

Quick Service Couriers Strike a Pose

By Bridget O'Brien
Staff Reporter

The diverse forms of contemporary art have very few references to the masterpieces of old. However, for Montreal-based artist Adad Hannah, the way the world looks at famous art is the perfect topic: How people go to galleries and look at famous work, how people stand when they are in museums of art and their facial reactions to the works tells us something about the relationships people have with art in the world today.

Here on a two-month SSamzie Space residency, Hannah has been able to renew his interest in a sculpture he saw at the Rodin Gallery of the Samsung Museum of Art on a previous visit to Seoul.

The sculpture is the 1884-86 "Burghers of Calais," by Auguste Rodin. It consists of six men, cast in bronze, who were the hostages to the King of England in the 14th Century when the French city of Calais was laid siege during the Hundred Year's War. The burghers, all rich and well-respected citizens, volunteered to give themselves up in return for the city's freedom.

The sculpture exists in twelve editions, which are held in collections around the world. Although the city of Calais originally commissioned the work to commemorate its heroes, according to the Hannah, it now reflects art's value in the corporate world. "They are kind of like a franchise; a company buys such a sculpture to enhance their prestige, it doesn't really have any relevance to the city (of Seoul) historically," Hannah said.

However, it is a significant sculpture and one that is held in many people's minds. This mental "index" is also material for the artist. "The aim is to extend people's engagement with the real world thing and the photo index that people hold in their mind," he explained.

The "real world thing" is recreated with "real world" characters. Taking the sculpture with its history and full-range of interpretations, Hannah then takes some unlikely candidates to strike the pose of the burghers: Quick Service couriers.



Above is Auguste Rodin's "Burghers of Calais," (1884-86) which served as the model for a work in process by Montreal-based artist Adad Hannah.

Right image is six motorcycle couriers in the pose of the "Burghers of Calais," filmed on a 360 rotation in Seoul by Adad Hannah.

Motorcycle couriers are not thought of as the cultured types, but more as grungy and often monstrously scary as they might bowl you over on the footpath. But they are hardworking heroes the city depends on for their vital service.

SSamzie Space helped find some very stern, and evidently pathos-filled couriers, while Hannah made sure they were sufficiently briefed on their individual poses to recreate the Rodin sculpture. The men are touchingly serious as they are filmed "tableau vivant" — still as a statue, only slightly wobbling or blinking as they are seen 360 degrees as the video camera rotates around them.

Hannah brings a sculpture of 14th century French citizens and collides it with modern Seoul characters. With some tricky editing and camera work, but also extensive research and planning, Hannah intriguingly comments on the idea of the artwork in a modern environment and the relationship the art may hold with the city itself.



Hannah was born in New York in 1971. His video works have recently been presented at WRO 05 11th International Media Arts Biennale (Poland 2005), G39 (Cardiff 2005), Viper Basel (2004), Loop 04 International Video Art Fair (Barcelona), SeNef Festival/Ilmin Art Museum (Seoul 2004), Big M, Mediakunst Tour (Groningen, Amsterdam, and Nijmegen 2004), and Artists Space (New York 2003). More information on Adad Hannah's work can be found on his Web site www.adadhannah.com.

Hannah's "Burghers of Calais" work in progress can be seen as part of the SSamzie Open Studio, an

The 7th Open Studio Exhibition

When: Through April 4
Where: SSamzie Space (Near Hongik University Station on subway line 2)
Info: (02) 3142-1693 www.ssamziespace.com

annual event that brings all studio residents of the past year back for one inclusive view. The open studio show will include artist talks Tuesday through Thursday.

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