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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

The Museum Within Us

Exposing artist-led curatorial strategies in an expanded practice

Janssen, Edwin

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# The Museum Within Us

Exposing artist-led curatorial strategies in an expanded practice

Edwin Janssen

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## Some notes at the beginning

Nowadays curatorial practice is a key component of the artist's toolkit. Over the last decades artists have developed a wide range of curatorial modes that involve the creation or representation of archives and collections, interventions in museums and galleries and devising programmes of discursive events.

Driven by my love for museums and displays I conceived a research project, *The Museum Within Us* with the intention to offer some new insights into the different curatorial strategies artists use as part of their creative processes. It was clear from the start that the notion of the 'curatorial' could also function as a productive guiding principle for the exploration of my own artistic development.

Using reproduction and montage, and referencing as key components, I aimed to reveal the workings of my shared art practice against the backdrop of how artists utilise the functions of museums and take up the role of collector or archivist as part of their creative activities. Through production, reflection and contextualisation I set out to give insights in the history of my individual art practice and in particular the role of collecting, curating and display in my collaborative, dialogical and socially engaged art practice with Tracy Mackenna.

As Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen we have produced a variety of exhibition projects that have taken the museum as a starting point often creating or representing public or private collections, and using a variety of media. This art practice is an on-going and cumulative activity, a never-ending process of shared sowing, growing, harvesting, cooking, eating and digesting.

### **The foundations of the museum**

*The Museum Within Us* was conceived on the basis of three sets of key questions:

#### *Curatorial tools*

Collecting and representing visual material has always been at the heart of artistic activities. How can these core tools be applied to open up and share my art practice? How can notions of curating be used as an organising principle to give insight into the urges, processes and sources that shape an art practice?



### *Primacy of the visual*

Academic research mainly results in textual outcomes in some instances supported by visual material. Even practice-led doctoral research projects often result in written and illustrated dissertations. Alain de Botton and John Armstrong see writing as the first “response to the consequences of forgetting” and art making as the second possible retort<sup>1</sup>. Could this order be reversed, and could memorise and sharing my own creative life be image-driven? How can the visual take precedence over the textual in a practice-led investigation? Could a visual outcome reveal a multiplicity of ‘seeings’, readings and practice-led understandings?

### *Me, myself and the bigger picture*

How could narratives of hyper subjective and individual art practice be situated in a broader objective contemporary art context? The artistic research I set out to conduct defies the separation in the art of knowing, of performing (art and the every day) from theory, “of that mode of activity commonly called ‘practice’ from insight, of imagination from executive doing, of significant purpose from work, of emotion from thought and doing.”<sup>2</sup> Confusing life with art and the private with the public, I aimed to materialise and expose what I carry with me.

## **Exhibitions of images**

To pursue the fore-mentioned questions I adopted the structure of a portable museum with five rooms. Each room is designed in the form of a box and contains a curated selection of the in total 206 digital prints (277 x 390 mm each) I produced as part of the research process:

### Room I

Love Hate: the artist and museum culture.

### Room II

For Work: the artist as collector and archivist

### Room III

Curartists: the artist as curator

### Room IV

WAR AS EVER!: visual representations of images of war and conflict

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<sup>1</sup> Alain de Botton and John Armstrong, *Art as Therapy*, (New York / London Phaidon, 2013), 8.

<sup>2</sup> John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, (New York:Perigee, 2005), 21.

## Room V

The Museum of Loss and Renewal: looking at well-being and well-dying through objects and encounters

The production of a series of exhibitions of digital photographic images helped me to identify, further explore and contextualise some of my key concerns, and enables me to share my sources, and observations with others. Using curatorial modes, a wide variety of interests, approaches, working methods and media could be presented visually without concealing the fragmented nature of the constellation of stuff that makes up my, partly collaborative, art practice.

As the visitor of the museum you are invited to activate this collection of photographic images using two of your senses, sight (ophthalmoception) and touch (tactioception). The composition of *The Museum Within Us* stimulates a personal engagement with the visual material through handling, looking and 'reading'. The five accompanying books offer a linear route but the public should feel free to wander of on their own accord.

### **Peculiar probing**

In *The Museum Within Us* research is understood as an open-ended process of artistic thinking that is inherently unpredictable and idiosyncratic. Experimental in nature, uncertain, and resisting regulation, my artistic research moves between production of art, revealing and narrating the inner workings of a practice, sharing memories of making and recording data of past events or related to artefacts.

The traditional thesis is replaced by a collection of pictures with a coexisting text. The narrative that accompanies the digital prints resists the overly objectifying and distancing style of academic writing and could be described as revelatory and reflective non-fictional writing. The visual, as the primary language, and the textual, as the secondary language, are used here to document the research process. This recording of my past practice is the result of an impulse to archive and to recollect what I deem important and was inspired by a desire to open the museum within me.

# I

## Love Hate

The artist and museum culture

NOT TO BE REPRODUCED

Welcome to Room I of *The Museum Within Us*. This portrait of the English poet Edward James (1907-1984) by the Belgian surrealist René Magritte is the starting point for our stroll through the museum. *Not to be Reproduced* (1937)<sup>3</sup> was the very first work of modern art I experienced during my first ever visit to an art museum. This enigmatic painting, which is part of the renowned collection of surrealist art of Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam, triggered a profound interest in visual art. My first visit to 'Boijmans' was full of beautiful and puzzling surprises and ultimately led to an artistic life that will be partly shared with you during this guided tour.

Buying a postcard in the museum shop with a reproduction of *Not to be Reproduced* marked the beginning of my extensive image collection, which has formed the basis for *The Museum With Us*

After I prematurely left Art College, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam, the city where I had lived for more than twenty years, became my preferred environment for visual and intellectual stimulation. As such it played a major role during the formative years of my art practice. Despite being disillusioned with art education I was determined to become a successful artist. To achieve this dream I embarked on an initially self-directed study in my 'local' museum.

Numerous visits to Boijmans Van Beuningen with its varied collections of historical, modern and contemporary art helped me to fill the considerable gaps in my knowledge of art history. It was during my frequent visits to the museum that I came across many of the works that informed my own artistic activities; some of which were included in my solo exhibition *Narcissus and the Pool of Corruption*, which took place at "Boijmans" in 1995.<sup>4</sup>

The only visual art that I was brought up with were reproductions of old masters on our living room walls. Postcards of famous paintings such as *The Milkmaid* (c.1657)<sup>5</sup> by Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675) and the *Head of a Negro* (c.1620)<sup>6</sup> by Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) were framed by my father using cardboard, glass plates and black tape. Our 'home museum' also included a

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<sup>3</sup> Oil on canvas, 79 x 65.5 cm, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. Edward James, a patron and collector of surrealist art, was a close friend of René Magritte, who took him also as the subject for his painting *The Pleasure Principle*, which was produced in the same year as *Not to be Reproduced*. In both paintings the face of James is concealed, evoking a sense of mystery and detachment.

<sup>4</sup> See III - 23.

<sup>5</sup> Oil on canvas, 45.5 cm x 41 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

<sup>6</sup> Oil on canvas, 45.7 x 36.8 cm, The Hyde Collection, Glen Falls, New York.

framed drawing, *Het Hertje* (*The Fawn*, 1921)<sup>7</sup> by the Dutch painter and sophisticated art forger Han van Meegeren (1889-1947).

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<sup>7</sup> Pencil on paper, 30 x 45 cm. Tens of thousands of copies of this drawing were sold as a reproduction. I made a reference to *The Fawn* in my installation *The Fall* (1989) that included a mounted reebok symbolising innocence. See next image.

NOT TO BE PRODUCED

Han van Meegeren felt under-rated as a painter of skilfully executed figurative works. Regarded as too traditional by contemporary art critics who were more interested in cutting edge cubist and surrealist art, he started painting in the style of 17th century Dutch masters to show off his skills. In the same year that Rene Magritte painted *Not to be Reproduced* van Meegeren finished his counterfeit masterpiece *The Supper at Emmaus*,<sup>8</sup> which was bought by The Rembrandt Society and gifted to Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen as an “extraordinary Vermeer.”<sup>9</sup>

In 1947 van Meegeren was convicted of forgery and received a one-year prison sentence. During his trial he was forced to admit that he was the creator of numerous paintings, including *The Supper at Emmaus*, previously attributed to a famous predecessor.<sup>10</sup> He was initially arrested for collaborating with the enemy; one of his Vermeer forgeries *Christ with the Adulteress* (c.1943)<sup>11</sup> was found in the possession of the German art lover and looter Hermann Göring, Adolf Hitler’s right-hand man.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Oil on Canvas, 115 x 127 cm. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen.

<sup>9</sup> “Han van Meegeren,” Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, accessed June 2, 2015, <http://collectie2008.boijmans.nl/en/work/St%201>.

<sup>10</sup> Éric Laurent and Jean-Michel Ribettes, “De l’imposture,” in *Vraiment Faux*, ed. Marie-Claude Baude (Jouy-en-Josas: La Fondation Cartier, 1988), 66.

<sup>11</sup> Oil on canvas, 97 cm x 89.3 cm, The Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, Amersfoort.

<sup>12</sup> “Vermeer: Erroneous Attributions and Forgeries,” Essential Vermeer 2.0, accessed June 2, 2015, [http://www.essentialvermeer.com/fakes\\_thefts\\_school\\_of\\_delft\\_lost\\_sp/erroneously\\_attributed\\_vermeers\\_two.html#.VW4JI2DvvuU](http://www.essentialvermeer.com/fakes_thefts_school_of_delft_lost_sp/erroneously_attributed_vermeers_two.html#.VW4JI2DvvuU).

## PICTURE LOVERS

Both of these postcards depict a museum room with a visitor: on the left *The Picture Lover*<sup>13</sup> by the Dutch artist Pieter Oyens and on the right a sculpture<sup>14</sup> by Maurizio Cattelan.

Pieter Oyens (1842-1894) lived and worked for most of his life in Brussels where he shared his studio with his twin brother David (1842-1902) who was also a painter. *The Picture Lover* was used for the invitation sent by Dordrechts Museum to all inhabitants of Dordrecht, a city 20 km from Rotterdam with a rich art historical past, encouraging them to visit the local museum for free after it's reopening in 2010.<sup>15</sup>

Maurizio Cattelan (1960) is an Italian artist who employs satire and humour to comment on contemporary life through the creation of striking sculptures that often reference popular culture. Cattelan's intervention in Museum Boijmans van Beuningen shows the forced entrance of the artist himself evoking an art robbery while in fact placing a new work in the museum room. The hole in the floor allows the visitor to peek into the museum offices below.

Cattelan is often portrayed as an entertainer and even as a prankster. His unsettling, hyper realistic and iconoclastic sculptures indeed evoke strong, sometimes extremely negative responses. Charlie Finch, a contributor to artnet.com, is an example of somebody who struggles to appreciate the Italian artist's work. This is what he had to say about Cattelan's exhibition in the Guggenheim Museum:<sup>16</sup> "The news that Maurizio Cattelan plans to hang his expensive 'masterpieces' from the world's strongest steel bar (also the largest suppository from the world's largest asshole, Cattelan), suspended in the Guggenheim's rotunda, would be laughable if it weren't so unfunny. Perhaps the cast of Spiderman could perk up the vernissage by slinging some webs from piece to piece, or a few Wild West sure-shots could use the dangling shit pieces for target practice, with the winner getting to string up Cattelan from the nearest beam, in fine imitation of one of his own fey tropes."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Pieter Oyens, *De schilderijenliefhebber (the Picture Lover)*, 1878, Collection Dordrechts Museum, Dordrecht, the Netherlands.

<sup>14</sup> Maurizio Cattelan (1960), *Untitled*, 2001, installation, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, the Netherlands.

<sup>15</sup> Liesbeth van Noordwijk, Editorial in Bulletin Dordrechts Museum, no 3 & 4 (Dordrecht: Dordrechts Museum, 2010), 10.

<sup>16</sup> The retrospective *Maurizio Cattelan: All* took place in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York between 4 November 2011 and 22 January 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Charlie Finch, "Cattelan's Dingleberries," Artnet, accessed 17 May 2015, <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/finch/maurizio-cattelan10-3-11.asp>.

## CONTEXT AND JUXTAPOSITION

In contrast to Charlie Finch, the co-author of *Most Art Sucks: Five Years of Coagula*, the American artist Louise Lawler shows appreciation or at least a positive interest in Maurizio Cattelan's art. This page from *Louise Lawler and Others*<sup>18</sup> shows Lawler's work *Big* (2002/2003)<sup>19</sup>, which combines part of Maurizio Cattelan's *Untitled* (1998) and Thomas Struth's *Pergamon 4*, (2001).

The Museum is a favourite subject for a wide-range of photographers and artists such as Candida Höfer, Elliott Erwitt, and Thomas Struth. Through framing and zooming in on particular aspects these artists reveal the different qualities of their subject through their own lens. The American artist Louise Lawler (1947-) emphasises in her photographs how the interpretation and appraisal of art is context related. Lawler's juxtapositions are found in museums and art galleries, at art fairs, in the homes of private collectors, and the offices of corporate collectors.

Lawler, who was part of the so-called "The Picture Generation"<sup>20</sup> presents artworks by others in a critical framework revealing a complex network of social, political and economic interests. Her photographic fragments of displays are an analysis of the aesthetics of cultural representation and are influenced by ideas developed by post-structuralists such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes. They propose that art should be looked at and thought about as a set of social signs or cultural codes and question various modernist myths such as authorship, authenticity and aura.

