

BENNO STEINEGGER

PORTFOLIO

Artist statement

Ever since my artistic work is investigating identity. I'm trying to break through the surface of what appears to capture the complexity of continuously changing identities in contemporary societies. My artworks are questioning the stability of identities and aim to build up dispositives, which give the public the chance to reflect themselves in them, in order to catch aspects of their own changing identities.

In one of my first works, "Cecchini/Scharfschützen" [2006] I investigated common traces of local identities of my home-region, the north-italian South-Tirol. Working with the collective Codice Ivan I investigated identity in relation to what Guy Debord would define the "Society of the Spectacle" and the need to go beyond appearance to find something deeper (performance "Pink, Me and the Roses" [2009]), in relation to the notion of happiness (GMGS_What the hell is happiness [2011]) and in relation to death and life ("Muori" [2013]).

My recent video "Aderlass/Salasso" [2014] is an action, which frees mother and son from identification with male violence.

Between 2013 and 2015 I was working on a long-term project called "The Casting". It is an investigation of the political implication of the seek for beauty. This research produced several staged portraits in the form of performances of amateur-actors.

i (to be defined) (2016) is my last performance and is the reconstruction of my own identity through the eyes of people who I've interviewed during two years. The Performance got following recognitions:

- WINNER of the NORDIC FRINGE AWARD || Gothenburg Fringe Festival 2017
- AWARD-NOMINATION: INNOVATION IN PERFORMANCE
Stockholm Fringe Festival 2017
- AWARD-NOMINATION: EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED
Stockholm Fringe Festival 2017



Benno Steinegger has spent two years interviewing a wide range of people about a common subject: himself. Responses to his request “describe me” were as diverse as the relationships he shared with his subjects: from his physician, who spoke about his blood test, to his mother, who went through his biography, to a shaman who based his description of Steinegger on his own spiritual visions. Listening back to those interviews it became clear that this was a journey of discovery of the artist’s own identity: Who am i, who can i be, and how do the viewpoints of external observers differ from the perception i have of myself?

The starting point of i (to be def ned) is the reconstruction of Benno’s identity through the eyes of people who know him. This process led to an investigation of the boundaries of his identity, a refusal to take for granted characteristics which had previously seemed clear and well-def ned. By translating this information into physical and vocal exercises, the process attempts to explore the possibility of deep personal transformation.

Just like Parsifal, who found the Holy Grail only after listening Trevrizent the hermit’s describe him to himself, we can only discover our true identity after having investigated all aspects of it, including those aspects which are most obscure.

Full video: <https://vimeo.com/236387776>
Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/236395024>

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- 1) Transart Festival 2016: Premiere
- 2) Gothenburg Fringe Festival 2017
- 3) Stockholm Fringe Festival 2017







"I do not know about you, but I often need to escape the spectacular; I need time in which happens just a little, almost nothing. To be able to lay my eyes on the silence, so that I can listen to the music that the silence carries in itself; on a person, until the story will emerge that its body tells; on what seems obvious, to realize that maybe it is special." Director's Notes

"The Casting" is a project about beauty. The way one looks at things is a highly political issue. 'The Casting' is intending to search for beauty where one does not expect it, to find the spectacular in the ordinary and vice versa, but above all to feel the beauty in the ongoing effort to change one's perspective, which means to change one's point of view, change one's concept of beauty and then to open up for a possible change. On stage as in life.

The project "The Casting" is split up into two stages: a series of performances and a theatre-play. The performances are real castings, auditions for amateur actors, opened up to the view of an audience. The casting director has known and observed the amateur actors in their daily lives, in order to create a road map to guide the participants along the course of the performance. The theatre-play is the result of the research done for the performances, but which will deal with the repeatability of text and actions.

Both, performance and theatre-play, might seem like live-portraits. The portrait, in fact, represents the face of a real person. Who looks at it, however, can see what is behind this face; and find oneself. And perhaps this is the absolute beauty: change the way you look at things and in the same one, find other worlds.

