

## KABK

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Faculteit  
Faculty of  
der  
Creative and  
Kunsten  
Performing Arts



# Genius Loci: report of a quest to search for the spirit of Carrara



by: Nicky Assmann

As part of the research group Genius Loci, a course in the curriculum of the Interfaculty ArtScience, we went on a trip to Carrara, Italy. The trip took place from the 9<sup>th</sup> till the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April, and involved a stay in Carrara and Florence. We were invited by the Dutch University Institute for Art History (NIKI) to present our final projects in the presentation GENIUS LOCI - NULLUS LOCUS SINE GENIO - No place is without a spirit. Objective of the research group was to use the characteristics of a space in the creation of works of art.

Genius Loci means as much as: spirit of the place. It can be translated as something special that attracts people to this place. These places in nature have inspired people to create works of art or to react to them spiritually in rituals with characteristics related to the spirit of the place. In the case of Carrara this meant the mountains from where the famous white marble is derived. It is one of the few places which has this white marble and from which for instance Michelangelo made his well-known David.

Michela Pelusio, the initiator of the project in Italy described the contemporary situation of Carrara: '500 years ago Michelangelo walked the same roads to choose his marble blocks, which, in his view, already contained the form that was later freed by him (making the world's most famous art works). Many artists have walked these paths, but few contemporary artists are walking them. In contemporary art it seems almost as if marble was forgotten. Perhaps, marble, the eternal material, is not appropriate for ephemeral conceptual and virtual art forms. Marble is less and less used for sculpture, and mostly for industrial and non-artistic purposes (most blocks are made into powder for use in chemicals), while these mountains are changing into Swiss cheese with an astonishing speed. The rich history and panorama of the marble caves are quickly disappearing. There are no laws or regulations that limit this extraction in any way. What do artists feel when they now walk the roads that Michelangelo walked, enthusiastic to find his piece of marble. Which feelings does this site of devastate mountains give?



The motivation of this art research was to go and give back something to the mountains, instead of taking, and to listen to the cry of the mountains, the emptiness and to amplify the sounds from the caves.'

The dangerous and hard work for the quarry workers stimulated to form the first strong union of anarchists in Carrara. Since working in the caves literally meant working on the edge of life and death, they had nothing to lose, which resulted in revolts and standing up for their rights. Nowadays machines have taken over and only a few people are still working in the caves, but because of the tempo in which the marble has to come out, the traditional ways of 'listening' to the stones in the caves, to hear how the structure is from inside, have been left aside, and many accidents still happen.

After our first visit to the cave Fantiscritti, I felt overwhelmed by the immensity of the cave and a weird feeling of being inside a mountain, which is not a natural place for a human being. We had decided not to make any recordings, to have all our senses fully open and fresh for the first impressions. We started to explore the cave and make sounds on the big marble pieces, with available items lying around. Because of the acoustics this produced impressive sounds. The idea came up to do a humming session with the whole group in the cave. This created beautiful overtones, and quite a strong picture because only we were alone in this immense cave with big yellow protective caps on that united us. It felt like bringing the voice of the mountain alive and finally resulted in a performance, which became our overall project. Next to this we all made our personal projects, which included performances, soundscapes, 3d animated pictures, visuals and installations.

All in all this research group meant a rich and intense experience of living together for two weeks, which sometimes felt like a big Italian famiglia and working hard together, with a quite diverse result, reflecting everyone's personal feeling with the genius loci, or what was left of it in Carrara.

For more information: [www.geniusloci2008.interfaculty.nl](http://www.geniusloci2008.interfaculty.nl)

# A snowball in the Middle East

by: Fabienne van Eck and Danny Felsteiner

Except for the heat, it's hard to notice that the season is spring in Silwan, a Palestinian slum neighborhood in East Jerusalem. Children don't chase butterflies, because butterflies don't visit Silwan, because there are no flowers, because there are no parks, because there is no space. Yet, there is something special about spring 2008 in the neighborhood: for the first time, every Sunday, parents hear their children sing and play instruments in the free music school that we (Fabienne, Dutch; Danny, Israeli) opened more than six months ago, sponsored by music in me ([www.musicinme.net](http://www.musicinme.net)).

We look back to the first day, where we greeted about thirty children between the ages of 6 and 12, and remember how lacking in confidence and uneasy the children (and we, to be honest) were. They arrived in a small rented apartment, sisters and brothers holding hands, keeping their mouths shut, having no idea what to expect. Since then, they have learned how to work in teams, to listen to and help each other, to sing songs alone in front of their classmates and play various musical instruments, and they have even performed in and outside the village in front of family and friends.

Snowballs are a rare commodity in the Middle East, but the music school has created one that refuses to thaw. Art lessons for children, languages courses for women and men, assistance with enrolment and administration, a library with Arabic children books (the whole Harry Potter series!), weekly women's meetings and a leadership course for teenage girls. Along with the music lessons, all of these have created a true community center of which the residents can be proud. These people gave their community center a name: Madaa, which means horizon in Arabic. ([www.madaa.org](http://www.madaa.org)).