Andrea Fraser (1965-) argues, "The collection and presentation of art has always been a display of social and economic standing before being an exhibition of aesthetic value"<sup>21</sup>. She describes the art of Louise Lawler, with whom she collaborated, as follows: "Lawler's photographs documenting *arrangements of pictures* in private, corporate and museum collections demonstrates the social uses to which art is put after it leaves the artist's studio."<sup>22</sup>

Lawler's art of appropriation shows the interconnections between the players in the art world, the

<sup>18</sup> George Baker, et al., *Louise Lawler and Others*. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2004), unpaginated.

<sup>19</sup> Cibachrome, 134 x 118 cm.

<sup>20</sup> The term 'The Picture Generation' was used for a group of artists that were included in an exhibition with the same name that evolved around image appropriation and was curated by Douglas Eklund. The exhibition took place in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2009 and featured work by mainly American artists who were very successful during the nineteen-eighties such as Robert Longo, Barbara Kruger, Richard Prince, Cindy Sherman and David Salle.

<sup>21</sup> Andrea Fraser, "In and Out of Place," in *Museum Highlights: The Writings of Andrea Fraser*, ed. Alexander Alberro (London/Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT press, 2005), 22.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.



public and private locations of art and art's institutional structures. She sees the appropriation of other artists' work as a form of collaboration. In her own words: "And art is always collaboration with what came before you and what comes after you."<sup>23</sup>

During her career Lawler gradually realised that she herself was caught in the art world's web of interests, acknowledging the role of museums and collectors as her patrons and supporters. This insoluble conflict of questioning the power and interests of your benefactors runs through the history of art. It is a key feature of Hans Haacke's and Michael Asher's work, both artists who engage in a form of 'institutional critique' that reveals their love-hate relationship with the museum.

Louise Lawler's work is often positioned in this category of discursive practice but her response to the displays of artworks she photographs is not solely analytical or critical; the emotive quality of her work shouldn't be underplayed. As an artist Lawler seems to be drawn to the aesthetic qualities of the juxtapositions she photographs and the chosen artworks, often by people she admires, are portrayed with affection.

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<sup>23</sup> "Prominence Given, Authority Taken, an interview with Louise Lawler by Douglas Crimp." in Louise Lawler, "An Arrangement of Pictures" (New York, 2000). Cited in Philip Kaiser's introduction in Baker, G., et al., 2004, *Louise Lawler and Others* (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz Publishers), 9.

I - 05

PICASSO THE CLOWN

A spread from the publication *Maurizio Cattelan*<sup>24</sup> showing *Untitled*<sup>25</sup> comprising an actor, dressed up as Picasso with an enormous head in the entrance area of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

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<sup>24</sup> Francesco Bonami et al., *Maurizio Cattelan*, (London/New York: Phaidon, 2000), 134-135.

<sup>25</sup> Maurizio Cattelan, *Untitled*, 1998, papier mâché, paint, paint, costume and actor.

## BODIES AND FRAGMENTS

Since 1987 the German artist Thomas Struth (1954) has produced a series of photographs taken in various museums around the world. Photography is a powerful medium through which to mediate and question different aspects of museum culture and display. As the ultimate tool for representation the camera is used by a wide variety of artists and photographers to frame museums, exhibitions, artworks and visitors. The book from which this photograph is taken<sup>26</sup> brings together a series of pictures shot by Struth between 1987 and 2004, which show museum visitors caught in the act of looking.

Between 1996 and 2001 the artist regularly visited the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, resulting in six large photographs with the title *Pergamon Museum* (1-6). The work presented here,<sup>27</sup> shows fragments from the ancient Greek city of Pergamon with admiring spectators.

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<sup>26</sup> Hans Belting and Claudia Seidel, *Thomas Struth Museum Photographs*. (München: Schirmer/Mosel, 2005), 101.

<sup>27</sup> *Pergamon Museum 4*, 08.01.2001, 153,4 x 228,8 cm.

I - 07

## MONKEY BUSINESS

This photograph I took in 1992 during the opening of the exhibition *Small Medium Large Lifesize*<sup>28</sup> Watching people surrounded by my work *Monkey Business (part 1)*<sup>29</sup> made me realise that I needed to consider multiple publics more carefully. Framing these visitors triggered questions regarding the nature and role of the viewer. Previously I had considered the audience, including possible buyers, mainly as a concern of the museum or (commercial) gallery that hosted the exhibitions I participated in. I regarded publics as a given without really taking into account their relevance or diversity. I managed to give the audience a more prominent place when I started to collaborate with Tracy Mackenna. I will discuss issues of publics, engagement and participation in more depth later during our tour.

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<sup>28</sup> *Small Medium Large Lifesize* took place between 11 July and 14 September 1992 and was curated by the students of the School for Curators of the Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci in Prato. Other participants included Sylvie Fleury, Anya Gallaccio, Huang Yong Ping and Vik Muniz.

<sup>29</sup> 1992, 4 black & white photographic reproductions on wooden panel, each 120 x 180 cm and two vinyl texts of variable dimensions. Collection Museo Contemporanea Luigi Pecci, Prato.

## PRIVATE MEMBERS

The installation *Monkey Business (part 1)*, shown in the previous image consists of a series of enlarged postcards with dressed chimpanzees printed in black and white and black vinyl quotes from an Italian translation of *The Booke of Demeanor and the Allowance and Disallowance of Certain Misdemeanours in Companie* (1619) by Richard Weste<sup>30</sup>:

Let not thy private Members be  
layd open to be view'd,  
it is most shameful and abhord,  
detestable and rude.

Retained not urine nor the wind,  
which doth thy body vex,  
so it be done with secrecy,  
let that not thee perplex.

Weste's guide to good behaviour is based on *A Handbook on Good Manners for Children: De Civilitate Morum Puerilium Libellus* (1530) by Desiderius Erasmus Rotterodamus (Erasmus of Rotterdam). Tracy Mackenna and I named our son, born in Rotterdam in 1999, after this Renaissance humanist, theologian, Catholic priest and social critic. References to his work continue to appear in the work that I have produced in collaboration with Tracy Mackenna since 1997.<sup>31</sup>

*Monkey Business, part 1*, reflects my initial interests in human behaviour, morality and the social preconditions we struggle to resist. Previous to my life as an artist I studied sociology during which period I became familiar with *The Civilizing Process* by the German sociologist Norbert Elias (1897-1990). Drawing on Dutch seventeenth century genre paintings that feature monkeys and jesters, I expressed my bewilderment with human existence by embracing clichés and absurdity. In the *SMALL MEDIUM LARGE LIFESIZE* catalogue Bettina Della Casa describes my urge to grasp the conventionality of my existence, referring to a body of work I made using Letraset symbols<sup>32</sup>, "... it is the very banality of the material and itself that becomes the fundamental question, an

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<sup>30</sup> Cited in Norbert Elias, *Het Civilisatieproces*, trans. Willem Kranendonk (Utrecht: Het Spectrum, 1987), 183.

<sup>31</sup> See for example Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen, *WAR AS EVER!*, 2013 and *Erasmus the Clown*, 2014, image III - 35.

<sup>32</sup> See image II - 18.

urgent request for meaning.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Bettina Della Casa, “Uncertain Identities,” in Amnon Barzel, et al., *SMALL MEDIUM LARGE LIFESIZE* (Prato: Centro per l’Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci, 1992), 37.

### THREE OF A KIND

With these three postcards we return to the photo camera as a device to frame and capture other artists' work. These reproductions of photographs, taken of the same Jackson Pollock painting, by three prominent German photographers in the Museum of Modern Art in New York reveal key differences in their approaches.<sup>34</sup>

Candida Höfer (1944-) focuses on the location and the architectural space surrounding the painting; Thomas Struth gives in his photograph precedence to the museum visitors and Andreas Gursky stuck to his neutral and abstracting approach when he captured Pollock's *One: Number 31, 1950*. All three artists studied at the renowned Düsseldorf Academy of Art with Bernd and Hilla Becher, who had a great influence on their distancing and matter of fact approach. This objective attitude towards cultural production is referred to in Germany as "Neue Sachlichkeit", which emerged during the Weimar Republic as a response to the romantic idealism of the expressionists and their involvement of the self.

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<sup>34</sup> From left to the right: Candida Höfer, *Museum of Modern Art XII*, 2001, 121 x 152 cm; Thomas Struth, *Museum of Modern Art*, 1994, 180 x 238 cm and Andreas Gursky, *Untitled VI*, 1997, 186 x 239 cm.

## NO BODIES

This page<sup>35</sup> shows a photograph in a book of a room in the National Gallery in Oslo<sup>36</sup>, Norway taken by Candida Höfer in 1992. The beautifully printed book contains an unusually short essay by Michael Krüger that invites the viewer to look at two hundred and nine of Höfer's photographs of public places, including museums, libraries, archives, banks, theatres, lecture rooms and foyers.

Krüger starts his text with "If you look at Candida Höfer's silent photographs for long enough - this is not frivolous - you can imagine a world without people."<sup>37</sup> The neutral approach that Candida Höfer follows when taking her photographs, without people present, results indeed in a sober, uncanny experience that evokes a strong sense of emptiness.

People interested in art are quite familiar with this kind of photography. Most exhibitions in art galleries and museums are photographed deprived of visitors. These photographs give the impression that curators and artists prefer their exhibitions to be reproduced as desolate spaces unspoiled by humans. Museum rooms are represented as spatial still lifes rather than tableaux vivants. The museum without people evokes a mausoleum rather than an animated civic space.

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<sup>35</sup> Michael Krüger, *Candida Höfer, A Monograph* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 12.

<sup>36</sup> Original photograph is 38 x 57 cm.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Krüger, "On Candida Höfer's Photographes," In *Candida Höfer, A Monograph* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 5-6.



## OUT OF PLACE

Roger Fenton (1819-1869) was the first official photographer employed by the British Museum. In this capacity he photographed the museum's galleries and a wide range of artefacts from the collection. Fenton aspired to make photography important in modern life and equal to fine art. His subjects included the Crimean War, landscapes, ruined abbeys, the royal family and still lifes.

With several Egyptian sculptures in the background, the *Discobolus* in this photograph<sup>38</sup> seems displaced. It was waiting to be installed in another gallery<sup>39</sup>. This is a cropped version; the original print is 7.6 x 7.1 cm and has curved top corners.

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<sup>38</sup> Gordon Baldwin, Malcolm Daniel and Sarah Greenough, *All the Mighty World: The Photographs of Roger Fenton 1852-1860*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 150.

<sup>39</sup> The British Museum, accessed April 26, 2015, [http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight\\_objects/archives/r/roger\\_fenton,\\_the\\_discus-throw.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/archives/r/roger_fenton,_the_discus-throw.aspx).

## MUSEUMS AT HIGH SPEED

It is not only through Greek sculpture that sports are introduced to the museum. In 2008 the Scottish artist Martin Creed (1968-) was given the Tate Britain Duveen's Commission which resulted in *Work No. 850*, and comprised people running every 30 seconds through the majestic neoclassical hall of Tate Britain, each run was followed by a pause of the same length. The Tate website states: "This work celebrates physicality and the human spirit. Creed has instructed the runners to sprint as if their lives depended on it. Bringing together people from different backgrounds from all over London, *Work No. 850* presents the beauty of human movement in its purest form, a recurring yet infinitely variable line drawn between two points."<sup>40</sup>

When I witnessed this constantly repeating performance I assumed that it had been inspired by two related films: *Bande à part* (Jean-Luc Goddard, 1964) and *The Dreamers* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 2003). Martin Creed gives another source though. "In Palermo we went to see the catacombs of the Capuchin monks. We were very late and only had five minutes to see it all before closing time. To do it we had to run. I remember running at top speed with my friends through the catacombs looking desperately left and right at all of the dead people hanging on the walls in their best clothes, trying our best to see it all... it was a good way to see it. It was that kind of delirious running, which makes you laugh uncontrollably when you're doing it. I think it's good to see museums at high speed. It leaves time for other things."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> "Martin Creed Work No. 850, 2008, Tate Britain Duveen's Commission," Tate, accessed May 10, 2015, <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/martin-creed-work-no-850>.

<sup>41</sup> "Martin Creed Work No. 850," The Guardian, accessed May 10, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2008/jun/30/art>.

## A MOVIE ABOUT MOVIES

The image on the left shows stills from the movie, *Bande à part* (Band of *Outsiders*)<sup>42</sup> by Jean-Luc Goddard, which was the inspiration for the scenes that Bernardo Bertolucci shot in the Louvre for his film *The Dreamers*.<sup>43</sup> In this scene the three main characters try to break a record set in the same gallery by the three main characters in *Bande à part*.

*Bande à part* was released in 1964. The film, with music by Michel Legrand is an adaptation of the novel *Fools' Gold* (1958) by the American author Dolores Hitchens (1907-1973). The film tells the story of an unsuccessful robbery and the developing relationships between the three protagonists Odile (Anna Karina), Franz (Sami Frey) and Arthur (Claude Brasseur).

The Scottish writer and film critic Gilbert Adair (1944-2011) wrote the screenplay for *The Dreamers*, which is based on his own novel *The Holy Innocents* (1988). Against the backdrop of the 1968 student riots in Paris the sexually liberal twins Isabelle (Eva Green) and Théo (Louis Garrel) befriend the American exchange student Matthew (Michael Pitt) with whom they share a passion for film. *The Dreamers* is also a movie about movies. The actors re-enact several scenes from movies such as *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne* (1945) by Robert Bresson, *Persona* (1966) by Ingmar Bergman and *Blow-Up* (1966) by Michelangelo Antonioni and another Godard film *La Chinoise* (1967).<sup>44</sup>

The still from *The Dreamers* shows in the background two paintings that you will come across as postcards at a later stage in this tour: Jacques-Louis David's *Portrait of Madame Récamier* (1800) and *The Grand Odalisque* (1814) by Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres.

