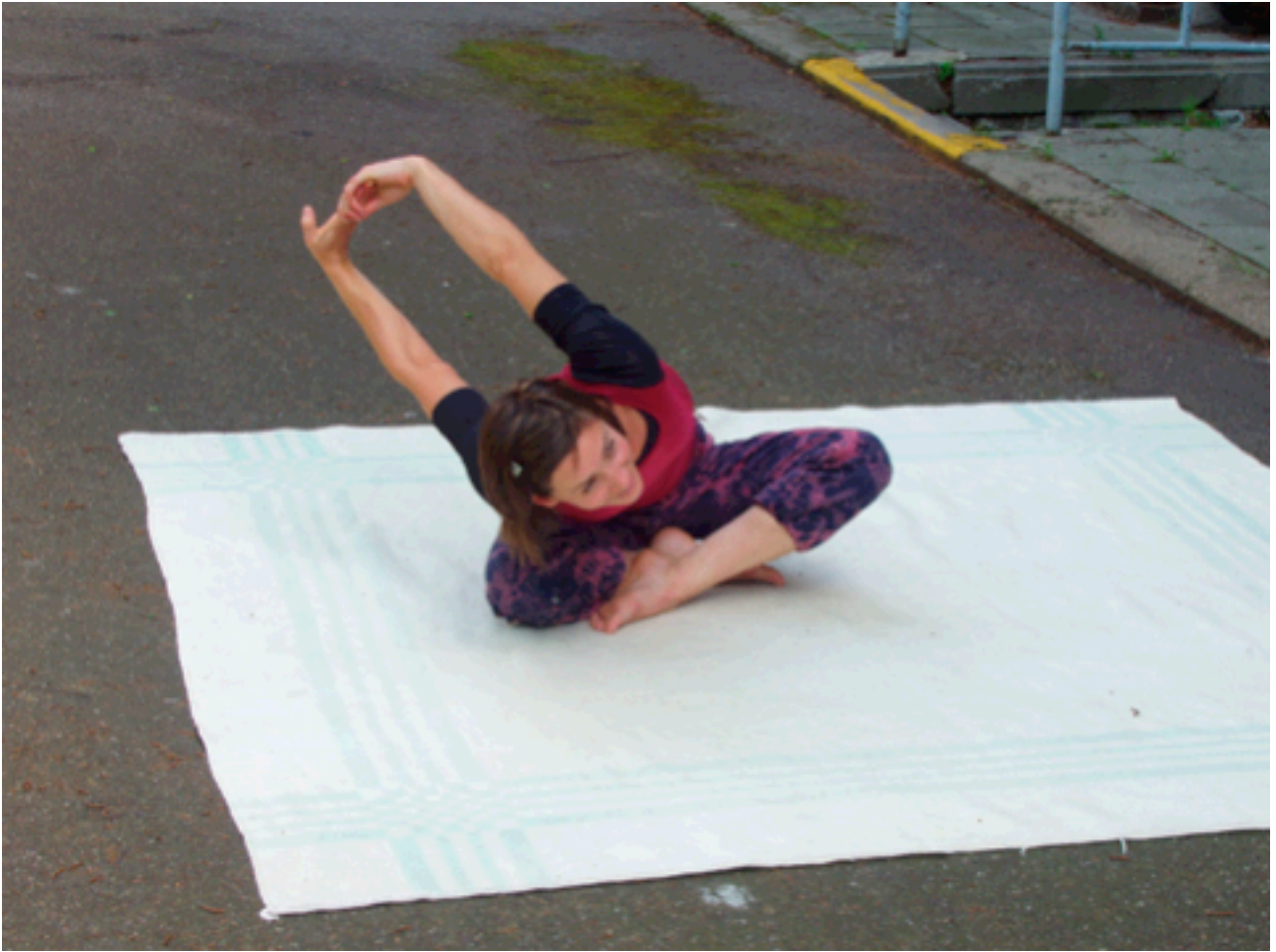


**RIGHT AFTER THE PERFORMANCE I MADE A DVD VIDEO OF IT AND DURING THE REST OF THE EXHIBITION THE VIDEO WAS PROJECTED ON THE STAGE. THE LIGHT EFFECTS WERE PROJECTED ON THE WALL NEXT TO THE STAGE, WHERE PHOTOCOPIES OF PRESS CLIPPINGS RELATED TO BUCKET BUTT WERE HANGING IN A FRAME.**

