



Envision this is part XXXVII of an ensemble that is no longer necessarily ceremonial

Exhibition #16

Curator: Felix Kindermann

Dürst Britt & Mayhew, The Hague

Networked collective

Bas van den Hurk, Jochem van Laarhoven, Bo Stokkermans, Samieh Shahcheraghi, Urs Moore, Jamie Kane, Fatima Beker, Fatemeh Heidari, Andela Vidic, Katerina Sidorova, Piet Dirx Mathilde Nobel, Lotte Driessen, Joachim Harten, Rob van Kranenburg, Loran van de Wier, Marijn van Kreijl, Matea Bakula, Kim David Bots, Gijsje Heemskerk, Ramon de Gier, Mike Suijkerbuijk, Isabel Cordeiro, Felix Kindermann, Sanne Janssen, Matthijs van de Sande Bakhuyzen, Chrys Amaya Michailidis, Berendine Venemans, Reinout Scholten van Aschat Liza Wolters, Maud van den Beuken, Robert Lombarts, Alicia Kremser, Michele Bazzoli, Cathleen Owens, Hussel Zhu, Ralph de Jongh, Rik Laging, Do Klar

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For six weeks we, Networked Collective, have been creating works in gallery Dürst Britt & Mayhew.

Networked Collective is a non-permanent group of about twenty five artists, actors, theoreticians and performers that collectively produce works, films and plays.

The main protagonist of this show is a printing press on which all the works were produced. Every work has multiple 'authors'. These works have a pluriform potential; they can function autonomously, but they were also be transformed into garments, and from time to time activated by performers.

The collective has been initiated by Bas van den Hurk and Jochem van Laarhoven and has been active in various places. This is the first time however that they worked within the context of a 'commercial gallery'. During this project the space of the gallery functioned as a studio to work and experiment in, an assembly line, a stage for performance, a 'zone of sentience', a sewing workshop, an educational space, a white cube and a hang-out.

Visitors could see the collective 'at work' during opening hours in the main space of the gallery. In the Frontspace there were continuously changing presentations of the works produced. The selection of these works was not only be made by the gallerists, but also by guest curators.

Stemming from self-organized structures Networked Collective created a rhizomatic rampant growth in which potentialities and impotentialities - notions that come from Giorgio Agamben - both played a role.

During the period there were three special events: a jam, a dinner and a performance.





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Text

The aesthetically gluttonous may eat with their hands

by Jeroen van der Hulst

At its core, the Networked Collective is a comprehensive exercise, with a large group of people, in interplay and collaborative effort to find the space between making art and displaying it. Individual authorship dissolves in a greater, more or less organised, whole — though, in various ways still relying on more or less specialised labour from each participant. Everyone's traits and talents are churned together and push a production process further. Over the course of five weeks, artists, makers, theoreticians, performers and the like have been coming together every week to work from Thursday to Sunday, and at the end of every day, an exhibition with different and new works has been curated by members of the collective, the gallerists and guest curators. The Networked Collective plays with the question posed by German/Russian theorist Boris Groys, who states that making art is the same as deciding on what is to be displayed as art. And if there is no longer any real difference between making art and displaying it, how is it possible to differentiate between the role of the artist and that of the curator?

In this respect, a gallery space like Dürst Britt & Mayhew is very fitting to be used by a collective such as this one: what is practiced in the back is to be displayed in the front, not unlike, say, a bakery or pastry shop. One could also make the comparison with a traveling circus of changing acts in every town they call on. After all, the Network Collective, initiated by Bas van den Hurk and Jochem van Laarhoven, brought their own circus, figuratively speaking. They landed in The Hague with a wide range of materials — a printing press as the beating heart, tables fashioned from home-made trestles, paper and fabrics galore, and as is tradition with all their on-site projects: a sofa. Comparisons, however, might either overcomplicate or oversimplify what has been taking place in the gallery space — a collective endeavour to produce and to show the decision-making process of getting to an artwork and, subsequently, an exhibition. They make 'network posters', compiled/assembled by those present and willing to participate, for instance. It shows how letting go of certain rules and frameworks requires holding on to others or putting still others into place.

The name Networked Collective is borrowed from Nigerian critic and curator Okwui Enwezor's text 'The Artist as Producer in Times of Crisis'. In it, Enwezor delineates how collectivity, both as praxis and a state of being, causes a shift in traditional artistic production: artistry, authorship, and the authenticity of a work of art no longer have to be attributed to an individual, but emerge from collective act(s) across disciplinary lines. Enwezor goes on to define different types of collective formations: first, the fixed groups that work together for a prolonged period of time, which can be considered a single entity — also in terms of authorship. Second, the networked collectives, which "tend to emphasize a flexible, non-permanent course of affiliation, privileging collaboration on project basis than on a permanent alliance". In the Networked Collective, different artists leave different traces across the whole. What is made in the first week, may, in part, return in works made and/or exhibited far further down the line. Echoes of authors, in the way that stories and storytelling also relies on retelling and reshaping existing tales, which is not a caveat on authenticity. It is the practice of it.