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<sup>42</sup> *Bande à part*, directed by Jean-Luc Goddard (1964; Culver City: Columbia Pictures, 2003), DVD.

<sup>43</sup> *The Dreamers*, directed by Bernardo Bertolucci (2003; London: Recorded Picture Company, 2004), DVD.

<sup>44</sup> "The Dreamers," Mubi, accessed May 10, 2015, <https://mubi.com/lists/film-references-from-the-dreamers>.

## MUSEUM AS SOURCE AND SUBJECT

The American artist Mark Dion (1961) combines in his work an interest in the histories of science, natural history and museum culture. Between September 2010 and March 2011 the Oakland Museum of California (OMCA) staged an exhibition with an accompanying publication that showed the result of Mark Dion's exploration of the museum's history and collections. As part of *The Marvelous Museum: Orphans, Curiosities & Treasures* Dion focussed on what the curator of the exhibition, René de Guzman, calls "the idea of the orphaned object."<sup>45</sup>

The OMCA was founded in 1969 by merging three small museums with distinct collections into one big museum. The aim of the newly established institution was "to highlight the natural, cultural, and artistic heritage of California."<sup>46</sup> The original foci of the Snow Museum of Natural History, the Oakland Public Museum, and the Oakland Art Gallery have remained the three pillars of the OMCA collection: art, history and natural science.

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<sup>45</sup> René de Guzman, "Time Machine," in *Museum - Orphans, Curiosities & Treasures: A Mark Dion Project*, Lori Fogarty, et al (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2010), 11.

<sup>46</sup> Lori Fogarty, "Introduction," in *Museum - Orphans, Curiosities & Treasures: A Mark Dion Project*, Lori Fogarty, et al (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2010), 9.

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## TREASURES

The publication that accompanied *The Marvelous Museum - Orphans, Curiosities & Treasures: A Mark Dion Project* is a beautifully designed and printed hard cover book of 128 pages, which is protected by a paper covered clamshell box (30 x 37.5 cm). This box mimics a plywood museum crate, housing a folder with object identification cards.

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## CURIOSITIES

Mark Dion's discoveries were wide-ranging and included magic lantern slides, taxidermic polar bears, elephants and birds, a lyre made of human hair, a wheelchair with a stamped tin sign 'load under 1000 pounds', Chinese snuff bottles, a bird cage in the form of a cathedral and a rope-covered ball.

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## ORPHANS

It is easy to understand why the curator decided to invite Mark Dion, who is interested in archaeology, natural history and museology, to embark on an expedition through the storage rooms and look for “things that are outside the Oakland Museum’s current collecting interest or are outside the domains of the Museum’s three disciplines, but have remained in our possession.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> René de Guzman, “Time Machine,” 11.

## DEACCESSION (A)

At some stage a museum will have to consider the value and relevance of particular objects in its collections. The American artist Michael Asher (1943-2012) investigated and revealed the deaccession policy of the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), New York, as part of his contribution to *The Museum as Muse: Artist Reflect* exhibition.<sup>48</sup> Asher's project took the form of a publication with an inventory of all the paintings and sculptures that have been deaccessioned since the establishment of the museum in 1929. MOMA reluctantly agreed to the publication of Michael Asher's *Catalogue of Deaccessions*<sup>49</sup> and only with the inclusion of a disclaimer.

The approach MOMA took is contrary to that taken by the Oakland Museum of California, which embraced the orphans in its collection and addressed the change in their artefacts' fortunes through Mark Dion's, previously discussed, celebratory intervention.

This image and the following three images show an interview by Stephan Pascher with Michael Asher.<sup>50</sup> Their exchange focuses on Michael Asher's troubled commission that explores some of the less 'lofty functions' of the museum.

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<sup>48</sup> *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect* took place in 1999 and brought together a wide variety of historical and contemporary artworks including photographs that take the museum as their subject.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Asher, *Painting and Sculpture from the Museum of Modern Art: Catalogue of Deaccessions, 1929 through 1998* (New York: MoMA, 1999).

<sup>50</sup> Stephan Pascher, "Museum as Muse - Asher Reflects," in *The Museum as Arena: Artists on Institutional Critique*, ed. Christian Kravagna (Bregenz: Kunsthaus Bregenz, 2001), 106 -112.



## DEACCESSION (B)

The Museum, with its historical, epistemological and educational claims, is a challenging site from which the artist can critique its practice, role in cultural politics and links with commerce. In the introduction to the catalogue published on the occasion of *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect* the organiser Kynaston McShine alerts us not to expect much trouble from the cohabitation between “two superpowers that mutually respect each other: ”Overall, the relationship between museum and artist is far less adversarial than it was a few decades ago; occasional disruptions aside, the status quo prevails. Museums are allowed to maintain their lofty functions, and artists are allowed to behave in the expected way, their transgressions against the museum being usually consistent with the romantic definition of the artist.”<sup>51</sup>

The curator clearly hadn't properly thought through his invitation to Michael Asher, McShine assumed, as the above quote reveals, that the days of the critical artist were over and that we were back, after an uncomfortable period of institutional critique, to business as usual. But the world has changed. Institutional critique with all its shortfalls and conundrums has helped us to see the museum and public galleries in a very different light. It has stimulated artists to develop more democratic and less hierarchical platforms for presentation and exchange such as artist-run spaces and web-based galleries. Many of these newly created, sometimes temporary sites in the public sphere often target local communities and involve non-art audiences.

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<sup>51</sup> Kynaston McShine, *The Museum as Muse: Artist Reflect* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 23.

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DEACCESSION (C)

Continuation of Stephan Pascher's interview with Michael Asher.

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DEACCESSION (D)

The final page of Stephan Pascher's interview with Michael Asher.

## FORM AND FICTION

The Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers (1924 -1976) explored the museum both as subject and as form. This picture, which was taken by Maria Gilissen (1938-), Marcel Broodthaers' wife,<sup>52</sup> shows the artist at the opening of his *Musée d'Art Moderne Département des Aigles Section XIXème Siècle* on 27 September 1968.

The installation, based in Broodthaers' house and studio reflects his interest in taxonomy, categorising and labelling. Johannes Cladders, the director of the Städtisches Museum Mönchengladbach, who is standing next to him, opened this seminal curatorial work, which was developed further over a period of several years.

*Section XIXème Siècle*, the first manifestation of the *Musée d'Art Moderne Département des Aigles*, closed its doors after exactly one year. During its existence the museum hosted various performances and events.

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<sup>52</sup> Maria Gilissen's photographic record of Marcel Broodthaers' creative life and artistic output contributes greatly to our understanding of this enigmatic artist.

THIS NOT A WORK OF ART

This image<sup>53</sup> shows one of the museum rooms in the *Musée d'Art Moderne Département des Aigles, Section XIXème Siècle*. An art-removal firm provided all the empty crates and boxes and one of its trucks was parked in front of Broodthaers' house during the opening ceremony.

Between 1968 and 1978 *Section XIXème Siècle* was followed by newly created components with titles such as *Section XIXème Siècle (Bis)*, (Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Germany, 1970), *Section Documentaire* (beach at Le Coq, Belgium, 1970), *Section Publicité and Section d'Art Moderne* (Neue Galerie, Documenta 5, Kassel, Germany, 1972). Broodthaers's large scale exhibition *Musée d'Art Moderne Département des Aigles, Section des Figures (Der Adler vom Oligozän bis Heute)* took place in the Städtische Kunsthalle in Düsseldorf (1972). It included more than 300 artefacts depicting eagles on loan from a wide variety of collections. All the objects in the installation had the same label: 'This is not a work of art!'

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<sup>53</sup> Photograph by Maria Gillisen in Frank Lubbers, Anne Hakkens and Maria Gillisen, eds., *Marcel Broodthaers Projections* (Eindhoven: Van Abbe Museum, 1989), 16.

## THIS IS NOT A MUSEUM

Douglas Crimp appropriated this label as the title for his text *This Is Not a Museum of Art*,<sup>54</sup> which he wrote for the publication that accompanied the exhibition *Marcel Broodthaers*, organised in 1989 by the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis in association with the Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels.

Crimp, informed by Foucault's ideas about institutions explores, in *This Is Not a Museum of Art* the key issues that underpin Marcel Broodthaers' artistic activities in which notions of fiction and reality merged fluently. According to Broodthaers he didn't have that much control over the development of projects such as the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles*. Initially asking questions about the role of the artist and the role the museum in society in the context of the events of 1968, Broodthaers explains that he lost control over his seminal work during its evolution. "...this is the classic phenomenon of art. You conceive something, which you believe is intimately connected with a determined event that has taken place in society and then this thing all of a sudden starts to live his own life, to grow and to produce cells. At the time a kind of biology is born out of art, over which the artist himself has practically no control."<sup>55</sup>

The quotations chosen here (see image) by Crimp reveal that Marcel Broodthaers aspired to be an "art lover" and a collector but that the "lack of even the minimum of financial means" made him decide to become a "creator." Broodthaers decided to take up the role of the artist acknowledging that his motivations were not entirely genuine. In Crimp's words: "While we might suspect 'insincerity' and 'bad faith' on the part of many 'creators' such negative qualities are rarely so frankly admitted as the necessary stance of the artist working under the conditions of late capitalism."<sup>56</sup>

Role-playing seems to be at the heart of Marcel Broodthaers' art practice that was informed by his activities that anticipated his life as an artist and included writing and lecturing about art. The fictive character of the creator was realised in the guise of a writer-artist, collector, curator and museum director. Broodthaers' investigations into the value of art, and the relationship between material culture and power resonate with my own interests in the socio-political aspect of art production and the workings of the art world.

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<sup>54</sup> Douglas Crimp, "This Is Not a Museum of Art." in Marge Goldwater, et al., *Marcel Broodthaers*. (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center and New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 71.

<sup>55</sup> Marcel Broodthaers, "Interview with Jürgen Harten and Katharina Schmidt in 1972," in *The Archive*, ed. Charles Merewether (London: Whitechapel/Cambridge Mass.: The MIT Press, 2006), 82.

<sup>56</sup> Douglas Crimp, "This Is Not a Museum of Art." 71.

I too made a conscious decision to become an artist without having any track record of making art. After being introduced to a variety of art forms by an art student whom I met during my sociology studies at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, I decided that pursuing contemporary art would offer me a great opportunity to explore my own life and the world beyond, with visual and material means. Realising that there is no longer any agreed or credible quality control system in the art world and that one doesn't need a lot of technical skills to be able to work as a creator, I embarked on a creative life as an artist.

## MY CRATES ARE SUPERB

During his 'directorship' of the *Musée d'Art Moderne* Marcel Broodthaers wrote a series of open letters. In the first, which was published two months after the Museum d'Art Moderne officially opened he describes the *Département d'Aigles Section XIXème Siècle*. The letter<sup>57</sup> reads:

Dear Friends,

My crates are empty. We are on the brink. Proof: When I 'm not there, there is no one. Then? Should I assume my duties any longer ? Would the museum system also compromise the galleries? However, note that the Department of Eagles is still unscathed although one tries to destroy it.

Dear friends, my crates are superb; here a famous painting, there a known sculptor, below an inscription which predicts the future of Art. Long live the history of Ingres! This cry resounds in the depth of my conscience. War cry. I am in peril. I renounce giving you an explanation that exposes me to more peril ....

### Poem

I am the director. I don't care. Question?

Why do you do it?

### Politics

The Department of Eagles of the Museum of Modern Art, Section XIXth Century was actually inaugurated on the 27th of September 1968 in the presence of civilian and military personalities. The speeches were on the subject of the destiny of Art. (Grandville). The speeches were on the subject of the destiny of Art. (Ingres). The speeches were on the subject of the relationship between institutionalised violence and poetic violence. I can not and I do not want to expose the details, the sighs, the highlights, the calculations of these initial discussions. I regret it.

### Information

Thanks to the assistance of a transport company and of some friends, we have been able to

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<sup>57</sup> Translated by the author.



create this department, which includes, in principal order the following:

- 1/ crates
- 2/ postcards 'overvalued'
- 3/ a continuous projection of images (to be continued)
- 4/ a devoted member of staff

Dear friends, I am sorry for such a long silence in which I have left you since my letter dated .....

For now I have to leave you. Quickly, a word of affection.

yours, Marcel Broodthaers<sup>58</sup>

P.s. My order, here, in one of Duchamp's towns are populated by pears; one comes back to Grandville.

Correspondence: Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles

30 rue de la Pèpinière, Brussels 1. Tel. 02/12.09.54

Like many other Belgian artists such as René Magritte, Jan Fabre and Wim Delvoye, Marcel Broodthaers embraced the ridiculous, grotesque and the laughable but in his comical mimicking of the values and power of the museum the love of the artist for the institution he critiques is revealed.

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<sup>58</sup> Published in Marge Goldwater, et al., *Marcel Broodthaers* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center and New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 77-81.

## POSTCARDS AND PROJECTIONS

This picture<sup>59</sup> shows one of the museum crates and a selection of Marcel Broodthaers' collection of postcards in one of the rooms of his domestic museum. The art works printed on the cards by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, Jacques-Louis David, Gustave Courbet and Eugène Delacroix were also used for the projections on crates exhibited in one of the other rooms.

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<sup>59</sup> Photograph by Maria Gillisen, in Martin Visser, et al., *Marcel Broodthaers. 28.1.1924/28.1.1976* (Rotterdam: Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, 1981), 6.

