***SONIC CAMOUFLAGE***

**Uncodable Happenings: ‘girl walks into a bar’**

**Review by Sarah Cameron**

The Greeks invented the alphabet as we know it. I was once told that the Greek alphabet is the most concise set of symbols to contain the most diverse number of sounds. If this is true, Greece could be a most apt site for an experimental group of artists to explore sound and language.

This was not the art school cliché of one male tutor at the centre of a harem of infatuated groupies, bored post-feminists and cynical dropouts. On the contrary this immediately appeared to be a group of like-minded friends who had built relationships based on mutual excitement about the cross-over between sonic stimulation, the layering collage techniques used by abstract painters, and performance art. The fact that these artists had been working together for almost three years by the time the residency took place is perhaps proof that a community of practice really can exist, if there isn’t the degree of enforced institutionalising and bureaucracy that can hamper the fluid coming together of communities of like-minded people in the university setting.

The bowl-shaped valley that Zarakes sits in is, and has been, a hub for artists travelling east since the sixties. There is something of that flavour remaining, of faded radicals retiring in the sun, much as you might find in Kathmandhu; a guitar is occasionally strummed from a balcony over-hanging what used to be the animal quarters of an old stone shepherd’s hut. Some artists stayed, became embedded in the village, learned to speak Greek and ‘semi-blended’. From 1992-1996 Martin Kippenberger invented and reinvented MOMAS, ‘The Museum of Modern Art Syros’, on a nearby and similarly offbeat island in the Cyclades.

But what have we actually learned? Perhaps we are slowly learning that every different landscape has particular and peculiar assets, that are in the detail, and only apparent when one is immersed in the culture and the land and looking for slight sounds and twitches from the undergrowth that make *this place* different. Goat bells can often be heard in Zarka, as these contrary animals insist on grazing nonchalantly on the verges of the dirt track with its provisional, broken up concrete surface, or on the roofs of houses, sheds and dirt covered barns, that have ‘naturally’ become ‘living roofs’ in this abundantly fertile climate, disrupted by regular earthquakes and occasional volcanic eruptions. They patter around with tinkling hand-made bells around their necks and clipping hoofs.

I experienced the sound of a bohemian and almost eastern European traveller music emanated from the dark, night-time coming together moments of the group, who had brought an array of instruments and improvised many more sound making devices.

These really are radically interesting ways of being on an ‘artist residency’, so much so that the term is perhaps misleading. Similarly, arriving in the centre of the village on market day and performing for a local non-art audience also takes guts and ambition: for these artists to play around with being seen less as bourgeois outsiders and more as people willing to experiment with social situations, to weave in and be seen but not to disrupt with political taglines or mythologised artistic ‘attitude’; but truly to create *uncodable happenings,* that are too awkward, improvised and genuinely socially adapted to each new situation, to be labelled as anything simplistic.