

'Days and Nights With Christ'

SEAN KELLY

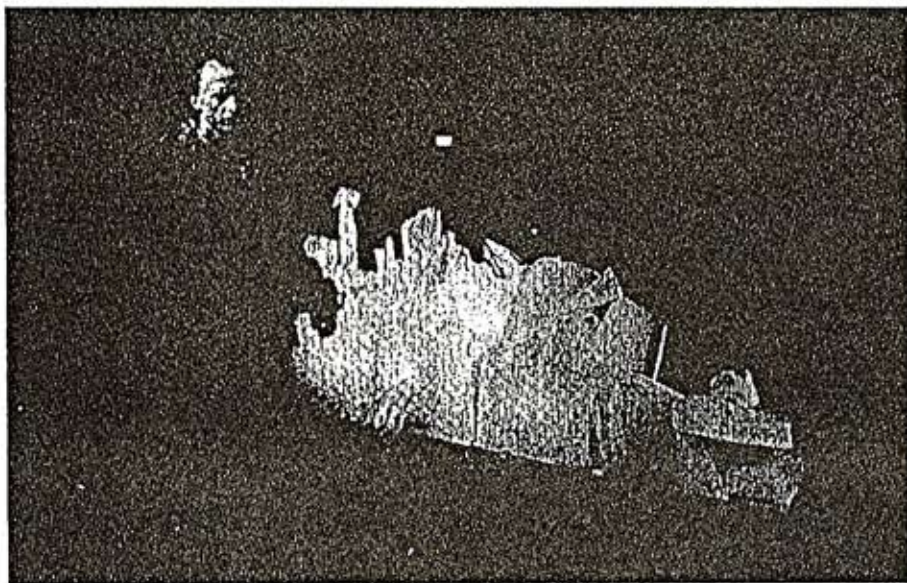
HOW many times have you attended a multi-media event full of optimistic anticipation that the usual problems which bedevil such presentations would not eventuate? Quite often if, like me, you showed any interest in the arts during the seventies.

And how often were you pleasantly surprised to find that the multitude of variables which had to fit actually did so? Virtually never, if your experience was anything like mine. Consider the problems and, of course, multiply them by some kind of exponential factor the moment you want to increase the scale of the work, the duration, or the component elements. There is cause to be cynical or, at least, very guarded if, like me, you have been involved in some avant-garde extravaganza only to find at the climactic moment that the ageing projector decided to blow (and, of course, there was no back-up bulb), or that the primitive technology was in no way able to cope with the demands made of it by the artist's imagination? Perhaps your experience was of the much vaunted event which would bring the various disciplines together in a kind of seamless 'Gesamtkunstwerk' in which the whole was expected to be far greater than the sum of its parts. It never was, was it? What you really got was a fairly tacky little operation in which one discipline or medium was invariably the central point while the others trotted along behind like bridesmaids, the wedding was rarely satisfactorily consummated. I could go on, but I think you get the drift.

Okay, it's Festival time. I'm at an exhibition opening, Ted comes up to me and offers me two tickets, free. For that price I'm prepared to consider anything. On the ticket are the letters IHOS. Ted tells me it's a kind of opera. At no time does he use the words avant-garde or multi-media. That's promising. 'Days and Night With Christ'. That's worrying. Could this be another Catholicism exorcism? Why do they always have to do it in public? Could I stand it? Would the bulb blow? It's where? Princes Wharf? Take a coat.

The first night (this is when the seams all show). Trying to generate some enthusiasm, but fearful of the worst. We enter, five minutes late. What is immediately apparent is that the whole space has been utilised (activated), and quite a space it is. On my left a wall of ice, glowing greenish. An object with authority. This sets a tone. There is a scale and a confidence at work which is impressive. I am immediately prepared to suspend my disbelief and leave my detached cynicism at the door. Hmmm.

"There is no doubt that Con Koukias and the others involved in the conception and presentation of this work have attempted to subvert the tendency to sit back and objectively regard the event with critical detachment."



A long walk takes me to a position about halfway down the length of the wharf and I am able to slowly take in the immense scale of this operation and work. At this point I am already content. The thing works at the visual level. As a visual installation the ice, the beds of earth and leaves, the huge mound of salt and the lines of men's suits stretching away into the distance along the ceiling are enough.

That's only part of the story. Yes, this is to be an experience centralised on the ears. At this point the sounds impinge on my visually predisposed consciousness and I am aware of how tightly this construction is welded together. The sound (original composition by Constantine Koukias) is stunning. A complex mix of styles and sounds which belies too close a comparison with any particular patterns or forms and at times even with the notion of music itself. The gaps between the senses are being broken down at a rapid rate. At this point the live human factor is engaged and the more cerebral, theatrical elements of the piece develop.

Space does not permit a detailed description of the work. It is simply too vast and the interaction between the various elements too complex. Further than that, here is an experience that comes close at times to the ineffable. You really had to be there. It is hard to translate the response which is not

conscious or analytical into a form which is. There is no doubt that Con Koukias and the others involved in the conception and presentation of this work have attempted to subvert the tendency to sit back and objectively regard the event with critical detachment. They are really seeing an experience which more closely approximates the sublime. There are criticisms to be made, the only glaring problem for me was the tendency for the dance to break out of the more raw movement as emotional equivalent into something which just looked like modern dance standard moves. (Something like the equivalent of including a painting as part of the visual element.) Sure there were obvious references to work done by Cage, Rauschenberg and Merce Cunningham and various other early practitioners of such forms, but to detail them would be nit-picking. There is reason to be very cheerful. Congratulations Con. This project was original, ambitious and highly professional. What is more significant is that it happened in Hobart. It never entered my mind to qualify my enthusiasm for this work with the rider... 'for Hobart it was good'. This was above the other offerings that the Salamanca Festival presented us with. To think that so long after the seventies I am able to once again approach the avant event without trepidation, for that Constantine, I thank you. ○