INGRES AND DAVID

Some of the postcards in one of the rooms of *Musée d'Art Moderne Département des Aigles, Section XIXème Siècle* that were previously mentioned:

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780-1867), *The Grand Odalisque* (1814), oil on canvas, 91 x 162 cm, Louvre Museum, Paris

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *The Valpinçon Bather*, (1808).<sup>60</sup>

Jacques-Louis David, *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*, (1801).<sup>61</sup>

Jacques-Louis David, *Portrait of Madame Récamier*, (1800).<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Oil on canvas, 146 x 97.5 cm, Louvre Museum, Paris.

<sup>61</sup> Oil on canvas, 261 x 221 cm, Château de Malmaison, Rueil-Malmaison.

<sup>62</sup> Oil on canvas, 174 x 224 cm, Louvre Museum, Paris.

## SQUASHED NEOCLASSIC ELEGANCE

The Parisian socialite Juliette Récamier was in her day a symbol of neoclassic elegance. Jacques-Louis David was not the only one who admired the youthful celebrity. Many French artists such as Joseph Chinard, Francois Gerard and Firmin Massot portrayed her wearing her iconic white dress, as the beautiful stylish muse.

In Magritte's witty and sardonic version,<sup>63</sup> the coffin that the artist put in her place squashes Juliette's stylish dress.<sup>64</sup> Two years later he made a second copy of his take on David's masterpiece<sup>65</sup> and shortly before his death in 1967, he turned this painting into a bronze sculpture.<sup>66</sup>

Marcel Broodthaers' interest in the relationship between the object, word and image was inspired by René Margritte's paintings, which are often playful reflections on the connections or disparities between words and images, most famously *La Trahison des Images, Ceci ne'st pas une pipe (The Treachery of Images, This is not a Pipe)*, 1928-1929).

Anna Hakkens describes their shared concern as follows: "The word is a sign by which the idea, and thus the ultimate thing, can be evoked. The relationship between the two is not, however, self-evident but arbitrary and founded on conventions. Through the detachment of the name from the thing, both are made free. Objects become nameless and regain their original radiance; words lose their freedom without ceasing to exist. Whereas Magritte stresses the relationship between word and image, Broodthaers tries to bring the two as close together as possible. Existing relationships and meanings are disrupted and undermined as image and object merge."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> René Magritte, *Perspective: Madame Récamier de David*, 1949, oil on canvas, 60 x 80 cm, private collection.

<sup>64</sup> During the 1940s and 50s René Magritte (1989-1967) made several copies of historical paintings replacing the portrayed woman with a coffin.

<sup>65</sup> Collection National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

<sup>66</sup> René Magritte, *Madame Récamier de David*, Bronze, 197 x 196 x 50 cm, Centre Pompidou, Paris.

<sup>67</sup> Anne Hakkens, "Introductory essay" in Frank Lubbers, Anne Hakkens and Maria Gillisen eds., *Marcel Broodthaers: Projections* (Eindhoven: Stedelijk Van Abbe Museum, 1994), 11.

## MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION

Ingres' *The Grand Odalisque* features in the film *The Dreamers* by Bernardo Bertolucci<sup>68</sup> and in Broodthaers' two-part edition *Musée - Museum* (1972),<sup>69</sup> which was made 3 years after the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département Des Aigles, Section Xixème Siècle* closed in 1969. Both sheets show the same architectural drawing of the temporary museum combined with postcards by Ingres and Courbet. The words 'Musée' and 'Museum', making up the title of this edition were the words-painted on the *Musée d'Art Moderne* windows facing Rue de la Pépinière in Brussels.

Postcards on the left:

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *The Grand Odalisque* (1814).

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *The Turkish Bath* (1862).<sup>70</sup>

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *The Sleepers* (1866).<sup>71</sup>

Postcards on the right:

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Portrait of violinist Paganini* (1819).<sup>72</sup>

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Portrait of Victor Baltard's wife, born Adeline Lequeu and their daughter Paule* (1836).<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> See I - 13

<sup>69</sup> Broodthaers, Marcel. *Musée - Museum*. 1972, duotone, photolithography and collage on paper, 50,7 x 74.5cm each. MACBA, Museum of Contemporary Art Barcelona.

<sup>70</sup> Oil on wood, 108 x 108 cm. Louvre Museum, Paris.

<sup>71</sup> Oil on canvas, 135 x 200 cm. Petit Palais, Paris.

<sup>72</sup> Pencil on paper, 29.8 x 21.8 cm. Louvre Museum, Paris.

<sup>73</sup> Pencil on paper, 31,6 x 23.7 cm. Private collection, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

## A DAY AT THE BEACH

Marcel Broodthaers' hat<sup>74</sup> worn during the creation of *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section Documentaire* in 1970 at the beach at the seaside resort Le Coq/De Haan in West-Flanders, Belgium. Assisted by Herman Daled, who wore the same cap, Marcel Broodthaers dug a floor plan of a museum. Alongside the dugout area they put up warning signs in French and Dutch stating: "Touching the objects is absolutely forbidden."

Bilingualism is an important aspect of Belgian culture and was extensively utilised by Marcel Broodthaers as part of his interest in the relationship between object, image and word.

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<sup>74</sup> Now in the collection of Harry Ruhé, Amsterdam.

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## MINATURE MUSEUM

In 2011 the Belgian photographer/model-builder Philippe De Gobert (1946) recreated the *Musée D'art Moderne, Département Des Aigles, Section XIXème Siècle* as a maquette.<sup>75</sup> De Gobert was present at the official inauguration in 1968.

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<sup>75</sup> Mixed media, 100 x 65 x 60 cm. The model can be 'visited' at the 'Museum to Scale' website, an online platform where one can access a growing collection of miniature museum rooms. Accessed June 12, 2015, <http://www.museumtoscale.com/museums/detail/98>.

## MOBILE MUSEUM

In 1935 Marcel Duchamp made the first edition of the *Boîte-en-valise*,<sup>76</sup> a portable museum with reproductions and models of virtually all his work in the form of a leather suitcase similar to those used by gamblers and travelling sales representatives. Many regard this seminal work, which was reworked and revised many times, as an important early example of an artist's creative engagement with museum culture.

Subverting the notion of the 'original', and drawing on the expertise of a wide range of people such as bookbinders, typesetters and photographers Duchamp created a mobile exhibition of his own works curated by the artist himself.

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<sup>76</sup> The following is the caption text for *the Boîte-en-valise* from the publication that accompanied the exhibition *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect*, curated by Kynaston McShine at The Museum of Modern Art New York, 1999 (p. 51): "Marcel Duchamp, *Boîte-en-valise (de ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rose Sélavy)*. 1935-41. Leather valise containing miniature replicas, photographs and color reproductions of works by Duchamp and one 'original': Large Glass, collotype on celluloid (69 items), 7 1/2 x 9 1/4" (19 x 23.5 cm); overall 16 x 15 x 4" (41 x 38 x 10 cm). [IX/XX, from Deluxe Edition] The Museum of Modern Art, New York, James Thrall Soby Fund."



## LITTLE FOUNTAIN

As a miniature monograph and money making machine the *Boîte-en-valise* was produced and reproduced in many variations. Between 1941 and 1968 Duchamp created seven series, totalling approximately two hundred boxes. Over time he would change the content, amount of items, selected art works, and the material used to cover the case.<sup>77</sup> Duchamp of course included a mini version of his legendary *Fountain*.<sup>78</sup>

At the same time as applying the concept of the 'museum', Marcel Duchamp actively pursued the museum as the public environment for presenting his work after he realised that his legacy was in danger of becoming owned mainly by private collectors such as Katherine Dreier and Walter and Louise Arensberg. According to the German artist and typographer Ecke Bonck (1953-) "Duchamp was looking for an institutional context for his art. He accepted, and even promoted, the museum as a natural haven of the arts, emphasizing the undercurrent meaning of the Greek 'museion' as the home and permanent address of the nine muses."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ecke Bonck, *Marcel Duchamp The Portable Museum: The Making of the Boîte-en-valise*, trans. David Britt (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), 31.

<sup>78</sup> The size of the miniature *Fountain* is 7.5 x 5.8 x 4.5 cm.

<sup>79</sup> Ecke Bonck, 'Marcel Duchamp,' in *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect*, Kynaston McShine (ed.) Kynaston McShine (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 52.

UNIQUE URINAL

The *Fountain*<sup>80</sup>, printed on these postcards was purchased by the Tate in 1999 and is actually a replica (1964) of the original (1917), which no longer exists. Through duplication the urinal ironically lost its ready-made quality; the copies are carefully handcrafted imitations. This commodification through the replication of a found object and the reproduction of the photograph of the ready-made is a paradoxical aspect of Duchamp's oeuvre.

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<sup>80</sup> *Fountain*, 1917, porcelain, 36 x 48 x 61 cm, signed R. Mutt.

WALTER AND LOUISE

The caption on the left page reads as follows: “Closing sequences of the interview with James Johnson Sweeney, in which Duchamp demonstrates the Arensbergs’ *Boîte-en-valise*, Philadelphia, 1955.”<sup>81</sup> Walter and Louise Arensberg were close friends of Duchamp and important collectors of his work. They donated most of their collection to the Philadelphia Museum of Art including their *Boîte-en-valise*.

The intended portability of the *Boîte-en-valise* editions has increasingly become problematic due to conservation issues. The *Boîte* in the collection of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art<sup>82</sup> is in a very fragile state and can be handled only with extreme care, and displayed behind glass.

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<sup>81</sup> Ecke Bonck, *Marcel Duchamp The Portable Museum: The Making of the Boîte-en-valise*, trans. David Britt (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), 176-177.

<sup>82</sup> The Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art owns number two (II/XX, 1941) of the deluxe leather edition, which was donated to the museum by Gabrielle Keiler in 1989. See the video recording of the installation of this restored copy of the *Boîte-en-valise* at the National Galleries of Scotland website: accessed May 26, 2015, <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/play/play-menu/marcel-duchamp-la-boite-en-valise-box-in-a-suitcase>.

## SWAN SONG

Maurizio Cattelan's exhibition *All*, at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 2012 brought together almost every work (128) he has ever made, presented as one big mobile hanging from the ceiling of the Guggenheim rotunda. All his work since 1989 merged into one final artistic statement. Cattelan's curatorial role and the miniatures of his artworks, which he produced during the preparation of *All*, bring to mind Marcel Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise* (1935-41).

*All* was accompanied by a hard-cover book, similar to the Bible, which gives a detailed overview of the artist's oeuvre. The text is by Nancy Spector, Deputy Director and Chief Curator of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation. In her *Acknowledgements* Spector describes Cattelan's challenging relationship with museum culture.<sup>83</sup> His site-specific presentations often undermine established ways of presenting art and in this case, of staging a retrospective.

*Acknowledgements* continues with five more pages, mainly with the names of hundreds of collectors, curators, writers, art institutions and companies, revealing an extensive network of interested parties that were engaged in realising this provocative, all in one work.

*All* is widely regarded as Cattelan's final exhibition, his retirement and swan song. In an article on the New York Magazine website Cattelan was quoted as stating, "There will be shows without my involvement. It will be as if I were dead. Technically, that is - instead of being dead and not seeing what people will do with your work, you will be alive and you will suffer a lot."<sup>84</sup>

Similar to Duchamp, Cattelan developed a form of 'self curation' that made him perform a double act: both artist and curator. Both Cattelan and Duchamp subverted the notion of an overview presentation by merging exhibition and artwork into one all-encompassing artistic self-portrait. The *Boîte-en-valise* project gave Duchamp's previously produced art works a new life. His miniature museum, full of recreations, was the beginning of a new creative and financial enterprise. This quality of renewal and recycling is rather absent in Cattelan's *All*. Showing the entirety of his artworks together indicates for him the end of his artistic career.

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<sup>83</sup> Nancy Spector, *Maurizio Cattelan: All* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2011), 11.

<sup>84</sup> Carl Swanson, "Mister Wrong," *New York Magazine*, accessed May 17, 2015, <http://nymag.com/arts/art/features/maurizio-cattelan-2011-10/>.

## FILLING THE VOID WITH WORDS

*A Retrospective (Tomorrow is Another Fine Day)* that took place at Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam<sup>85</sup> is another example of an exhibition that involved an artist self-curating an overview of his oeuvre; in this case, the Thai artist Tiravanija (1961-). Tiravanija's art is regarded as a prime example of 'relational aesthetics'. His event-based projects depend largely on public participation and social interaction. The objects used during Tiravanija's process-based installations lose their significance after the event has finished. What remain are visual records of the gathering and the memories of participants. In the accompanying publication the curator of the Rotterdam exhibition, Rein Wolfs, writes about this particular aspect of Tiravanija's work, "Once the decision to organize a retrospective is made, the question that arises is how this type of active project can be reproduced in a meaningful manner. Tiravanija's works are always much more than the material parts and the underlying meaning that is constructed by the mobilisation of these material parts. The ever-changing constellations of participants, the ever-new situations and the communicative input are at least as important as constituents of that deeper essence in his oeuvre."<sup>86</sup>

To discuss this conundrum Tiravanija decided to organise two meetings with curators of the participating institutions including Hans Ulrich Obrist, Maria Lind and Rein Wolfs. As a result the artist came up with the idea to recreate, from plywood, the spaces that had hosted his social situations, rather than re-staging his past ephemeral events. The American science fiction writer Bruce Sterling, the French artist Philippe Parreno and the artist himself wrote 'scripts' to evoke Tiravanija's previous projects that were to be used by narrators to take the audience on a 'theatrical tour'.<sup>87</sup> When I, in 2005, followed the narrators through the spaces they helped to evoke a lost world of un-experienced happenings filled with words, bodies and the smell of plywood.