**MY IMPRESSION WAS THAT THE PUBLIC WAS QUITE PERPLEX. MANY PEOPLE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO THINK OF THE LIVE PERFORMANCE – AND THE VIDEO INSTALLATION AFTERWARDS. I HAD THE FEELING THAT PEOPLE WERE A BIT ANGRY ABOUT THIS WORK. MANY DIDN'T LIKE IT AND THOUGHT THAT I WAS MAKING FUN OUT OF THEM SOMEHOW.**

**FOR ME IT WAS A NEW EXPERIENCE AND I AM STILL TRYING TO UNDERSTAND MY PART AND INVOLVMENT IN THIS WORK. I AM NOT TAKING IT FOR GRANTED THAT SINCE I DECIDE TO SHOW SOMETHING IN AN ART CONTEXT THIS IS ENOUGH TO TRANSFORM IT INTO AN ART WORK AND TO GRANT ME THE AUTHORSHIP OF IT. MY FIRST INTEREST IN THE AIR GUITAR PHENOMENON WAS THAT THESE PEOPLE CREATE AN INVISIBLE OBJECT BY SIMULATING TO PLAY GUITAR. THEN I WAS ALSO INTERESTED IN BUCKET BUTTS SPECIFIC OUTFIT AND APPEARANCE ON SCENE. THIS KIND OF PERFORMANCE – BEING ALMOST NAKED WITH A BUCKET ATTACHED TO HIS BUTT, THE WHOLE BODY WRAPPED WITH CELLOPHANE, WEARING RUBBER GLOVES ON HIS HEAD, FEET AND HANDS – REMINDED ME OF A PARODY ON TYPICAL PERFORMANCE ART OF THE LATE SEVENTIES... I ALSO FOUND IT INTERESTING TO DISPLACE THIS SHOW INTO A CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ARTS, BECAUSE OF THE ENCOUNTER OF DIFFERENT FIELDS OF CREATIVITY, ENERGY AND PASSION. THE PASSION THAT RON VAN DEN BRANDEN INVESTS IN AIR GUITAR WITH “BUCKET BUTT“, SEEMS TO ME RATHER OBSCENE IN THE FIELD OF VISUAL ARTS...**