- 1) Festival 'Zoom' at the Teatro Studio in Scandicci (13/11/2013)
The Casting. First experiment of composition.
- 2) Skillbuilding-Drodesera Festival 2014 (31/07/2014)
The Casting. Special project for Skillbuilding-Drodesarea 2014.



The Casting. Special project for Skillbuilding-Drodesarea 2014.



The Casting. First experiment of composition.



The Casting. First experiment of composition.



In "Aderlass/Salasso" I put myself in relation to a diary of a woman, written during the darkest and at the same time most liberating hours of her life. She read and told me of that time. I recorded the talk. While I listen to the recorded audio-file, I give voice to her words. This becomes a cathartic act, both for the woman and myself. I become the voice and interpreter of a true story.

This process of identification and overlapping makes doubts on a culture model rise, which identifies gender-violence only as a problem of women. But it affects also (and particularly) men. The story of the woman, becomes my own story. I appropriate her story by telling it. And in this way I free the woman and myself from the relation to gender-violence. With "Aderlass/Salasso" I try to re-define male identity, which nowadays seems to be affected by a deep crisis.

Video installation
(video-performance for the opening of the exhibition "Cose da uomini / Männersache" 2014)

"Dedicated to my mother"







Without the hypothesis that another world is possible, there is no politics, there is only the administrative management of men and things. (G.Decrop)

Often we proceed with eyes closed, too focused on ourselves, without realizing the price we are paying. But happiness is also a moment of shared time in which we are called to re-build, to re-think, to re-formulate another possible world: it is not a private space but an active relationship, a relationship of imagination and action between us and the other.

The area of "San Salvi", the former sanatorium of Florence, seemed particularly well suited to develop a specific project of The City of Happiness especially for its historical connotation, but also simply because it is a green and silent island that can provide shelter and peace.

Theatrical and social organizations have been working for years in the attempt to transform the area of San Salvi in a place of "different happiness" (or "happiness of the difference"). The people who populated the area in the times of the closed sanatorium and their diversity are therefore not seen as a threat, but rather as a chance to open horizons and to find different ways to approach happiness.