The shift from the display function towards the exhibition space as a site for activation, interaction and reflection is also evident in the installation *The Empty Museum* (2004) that the Ukrainian artists Ilya (1933-) and Emilia (1945-) Kabakov showed at the Sculpture Centre, Long Island City, New

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<sup>85</sup> *Rikrit Tiravanija, A Retrospective (Tomorrow is Another Fine Day)* took place in Museum Boijmans van Beuningen from 4 December, 2004 to 6 February, 2005 and travelled afterwards to the ARC, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and the Serpentine Gallery in London. The photo that is used for this postcard is by Bob Goedewaagen, who also photographed most of my earlier work. In pre-digital times artists had to spend a lot of money on the documentation of their work.

<sup>86</sup> Rein Wolfs, 'Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow,' in *Rikrit Tiravanija, A Retrospective (Tomorrow is Another Fine Day)*, ed. by Rein Wolfs (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, 2004) 16.

<sup>87</sup> Sjarel Ex, "Preface," in *Rikrit Tiravanija, A Retrospective (Tomorrow is Another Fine Day)*, ed. Rein Wolfs (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, 2004) 9.

York. As a replica of a classical museum gallery, including red walls, benches and spotlights but devoid of paintings or sculptures, this installation invited the audience to reflect on the status and role of art in a museum context. While visiting the empty museum room organ music by Bach (Passacaglia) could be heard. By entering, the visitor animated the Victorian void and filled it with their contemplations. Strangely enough the Sculpture Center's website shows *The Empty Museum* in an incomplete state, without any visitors and no music to be heard.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> "Past Exhibitions," Sculpture Center, accessed May 21, 2015, <http://www.sculpture-center.org/exhibitionsExhibition.htm?id=10114>.

EX NIHILO

The empty spaces created by Rikrit Tiravanija and the Kabakovs resonate with *Last seen* (1999)<sup>89</sup>, a project by the French artist Sophie Calle (1953-), who also made the notion of emptiness a key feature of her work.

On March 18, 1990 thirteen artworks were stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, including six paintings from the Dutch Room by Rembrandt, Vermeer and Flinck. On the website of the Federal Bureau of investigation (FBI) one can read the following description of the robbery: "On March 18, 1990, two men disguised as police officers gained access to the Gardner Museum. Once inside, they tied up the security guards and proceeded to steal 13 objects, including rare paintings by Rembrandt, Degas, and Vermeer, valued at approximately \$500 million. The case represents the largest property crime in U.S. history."<sup>90</sup>

This dramatic event inspired Sophie Calle to produce a series of nine diptychs juxtaposing photographs of the spots, empty after the artefacts were taken, with descriptions of the stolen artworks by museums staff. In her will Isabella Stewart Gardner stated that the museum should remain unchanged after her death; turning it into a time capsule and making it impossible for the curators to rehang the collection after the loss of so many masterpieces. The museum is offering an award of five million dollars for the return of the works.

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<sup>89</sup> The image shows page 53 from the accompanying publication: Elbrig de Groot, ed., *Sophie Calle: Absence* (Rotterdam: Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, (1994). *Last Seen* was presented as part of Calle's exhibition in Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam, which took place in 1994.

<sup>90</sup> "Gardner Museum Theft," FBI website, accessed June 12, 2015, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2013/march/reward-offered-for-return-of-stolen-gardner-museum-artwork/image/hi-res/a-lady-and-gentleman-in-black-rembrandt/view>.

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## ISABELLA'S LOST COUPLE

This postcard shows Rembrandt's painting, *A Lady and Gentleman in Black* (1632), one of the thirteen pieces of art that were stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and whose absence was documented by Sophie Calle as part of *Last Seen*.



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NO CCTV

In his book *Stealing the Mona Lisa: What Art Stops Us from Seeing*<sup>91</sup> Darian Leader explores the connection between psychoanalysis and art. The Lacanian psychoanalyst argues that the theft of the *Mona Lisa* by Vincenzo Perugia in 1911 and the empty space it left behind contributed to Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece becoming the most famous painting in the world.

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<sup>91</sup> Darian Leader, *Stealing the Mona Lisa: What Art Stops Us from Seeing* (Washington DC: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2004).

## LOSS BECOMES OBJECT

Following the psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Jacques Lacan, Leader argues that we look at visual art to find something that we have lost. This image<sup>92</sup> illustrates his observation. Brian Grosskurth states that Lacan understands objects “as signifying structures created and shaped in relation to a void”<sup>93</sup> and explains, “the production of art is literally creation ex nihilo, the drawing of form around a space of nothingness.”<sup>94</sup> Leader explains this rather complex concept using the story of Perugia’s robbery. At the end of his book he states, “The story of the vanishing of the Mona Lisa has shown us what happens when the split between the artwork and the empty place it occupies is made manifest. But there is still enough of this empty space present when art fails to disappear: it is the special, sacred space that artwork inhabits, the space that makes us ask the question, ‘Is this art?’ The problem, and the power, of this space is that we can’t see it. Art can evoke it for us but it remains invisible. It is both what art invites us to see and what art stops us from seeing.”<sup>95</sup>

The exploration of the void raises interesting questions regarding the purpose of art and why we visit museums to spend time with artworks. I have always been fascinated by the question of whether I would make art if I lived in the desert or any other remote place, or even better in paradise. Do artists with their artistic outputs fill the emptiness we all experience in our lives? Do they make art to fight the alienation and pointlessness we all regularly feel? Do artworks help us to experience what surrounds us as more meaningful? I certainly understand my art as a shared attempt to grasp the complex and incomprehensible world around me and as a tiny contribution to making the world a slightly better place. I wouldn’t make art in paradise.

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<sup>92</sup> Darian Leader, *Stealing the Mona Lisa: What Art Stops Us from Seeing* (Washington DC: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2004), 5.

<sup>93</sup> Brian Grosskurth, ‘Inside Out: Rebecca Horn’s Estimate Monument,’ in *Sculpture and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Brandon Taylor (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 181.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Darian Leader, *Stealing the Mona Lisa: What Art Stops Us from Seeing*, 177.

## THE ARTIST OF SPACE

The French artist Yves Klein (1928-1962) presented the empty space as a blinding white hole. For his exhibition with the rather lengthy title *The Isolation of Specialization of Sensibility in a State of Primary Matter Stabilized by Pictorial Sensibility, The Void* (1958) at the Iris Clert Gallery in Paris, Klein left the gallery space without any content. Brian O'Doherty describes Klein's nothingness, "While offering itself as site and subject, the gallery primarily hosted a transcendent gesture. The gallery, the locus of transformation, became an image of Klein's mystical system - the grand synthesis derived from the symbolists in which azur (International Klein Blue) became the transubstantiating device - the symbol as it was for Goethe, of air, ether, spirit."<sup>96</sup>

Two years later Klein performed his famous *Saut dans le vide* (Leap into the Void). He published the resulting photomontage on the 27th of November in a one-off newspaper: *Dimanche - le journal d'un seul jour* (Sunday - the newspaper of a single day).<sup>97</sup> In this broadsheet he called himself 'the artist of space' and criticised NASA's expeditions to the moon. This postcard shows a photograph by Harry Shunk (German, 1924–2006) and Janos Kender (Hungarian, 1937–1983) of Yves Klein leaping, before the judo students who caught him were removed from the image.

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<sup>96</sup> Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, Expanded Edition (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1999), p 89.

<sup>97</sup> Tony Godfrey, *Conceptual Art* (1998; reprint, London/New York: Phaidon, 2011), 69.

## MUSEUM AFLOAT

Joan Jonas (1936-) is an American artist who pioneered video and performance art, often combined with some form of drawing. In 2015 she represented the United States at the 56th Venice Biennale.

Her *Untitled Statement*<sup>98</sup> paints a picture of the museum afloat, “travelling through space for hundreds of years,” with the curators as the “Double Lunar Dogs” exerting power over a lost audience without a sense of their history or their future. Joan Jonas finishes her text with a popular quote by Walter Benjamin in which he expresses his concerns regarding our fading historical awareness.<sup>99</sup>

Many other artists have taken up the pen to share their critical observations and reflections in relation to the role of the museum. We will meet some of them later.

Jonas’s mild institutional critique in the form of creative writing was first presented during Documenta 7 in 1982. The Documenta in Kassel was the first major international art exhibition I visited as an aspiring young artist. At that time (1982-1983) I worked in the exhibition department of the Rotterdam Arts Council (Rotterdamse Kunststichting, RKS). My job included installing and invigilating exhibitions in the various gallery spaces managed by the RKS. My employment was the result of a successful appeal on ethical grounds against serving in the Dutch army. The following 18 months of gallery training that replaced 16 months of military service greatly informed my early artistic and professional development. It helped me to expand my technical skills and gave me invaluable insights into contemporary art and curatorial practice. It offered the opportunity to meet and assist a wide variety of local, national and international artists.

*Documenta 7*, which was curated by Rudi Fuchs, director of the van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven at the time, had a huge influence on my emerging art practice. Fuchs included work by several Dutch artists such as Armando, René Daniels, Jan Dibbets and Toon Verhoef who later became my tutors at Ateliers '63.<sup>100</sup> My first encounter with such a wide diversity of art at *Documenta 7* had a

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<sup>98</sup> Joan Jonas, “Untitled Statement,” in *The Museum as Arena: Artists on Institutional Critique*, ed. Christian Kravagna (Bregenz: Kunsthhaus Bregenz, 2001), 23.

<sup>99</sup> See Room III for more on the subject of historical amnesia.

<sup>100</sup> Ateliers '63 was established in 1963 by a group of Dutch artists in response to what they perceived as conservative and outdated art education. In the 1980s it became the model for several other postgraduate courses in the Netherlands. Students are called participants and receive a scholarship. I took part between August 1985 and June 1987. After its move from Haarlem to Amsterdam in 1992 Ateliers '63 was renamed ‘De Ateliers’.

profound effect on me. As a result of my visit to Kassel in 1982 I was introduced to the work of several artists who now feature in *The Museum Within Us*; for example Marcel Broodthaers, Michael Asher, Joseph Kosuth and On Kawara. These artists were points of reference during the initial years of my art practice.

## FUDDY DUDDY FODDER

Alan Kaprow (1927-2006), who is well known for his happenings in the late 1950s and 1960s, questions in the text<sup>101</sup> shown here, the museum's relevance for contemporary art. He introduces its relationship between the museum and the state of death. Kaprow argues that the museum has become a place where art is presented in an isolated way, disconnected from daily life, and therefore is transformed into "a true nature morte."<sup>102</sup> He regards the museum and the objects in it as out-dated, "a fuddy-duddy remnant from another era."<sup>103</sup> His fellow countryman Robert Smithson (1938-1973), whom we will visit next, describes this detachment in similar terms: "Once the work of art is totally neutralized, ineffective, abstract, safe and politically lobotomised, it is ready to be consumed by society. All is reduced to visual fodder and transportable merchandise. Innovations are allowed only if they support this kind of confinement."<sup>104</sup>

Both artists are highly critical of the role of the artist in this disconnection of art and society. Kaprow: "The artist, artwork and house of art grew to share a positive commitment to the notion of separating high culture from low life"<sup>105</sup> and Smithson, "Some artists imagine they've got a hold on this apparatus, which in fact got a hold of them."<sup>106</sup>

At the end of his now slightly dated text, Kaprow proposes to empty the museum and leave it as an "environmental sculpture"<sup>107</sup> to create a ruinous memorial for an institution of the past. Museum becomes mausoleum.

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<sup>101</sup> Alan Kaprow, "Death in the Museum: Where Art Thou, Sweet Muse? I'm Hung Up in the Whitney," in *The Museum as Arena: Artists on Institutional Critique*, ed. Christian Kravagna (Bregenz: Kunsthau Bregenz, 2001), 10-11.

<sup>102</sup> Kaprow, "Death in the Museum," 10.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Robert Smithson, "Cultural Confinement," in *The Museum as Arena: Artists on Institutional Critique*, ed. Christian Kravagna (Bregenz: Kunsthau Bregenz, 2001), 16.

<sup>105</sup> Alan Kaprow, "Death in the Museum," 10.

<sup>106</sup> Robert Smithson, "Cultural Confinement," 16.

<sup>107</sup> Alan Kaprow, "Death in the Museum," 10.

## HETEROTOPIA

Robert Smithson also shares Kaprow's labelling of the museum as an obsolete institution from a bygone era: "Museums and parks are graveyards above the ground - congealed memories of the past that act as a pretext reality."<sup>108</sup> He sees it as a "cultural prison"<sup>109</sup> that limits the potential of art by forcing it into "fraudulent categories."<sup>110</sup> Museums are comparable with asylums, jails and cemeteries, places that were categorised by Michel Foucault as 'heterotopias', meaning spaces outside everyday social and institutional space. The museum is given as an example of a heterotopia that accrues time. "Museums and libraries have become heterotopias in which time never stops building up and topping its own summit, whereas in the seventeenth century, even at the end of the century, museums and libraries were the expression of an individual choice. By contrast, the idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place, this whole idea belongs to our modernity."<sup>111</sup> These heterotopias are institutions that exert power in order to benefit a certain group in society according to Foucault.<sup>112</sup> Smithson would have agreed.

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<sup>108</sup> Robert Smithson, "Cultural Confinement," in *The Museum as Arena: Artists on Institutional Critique*, ed. Christian Kravagna (Bregenz: Kunsthhaus Bregenz, 2001), 17.

