



PRESS RELEASE

'INFLATABLE REFUGEE'
ARRIVES IN MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA AND IS WELCOMED
BY LORD MAYOR MR ROBERT DOYLE'

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The Immigration Museum Victoria (Melbourne) invited Belgian artist collective Schellekens & Peleman to sail with their iconic art work 'Inflatable Refugee' on the Yarra river on 17th June 2017 from 11 am in the context of Refugee Week. The work shall be welcomed by Lord Mayor of Melbourne Mr. Robert Doyle.

When: Saturday 17 June 2017 - 11am

Where: Peppercorn Lawn (adjacent to the Boatsheds) adjacent Princess Bridge

What: The Lord Mayor Robert Doyle will welcome the work and sign the Refugee Welcome Scroll as part of the event.

Who: Schellekens & Peleman, The Lord Mayor Robert Doyle

GENERAL PUBLIC VIEWING: The six metre high work can be viewed by the general public from 12 – 3pm on Saturday afternoon 17 June and on Sunday 18 June from 11am – 3pm (east of Princess Bridge by the boat sheds). It will then be installed at the Immigration Museum from Monday 19 to Sunday 25 June.

To mark World Refugee Day, the Immigration Museum will be open free-of-charge on Tuesday 20 June.

The presentation of the work in Melbourne was made possible by Museums Victoria and the City of Melbourne.

Mr. Doyle quoted:

“The artwork aims to help break down stereotypes about refugees and it highlights the difficult journey that people make in fleeing global conflicts,”

Mrs. Pedrami, Immigration Museum manager quoted:

“The enormity of the work prompts us to reflect on the human cost of conflict, political unrest, environmental displacement and poverty. With over 63 million people currently displaced, the work is a poignant reminder of the crisis facing so many people around the globe.”

Schellekens & Peleman feel more than ever the need to make critical remarks on what’s happening in society nowadays, by making art. They believe art can catalyze debate, not by patronizing nor by giving answers or opinions, but by bringing art into our daily life which grates, which shows what people do not want to see: uncertainty and doubt instead of conviction, the artists raise questions like: is he a big problem or a huge opportunity? As artists they like to leave a trace of breadcrumbs that doesn’t lead anywhere.

Coinciding with the current migration crisis from East to West, Schellekens & Peleman have started work on ‘The Inflatable Refugee’.

‘Inflatable Refugee’ is a large inflatable adult male figure of 6m height that represents a seated refugee and currently travels the world.

The ‘Inflatable Refugee’ gazes blankly into the distance. Has he arrived at a safe haven or will he be refused and be sent from whence he came? His sheer size allows him to look over and beyond us and keep watch on the horizon, not limited by borders or documents. It makes him inescapable, undeniably present.

Schellekens & Peleman proportionally enlarged the ‘Inflatable Refugee’ to match the reactions his arrival in the Western world evoked. His size represents how we perceive him. Do we see him as a human or as a problem? Is his presence an opportunity or a threat, devoid of human characteristics? Questions of uncertainty galore.. The

surrealism of this iconic figure eliminates fear as being the leitmotiv of many discussions and debates.

Schellekens & Peleman have chosen to create this inflatable figure from the same material as the boats, used by human traffickers to cross the Mediterranean Sea, are made from. It's too fragile to withstand the waves of the sea, making the passengers on these boats extremely vulnerable.

Schellekens & Peleman created the 'Inflatable Refugee' to be able to travel on water. Seated on a pontoon he floats and passes the skylines of big world cities and the lives of the people that inhabit them. Schellekens & Peleman will float the 'Inflatable Refugee' on the Yara river.

Inflatable Refugee brings a message. His presence is undeniable. By introducing the surreal figure of Inflatable Refugee in a city, citizens are aware that something is different, something is brought into their urban life that they did not see before. Inflatable Refugee will be the citizen's fellow citizen for a certain amount of time.



'Inflatable Refugee' in Venice (Italy), Schellekens & Peleman, photo: © Dirk Kinot



Photo © Ian Cox 2017

'Inflatable Refugee' in Ostend (Belgium), Schellekens & Peleman, photo: Ian Cox