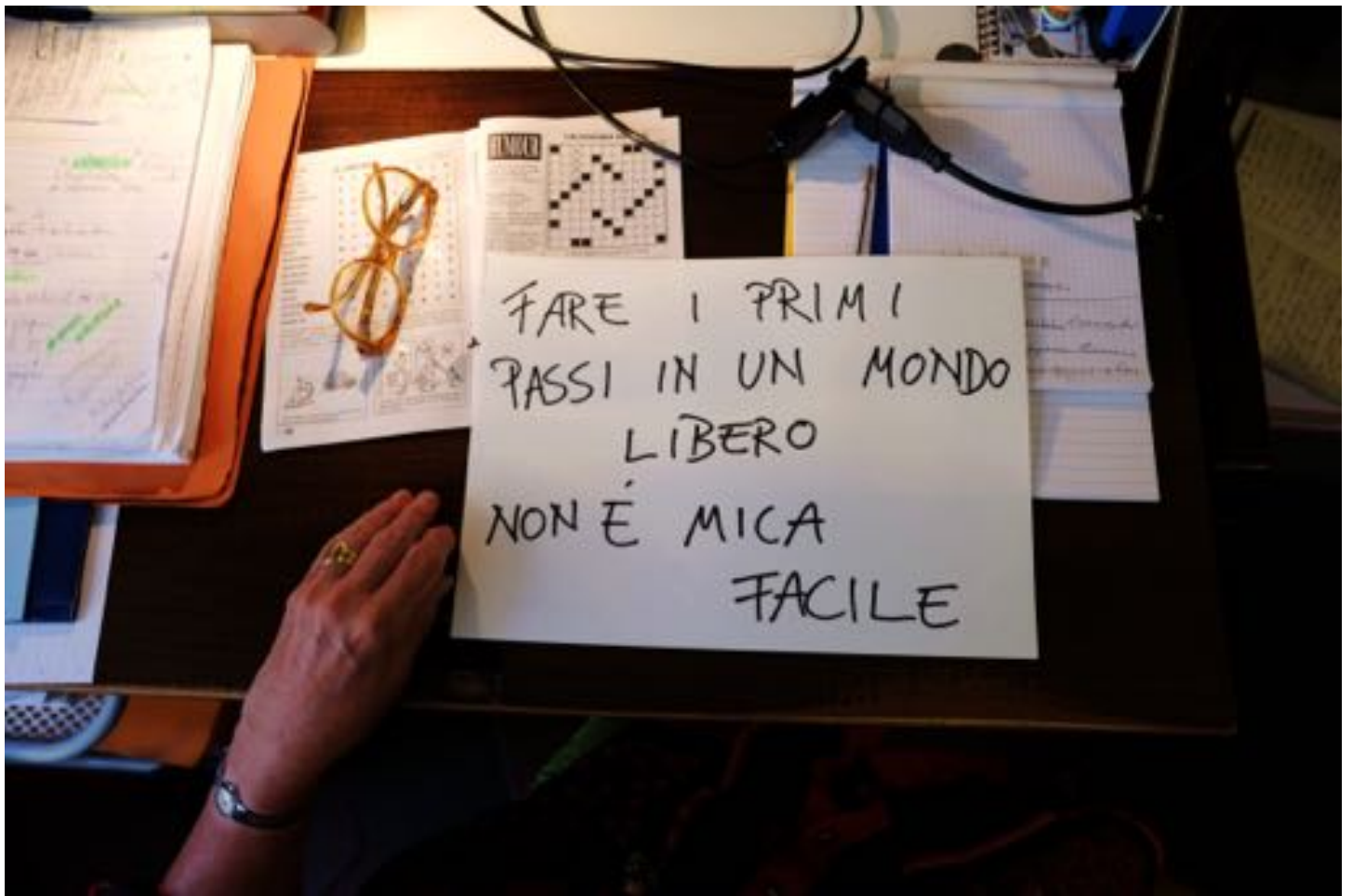
Following the spirit of the project The City of Happiness, I wanted to meet some people who have a specific relation to this particular space. I met Alberta Bigagli, a historical inhabitant of Florence, poetess and collector of testimonies of disadvantaged people. I wanted to understand what happiness is for her and how it is related to her everyday life.

The result is an installation that combines photography and sound. The photographs are extracts from her daily life that takes place, for reasons related to her age, especially in her modest apartment in the historic centre of Florence; a life that might seem simple, but it vibrates with a force that seems to come straight from her heart.

The installation speaks not only about happiness, but also about the encounter of the poetess Bigagli and myself, an encounter between two completely different generations, two artists and two different forms of expression. The surprise is that the core-issues, the one which burn inside, move soul and spirit are the same for both. Maybe because they are the fundamental questions of our existence.

The City of Happiness is a project by Codice Ivan. The specific project for "San Salvi" was created by Benno Steinegger.





COLLABORATION with CODICE IVAN

Codice Ivan was born in 2008 from the encounter of Anna Destefanis, Leonardo Mazzi and Benno Steinegger. The group's works move from the performing and fine arts/theatre fields to the investigation of different formats.

In 2009 Codice Ivan produces the piece *Pink, Me & The Roses*, and receives Premio Scenario for it. This is Italian's leading theatre award for young companies. In the same year Codice Ivan becomes part of Fies Factory, a project by Centrale Fies, which supports young Italian companies on a long-term basis.

During 2009-2010 The company investigates the relationship between audience and performer through the project "We Wanna Be Your Happening". (Raum [Bologna-I], festival Santarcangelo 40° [I], inauguration of Murate, the new contemporary-art-centre in Florence [I]).

