

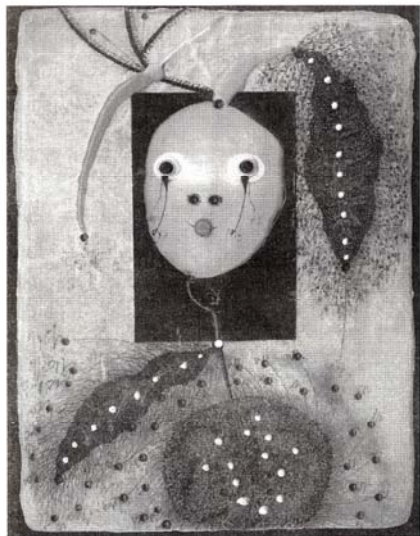
Adrian Dannatt, *Zush/Evru is not as mad as he seems*, Artist Interview - Features, The Art Newspaper, No. 154, January 2005, p. 2.

Artist interview: New York

Zush/Evru is not as mad as he seems

Obsessive drawing and resonating bells are the ways in which this surrealist Catalan artist expresses himself

Evrú was born, to general surprise, on 21 February 2001 during a performance by the artist Zush, who interrupted his retrospective at the Museu d'art Contemporani in Barcelona to proclaim his new identity. Zush himself was often thought of as a wild "Outsider" artist with corporeal-poetics and a drawing style akin to Antonin Artaud, not to mention parallels with Scottie Wilson or the local politics of Betyus. But in fact Zush was always at the forefront of technological if not magical advances. Indeed in 1975, Zush received a Fulbright scholarship to study holography at MIT and from the beginning of the 90s was among the first involved with "web-art" and internet experimentation. Hence his exhibition at Haim Chanin includes a computer with its own digital DIY drawing system, as well as hand-made books, obsessive drawings and resonating bronze bell sculptures. For Evru believes we are all "Psycho-manual-digital": to have an idea is "psycho"; being "manual" you have to use your body; and "digital" is what communicates you to others. Thus to be happy you must always keep a balance between the conceptual, the manual and the digital.



"Momesi I", 2003, Indian ink, oil, pencil, collage of inkjet printed infographic image, acrylic paint, pirograph dots and raffia threads, on paper

Evru: Odiram Evru!g!

The Art Newspaper: Odiram Evru!g?

Evru: That is how we greet people in the Asura language. We have about 3,000 words in this language of my own Evru!g Mental State.

TAN: You also scratch the middle of your head as a greeting.

Evru: Yes, my greeting is to scratch my head. It's the most traditional way of salutation; it's how the monkeys greet each other. When you scratch your head you get ideas, it excites your ideas.

TAN: Do you expect other people to scratch their heads?

Evru: If someone is a very good friend I scratch his head and I try to convince him to scratch mine back. That's my salutation.

TAN: Why do you have a black line drawn in the middle of your skull?

Evru: To tell the truth, it's because I'm getting bald and I realise I have freckles on my head. Then I read this amazing theory that's impossible to prove: that we have freckles which are stars in the universe. So I started this line from my first freckle in the front and kept on going from freckle to freckle, to try and find my own galaxy.

TAN: You have only been Evru for a few years now.

Evru: My name Evru is from the first four letters of Evru!g Mental State, a micro-nation which I set up in 1968, but I have only been Evru since 2001. I am using my third name. I was born Alberto Porta. In 1968, that very symbolic year when we were all rebelling against the establishment, I was one of the few hippies in Barcelona, smoking grass and using psychedelic drugs. Coming out of my studio on a motorbike with my long hair and paint all over my body I was stopped by the police and as I had grass in my pocket I ended up in jail.

You have to remember this was the Franco regime. And then a judge, who was an art critic, arranged for me to be put in a mental hospital to "cure" myself of this addiction to marijuana, which as you know is not addictive.

Basically, they did not want people like me on the streets and just removed me, they tried to apply a law which was actually

called "lazy and nasty people"! When I arrived in the mental home, this schizophrenic called Armando said to me, "Hello Zush how are you?" And I said "No, my name is Alberto." And he said "You must be crazy or amnesiac because I've known you for many years and your name is Zush." And so I asked him to spell this name, and when I came out I went to live in Ibiza and I told everybody I was "Zush". And as I didn't have any hope for the political system in Spain I created my own State. That was when I decided to make my own mental territory and physical world as a way of being happy and trying to find a political coherence for myself.

TAN: And how did you develop your own language, the Asura?

Evru: It's hard to explain. It's like how a painter creates a colour or a shape. Thousands of words come to my mind, just as a form comes. You could relate them to schizophrenic words; Joyce used such words and children invent words so their teachers don't understand.

I needed to create a personal alphabet, when I paint I need to write on the works I produce. If you write the word "God" underneath an image, that conditions the reception of the painting, but if you write in an alphabet nobody can understand, that gives them the possibility to dream. If you're in the desert and see beautiful calligraphy on a sign, then discover it just means Coca-Cola, the magic is finished. My alphabet is almost like shorthand; it's evolved over the years into a form of calligraphy.

TAN: Are all three of your artists similar in their creative style?

