

Mikhail Karikis

The Chalk Factory

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Aarhus 2017 European Capital of Culture

'O' Space

Mindet 6

8000 Aarhus C

Denmark

European Capital of Culture Aarhus 2017 presents a world premier of the new audio-visual installation by Mikhail Karikis: *The Chalk Factory*. Karikis's practice embraces moving image, sound, performance, and other media, and emerges from his long-standing investigation of the voice as a political agent. He often collaborates with communities to orchestrate performances to camera in order to highlight alternative modes of human action and existence. His works explore histories of labour and the energies that create collectivist dynamics, and resonate with people's economic, cultural, psychological and moral circumstances.

The Chalk Factory is an ambitious new project focusing on a community of factory workers with disabilities in Japan. Built in the dense industrial outskirts of Tokyo, Rikagaku Chalk Industries offered temporary employment to two teenagers with mental disabilities in 1960. The last day of the youths' employment was marked by a little-known but extraordinary event that changed the factory's identity and Japan's labour history. Workers rebelled against the dismissal of their disabled colleagues, demanding the extension of their contracts and emphasising the benefits of including them in their team.

Karikis was inspired by the workers' historical protest, which addressed labour rights for workers with disabilities in Japan. Fifty years on, the facility has a workforce almost exclusively formed of people with mental disabilities. Karikis developed a relationship with the factory, gaining access to its unique production processes.

His ten-channel video installation transposes the chalk factory's architectural layout onto the exhibition venue – itself a former factory. It observes the rhythms of a day at work, the transformations of materials and the vivid colour changes of the workspace. In this environment, we see the employees starting their day with balletic exercises, followed by the coordinated production choreography of workers and machines, and their mesmerising performance of repetitive and highly specialised tasks on specially modified equipment. The soundscape ranges from factory chimes which conduct the day's activities to industrial beats accompanying the workers' murmurs, their involuntary vocalisations and repeated soliloquies. These are interrupted by the cheerful dissonances of the workers' karaoke and communal leisure time.

A separate film provides a prologue to the exhibition's theme of disability and labour. It features a performance of the ancient Japanese legend of Hyottoko by the bamboo flute player Kiku Day. Recently rediscovered by Dr Nicola Grove and analysed through the emergent field of the cultural history of disability, the Hyottoko legend centres on an 'odd-looking' character who fails at every job he tries until he is asked to blow the village fire through a bamboo stick, at which he excels.



In addition to the exhibition, Mikhail Karikis collaborated with Aarhus-based street performer and political activist Jon Skjerning-Rasmussen, as well as the local project leader of Music Unites Europe, Brian Laurie, to organise participatory workshops, storytelling performances and public discussions.

The Chalk Factory by Karikis foregrounds disability's own cultural history. The project observes productivity, the body and social function and raises ethical questions about disability and labour. The immersive installation together with the public events and workshops propose an empowering model of inclusion and difference.

Mikhail Karikis (b. Greece, 1975) lives and works in London and Lisbon. A survey exhibition of his work 'Love Is the Institution of Revolution' is currently on view at Casino Luxembourg (2017). Recent group shows include Kochi-Muziris Biennale, India (2016-17); the British Art Show 8, various venues, UK (2015-17); the 19th Biennale of Sydney, Australia (2014); Aichi Triennale, Japan (2013); Manifesta 9, Genk, Belgium (2012); the Danish Pavilion, 54th Venice Biennale, Italy (2011).

The Chalk Factory was commissioned by Juliana Engberg for European Capital of Culture Aarhus 2017.

Photo: Mikhail Karikis, "The Chalk Factory", 2017, production video still. Photo by Mikhail Karikis, courtesy of the artist (c) Mikhail Karikis.

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