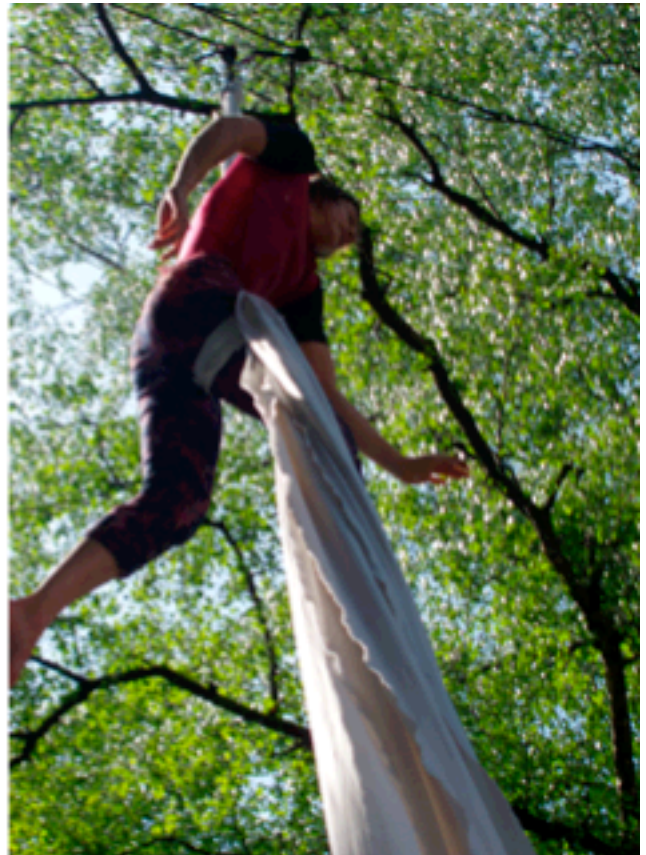


## OPEN STUDIOS, PART 2: AIR CHOREOGRAPHY

**FOR THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE OPEN STUDIOS (A BARBEQUE) I ASKED THE CIRCUS ARTIST INGRID SWAELENS (THAT I HAD MET BY CHANCE SOME DAYS BEFORE) IF SHE COULD IMAGINE TO MAKE AN “AIR CHOREOGRAPHY“ OUTDOOR BY NIGHT – AS A SURPRISE SHOW DURING THE BARBEQUE. SHE ACCEPTED AFTER HAVING INSPECTED THE TECHNICAL CONDITIONS AND A MINIMUM OF SAFETY REQUIREMENTS REGARDING THE ATTACHMENT OF THE CORD BETWEEN THE BUILDING OF THE HIGHER INSTITUTE FOR FINE ARTS AND A TALL TREE IN THE GARDEN.**