<sup>109</sup> Robert Smithson, 'Cultural Confinement,' 16.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Michel Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, trans. Jay Miskowiec, accessed May 25, 2015. <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf>, 3-4. Translated from Michel Foucault, 'Des espaces autres' (conférence au Cercle d'études architecturales, March 14, 1967), *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, n°5, October 1984, 7.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

SEPULCHRES OF ART

In his book *Prism*<sup>113</sup> sociologist and philosopher Theodor W. Adorno discusses the opinions held about museums by two French poets, Valéry and Proust. Similar to Alan Kaprow and Robert Smithson, he understands the museum as a place of death: "Museums are like the family sepulchres of works of art. They testify to the neutralization of culture."<sup>114</sup>

This page from *Valery Proust Museum*, a chapter in Adorno's *Prisms* is juxtaposed here with a postcard of Ferdinand Knab's impression of the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Theodor W Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Sherry Weber (London: Neville Spearman, 1967).

<sup>114</sup> Theodor W Adorno, *Prisms*, 175.

<sup>115</sup> Ferdinand Knab (1834-1902), *The Mausoleum of Halicarnassus*, from the series 'Seven Wonders of the Ancient World', 1886. This mausoleum was built by Artemisia II of Caria for her husband and brother Mausolos between 355 and 350 BC. The ruin is in contemporary Bodrum, Turkey.



## CONSERVATORY

The French artist Daniel Buren (1938-) explores place, architecture and context. He has realised numerous site-specific installations that consist of coloured stripes often adhered to landmark buildings. *Function of the Museum* reflects his earlier interest in the 'framing' of art and the production of value.<sup>116</sup>

According to Buren an artist should be politically engaged and critical of the established powers and its institutions. Like Alan Kaprow and Robert Smithson, Buren believes that the museum should present culture in a more democratic, and less confined way.

In the mid 1980s 'institutional critique' became a commonly used term for labelling reflections on the museum made by artists and academics. Writing was a significant part of these artists' practices. Other examples include Marcel Broodthaers, Michael Asher and Martha Rosler, who were later followed by Louise Lawler and Andrea Fraser. The art historians Douglas Crimp, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh and Pieter Bürger were also heavily involved in this form of cultural critique.

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<sup>116</sup> Daniel Buren, 'Function of the Museum,' in *The Museum as Arena: Artists on Institutional Critique*, ed. Christian Kravagna (Bregenz: Kunsthaus Bregenz, 2001), 40-42.

## ASYLUM

In his manifesto, that is an example of non-American institutional critique, Buren rails against the authority of the museum, the controlling wealthy middle class and the artists who choose to assist the prevailing “bourgeois ideology.” Buren argues that artists are complicit by not questioning the museum’s power to present a particular picture of the world through the way it “selects, collects and protects.”<sup>117</sup>

Thirty-five years after Buren wrote his text in 1970 artists seem less preoccupied with the museum as an instrument of oppression and inequality. As pointed out earlier the museum and its central role of judge and endorser of taste and quality have been diminished by a fundamental change in the way we engage or are confronted with art. The multitude and variety of public art spaces, including the world-wide-web, which are less controlled by the taste of professionals are accessible alternatives where artists can reach audiences and share their creative activities.

Buren himself has also moved on. In 2005 he created *The Eye of the Storm* a site-specific installation in the Guggenheim Museum, New York. The text on the Guggenheim Museum’s website mentions the shameful incident involving the removal in 1971 of Buren’s and Hans Haacke’s work from the Guggenheim Museum’s *Sixth Guggenheim International Exhibition*.<sup>118</sup> Buren’s “...resumed dialogue with the museum’s legendary Frank Lloyd Wright-designed rotunda’ raises a pressing question, poignantly formulated by Andrea Fraser (1965-): “How can artists who have become art-historical institutions themselves claim to critique the institution of art?”<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Daniel Buren, ‘Function of the Museum,’ 42.

<sup>118</sup> “The Eye of the Storm: Works in Situ by Daniel Buren,” The Guggenheim Museum, accessed may 26 2015, <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/press-room/releases/press-release-archive/2004/627-december-2-the-eye-of-the-storm-works-in-situ-by-daniel-buren>.

<sup>119</sup> Andrea Fraser, “From the Critique of institutions to an institution of critique,” in *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists’ Writing*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (London/Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2011), 408-409.

## I AM AN ARTIST

Andrea Fraser, closely associated with the second wave of 'institutional critique', explains in *An Artist's Statement*<sup>120</sup> her perspective on the complex relationship between the artist, the museum, culture and society with an emphasis on the notion of power. Writing has always been an important aspect of Fraser's cultural production that is strongly informed by psychoanalysis and which is primarily located in art institutions and academia. More recently she focuses on power relationships in the art world.<sup>121</sup>

*An Artist's Statement* reflects views on art, culture and museums that were developed by artists from an older generation such as Daniel Buren, Michael Asher and Robert Smithson. In the late 1980s and early 1990s Fraser developed site specific performances in the form of critical and explorative gallery tours, for example *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989) at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

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<sup>120</sup> Andrea Fraser, 'An Artist's Statement,' in *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect*, ed. Kynaston McShine (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 162-165.

<sup>121</sup> Fraser's video performance *Untitled* (2003) shows the artist having sex with an art collector who paid an undisclosed amount for the recorded encounter. The video was produced in an edition of five copies. Three of these were sold to private collectors including the male protagonist in *Untitled*.

## WE ARE THE INSTITUTION

Sixteen years after staging her *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* Andrea Fraser reflects on what happened to her initial area of interest, institutional critique. In her contribution to *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writing*<sup>122</sup> she acknowledges that the art establishment has absorbed many of the artists who were involved in the critical reflection on museum culture. Fraser has come to realise that artists are not outside the institutions but are complicit in the shaping and maintaining of the structures that define them. Going back to Fraser's question posed earlier in connection with Daniel Buren's installation in The Guggenheim Museum,<sup>123</sup> "Every time we speak of the *institution* as other than us, we disavow our role in the creation and perpetuation of its conditions. We avoid responsibility for, or action against, the everyday complicities, compromises, and censorship - above all, self-censorship - which are driven by our own interests in the field and the benefits we derive from it. It's not a question of inside or outside, or the number and scale of various organized sites for the production, presentation, and distribution of art, It's not a question of being against the institution: We are the institution."<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Andrea Fraser, 'From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique,' in *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writing*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (London/Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT press, 2011), 408-409.

<sup>123</sup> "How can artists who have become art-historical institutions themselves claim to critique the institution of art? See I - 048.

<sup>124</sup> Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," 416.

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## For Work

The artist as collector and archivist

The Museum Within Us

## CARAVAGGIO ON A WINDOW SILL

The second room in *The Museum Within Us* is dedicated to the role collecting and archiving<sup>125</sup> plays in contemporary art practice. The focus here is on artists who produce collections or pseudo, informal or counter archives rather than simply using them as a source for the research and development of their work.

Most artists collect a variety of objects and images to use as reference or source material. The process of amassing stuff informs their works and projects in fundamental ways. The idiosyncratic collections they create help artists to produce art and to explore and externalise the complex constellation of interests that inform their work. In some cases these accumulations become the actual artwork.

In addition to collecting, the artist's approach often includes reproducing, ordering and re-presenting the objects in their collection or archive.

Hal Foster traces this "archival impulse"<sup>126</sup> back to the photomontages produced in the pre-WWII period by artists such as John Heartfield and Aleksandr Rodchenko. Martha Buskirk also makes a link with the montage and assemblage techniques developed in the twentieth century. She notes that these practices of creating a collection for work or as work "involve fairly direct interaction with the found material that is nonetheless transformed in the process, while the ready made emphasises the unaltered status of the singular object."<sup>127</sup>

Collecting and archiving became a more widespread component of artistic practice after WWII "as appropriated images and serial formats became common idioms"<sup>128</sup> as Foster puts it. His examples include "the pin-board aesthetic"<sup>129</sup> of the Independent Group, "the informational structures"<sup>130</sup> of conceptual art, and institutional critique. The urge to collect became a key aspect of twentieth century art revealed through image appropriation and the use of found objects.

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<sup>125</sup> The dictionary on my computer describes a *collection* as "a group of accumulated items of a particular kind" and an *archive* as "a collection of historical documents or records providing information about a place, institution, or group of people." An *archive* is therefore a sub category of the more general term *collection* and is generally understood as being official and bureaucratic. *Archive* is also used to name the place where documents and records are kept.

<sup>126</sup> Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," in ed. Charles Merewether, *The Archive* (London: Whitechapel/Cambridge Mass.: the MIT Press, 2006), 143.

<sup>127</sup> Martha Buskirk, "Consumption and Production," in *Francis Alj's: Fabiola: An Investigation* (New York: Dia Art Foundation, 2008), 43.

<sup>128</sup> Hal Foster, *An Archival Impulse*, 143.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

I would like to note that evidence of the artist's compulsion to collect emerged much further back in art history. Consider the sixteenth and seventeenth century tromp l'oeil depictions of letter racks with letters and documents, paintings of studio walls, and the elaborate still lives produced by numerous artists since the fifteenth century; all involved a form of collecting, editing and arranging to produce a work of art.

What have now become common elements of contemporary art are also key aspects of my practice. Two of the projects developed since 1997 with Tracy Mackenna are being presented in this room. Both involve some mode of curatorial practice and the presentation of collected and juxtaposed material.

But now we will continue our tour through *The Museum Within Us* by looking at a photograph by German artist Wolfgang Tillmans (1968-).<sup>131</sup> Well-known for his 'snapshot photography,' Tillmans often captures found still-lives. The juxtaposition of postcards shows paintings by Caravaggio and Hans Memling.

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<sup>131</sup> *Window Caravaggio*, 1997, chromogenic print, 61 x 50.8 cm, edition of four copies.

II - 02

## A VISIT TO ROME

The four postcards that feature in Wolfgang Tillmans' still life photograph *Window Caravaggio*.

Hans Memling (1430-1494), *Compassion for the Dead Christ with a Donor* (Late 1400s).<sup>132</sup>

Michelangelo Caravaggio (1571-1610), *Repentant Maria Magdalena* (c. 1595).<sup>133</sup>

Michelangelo Caravaggio, *John the Baptist (Youth with a Ram)* (1602).<sup>134</sup>

Michelangelo Caravaggio, *The Fortune Teller* (1595).<sup>135</sup>

The postcard plays a key role in *The Museum Within Us*. As part of the commodification of art, museums and public galleries reproduce images of the artworks in their collections, to be sold in the museum shop. Buying these miniature pictures enables the creation of domestic private collections.

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<sup>132</sup> Oil on wood panel, 68.5 x 52.5 cm, Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, Rome.

<sup>133</sup> Oil on canvas, 122.5 x 98.5 cm, Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, Rome.

<sup>134</sup> Oil on canvas, 129 cm x 94 cm, Musei Capitolini, Rome.

<sup>135</sup> Oil on canvas, 115 x 150 cm, Musei Capitolini, Rome.

## MECHANICALLY REPRODUCED EXAMPLES

The American photographer Walker Evans (1903–1975) was an obsessive collector of picture postcards, which were the most omnipresent manifestation of photography in the early decades of the twentieth century. Evans started collecting during his childhood, when the picture postcard still had the power to fill people with amazement. At a later age during a discussion with students he commented on his inclination to accumulate images: “I think artists are collectors figuratively. I’ve noticed that my eye collects... My eye is interested in streets that have rows of wooden houses on them. I find them and do them. I collect them.”<sup>136</sup> He continued his passion for these mechanically produced pictures, taken by a legion of anonymous photographers, into the final years of his life. Most of his cards date from the 1900s to the 1920s.

The young Walter Benjamin was also in love with the, for his time, novel photographic picture postcard, which was introduced in 1895 shortly after he was born. In no time this mass-produced and affordable commodity became an immensely popular and collectable item. The postcards sent from exotic destinations, visited by his widely travelled grandmother, became the core of Benjamin’s first collection, which shaped his later interests and explorations. “There are people who think they find the key to their destinies in heredity, others in horoscopes, others again in education. For my part, I believe that I would gain numerous insights into my later life from my collection of picture postcards if I were to leaf through it again today. The main contributor to this collection was my maternal grandmother, a decidedly enterprising lady, from whom I believe I have inherited two things: my delight in giving presents and my love of travel.”<sup>137</sup>

Amassing huge amounts of objects is one thing but without any form of taxonomy these collections become difficult to access and to manage. As the keeper of his collection, Walker Evans carefully classified the more than 9,000 cards in his possession,<sup>138</sup> using categories such as “occupation”, “boats”, “interiors” and “Detroits.”<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> “Walker Evans, Visiting artist: A transcript of his Discussion with the Students of the University of Michigan, 1971,” in *Photography: Essays & Images, Illustrated Readings in the History of Photography*, Beaumont Newhall, ed. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1980), 317. Cited in Jeff L. Rosenheim, *Walker Evans and the Picture Postcard* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009), 17.

<sup>137</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 2:2* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 620-1.

<sup>138</sup> Evans’ collection is now part of the Walker Evans Archive, which was acquired in 1994 by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

<sup>139</sup> *Detroits* was a series of high quality postcards of a vast range of subjects photographed in America such as hotels, tourist resorts, landscapes and Indians, produced by the Detroit Publishing Company.

