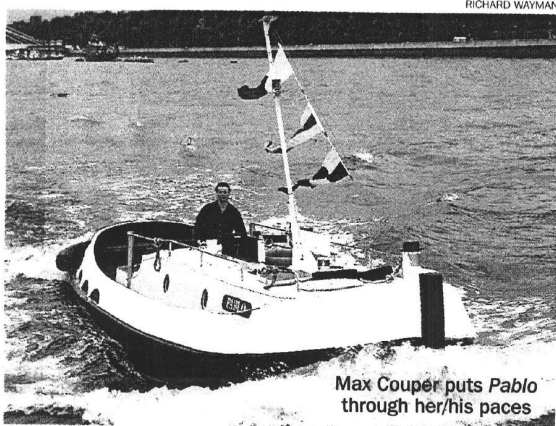


THE EUROPEAN

The European Magazine, 8 – 14 August 1996



Max Couper puts Pablo through her/his paces

Cultural metaphor chugs down the old waterways

ONE man and his tug boat begin an eccentric crusade on 8 August to raise awareness of our common European culture.

The British artist Max Couper and his tug *Pablo* will travel the waterways which were the old northern trade routes – from London to Hannover via Antwerp, Rotterdam and Duisburg – delivering and creating tug-related artworks en route. He

aims to explore the “cultural flows” and “connective forces” which unite the continent of Europe – ideas of trade, technology, commerce, cultural exchange and history.

Couper’s 12 years living on a barge on the Thames have made him feel part of an international floating community. “Since I’ve been here it has become obvious that I’m as closely connected with someone

in Rotterdam as I am with someone in inland Britain,” he says.

His first port of call is Antwerp, where he will arrive on 7 September. *Pablo* will be lifted onto the quay where, using a spotlight attached to her rudder, Couper will direct dances exploring the concepts of language and history. “The way a rudder steers a boat from behind is a perfect metaphor for the way our

culture is steered, from behind, by history,” he explains.

The next stop is Rotterdam where a ‘staged artwork’ will explore the secretive petroleum business which underpins Europe’s economies.

From April to May 1997 Couper will be in Duisburg. There he will convert a 25-ton barge into a giant see-saw. The public will be able to enter the barge and pivot

it with their weight. This balancing act, Couper explains, is a metaphor for the challenges confronting the Ruhr valley in a post-industrial world.

At the end of his tour, in Hannover in June, Couper will stage a piece called *Tugprint*. His boat will be dropped from a crane into a bed of mud in front of the Sprengel Museum. When the tug is removed, it will leave its imprint. This gesture is

intended to dramatise the process by which one culture leaves its imprint on another – and will also provide a bit of a laugh.

Couper has funding from several ports. Antwerp’s Museum of Contemporary Art has supplied an office from which to co-ordinate the project, and museums in three ports are hosting exhibitions of his work to coincide with the visits.

Edward Platt

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