In 2010 Codice Ivan starts the production of the second theatre piece, which investigates happiness. The debut is preceded by five steps/ studies. The final piece, *GMGS_What the hell is happiness*, is presented at Drodeseira 2011. 2011-2014 The piece *GMGS_What the hell is happiness*, tours in some of the most prestigious Italian festival and theatres and is hosted by Beijing Fringe Festival (China), Vooruit (Ghent-B), Festival Fast Forward (D), Festival Premieres (Strasbourg-F), Festival Far° (Nyon-Ch). The piece is still touring.

In 2011 the company wins with the project *Score*, the Transart Prize for young creativity promoted by TRANSART, MUSEION e SÜDTIROLERKÜNSTLERBUND. The project is divided into two events: a multimedia-performance, presented at the Alumix (Bolzano, Italy) and a mixed media installation for the museum of contemporary art of Bolzano, MUSEION. The multi-media art installation is permanently exhibited at Museion.

During 2012-2013 The investigation of happiness becomes not only a theatrical piece, but a project, which involves people outside the theatre, in the streets, and in their private houses; it is called "The City of Happiness". Till today the company has realized several different projects (Prato, Certaldo, Dro, Milan, Lana/Bolzano, Florence, Nyon).

In 2012 the group starts a project called "Tank Talk": a project for a collective urban performance, which produces videos.

In 2012 Codice Ivan begins the production of the third theatrical piece called "Muori-Die // inspired by Mozart's Requiem". The debut was in July 2013 at the festival Drodeseira and has toured to the Beijing Fringe Festival (China) and to several Italian Festivals.



“We are death, as well as life!” (Lester Bangs)

Life and death do not coincide, but we would like to live like this: full of life because conscious that we are dying. MUORI does not investigate death but the decay of what creates identities. It investigates the passing of time and abandonment. And it does it through three time-layers and three languages (words, body, image), which coexist and confront oneself with the other on stage. Words create dramaturgy through the body and what remains from the actions becomes at first relics then image in movement. Memory regenerates life and composes new perspectives, beyond the fall, which is not just physical falling.

Once the body in action is exhausted, the picture becomes complete. Identity collapses, leaving space to the essence. Light becomes the protagonist. Mozart's Requiem gets on stage as a thunder, swallowing words, actions and images, revealing a new level. A different perspective where the poetic dimension opens to a new life. It is not an invitation to die but a motivation to live. Life and death one on the other, one in the other. The composition of a contemporary Requiem can not be other, than the choice to live the experience of life. To be present, also when you risk to fall. “Do not be afraid to be judged. Do not be afraid to be remembered.”

Cammini e basta



WHAT THE HELL IS HAPPINESS?

There is only one inborn erroneous notion ... that we exist in order to be happy (A. Schopenhauer)

The project GIVE ME MONEY, GIVE ME SEX_What the hell is happiness? (GMGS), was born from the necessity of comparing with the wheels of modern life and its often obsessive research: happiness. Everybody struggles to reach it without understanding where to go or how to arrive to it. The only certainty is the (self)dismissal from a perfect world, and the consciousness that every human action produces as many damages as benefits. We wonder: How should we live?

Over the last few years "GMGS. What the hell is happiness?" has been shown in some of the most important national and international venues, such as: BEIJNG FRINGE FESTIVAL, China - Vooruit, Gent, Belgium - SANTARCANGELO 12 - ATERTEATER, Festival Internazionale di teatro Val Badia - Short Theatre / Teatro India, Roma - Zoom, Teatro Studio/Firenze - Nuova Scena Toscana 2012, Teatro Fabbrichino, Prato - Zona K, Milano - Is It My Word? #5, SpazioK, Prato, Festival Fast Forward (D), Festival Premieres (Strasbourg-F), Festival Far° (Nyon-Ch). The piece is still touring.





