

25th anniversary of Illusorialand, the Illusion Art Museum of Sandro Del-Prete

On my invitation, are inscribed the words: 'May we deceive you?'

On the road to Ittigen, I was treated to and enjoyed a concert of clarinets, playing in honour of the 250th anniversary of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. (25 versus 250!)

Sandro Del-Prete, a 68 year old artist who resides in the canton of Tessin, has realized his dream: the Land of Illusion in Ittigen, near Berne. He warmly welcomed me and graciously consented to my request for an exclusive interview with him.

50 years ago, he drew inspiration from a chameleon. As he pondered the strange looking creature, he realized that one eye looked forward while the other scrutinized the rear. Del-Prete reflected on how this little animal, with its twisted sight, might perceive the world around it.

He began looking at things from different perspectives and tried to bring them to paper. In so-doing, he discovered a new dimension; a space without directions like ahead, behind, above and below, or right and left. From his early reflexions, he created his first illusion: 'The Window Watchers' (illustrated in his first book, 'Illusorismes').

He began with a special performance, and for this, he handed me a box with a mirror fixed to the top of it. The ceiling was also blanketed with mirrors. Curiously, I gazed into the mirror on the top of my box. I had never seen myself from this perspective. Three meters below me, I could see my hairstyle from above. As I walked around with my head in the box, I wondered how it might be for men who suddenly notice the untimely birth of a bald patch on the top of their head.

The unveiling of pictures and sculptures was an invitation to self-awareness and new perspectives. 'The scallywag' - with tongue sticking out, followed my every move with its head.

The viaduct of life showed that life never stands still. Each in turn, Adam and Eve, Aphrodite, the Delphines and a 'copa misteriosa' revealed new perspectives. A bar with a blue crystal fire beckoned invitingly to pause and meditate.

The climax of the exhibition was a huge panoramic oil painting which used a relief technique and depicted the lake of Thun and the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau mountain ranges of the Alps. In the foreground, were columns with faces and a floating vase. This representation was and truly is a world première. Sandro Del-Prete is the first artist to use both inversion and eversion techniques in the same image.

I was asked to walk in front of the image and when I did, the whole thing began to move. It seemed as if the vase and columns were really moving, though I knew that I hadn't consumed any alcohol.

His son, Silvano, composed the background music especially for this event, which became the stage for his first public performance. What a beautiful complement: colourful, warm, light, recalcitrant and harmonious tones from the father and his son turned into a wonderful feast for both eyes and ears!

There were many things to admire in the Land of Illusions: from holograms and a suspended bridge over a revolving precipice, to Nero Castle, where blind people found jobs that helped strengthen their self esteem.

Sandro Del-Prete's enthusiasm was absolutely infectious. His objective is to bring joy of living and encouragement to everyday living. He succeeded in opening eyes where normally, one would have simply passed by. His exhibition helped heighten our consciousness, while his words helped us to acquire a more profound insight.

His optical illusions were and are truly 'world class' and in addition to his exhibition, can be found in the book: 'Masters of Deception' (Al Seckel, Sterling publishing Co. Inc. New York, 2004; ISBN: 1-4027-0577-8). In this same book, one can stumble upon such prominent names as Salvador Dali and M.C. Escher.

A guest artist described the event by saying, 'I see things as they are; knowing that they are not, in fact, as I see them.'

What a pity this exhibition isn't enjoyed by millions!

A jewel for teenagers, a beautiful cultural contribution to the city of Berne and a genuine touristy treasure; such exhibitions are superb teaching aids, helping students and adults alike to improve their observation and perception skills!

I can't help wonder how or why our local media, politicians and teachers can possibly ignore the existence and availability of such wonderful treasures in our midst, when even foreign countries know of Sandro Del-Prete. He's even received an invitation from the United States of America!

Illusions sometimes do materialize... and survive!

Let us reach new dimensions with the help of illusions!

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