Evru: You have to understand I became Evru because I'd done two large retrospectives in Spain and it just became boring to carry on being Zush. The easy way out would be just to copy myself over and over again as most artists do, and I thought, what a horror!

I decided to change my name and find a new artist but I have to confess I'm still in the process of it. I'm a disciple of Zush, trying to find new ways to express myself and keep away from what Zush was, but I still haven't succeeded. I'm a failure because I changed my name three years ago to become a totally different artist and haven't succeeded yet. The first show I had as Evru, I explained that Zush was an artist from the past century, the 20th century, and I was 10% higher in price. So all the Zush sold immediately, not only were they historic; they were cheaper. Two collectors came with Zush paintings and asked me to sign them on the back as Evru, to become 10% more expensive. I'm the only person in the world who can fake a Zush and not go to jail.

TAN: Alberto Porta was very young when he became Zush, 21 or so.

Evru: Yes, I had my first one-man show at 16. I was a sort of self-taught prodigy. There was this French gallerist in Barcelona called Rene Metras and he was like my father. He led me into the art world. The first time I was at the São Paulo Biennial—I've done it three times now—I was not even 21. Someone from the government selected me to go to São Paulo and they fiddled the forms, cheated, to pretend I was old enough.

TAN: Could people relate your work to "Outsider" art?

Evru: You yourself seem extremely sane, very logical, maybe because the madness is in your work?

Evru: One of my assistants is a schizophrenic, and I still do a lot of work, teaching and speaking and courses and therapy with mental patients. I explain to them, "look, I'm as crazy as you but I can disguise it, I can convince society; the problem with you is you can't hide it." Most crazy people are just too sincere; they tell everything, and that's what creates a problem with society. I'm proud to say I make a bridge with my work between sanity and insanity. There are parts that are totally rational and others out of this world. I make this bridge and keep crossing it all the time. I explain to art students that you don't have to play crazy to be a good artist; you can be a very normal person and still a great artist. Forget the bullshit game of being histrionic or weird.

TAN: Is your work linked to Barcelona Surrealism such as Dau al Set?

Evru: Well, at my first solo show when I was 16, Miró



"Tectura" (digital installation) and "Muxlevo" (bronze bell) at Haim Chanin Fine Arts

came along and discovered someone had written in pencil *caca*, meaning shit, on one of my works. Exactly the same thing had been done to his work when he was young. So he was very touched and was such a nice guy he asked the gallerist whether he'd be allowed, as a professional artist, to erase this from the painting. I discovered recently that Miró was a depressive; I'd never known this.

TAN: It doesn't strike me you have any mental problems at all.

Evru: Well, I do consider myself bi-polar; I get heavy depressions and incredible euphoria but it's not a problem. A mental patient is someone who has a problem with society and makes life unbearable for himself and all the people around him, and I'm not that way.

"If you write the word "God" underneath an image, that conditions the reception of the painting, but if you write in an alphabet nobody can understand, that gives them the possibility to dream."

TAN: It's hard to contain your vast universe just in a gallery show.

Evru: To tell the truth I have to do shows to make a living but if I were rich I would NEVER show my work. I would like someone to discover it when I'm dead. When I was younger I was excited to show my work, but more and more I just feel terrible about it. It's harder and harder. I must become obscure but for the moment I can't afford it, I can't afford to be unknown. People ask me if I will change my name again, but all I have left from Evru!g would be "go" and that would be my very last name. I will "go", away from the art world or from this planet.

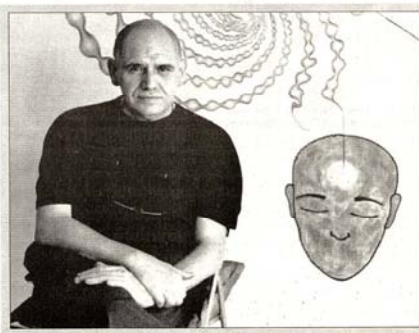
TAN: A perfect place to scratch my head goodbye.

Evru: I scratch mine too! Durutz!

TAN: Durutz! ■

Interview by Adrian Dannatt

□ "The second incarnation: from Zush to Evru" is now on view at Haim Chanin Fine Arts until 15 January, 210 11th Avenue, New York, ☎ +1 646 230 7200



Biography

Born: Alberto Porta, 1946, Barcelona.

Currently showing: "The second incarnation: from Zush to Evru", Haim Chanin Fine Arts, New York (until 15 January).

Selected solo exhibitions: 2007: retrospective, MACBA, Barcelona; 2000: retrospective, Reina Sofia, Madrid; 1998: S.M.A.K, Ghent; 1984: ICA Boston.

1977: Marlborough Gallery, Rome; **Selected group exhibitions:** 2001:

"Leading Spanish art", Taipei Museum, Taipei, Veracruz, Mexico; 1995:

"Drawing on chance", MoMA, NY; 1991:

Bienial de São Paulo; 1989: "Les magiciens de la terre", Centre Pompidou, Paris; 1984: "International survey", MoMA, NY; 1983: "Recent European paintings", Guggenheim Museum, NY.