The project "SCORE", developed in a performance for Transart 2011 and into a mixed media installation for Museion, investigates the essence of conflict, which too often escapes the view of human eye and human understanding. The event allows the viewer or participant to dive into a visual and acoustic experience, which guides him/her directly into the small angle of his/her own self, where the mystery of any conflict and of any challenge is lurking; the archetype of a conflict materializes in his/her own body, here and now.

The conflict is captured in an image; the image is a ping-pong-match. Now, the question is how far we are aware of the causes of our actions. And furthermore: is it really so easy to decide who wins and who is destined to lose? and again, are we strong enough to try the impossible, to hypothesize other worlds and other possibilities?



With SCORE // Please Try The Impossible, Codice Ivan calls to questioning about the similarities between game and conflict, involving the public more “athletic” to join their work, winner of the first edition of the Artistic Creativity Contest promoted by Museion, Transart and Südtiroler Künstlerbund in 2011, and now on show, for the first time, in a new version conceived on purpose for the Museion – Museum of Modern Art in Bolzano project room.

It is the story of a revisited ping-pong, a choice, of course, not random, which focuses on elements which though belonging to it, now become a metaphor of the meaning of the work: the table, primarily, understood as soil, tells the place of the clash, the battle field. And then the net, much higher than usual, amplifies the challenge, the effort, the overcoming of the obstacle and of themselves, in a time that expands itself, searching for an extreme resolution of the conflict. Inside this oversized booth, Codice Ivan inserts a thin strand of byssus, an ancient sea silk almost extinct, which becomes a precious thread able to unite things and people, stimulating to win (or at least try to get) the impossible.

Now, the question is how far we are aware of the causes of our actions. And furthermore: is it really so easy to decide who wins and who is destined to lose? and again, are we strong enough to try the impossible, to hypothesize other worlds and other possibilities?



During the process of devising the performance GMGS_ WHAT THE HELL IS HAPPINESS?, we frequently questioned ourselves about the political value of happiness. To investigate this aspect we asked ourselves: "How should we live?"

In seeking an answer we found further questions: "Can unhappiness be precious?", "What moves the individual to expose itself publicly?", "What could we do or not do to be happy?"

The THE CITY of HAPPINESS was born starting from these considerations, combined with the need to open up the work for the stage to other artistic forms and other contamination, it finds its ground in the urgency to create relations with other people, creating a series of images and public actions which aim to open up, to rethink and redefine the concept of happiness.

THE CITY of HAPPINESS becomes so a project of public art that evolves through different steps/episodes. In each episode THE CITY of HAPPINESS has assumed and will assume different artistic forms and formats; from public photographic installations to performative interventions and video installations.

- 1) MILANO 2012 Photographic project (I)
- 2) PRATO 2012 Photographic project (I)
- 3) UNIVERCITY FESTIVAL – Prato 2012 Flash mob. Video-project (I)
- 4) MERCANTIA FESTIVAL – Certaldo 2012 Itinerary Performance (I)
- 5) WE FOLK! – Drosesera 2012 – streets of the village of Dro (TN-I).
Dialogues in private spaces + photographic installation (I)
- 6) ZONA K MILANO. Quartiere Isola 2013 Dialogues in public spaces + photographic installation (I)
- 7) Festival FAR° FESTIVAL DES ARTS VIVANTS 2014 – Nyon (CH).
 - a) Dialogues in private spaces and photographic installation in public space
 - b) Dialogues in public spaces and creation of a daily journal on the web



MILANO 2012 Photographic project (I)



PRATO 2012 Photographic project (I)



UNIVERCITY FESTIVAL – Prato 2012 Flash mob. Video-project (I)



MERCANTIA FESTIVAL – Certaldo 2012 Itinerary Performance (I)



WE FOLK! – Drosesera 2012 – streets of the village of Dro (TN-I). Dialogues in private spaces + photographic installation (I)



ZONA K MILANO-ISOLA. "A cosa rinunceresti per essere felice?" 2013 Dialogues in public spaces + photographic installation (I)



We start from here. A performer, dressed like the man of Tien'anmen Square, will try to stop things and people following their own routes; he will try to repeat the same steps that allowed a man in 1989 to stop a line of tanks; he will try to have a human exchange, a dialogue; he will try again to say something, to be listened, to whisper or to scream something in someone's ear.

