



NEWS/ADVERTISING

The “Bloch” is coming!

By Melissa Eitenmiller

BELCOURT—The “Bloch” may be coming to the Turtle Mountain area next summer. What is it? Well, in a particular region of Switzerland called Appenzell, there is a centuries’ old tradition of, every odd-numbered year, taking the large trunk of the last spruce tree to be cut down in the season, and processing with it from the village of Urnäsch to the neighboring town of Herisau and back. Then at the end of the daylong procession, the tree trunk is auctioned off in the Urnäsch town square, followed by a masquerade ball. But on March 7, 2011, the Swiss artist group, Com & Com, purchased Bloch No. 23781 at the auction, and decided to take it on a world tour, with the hopes of reaching all 7 continents.

The point of this “Bloch” project, according to Com&Com’s brochure, is that it “unites contemporary art and folk culture and creates a dialogue among various people, traditions, and customs. It’s about participation and cultural exchange, about global art production and a broadened grasp of art and culture” (p.1). A new Bloch pro-

cession will be developed at each site, based on local traditions, and it is hoped that, in the end, artists from all the places around the globe where the “Bloch” has been, will unite in one last procession and bid farewell to the “Bloch”.

In addition to Bern and other cities in Switzerland, the “Bloch” has already traveled to Berlin and Karlsruhe, Germany; Taipei, Taiwan; Shanghai, China; Singapore, and now, Com&Com, in a collaborative partnership with Barbara Hauser (a Swiss photographer, multimedia installation artist, and linguist, who graduated from UND in 2007) and Troyd Geist (Folklorist with the North Dakota Council on the Arts) are exploring the possibility of bringing the “Bloch” to the Turtle Mountain area. In order to investigate this possibility further, Marcus Gossolt, of Com&Com, Hauser, and Geist arrived at the Turtle Mountain Reservation on Tuesday, October 2nd and spent a couple of days visiting with local artists.

“They’re interested in bringing [the “Bloch”] to the Turtle Mountain area, explained Geist.

“But we still have to figure out if things will work out with getting the tree here, and funding. They know what they want to do. They’re very interested and excited about the area and want to connect with individual artists, especially traditional artists. They do want to bring it to [this] area. Now they’re moving on to a stage of trying to find funding. Their goal is for it to happen next summer.”

Assuming they can obtain the necessary funding, Com&Com, in partnership with Hauser and Geist, plans to bring the Bloch to a still-to-be-determined site on the reservation and to another place or two just off the reservation, but within the immediate TM area. Geist and Hauser have already identified and introduced some traditional area artists to Com&Com. The two people they visited while in Belcourt were James “Cubby” LaRocque and Dan Jerome. LaRocque, who works as a Victims of Crime Advocate and has played the fiddle, bass guitar and steel guitar for many years, commented, “[Their project] reminds me of how Native Americans develop a totem pole. They have a similar ritual where

they knock the tree down.... Different native tribes had rituals that occurred with trees, so when I heard they were doing this over in Switzerland, I just automatically thought, ‘that’s just like what Native Americans do with trees. They honor a tree, or they use a tree as a symbol of honoring the earth. I’m impressed with the similarities between our cultures.”

LaRocque, who has played with such professionals as Stony Edwards and Buffy Sainte-Marie, is looking forward to the coming of the “Bloch” to Belcourt. “I plan on participating,” he said. “I’m extremely honored to even have my name brought up at all in this situation, and that people from the other side of the planet found their way to my living room just blew me away.... It was so nice to have Barbara and Marcus over to our house.... It was such a nice visit.”

Geist, Hauser and Gossolt also enjoyed a dinner at Dan and Bridget Jerome’s house. While there, they were shown a picture painted by Bev Doolittle, entitled, “Music in the Wind”, which depicts a Native American legend of an Indian



Music in the Wind, a Painting by Bev Doolittle, Depicting an Indian Legend of a Maiden Being Courted in the Forest, with the Tree Trunk Being Transformed into a Flute

maiden being courted when she comes upon a large tree trunk in the woods, which is actually a large flute being blown by a huge boulder which has the face of an Indian man. All the animals of the forest unite their voices to create the music that comes out of the flute. He [i.e. Gossolt] thought that was great!” said Dan Jerome, who has hand-carved many flutes out of aromatic cedar. The bringing together of the tree trunk from Switzerland and local instru-

ments, such as the flute or the fiddle, may be one way to show the similarity and union of cultures.

Although Gossolt, Hauser and Geist have already pinpointed some area artists that they would like involved with the “Bloch” project, other area artists who might be interested in this project are invited to contact Troyd Geist at tgeist@nd.gov. More information and pictures of the “Bloch” can also be found at www.bloch23781.com.