**INGRID AND HER PARTNER REGIS LEROY ATTACHING THE CORD.**

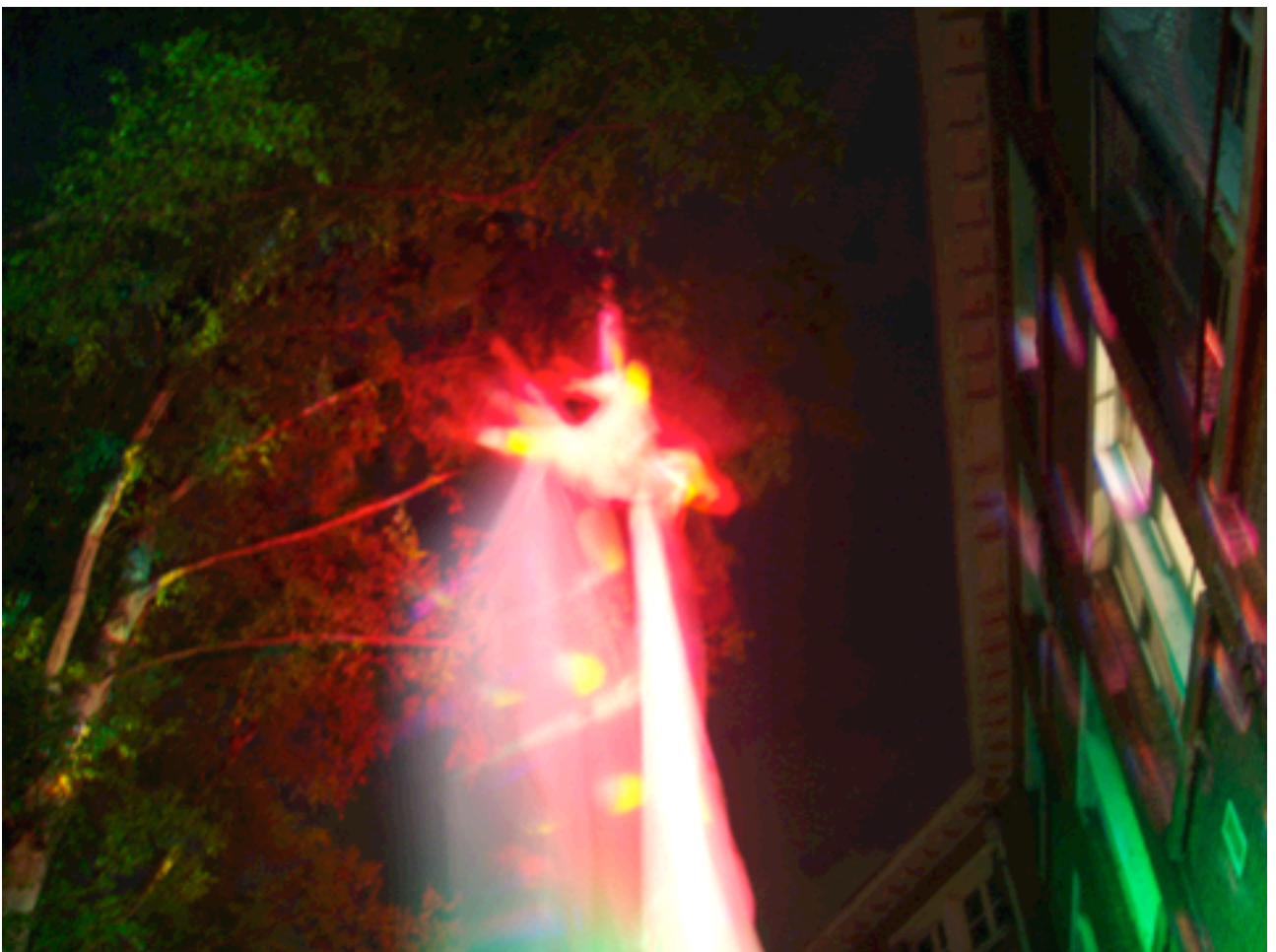


**AFTER HAVING SUCCESSFULLY ATTACHED THE CORD BETWEEN THE BUILDING AND THE TREE, AS WELL AS THE 6 METER LONG SHEETS TO THE CORD, INGRID SHORTLY REPEATED THE CHOREOGRAPHY THAT SHE WOULD PERFORM THE SAME EVENING.**



**AROUND 10 PM. INGRID ATTACHED THE SHEETS AGAIN AND HID HERSELF IN HER AIR COCOON, AWAITING THE MOMENT OF HER SURPRISE PERFORMANCE.**

**WHEN INGRID WAS READY I PUT ON THE "LIGHT SHOW" (THE SAME AS I HAD USED FOR THE AIR GUITAR SPECTACLE) AND THE MUSIC STARTED AFTER A SHORT ANNOUNCEMENT IN DUTCH BY BERT GHYSELS, WHO IS PART OF THE STAFF OF THE HIGHER INSTITUTE FOR FINE ARTS. IT WAS ALSO THANKS TO BERT THAT I GOT IN TOUCH WITH INGRID SWAELENS AND REGIS LEROY IN THE FIRST PLACE. THE CHOREOGRAPHY WAS ABOUT SIX MINUTES LONG.**







THIS TIME THE PUBLIC SEEMED TO APPRECIATE THE SHOW WITHOUT PERPLEXITY. IRONICALLY, I FOUND MYSELF QUITE PERPLEX REGARDING MY OWN ROLE IN THIS EVENT. FOR THE FIRST TIME I WAS REALLY NOT SURE IF I HAD MADE AN ARTWORK HERE OR IF MY WORK WAS NOT TO BE CHARACTERIZED RATHER AS AN IMPROVISED CIRCUS PRODUCER OR AS AN ARTIST'S MANAGER OR MAYBE AS A SCENOGRAPHER?

