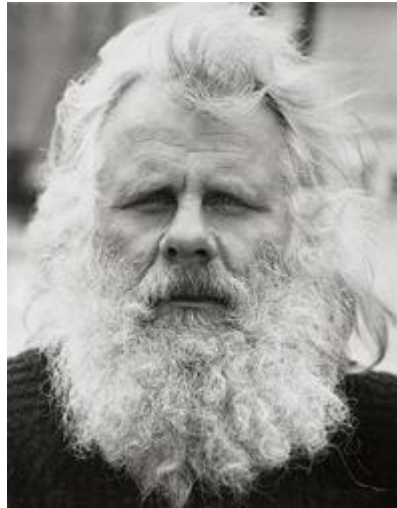


VIKTOR IV



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Viktor IV,
an American in Amsterdam

by Ad Petersen

From 1961 until his death in 1986, a conspicuous character, an artist who called himself Viktor IV (Viktor Four), lived and worked in Amsterdam.

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Amstel River

Viktor IV lived under primitive conditions on an old cargo ship which was moored along the Amstel River in the center of Amsterdam near the Blauwbrug.

The ship became a well-known phenomenon in Amsterdam, as it was covered with wild constructions, rigged up with flags and banners and surrounded by overgrown rafts on which huts and quite a menagerie of ducks, chickens and colorfully painted cats. Texts such as 'WHO NEEDS THE PACIFIC OCEAN' or 'THE SECOND QUALITY CONSTRUCTION COMPANY' or 'THE TIME IS ALWAYS NOW' attracted the attention of passers-by. From the stern of the ship a Dutch flag was flying with the words 'THANK YOU AMSTERDAM'.

Youth

Viktor IV or Jack Sun, Bulgar or Bulgar Finn (as he later named himself) was born in 1929 in New York City as Walter Karl Glück. His parents were European immigrants. His father was from Germany, his mother came from Greece.

In elementary school Walter was stubborn and disobedient. He was intelligent but had difficulty dealing with authority. He attended college in Florida where he majored in Journalism and Communication, focusing on photo journalism. He supported himself with various jobs. Restlessness and an urge for independence led him abroad. He traveled to Mexico and Peru, lived and worked in Korea and Japan for a while. He roamed around Europe from country to country living in a Renault Estafette (Spain, Italy, Portugal, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, England and the Soviet Union).



He became strongly attracted to the liberal city of Amsterdam, where he obtained a residence permit in 1961. Yet also there the solid ground under his feet seemed a bit too much for him. He created his own living space on an old ship that was connected to the quay by a dangerously narrow plank only.



Debut as a painter

The assassination of the American President John F. Kennedy in November 1963 had an enormous impact on Viktor IV. He realized that as a photographer one had to be on the spot to be able to make a picture. At the same time he became aware that there were also other ways to comment on events. In April 1964 he made his first painting, a text based on the assassination of Kennedy made with white stencil letters on a

black background. It was the beginning of his career as an artist and from that moment on he called himself Viktor IV.



'Ikons'

During the first few years Viktor IV's work consisted of numerous panels which he called 'Ikons'. They were made of driftwood, which he collected from the canals in and around Amsterdam, dried and then painted. He named his work 'The New Amsterdam School of Ikon Painting'. It was a true explosion of creativity, consisting of quasi-primitive images scratched in wood. The panels were sober in color and always carrying words in stenciled letters, as a title or explanation.



Inspiration

Two sources inspired Viktor in his work. Firstly, the thoughts and the ideas of the American Henry David Thoreau, author of 'Walden' and 'Civil Disobedience'. Secondly, the work and the alternative life style of the Dutch artist Anton Heyboer. Unlike Heyboer, Viktor could always be found in the city, riding his painted bike or carrier-tricycle, dressed in black with a white beard and always barefooted. He was constantly in search of social contact, preferably with young women and looking for material or subjects for his work.

Logbook pages

At the end of the '60s, after producing hundreds of 'Ikons', Viktor began his work on paper. His startingpoint was always a sheet of A-4 size paper, glued onto a paper twice as large. Each sheet was stamped with the date and big numerals marking the number of the month since April 1964. These grew into thousands of pages, usually with typed texts (Viktor was a good writer) and illustrated with drawings. The texts were based on stories, memories, or comments on what he had experienced.

But also anecdotes, myths or whatever crossed his mind. These so called 'logbook pages', all loose pages, were gathered in folders, which he called 'books', with titles such as 'The Big Fool', 'Thank you Silent Sun', 'Who Can Betray the Sun', 'The Post is a perhaps' or 'The Truth Always Happens'.



Bulgar Time

During the '80s Viktor IV focused with great enthusiasm on time. He had watches and clocks made with numbers counting to the left and hands turning counter-clockwise.

He designed clocks with various systems and speeds, both ingenious and confusing, which were marketed under the name 'Bulgar Time'. He was still very much engaged in his work, when he drowned in the Amstel River in 1986.



Exhibitions

Viktor IV's work, all of which was made in Amsterdam, was that of a maverick artist. His work did not seem to fit too well in contemporary art, but eventually it did. Museums including the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek and the Louisiana Museum in Denmark, as well as national and international galleries, such as New York's Lefebvre Gallery, organized exhibitions.



Ina Munck

In 1988 a book on Viktor IV was published in Amsterdam with intense cooperation from Ina Elisabeth Munck, Viktor's Danish wife and collaborator. It was edited by Ad Petersen, at that time curator at the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam.

In 2006, due to the ongoing interest in Viktor's work, a Viktor IV Foundation was established in Amsterdam, in consultation and with approval of Ina Munck.

The foundation's goal is to promote his work through exhibitions and publications and to find a suitable location for his estate.

Ref.: Viktor IV. Ad Petersen & Ina Munck. Ed. Meulenhoff/Landshoff & The second Quality Construction Company, 1988