As Van Laarhoven says, the protagonist in this exhibition project is the printing press they have installed in the back space of the gallery, which serves as an engine room. The apparatus made its way to the collective seemingly by coincidence. During a residency at Frank Masereel Centrum in Belgium, the collective had worked with a printing press and Van Laarhoven remembered an uncle who owned the same model. The collective were offered to take it into use ever since. Many facets of the Networked Collective seem deceptively coincidental, but it requires planning and dedication to allow things to emerge as if from nowhere. Note the selfmade trestles. They could have been bought, instead they made them specifically for their own ends.

Any collaborator uses the press to print on paper, card, fabrics, scraps of old books, other images, flowers, to name but a few—I ventured to list all the objects and materials I saw when I was in the space, but that proved futile. This very printing press was part of the reason I have been enamored by the project from the outset; the printing press is a forebear to the information age, allowing a rapid-fire dissemination of information and images — though one can wonder whether this printing press is more akin to capturing and holding in place, rather than dissemination. In its current form it is unmistakably playful, simple, and just about anything can go through its mechanism. The Looney Tunes character of Foghorn Leghorn is a recurrent image across the floor of the gallery space. "A reviewer once mistook one of our prints as bearing the image of Foghorn Leghorn. It didn't, but we decided to start using it from then on out, so here we are." The Networked Collective make their own rules.

Prints are used and reused by whomever, and the collective does its best to keep track of who has made what, and they also keep a photographic record of all the goings on. For instance, Katerina Sidorova, one of the collaborating artists, decided to use the printing press to make tank tops, while others worked on floating paper kimonos.

I join a session to make a set of network posters and to exhibit them in an exhibition at the end of the day. I find a few sheets that have been imbued in the printing press with flowers that were picked along the street. I have neither picked the flowers nor have I put them through the printing press. It reminds me of a medieval tapestry and I offer it up to be used in the network poster, my contribution was the mere selection of that sheet of paper.

"I do use scissors. The network means letting go of doubt", Van Laarhoven says as he kneels down to cut a semi-circle out of a big print. It is a statement that sticks with me, as the pair of scissors began to symbolize an unscrupulousness that is worthy of envy. This lesson in doubt and letting go is one of the keystones of Envision this is part XXXVII of an ensemble that is no longer necessarily ceremonial. The only way to decipher any meaningful difference between making art and displaying art is to distinguish individual parts of the mechanism. Sometimes that means cutting out a semi-circle, and showing other participants that that, too, is allowed.

And the works are for sale — we are, after all, in a gallery. One might wonder if working towards sellable works could be counterintuitive for a collaborative effort to make for the sake of making. Though, I think that in itself is an oversimplification of the project. Yes, this collaboration concerns labour that should be remunerated. "Selling the artworks means the project can be circular, allowing participants to break even first and foremost," Van den Hurk explains. The point is that the project is also an experiment in opening up the processes that lead artists down the path of deciding when something is 'finished' or able to be displayed, an interplay of serendipity and decisions. This is also a political space. If anything, that is the labour that the artists exercise here: sovereignty over the decision-making before and after the act of display. Puzzling together the posters is an exciting process, reacting on one another as if in a jam session. We end up with three posters, one of which is unanimously deemed to be "rubbish", and a triptych is selected from prints found in the back space, which, again in a deceptively coincidental way, are stunning.

On my last visit, I drop in as several visitors are also in the gallery space — some at work already, others on a tour of the space. The line between visitor and collaborator seems blurred all the more, or rather, the keen visitor might automatically want to participate. "I'm aching to make something now," one visitor exclaims. "And I insist you join as well!", she gestures towards me.

The collective has been at work making books from the materials formerly strewn across the floor in the back space of the gallery. To create these books has a bifurcated effect: a new work is made

made each time, sensuous objects that serve as open invitations to be held and leafed through.

Or, as a fellow visitor put it: “These books have the same effect on me that record stores have. You see someone flipping through a box next to you and you’re anxious for them to leave so you can swoop in to rifle through the same box.” But aside from being lush objects for the aesthetically gluttonous, the books also serve as a document to the work and exhibition experiments that have taken place, traces of activity, of aesthetic choices and musings, of presence. “That back cover, because it has been touched by ten hands, gains meaning. Something that is formerly just the back of something now becomes something in its own right,” Van den Hurk mentions.

