

Meet & Greet Noorse kunstenaar Petar Tale + Helge Seifert

21 November 2014

Ladies and gentlemen,

Oslo, June 2010. A chance encounter at the fairytale Hotel Holmenkollen. In the shade of the Holmenkollen ramp – the highest ramp worldwide and designed by the Belgian architect Julien De Smedt- two gentlemen are enjoying the breathtaking views over the Oslo Fjord. One sits behind his painter's easel, the other is on a study visit about Roald Amundsen, the world's most famous pole explorer. The art painter is the Norwegian Petar Tale, born Monte Negro. The other is the Belgian Helge Seifert, born Harstad, Norway.

Petar and Helge start a conversation, and soon their common fascination for the Norwegian pole explorers Roald Amundsen and Fridtjof Nansen comes to light. Those two explorers had a mutual friend: no other than the Belgian Adrien de Gerlache. Roald Amundsen accompanied Adrien de Gerlache on his first scientific exploratory expedition to Antarctica, on board of the Belgica. This groundbreaking expedition embarked from Antwerp, at a quay only a stone's throw away from here, on the 16th of August 1897.

Not until two years and some months later, the ship and the crew moored in this city's harbour again. During the odyssey with the Belgica, Amundsen experienced his urge to undertake future voyages of discovery to both the poles.

The connection between Petar and Helge was made, a warm friendship was born. Soon, new encounters and lots of animated and interesting conversations followed.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, both gentlemen are present here with us at 't Schoon Verdiep' of the Antwerp city hall. A beautiful and symbolic place. Symbolic, because this very place was the setting for an official reception of de Gerlache, Amundsen and the other expedition members back in November 1899. In fact, Amundsen would visit Antwerp and this city hall several times again later on.

Last summer, I myself visited the Fram Museum in Oslo. Wonderful and inspiring to see how the Norwegians cherish their maritime past and their explorers. At the Fram Museum, you cannot but understand and share the fascination of Petar and Helge.

You can, as it were, feel and experience the almost improbable and superhuman efforts made by Nansen, Amundsen and de Gerlache in order to unveil the secrets of our poles. Operating as the barometers of our planet, poles are invaluable. With regard to climate change and the sustainable survival of our planet, the Belgica expedition becomes surprisingly topical again.

It is the laudable merit of Helge that he succeeds in using his Norwegian contacts in order to maintain and strengthen the Norwegian-Belgian ties. Is that not exactly the same as De Gerlache was doing during World War I? When he exposed Belgian art in Norway in order to draw attention to the suffering of the Belgian people under German occupation?

Among many other things, Helge managed to get the exhibition 'Antarctic Pioneers' on loan from the Fram-Museum. Like that, this impressive exhibition about the adventurous trip of the Belgica was on display at the Belgica Wharf in Boom for over a year. But Helge wants more. In his search for exchange opportunities on common Norwegian-Belgian heritage, he invited his friend Petar over to Antwerp. They both aim to develop further concrete collaborative partnerships, for instance in terms of art and culture, but other initiatives and domains as well.

For instance, Petar is showing an enormous interest in building a permanent exhibition dedicated to the Belgica back in his Norwegian art gallery, in Larvick. This gallery will be inaugurated by the Norwegian queen.

Helge for his part, has aroused the interest of the people of the boat-building project ISEGRAN, located in Frederikshaven. ISEGRAN even considers cooperation with our own Belgica-project in Boom. How? By reconstructing the Belgica-cabin of Amundsen, as a contribution to the Belgica-replica project. How amazing would that be! And definitely It is therefore worthwhile checking if the students of the training 'woodworking' at the Provincial technical institute of Boom could be included in this project. For they are already participating in the Belgica-project.

Some of Petar's connections show interests in Belgica-merchandising. Think about Belgica beer, cheese, jenever, speculaas (spiced ginger biscuit), and of course, chocolate. This would offer you Norwegians the opportunity to enjoy all these delicious things, and at the same time, you would support the Belgica Project. That is what I call a true win-win.

One must say: the sense of initiative of those two gentlemen seems without limits, literally and figuratively. Let me thank you for all your efforts, and I wish you – together with all people present here- a lot of successes as well as inspiration during this Antwerp visit.

Ladies and gentleman,

In Flanders, volunteering work is a silent force. Silent, but at the same time, very present. Luckily! Weekly, even daily, thousands of hands and heads are at work in the social and cultural sector. All the initiatives by Helge Seifert are the best proof of the significance of a volunteer's contribution: a contribution to his city, his country and even abroad.

Helge, a warm thank you, and many congratulations.