

A rural proposition for an urban opportunity: Pier Shear - Happening/Art Exhibition on Rijeka's Pier Draws Hundreds

Pier Shear / Strizenje Lukobrana
by artist Matthew Mazzotta
Rijeka, Croatia
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Rijeka, Croatia - is the principal seaport and the third largest city in Croatia, with a population around 200,000. Situated on the Adriatic Sea its main shipping pier is downtown, stretching for 2km along its coast. The pier is located directly between the city and the sea, making it the only connection to the sea and without public walking access the views of the sea are visually cut off. Due to major loss of industry, unemployment, and the financial crisis, the once 'off-limits' working pier was opened to the public. Although, losing its main function as a shipping pier, a symptom of the problems Croatia is currently facing, the city has gained this new public space and a very liberating first step in terms of public access to the sea. However, after three years of public access, the pier still remains a long industrial space with no real plans as to what it will become.

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On April 21st, as part of Pier Shear, seven sheep moved from their home in the countryside to their new home on the Rijeka's main shipping pier to help (re)imagine what the pier can be. However a more intense makeover happens as seven artists and craftspeople work with wool and physically transform it into new works of art and install them directly on the pier.

Using the metaphor of transformation, Pier Shear is a public art project that provides the raw materials, location and context for these artists to create artworks made of wool, expressing unique voices that explore Rijeka's past and present, while revealing the complexity of Rijeka's transitioning future.

Pier Shear is not a work that provides answers, but a platform and a process that reveals imagination and raises issues in an attempt to shift the focus of this failing industrial city to a economy more grounded in creativity and culture.

Sheep are a symbol of the everyday visions that surround Rijeka. Sheep are woven into the culture through jokes, metaphors, advertisements, stories, and rituals. They are often taken for granted, similar to how we view the pier. The sheep's coarse wool, like the raw feeling of the pier, is often seen as valueless; however, when the visions and talents of artists from Rijeka are focused on creating change, something wonderful and deeply satisfying happens.

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Mazzotta says using the unscripted space of the shipping pier as the location to bring voice to the changes happening in Rijeka and Croatia, Pier Shear is now changing people's leisure habits and maybe the way they see and inhabit their city.

"It's like the High-Line in New York, when they turned the unused elevated train tracks into a park, there is really only one reason to go there, and that is to have time to walk

and think. Croatia is facing more serious problems than New York though, so along with the show's vision of inhabiting a new public space it also brings a critical edge. Yet, some of the projects are so practical and beautiful, like the outdoor living room at the end of the pier, which must be one of Rijeka's most beautiful views, I think the effects from Pier Shear will be known after the show comes down and the citizens of Rijeka ask to have these aspects of their city developed further. This might be a turning point for the city, being able to see some potential in these hard times, so I am very glad to be at such a powerful moment in the history of Rijeka."

Since the opening, each day hundreds gather throughout the day at the end of the pier and inhabit this newly discovered area of the city. And although the show is at the very end of the 1.8km pier, it has transformed this overlooked section of a city and taken on a life of its own with people walking out there and spending time with each art installation, reading the artists' statements, relaxing and meeting each other as they see views of their city and the sea they had never seen before.

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Pier Shear is collaboration between Musagetes (musagetes.ca), the Port Authority of Croatia, the City of Rijeka Department of Culture, and a local veterinarian, animal rights group, artists, and a shepherd.

Please see a few photos of the show below or
For full details, photos, history and context go to piershear.com