A week earlier, the Networked Collective spent the whole day working at a collaborative performance dinner, conducted by chef-cum-artist Loran van de Wier. Tablecloths have become literal canvasses, for flavours, textures, colours, fragrances, all smeared, applied, served, touched, tasted and eventually rolled through the printing press. Van de Wier made an effort to let people taste The Hague, briny and salty flavours, foam reminiscent of the sea. Mousses and cremes formed three-dimensional works on the table cloths and sheets as the food was served, a salute to Romanian artist Daniel Spoerri, perhaps. The traces from that Sunday’s performance are carefully placed along the walls of the workspace at the back of the gallery. “We’re not quite sure what will happen if we hang them on the wall, they’ve been laying here to dry.”

I am struck by how the uneaten food is now drying into a tablecloth. Groys says: “The artistic installation does not circulate. Rather, it installs everything that usually circulates in our civilization: objects, texts, films, etc.” Or, in this case, bits of radishes, perhaps a colourful salty mousse. To install means to freeze-frame that which otherwise flows outward, inward and across. The elements that have allowed Envision this is part XXXVII of an ensemble that is no longer necessarily ceremonial to breathe and flow all have to do with the parameters of what is allowed to dry up and be fixed, and what gets recirculated into the mix. It is an exercise in frolicking in existing frameworks, contorting them, smashing them, but only if need be. “To install a law is to break one,” Groys says. Meaning, that to put rules into place, first, you have to find yourself outside of some other rules.

Sometimes the final act is letting moist smudges dry to see what comes of it at the other end. Over the past five weeks, Dürst Britt & Mayhew has been the site of remixing a plethora of elements that appear when making and displaying art, a look behind the scenes in the artists’ studio, allowing authorship to breathe between makers and works to emerge as pleasant, active, stunning, and also rubbish. Because to make is to move into the unknown, to act without knowing what comes next, and to sift through the traces each time. The gallery space has been performed to its full potential by the Networked Collective, look at all the traces left behind. Whether to then display them is another matter entirely.

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Jeroen van der Hulst is a writer and works as a literary agent and press officer. He holds a MAREs in Critical Studies in Arts and Culture from the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and has published on the aesthetic dimensions of the atomic era, contingency in the age of mass-communication, and media archeology of a Cold War nuclear bunker. He regularly reviews art exhibitions.

colophon

Exhibition #16: 13-11-21 at Dürst Britt & Mayhew, The Hague
curator: Felix Kindermann

During six weeks we worked collectively in the gallery.
Almost all the work was made with the printing press.
We've organized a jam, a workshop, a dinner, a performance and a final presentation.

collaborated with:

Bo Stokkermans
Samieh Shahcheraghi
Urs Moore
Jamie Kane
Fatima Beker
Fatemeh Heidari
Andela Vidic
Katerina Sidorova
Piet Dirkx
Mathilde Nobel
Lotte Driessen
Joachim Harten
Rob van Kranenburg
Loran van de Wier
Marijn van Kreij
Matea Bakula
Kim David Bots
Gijsje Heemskerk
Ramon de Gier
Mike Suijkerbuijk
Isabel Cordeiro
Felix Kindermann
Sanne Janssen
Matthijs van de Sande Bakhuyzen
Chrys Amaya Michailidis
Berendine Venemans
Reinout Scholten van Aschat
Liza Wolters
Maud van den Beuken
Robert Lombarts
Alicia Kremser
Michele Bazzoli
Cathleen Owens
Hussel Zhu
Ralph de Jongh
Rik Laging
Do Klar

text:

Jeroen van der Hulst

jam: 17 October 2021

Mathilde Nobel
Benjamin Schoones
Samieh Shahcheraghi
Lotte Driessen
Jochem van Laarhoven

dinner: 31 October 2021

chef: Loran van de Wier
support: Do Klar

performance: 14 November 2021

Chrys Amaya Michailidis
Matthijs van de Sande Bakhuyzen
Alexander Mayhew
Reinout Scholten van Aschat
Lotte Driessen

photography:

Jochem van Laarhoven

curators:

Jaring Dürst Britt
Xuan Hu
Alicia Kremser
Piet Dirkx
Charlotte Koch
Annemiek Jacobs
Rob van Kranenburg
Niek Hendrix
Felix Kindermann
Alexander Mayhew
Cathleen Owens
Katerina Sidorova
Zeynep Kubat
Marijn van Kreij
Samieh Shahcheraghi
Joachim Harten
Mike Suijkerbuijk
Ramon de Gier
Isabel Cordeiro
Ralph de Jongh

workshop participants:

Robbert van Binsbergen
Michelle Kanter
Sounak Das
Rikki Swart
Berendine Venemans
Paolo Tarelli
Sixin Zeng