Ruslan Daskalov
"Billy Belly IV" 2023

The Indianapolis Cologne Sister City Committee (ICSCC) presents an interactive artwork that manifests as a Photo Booth. On display is a digital painting portraying a donkey in a brown suit that stands floating in an unworldly green cloudy universe. This captivating artwork, created by Ruslan Daskalov, is a testament to the power of digital media in contemporary art, particularly painting and its historical iconography. Visitors are invited to step into the frame, pose with the donkey, and hold its lead, blurring the lines between reality and the digital world.

"Billy Belly IV" (2023) holds profound significance for both Indianapolis and Cologne. It symbolizes the deep artistic exchange and collaboration between the two cities, fostering cultural understanding and innovation.

For Indianapolis, this installation represents the city's commitment to embracing diverse art forms and engaging with international artists, thereby enriching the local artistic landscape. The interactive aspect of the artwork encourages active participation and engagement, making it accessible to all, and reinforcing the importance of art in our daily lives.

For Cologne, this collaboration with Indianapolis strengthens the cultural ties between the two sister cities, showcasing the global reach of Cologne-based artists like Daskalov. The donkey, a symbol of hard work and determination, resonates with the industrious spirit of both cities, fostering a deeper connection through art.

Ruslan Daskalov (b.1979 in Stara Zagora, Bulgaria) lives and works in Cologne, Germany. His work has been exhibited internationally at renown museums and galleries. He studied at the Art Academy Düsseldorf with Professor Thomas Grünfeld. Billy Belly IV is 8'x 8'feet digital painting on vinyl with a grommet and a rope.

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What inspired you to choose a donkey in a suit as the subject for your interactive artwork, and how does it connect to the historical iconography you often use in your digital paintings?

The subject matter I use is not a mystery. When I started a series of self-portraits a few years ago, I spent a long time looking for an animal that I recognized as myself. The donkey was a hit. And yes, I think it is unmistakable that my works always reflect certain aspects of art history.

How did the idea for this interactive piece come about, and what message or narrative are you trying to convey to the audience?

The desire to make an interactive work has to do with the fact that I love interactive artworks more than anything. Essentially, all artworks are interactive in some sense. There is never a specific message in my work. I wish it to be a story with a surprise ending. A sort of dead end that leads to a door.

Would you walk us through your creative process in developing this digital artwork, from the initial concept to the final interactive design?

You can always find a reason to start with a new picture. I don't need a master plan for my work, because a lot of it comes from the process. I start pretty conventionally with a simple idea. I work relatively classically, dealing with simple form, color, composition and space. My eyes are forced to react to the visual happenings so that I can expand the narrative. Only the donkey knows when a picture is finished.

Interactive art often invites viewer participation. How do you envision the audience engaging with and experiencing your artwork, and what do you hope they take away from the experience?

The planning of this work in relation to the audience is very open. When I'm in an art museum, I always want to take photos of myself with different artworks. In my eyes, the work should invite you to a photo session. The interpretation of the depicted subject is left to the viewer. The process can be described as "lost in space".

See more artwork at www.ruslandaskalov.com

Indianapolis Cologne Sister City Committee

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