Meanwhile, Fabienne and her cello have traveled to Jordan with a small circus group from Britain ([www.circus2iraq.org](http://www.circus2iraq.org)). They visited refugee camps for Iraqi and Palestinian children and made them laugh. Danny has joined two Palestinian musicians from the West Bank. They are scheduled to give music workshops to Israeli children in the town of Sderot, where dozens of missiles fall every week.

Last Sunday, during the music theory class in Silwan, Ahmad, a 10-year-old whose father is in jail, pointed to a calendar pinned on the wall. It was still fixed on February 2008 and showed a picture of an Israeli soldier questioning a Palestinian man in a checkpoint. These kinds of calendars are widespread in Palestinian houses. 'A Jew - bang!' Muhammad said and squeezed an imaginary trigger. Danny turned to him and said, 'But Muhammad, I'm also a Jew, should I die as well?' He shook his head, and said, 'No, you're a good Jew.' Fatima snickered and added, 'We love you.'

We will end with a request: if you love children, and are looking for an unforgettable experience in the summer, then volunteer to become involved in the Summer Games. These are the yearly summer activities for hundreds of Palestinian children from East Jerusalem and the West Bank. To learn more about the project, please visit [www.preludefund.org](http://www.preludefund.org) or email Fabienne: [fabienne.vaneck@preludefund.org](mailto:fabienne.vaneck@preludefund.org)



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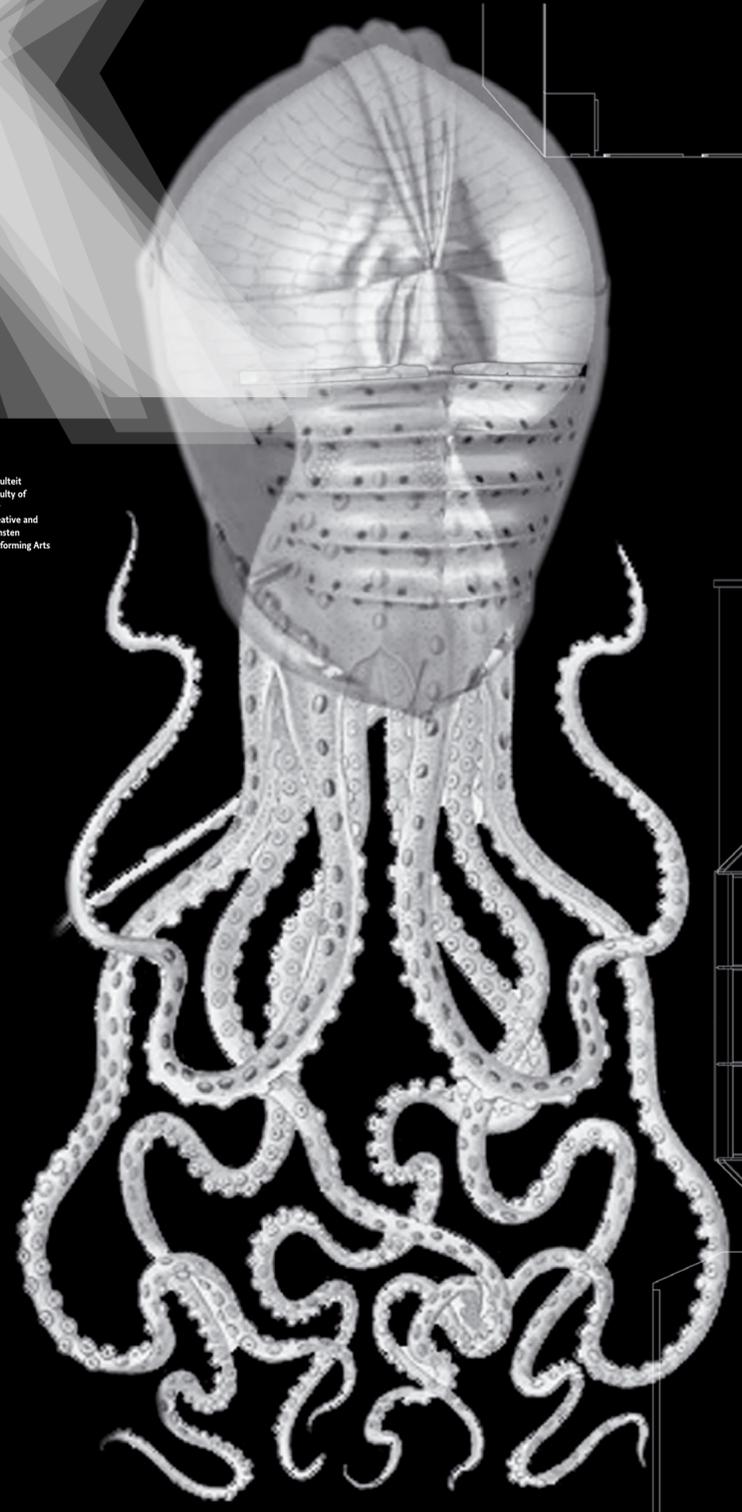
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