Evans had a huge admiration for the manufacturers of the early picture postcards and photographers who created what Jeff L. Rosenheim, the curator of the exhibition *Walker Evans and the Picture Postcard*<sup>140</sup> calls “a form of indigenous American realism.” He argues that Evans’ collecting activities had a considerable influence on his early artistic development as a photographer.<sup>141</sup> The relationship between the neutral style of the travelling photographers who took the pictures that were used for the postcards, and Evans’ own technique is evident in the two pictures presented here.<sup>142</sup>

The picture postcard wasn’t the only item Evans collected. He was a true hoarder who collected a variety of stuff such as quotations, books, newspaper and magazine clippings. At a later stage of his life he expanded his activities even to acquiring decaying roadside signs. Evans makes a connection between collecting objects and taking photographs. Both activities involve the shifting of context. “A distinct point...is made in the lifting of these objects from their original settings. The point is that this lifting is, in the raw exactly what the photographer is doing with his machine, the camera, anyway, always. The photographer, the artist, ‘takes’ a picture: symbolically he lifts an object or a combination of objects, and in so doing he makes a claim for that composition, and a claim for his act of seeing in the first place. The claim is that he rendered his object in some way transcendent, and that in each instance his vision has penetrating validity.”<sup>143</sup>

Similar to Walter Benjamin, Walker Evans was fascinated by the rise of mass culture and the commodification of our daily existence. One could argue that Evans’ photographs of signs and billboards collected with his camera anticipate the artworks created by pop artists such as Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and James Rosenquist who challenged the distinctions between high art and (low) mass culture.

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<sup>140</sup> *Walker Evans and the Picture Postcard* took place at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York between February 3 and May 25, 2009.

<sup>141</sup> Jeff L. Rosenheim, *Walker Evans and the Picture Postcard* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009), 10.

<sup>142</sup> Postcard: *Tennessee Coal, Iron & Rail Road Company’s Steel Mills, Ensley, Alabama*, 1910s; photograph: Walker Evans, *Roadside Gas Station and Miners’s Houses, Lewisburg, Alabama*, 1935, film negative.

<sup>143</sup> Walker Evans, wall text for his exhibition in the Yale University Art Gallery, December 1971.

THE LEITZ BANK

For the Dutch painter Marlene Dumas (1953-) collecting is a key aspect of her artistic activities. She is a passionate gatherer of pictures, photographs, paper cuttings and textual references. This image shows some of the folders in her image bank that she uses to organise her vast collection of source material: 'Men,' 'War,' 'Heads Only,' 'Death' and 'Jesus.'

Images are crucial to Dumas for the production of her highly sought after paintings, which are informed by her interest in subjects such as death, sexuality and gender. Her work focuses on the human body and the human condition, incorporating a wide range of cultural, and in particular, literary and political references. Cornelia Butler describes Dumas' art as "...a visual accounting of our time through the representation of individuals or, rather, of bodies and souls as they move through the incidents of life, politics and art."<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Cornelia Butler, "Painter as Witness," in *Marlene Dumas*, Cornelia Butler et al. *Measuring Your Own Grave* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008), 43.

DAS GESICHT AN DER WAND

This image shows some of the images collected and archived by Marlene Dumas. The organising principle seems to be visual connections and associations. The sleeve on the right combines faces of women from different sources filed under 'Female Portraits.' The postcard on the bottom left for example is a reproduction of a self-portrait by the Dutch painter Charley Toorop (1891-1955), which was used for Dumas painting *Models* (1994) and the images of a woman with a skin condition on the back of a postcard was the source for *The White Disease* (1985).<sup>145</sup>

On the right Dumas combines postcards of Brigitte Bardot and Alain Delon with pictures of herself and gallery owner Paul Andriessse, and his brother, the painter Erik Andriessse who died in 1993 at the age of 36 (bottom right). The little black and white photograph shows Alain Delon with an unknown woman.

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 91.



## DOUBLE DEATH

In 1967 Roland Barthes wrote his famous essay *La Mort de l'Auteur* in which he declared provocatively that the author, as the prime source of meaning in any literary text, has no significance. A literary text should be separated from its writer in order to protect it from imposed interpretation.

The ideas Barthes expressed in *La Mort de l'Auteur* have been widely applied to visual art and his *Camera Lucida* (1980) on the reading of photographic images has had a huge impact on the way one thinks about and looks at photographs.<sup>146</sup> Dumas, informed by Barthes' text, raises this question of meaning in relation to trust and memory. "Now that we know that images can mean whatever, whoever wants them to mean, we don't trust anybody anymore, especially ourselves,"<sup>147</sup> The English translation of the title of Barthes' seminal essay is also the name of one of Marlene Dumas paintings, which is based on a photograph published in a Dutch newspaper<sup>148</sup> and depicts the French writer Louis-Ferdinand Céline on his deathbed.

Dumas' work frequently involves the juxtaposition of cultural references. Her *Death of the Author* combines two acts of appropriation, the painted image and the borrowed title, adding a linguistic structure to embed meaningful connections. Factual death (Céline) meets metaphorical death (Barthes). Image meets text.

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<sup>146</sup> *On Photography* (1977), a collection of essays by Susan Sontag is of similar importance.

<sup>147</sup> "Marlene Dumas, "Suspect," in Gianni Romano, ed., *Marlene Dumas: Suspect*. (Milan: Skira, 2003) cited in Cornelia Butler, "Painter as Witness," in *Marlene Dumas, Measuring Your Own Grave*, Cornelia Butler et al. (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008), 145.

<sup>148</sup> Printed alongside an article about Louis-Ferdinand Céline with the title "Life and Death of a Mad Dog."

GOOD GIRLS GO TO HEAVEN, BAD GIRLS GO EVERYWHERE

This image from *Marlene Dumas, Measuring Your Own Grave*<sup>149</sup> shows a detail of a wall in Dumas' Amsterdam studio with, amongst other things, postcards of work by Frida Kahlo and several Dutch artists such as Rene Daniëls, Daan van Golden and photographer Ed van der Elsken. With the objects in the foreground, Dumas' wall evokes seventeenth century cabinets of curiosities and letter racks, which provided frameworks for arranging collections of stuff, and constructing meaningful displays. The artist's assemblage of things, quotes and images of people reveal some of Marlene Dumas' preoccupations around 1991, the time this photograph was taken.

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<sup>149</sup> Cornelia Butler et al., *Marlene Dumas, Measuring Your Own Grave* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008), 42.

## CURATED STILL LIFE

This display of objects and pictures looks similar to the previous photograph of Dumas' studio wall and was painted by the Flemish painter Frans Francken de Younger (1581-1624).<sup>150</sup> Francken, a member of a famous Antwerp family of painters, produced several "collector's cabinets", depicting collections of artefacts including paintings, porcelain crockery, antiquities and coins, and exotic natural objects such as stones, shells, seeds and taxidermic animals.<sup>151</sup> Often partly fictitious, these allegorical painterly juxtapositions show off the cultural and scientific knowledge of the wealthy collector. The aesthetically pleasing cabinets of curiosities, or wonder rooms are widely regarded as the forerunner of museums.

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<sup>150</sup> *Cabinet Of Curiosities* (c.1620-25 or 1636), oil on oak wood, 74 x 78 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

<sup>151</sup> Gerhard C. Cadée, "Sea heart and nickar nuts in a Flemish painting of 1617," *Archives of Natural History*, 38 (2011): 353, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3366/anh.2011.0041>.

## AN IMAGE OF OURSELVES

Comparable to Marlene Dumas, Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947) displayed pictures and reproductions of paintings on his studio wall. His image collection included a Japanese print and reproductions of works by Picasso, Gauguin, Seurat and Vermeer.

Bonnard's wall, here framed by the Hungarian photographer, sculptor and filmmaker Gyula Halász (1899 –1984), better known under his pseudonym Brassai,<sup>152</sup> predates the speedy age of digital collection, reproduction and distribution.

Previously the prerogative of professional photographers, we nowadays continuously shoot pictures of our complex and complicated surrounding world with digital cameras and mobile phones, creating huge visual archives of our existence. This now common routine of recording and archiving fragments of our lives helps us to grasp something that is difficult to comprehend. The never-ending hoarding of snapshots results in an encroaching stockpile of images that reveals what we observed, whom we met and where we were. This hard to manage archive enables us to see and to project a certain image of ourselves.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Detail from spread in Brassai, *The Artists of My Life* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 12-13. Brassai took this photograph in 1946. The caption on page 12 starts with "A wall in Bonnards' house on which he tacked up some reproductions of his favorite works..." The big picture of a nude on the left is an original painting by Renoir dedicated to his friend Bonnard.

<sup>153</sup> In 2005 CCA, Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow published *Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen: A Perfect Image of Ourselves*, which foregrounded some of our projects developed between 1997 and 2004. The title was taken from a drawing, which Tracy Mackenna and I made in 2001 and was executed as a wall drawing later that year for the *Ed and Ellis in Ever Ever Land* exhibition in CCA.

## LIFE, DEATH AND BEAUTY ON A PINBOARD

Alongside *Evernote*, an app on our smart phones and an online drop box, Tracy Mackenna and I use old-fashioned pin boards in our studio to share and organise our ideas, sources and references. *The Museum Within Us* was partly created using these tactile boards, which are still common features in offices, schools and peoples' homes. John Berger argues, "Adults and children sometimes have boards in their bedrooms or living-rooms on which they pin pieces of paper: letters, snapshots, reproductions of paintings, newspaper cuttings, original drawings, postcards. On each board all the images belong to the same language and all are more or less equivalent within it, because they have been chosen in a highly personal way to match and express the experience of the room's inhabitant. Logically these boards should replace museums."<sup>154</sup>

Visiting museums and galleries, and engaging with the art created by others is obviously a very important aspect of any artist's life. I have come to realise that I am interested equally in the consumption and the production of art. The role of artist-as-public often incorporates a process of collecting and juxtaposing reproductions of artworks and other visual material. In my case this "being audience" became over time a more foregrounded aspect of my practice and ultimately lead to a shared practice with Tracy Mackenna that includes the curatorial as an important creative strategy. Key museum practices such as collecting, curating and exhibition making are being mimicked, often on a domestic scale and in a studio context, to develop and shape our artistic research and our open-ended creative explorations.

In 2010 Tracy and I created *Life, Death and Beauty: You Make Me*.<sup>155</sup> This work, that consists of twenty-four framed archival digital prints,<sup>156</sup> brings together a wide variety of visual material from our 'image bank'. By juxtaposing mainly postcards of historical and contemporary artworks on one of our pin boards we assembled a visual narrative referencing a variety of issues such as loss, conflict, love, sexuality, and death. Subsequently, through a process of photographic framing, we created the twenty-four fragments that make up this montage and reflect our interest in daily life and academic subjects such as visual studies, image theory and psychoanalysis.

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<sup>154</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 23.

<sup>155</sup> The title combines the words 'Life Death and Beauty' that were printed on a paper postcard bag from the National Galleries, London with the words "You Make Me" on a painting by Christopher Wool, *Untitled* (1997), which is in the collection of the Tate Gallery, London.

<sup>156</sup> Each digital print on archival paper is 36 x 27 cm. The photographs were taken during the first exhibition of this work, at Sleeper, Edinburgh in 2010.

GAZERS AND VOYEURS

Four of the twenty-four prints that combine the following reproductions:

Top left

Bethan Huws, *Word Vitrine* (1999, fragment).

Jean-Leon Gérôme, *Pygmalion and Galatea* (c.1890).

Christopher Wool, *Untitled* (1997, fragment).

Unknown photographer, Henry Moore's studio at Dane Tree House, Perry Green, Much Hadham, Hertfordshire.

Marc Quinn attends to his sculpture of pregnant Alison Lapper at the Cervietti sculpture workshop in Tuscany, Italy, photographed by David Levene (undated).

Top right

René Magritte, *La Gâcheuse* (1935).

Film still from *Theo en Thea en de Ontmaskering van het Tenenkaasimperium (Theo en Thea and the Exposure of the Toe Jam Imperium)* (1989) by Pieter Kramer.

Film still from *Sauve qui Peut la Vie* (1980) by Jean-Luc Godard.

Julius Kronberg, *Nymph and Fauns* (1875, fragment).

Bottom left

Gilbert & George, *The Singing Sculpture* (1971, fragment).

Anonymous photographer, *Two male models posing as Cain and Abel for August Rodin* (undated).

Workshop of Benozzo Gozzoli, *Sheet with figure studies from a sketchbook* (1435-1494).

Bottom right

Eve Arnold, *China, Chongqing, Art Class* (1979, fragment).

Brassaï, *Wall in Bonnard's studio* (1946, fragment).

Pablo Picasso, *The Artist in Front of his Canvas* (1938).

Johan Klopffer, *Tromp L'oeil* (c. 1700).

## COLLECTING WITH A CAMERA

For our pin board displays Tracy Mackenna and I used collected reproductions of photographs and art works, which have mainly been produced by others and in many cases are distributed as postcards. The originals are mediated through several stages of mechanical reproduction using the camera and printing techniques. Candida Höfer's approach to "collecting" incorporates a more direct engagement with the works she frames. Between 2004 and 2007 the photographer visited many homes and galleries of private collectors to capture the *Date Painting(s)* by On Kawara in their possession. In total the artist made 252 photographs of works from Kawara's *Today Series*,<sup>157</sup> which were brought together in a beautiful book.<sup>158</sup>

The two postcards presented here each show a photograph of a *Date Painting* in a home, in Tokyo<sup>159</sup> and in Dundee.<sup>160</sup>

Her *Date Paintings* photographs contrast the singularity of Höfer's main body of photographic work that focuses on the representation of (empty) architectural spaces of cultural and religious institution such as churches, libraries, archives and museums. By photographing a selection of Kawara's records of time in private homes all over the world, Höfer added a new dimension to the *Today Series*. By collecting "Kawara's" she realised a spatial constellation of *Date Paintings* in situ, a web of moments in time and space.

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<sup>157</sup> On Kawara made his first *Date Painting* in 1966 in New York and continued to work on the *Today Series* until his death in 2014.

<sup>158</sup> Candida Höfer, *On Kawara: Date Paintings in Private Collections* (Köln: Walther König, 2008).

<sup>159</sup> Reiko and Yukio Ishibashi Collection, September 1, 2005.