MY INTENTION – TO PRODUCE A SURPRISE SHOW AS A GESTURE TOWARDS MY ARTIST COLLEAGUES AND THEIR FRIENDS, SOMETHING LIKE A GIFT TO OURSELVES – HAD SUCCEEDED I BELIEVE. BUT HERE THE DISTANCE TO THE PUBLIC, THAT DEFINITELY EXISTED IN THE AIR GUITAR PERFORMANCE, WAS SOMEHOW ABOLISHED. MAYBE BECAUSE THE PEOPLE PRESENT AT THE BARBEQUE DIDN'T ASSUME THE POSITION OF A PUBLIC? AND THEN WE HAVE THE CIRCUS ARTIST, INGRID, WHO HERE PLAINLY ASSUMED HER ROLE OF BEING THE ARTIST. IN THE CASE OF BUCKET BUTT I DO NOT DENY HIM THE STATUS OF BEING THE ARTIST, BUT PROBABLY THE SITUATION OF A KIND OF "FREAK SHOW" CREATED LESS AUTONOMY FOR HIM TO ASSUME HIS ROLE AS AN INDEPENDENT ARTIST. THE AIR GUITAR PERFORMANCE WAS VERY MUCH STAGED AND THE AIR CHOREOGRAPHY, IN CONTRAST TO THAT, WAS MUCH MORE IMPROVISED. WHEREAS THE AIR GUITAR TOOK PLACE WITHIN AN OFFICIAL EXHIBITION SPACE AND A GROUP EXHIBITION, THE AIR CHOREOGRAPHY DELIBERATELY TOOK PLACE OUTDOOR IN A MUCH LESS OFFICIAL CONTEXT. THE VIDEO I SHOT OF THE AIR CHOREOGRAPHY HAS A STRONG CHARACTER OF BEING A DOCUMENT TESTIFYING ABOUT AN ACTION THAT TOOK PLACE, WHEREAS THE AIR GUITAR VIDEO HAS QUITE MUCH THE CHARACTER OF A MUSIC CLIP.

WHY AM I WRITING ALL THIS? I AM TRYING TO UNDERSTAND BETTER THE CHARACTER OF THE PRODUCED WORK AFTERWARDS. TO ME IT SEEMS INTERESTING AND IMPORTANT TO OBSERVE THE INFLUENCES OF A SPECIFIC CONTEXT ON THE PERCEPTION OF AN ARTISTIC WORK. IT ALSO SEEMS INTERESTING TO ASK MYSELF IF I FEEL OBLIGED TO DEFINE MY OWN POSITION AS AN ARTIST OR IF I CAN ASSUME THE POSITION OF A PRODUCER, A DIRECTOR, A SCENOGRAPHER INSTEAD? AN EASY ANSWER WOULD BE THAT IT DOESN'T MATTER. BUT I BELIEVE IT DOES MATTER, BECAUSE MY ENGAGEMENT AND MY ACTIVITY ARE ROOTED IN THE FIELD OF VISUAL ARTS AND NOT IN THE FIELD OF THEATER FOR EXAMPLE. THE WORKS THAT I PRODUCE, DIRECT AND DOCUMENT, GET THEIR MEANING OUT OF THE CONTEXT OF VISUAL ARTS BUT THE TRICKY PART HERE IS THAT I USE OTHER PEOPLE'S ARTISTIC PERFORMANCE IN ORDER TO PRODUCE SOMETHING MYSELF. THIS "SOMETHING" COULD EASILY BE CHARACTERIZED AS A "READY MADE" IN THE FIELD OF VISUAL ARTS, BUT WHEN YOU DEAL WITH LIVING PERSONS THIS TERM DOES NOT SEEM APPROPRIATE IN MY OPINION. ANOTHER SOLUTION WOULD BE TO CHARACTERIZE MYSELF AS A CURATOR, CURATING OTHER ARTISTS – FROM OTHER FIELDS OF ARTS – ASSUMING NEVERTHELESS THE POSITION OF "THE ARTIST": ANOTHER DISLIKEABLE ALTERNATIVE. THE QUESTION OF THE AUTHOR SEEMS TO COME BACK WITH INSISTANCE THE MORE YOU TRY TO DISPLACE IT. AND IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THIS QUESTION SHOULD NOT BE TREATED WITH NONCHALANCE OR TAKEN FOR GRANTED. MAYBE THE AUTONOMY OF ARTISTS AND OF DIFFERENT FIELDS OF ART COULD EVOLUATE TOWARDS A MORE OPEN SITUATION OF ARTISTIC PRODUCTION AND TOWARDS MORE REAL COLLABORATIONS BETWEEN ARTS AND ARTISTS?

KRISTOFER PAETAU, BERLIN 16.05.2005

Thank you: Ron van den Branden, Bert Ghysels, Régis Leroy, Kate Mayne, Ingrid Swaelens and the Higher Institute For Fine Arts in Antwerp, Belgium.