Someone stopped a convoy of tanks with his small, dance-like steps, climbed onto the tank and looked for a crack in its armour, tried to talk to the driver. He sought the man behind the machine. Anyway... Revolt. Words are being consumed, counterfeited, forged, like concepts. They lose and change their semantic value. Thus talking about revolt (in this way) opens up spaces and possibilities for new interpretations. Turn around, twist, take new roads or interfere on those which have been, at least in appearance, already defined.

Which space defines the term revolt today? What does revolt mean for us, what makes it distinct? (what does it not mean any more)? Perhaps, nowadays, a revolt is an individual act, a personal enquiry. The intimacy of sustaining a certain position (becoming conscious), an attempt a dialogue or a quarrel with the world, with a tank which moves forward...

And then, having captured attention, what to say?

The video materials of each episode, collected during the urban action, will be presented to the audience through a video installation.

- 1) TANK TALK.Firenze (2010) (I)
- 2) TANK TALK.Ghent (2013) Vooruit Kunstencentrum (B)
- 3) TANK TALK.Livorno (2013) Inequilibrio Festival, Castiglioncello, Livorno (I)
- 4) TANK TALK.Dro (2013) Festival Drodeseera 2013, Dro, Trento (I)
- 5) TANK TALK. Roma (2013) Festival Italia Tropicci, Angelo Mai Occupato (I)





The scorpion, being carried across the river on the frog's back, stings the frog. The dying frog asks the scorpion, "Why did you sting me, knowing that this way we will both die?" The scorpion answers, "Because it is in my nature." Aesop

Pink, Me & The Roses is a decline. A concert in which an old rock musician plays music that talks about music. Everything seems to tend downwards, destroying itself and recovering its composure in an apparently meaningless game. We ask ourselves where is the inside and where is the outside, where is the boundary between the performer and the character, between the show as a linguistic event and its destruction, where are the boundaries between things, between the frog and the scorpion, between victory and defeat, between good and bad. Pink, Me & The Roses is a series of objects: a wig, an armchair, a cardigan, some linoleum, a knife in a mouth, some pvc, a transpallet, two heels and also a light on two wheels, a vase of flowers...

But Pink, Me & The Roses is also and above all a balloon that explodes, everything proceeding, however, jerkily and jamming continuously, in a device in which a mistake is inevitable and accepted for what it is. We remain imprisoned, not against our will but voluntarily, within the theatre itself. Pink, Me & The Roses not only reveals what happens behind the curtains, but also how the staging came into being. The making of, the process, breaks out in an essential scene: few objects, few colours, a small and well-marked space, in which, however, we yet again attempt to construct the umpteenth pretence; but we have gone beyond the narration and the deceit is no longer credible. The relationship between the objects (things and people) breaks continuously into small repeated deaths, into falls, crashes and mistakes. But it continuously finds new possibilities. Probably at the end, we will have to begin again, parting from a reconquered honesty.





WeWannaBeYourHappening is a performative path made up of units, it's conceived as of fragments, of performances that have very different themes but are all based on a common reflection: the relation between the spectator and the performer. The performer moves apart and asks who normally only watches for a stimulus, an image, an ingredient for the experiment. The risk consists of the failure of fiction before reality.

- 1) Raum, Bologna, 2010 (I)
- 2) Santarcangelo 40°, 2010 (I)
- 3) Inauguration of Murate, the new contemporary-art-centre in Florence, 2010 (I)