<sup>160</sup> Private Collection, June 23, 2006.

## ART AS REMINDER

Almost in direct opposition to Candida Höfer, who captures her architectural spaces devoid of the people that are using and inhabiting them, Christian Boltanski (1944-) is interested in the ephemerality of human experience and the way we deal with the past.

Many of Boltanski's installations are made up of almost identical items associated with deceased humans such as shoes, pieces of clothing and black and white portrait photographs, ordered in a repetitive way to emphasise the anonymity of death. As part of these displays the artist often uses shelving systems and spotlights to create a disturbing archival atmosphere, understood by many as a reference to the Holocaust. Art as a reminder of the transient nature of our being and the fate that befalls most of us after death: to be condemned to obscurity. "I am interested in what I call 'little memory', an emotional memory, an everyday knowledge, the contrary of the Memory with a capital M that is preserved in history books", Boltanski states. "This little memory, which for me is what makes us unique, is extremely fragile, and it disappears with death. This loss of identity, this equalization in forgetting, is very difficult to accept"<sup>161</sup>

Documentation and archiving are at the heart of Boltanski's practice which raises profound questions about the role of memory and photographic records. The book that I am holding here is an example of how the artist applies a pseudo-archival practice.

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<sup>161</sup> Christian Boltanski, quoted on the Serpentine Gallery website, accessed March 11, 2012, [http://www.serpentinegallery.org/2010/07/christian\\_boltanski\\_the\\_heart\\_a.html](http://www.serpentinegallery.org/2010/07/christian_boltanski_the_heart_a.html).



## THE QUESTION OF TRUTH

Christian Boltanski's *Kaddish*<sup>162</sup> forms a collection of found photographs of people, family holidays, domestic buildings and utensils. Divided into four parts, 'Materiality', 'Morality', 'Locality' and 'Humanity', this artist's book memorialises the death of anonymous people who died during the Nazi terror.

Boltanski's repository of almost 1600 photographs that juxtapose images of the victims and perpetrators of genocide suggests the depiction of the unfolding of the Holocaust but as a matter of fact, truth and fiction are deliberately rather confused here. The photographs of most "sufferers" are images of accident victims photographically taken from Mexican newspapers.

Can we be sure that we can believe what we are told to see when we look at photographs? Marlene Dumas gave the following answer: "Now that we know that images can mean whatever, whoever wants them to mean, we don't trust anybody anymore, especially ourselves."<sup>163</sup>

The German sociologist and cultural critic Siegfried Kracauer profoundly explored this question of *trust* and *truth* in his essay *Die Photographie*.<sup>164</sup> In his text he reflects on a studio photograph of a twenty-four year old film diva, one of the twelve so-called Tiller Girls<sup>165</sup>, taken in front of an image of Hotel Excelsior on the Lido in Venice and printed subsequently on the cover of an illustrated magazine. Kracauer, who analyses in his essay the way the media use the photographic image, considers this picture from the perspective of the woman's grandchildren.

Although photographs are considered to have what Siegfried Kracauer calls "likenesses", these are never sufficient to paint the full picture of the person or event depicted. "One has to believe the parents – who claim to have gotten it from Grandmother herself – that this photograph depicts the very same grandmother about whom one has retained these few details that may also in time be forgotten. Yet such testimonies are unreliable. It might turn out that the photograph does not depict

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<sup>162</sup> Christian Boltanski, *Kaddish* (Munich: Gina Kehayoff Verlag 1998). "Kaddish is an ancient Jewish liturgical prayer largely written in Aramaic and used in various forms to separate sections of the liturgy. Mourners have the right to recite some of these in public prayer during the year after, and on the anniversary of, a death." Source: *Collins English Dictionary, Complete & Unabridged 10th Edition*. Harper Collins Publishers, accessed, July 14, 2015, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/kaddish>.

<sup>163</sup> Cited in Cornelia Butler, "Painter as Witness," in Cornelia Butler et al., *Marlene Dumas, Measuring Your Own Grave* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008), 145.

<sup>164</sup> *Die Photographie* was first published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* (28 October 1927) that employed him in the 1920s as the editor of the arts and culture section. The text was reprinted several times afterwards. I consulted Siegfried Kracauer, "Photography," trans. Thomas Y. Levin, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 1993, 421-436.

<sup>165</sup> *The Tiller Girls* were a famous group of revue dancers named after John Tiller, a choreographer from Manchester, UK.

the grandmother after all but rather a girlfriend that resembled her. None of her contemporaries are still alive – and the question of likeness? The ur-image has long since decayed.”<sup>166</sup>

Kracauer points out that, “Photography grasps what is given as a spatial (or temporal) continuum; memory-images retain what is given only insofar as it has significance. Since what is significant is not reducible to either merely spatial or merely temporal terms, memory-images are at odds with photographic representation.”<sup>167</sup> Memory-images are incomplete and unreliable because they don’t incorporate the full course of an event or entire spatial presence.

But the photograph isn’t giving any assurance of truth either. Kracauer continues: “If photography is a *function of the flow* of time, then its substantive meaning will change depending upon whether it belongs to the domain of the present or to some phase of the past.”<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, *Photography*, 423.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid*, 425.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid*, 429.

REPRODUCTIVE LOSS

Kracauer's ideas regarding the function of photography might now and then seem slightly outdated but the misleading quality of the photographic image and the reproduction of artworks have been widely explored since he wrote his text in 1927. His pessimism about the role of the media and his cautionary note reminds us that the proliferation of the photographic image, in Kracauer's time through magazines and in our age also online, threatens the shared knowledge of our past. "But the flood of photos sweeps away the dams of memory. The assault of this mass of images is so powerful that it threatens to destroy the potentially existing awareness of crucial traits. Artworks suffer this fate through their reproductions" he notes, "The phrase 'lie together, die together' applies to the multiply reproduced original; rather than coming into view through the reproductions, it tends to disappear in its multiplicity."<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 432.

## KILLED BY USE AND FREQUENCY

Susan Sontag seems to agree with Kracauer's analysis. Tracy and I used this quote from her book *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) for one of our slides that make up the digital photomontage *Seeing is Believing* (2012).<sup>170</sup> Taking as its starting point the photograph by Pete Souza of Barack Obama and Hilary Clinton watching the killing of Osama bin Laden with members of the US National Security team, this black & white, silent, two channel slide projection brings together re-worked visual material and textual extracts and quotations from our constantly growing accumulation of visual and textual references. Through a process of association, interpretation and digital manipulation this work of art reminds us of our troubled relationships with conflict, ideology, power and truth.

Siegfried Kracauer's friend Walter Benjamin wrote his *Short History of Photography* two years after *Photography*, yet is not pessimistic at all about the effect of photographs and mechanically reproduced artworks. In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*<sup>171</sup> Benjamin shows that mechanical reproduction is not a new phenomenon. He discusses uniqueness, authenticity and the notion of the aura. "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence,"<sup>172</sup> Benjamin argues. The reproduction of an artwork and the resulting loss of aura changes the nature of the original according to Benjamin but in contrast to Kracauer he appreciates the newly acquired democratic qualities of the copy. Beyond the technical possibilities such as enlargement, reproduction "can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself. Above all, it enables the original to meet the beholder halfway."<sup>173</sup> This moving closer to the viewer is obviously key to my own interest in the reproduced image, its portability and the potential of montage. *The Museum Within Us* and many of the projects developed with Tracy Mackenna offer artworks new contexts and new meanings through their reproduction and the way these are in turn, reproduced and juxtaposed.

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<sup>170</sup> Black & white silent double screen slide projection, ±180 x 350 cm, duration 10:00. First shown as part of *WHO TOLD YOU SO?! #2, Truth vs. Organisation*, Onomatopée, Eindhoven, the Netherlands, 2012.

<sup>171</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1968).

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

A WHITE LIE

Living in the digital age we can easily sympathise with Kracauer and Sontag's gloomy observations but on the other hand one could wonder what a collective and inter-subjective understanding of the past would look like these days. Our shared past is itself a conundrum, a construct fraught with the influence of power and interests. History is unstable and historiography raises many questions about what 'our' history actually means.

Christian Boltanski's ambivalence reminds us that within all of this, *truth* is a complex concept. As an agent of memory his work evokes our recent and traumatic past by bringing together images and objects from a variety of sources. Does his mixing of fact and fiction not prove that we, in a sense, can tell the truth (the Holocaust) by lying?<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> See also Walid Raad/ATLAS Group's archive that explores ideological manipulation and the resulting historical contradictions related to the civil war in Lebanon (1970s-1990s). This archive deploys fictional evidence and characters such as the imaginary historian Dr. Fakhouri to reconstruct Lebanon's history.

## LIFE IN LETRASET

The German artist Hans-Peter Feldmann (1941-) explores the world through collecting and duplicating images. His love of pictures is so strong that during a trip to Egypt he declined an invitation to visit the Giza pyramids because he had seen so many beautiful reproductions of these amazing world wonders he therefore expected to be disappointed. Jacob Fabricius recounts the German artist's explanation: "he simply could not stand losing the magical image he had in his head. The image, he said, was better than the real thing. The illusion of something beautiful can be more powerful than the flesh of the real."<sup>175</sup>

Feldmann clearly doesn't agree with Siegfried Kracauer who, as mentioned earlier, believed that the mass reproduced image threatens to destroy the awareness, acquired via direct experience, of essential characteristics of the original. Feldmann prefers to engage with the world via reproductions and celebrates the open-ended quality of the, often clichéd, images he accumulates for his photomontages and artist's books. W.J.T. Mitchell would recognise Feldmann as a child of his time, "The idea that images have a kind of social and psychological power of their own is, in fact the reigning cliché of contemporary visual culture."<sup>176</sup> In his essay *What Do Pictures Want?* Mitchell explores what is done to, with and by images in our visual culture. He gives examples of issues that have been the subject of political critique of visual culture for decades such as gender and race. Mitchell also mentions the well-known argument "that art museums are a kind of hybrid form of religious temple and bank in which commodity fetishes are displayed for rituals of public veneration that are designed to produce surplus aesthetic and economic value."<sup>177</sup>

Let's return to Hans-Peter Feldmann's Egyptian story: Jacob Fabricius observes "Feldmann somehow frees these images, releasing the pyramids from their heritage."<sup>178</sup> I would argue rather that these images, often postcards, are mere ghosts of truly amazing human achievements. They have become cultural symbols, clichés that have replaced the profound immensity of the original and offer us a schematic visualisation of our life.

In my earlier work, produced from the mid 1980s to the early 1990s I tried to express my unease with the predictability and trivialisation of our existence, and the suffocating effect of our social

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<sup>175</sup> Jacob Fabricius, "Another Another," in Hans-Peter Feldmann, *Another Book* (London: Koenig Books: 2010), unpaginated.

<sup>176</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, "What Do Pictures Want?," in W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), 32.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid*, unpaginated.

attitudes. Room-filling installations, with titles such as *Paradijs Paradijs*,<sup>179</sup> *The Fall*<sup>180</sup> and *Life*<sup>181</sup> were created with line drawings, blown-up from those used by graphic designers and architects. These drawings were produced by a firm called *Letraset* and were economically grouped on so-called transfer sheets. Letraset offered a wide range of ready-made collections including letters, trees, dogs, and furniture. These stereotypes of human life allowed me to translate and enlarge my own experiences into a recognisable tale. “Edwin Janssen operates in the interactive area of the objective validity of collective clichés and the subjective meaning and experience which such images can impart to the individual viewer - a stance which as such implies ambivalence”, wrote Hanneke de Man.<sup>182</sup>

As you can see I used the following sets for my installation *Life*: men, famous buildings, women, couples, children and domestic interiors. The exhibition space was a former car showroom, which gave the gallery the feel of a huge display case. Watching from the outside passers-by could see the visitors inside looking at a superficial representation of untroubled modern life in the 1970s, which reflected my upbringing during my teens. Notably, the photographer who took these images of *Life* followed the conventional way of documenting art at that time: without its publics.

Sharing Feldmann’s love for trivial and mass-produced imagery I would like to think that the artist actually wants to remind us of the trivialisation of our cultural history. He plays with the conflicting emotions we experience when looking at these idealising postcards that turn the unique product of ‘high’ culture into mass-produced popular, ‘low’ culture. I like to suggest that Feldmann’s story regarding a visit to the pyramids is a rather ironic parable, told to make a point.

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<sup>179</sup> *Paradijs Paradijs*, 1988, Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven, the Netherlands.

<sup>180</sup> *The Fall*, 1989, De Stads Gallerij, Heerlen, the Netherlands.

<sup>181</sup> *Life*, 1987, Centrum Beeldende Kunst, Rotterdam, the Netherlands.

<sup>182</sup> Hanneke de Man, “For Instruction and Diversion,” in *Edwin Janssen: Narcissus and the Pool of Corruption* (Rotterdam: Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen, 1994), 13-14.

II - 19

## WAR ON TERROR

As part of his contribution to the exhibition *Archive Fever* Hans-Peter Feldmann presented a series of newspaper front pages, which he bought the day after the terrorist attack on the *Twin Towers* in New York. *9/11 Front Page* (2001) brings together more than 100 newspaper cover pages from all over the world that inform us about what was, according to George Bush, a massive attack on our freedom.



WAR ON LE MONDE

Buying newspapers in order to keep a record of an important historical event is in itself a simple, almost impromptu act. Showing them as an artwork in a New York gallery seven years after the attack happened, raises difficult questions about the role of art in memorising trauma, appropriation and authorship, the spectacular nature of these images and the dumbing down effect of endlessly representing images of violence by the media and artists.<sup>183</sup> “The ultra-familiar, ultra celebrated image - of agony, of ruin - is an unavoidable feature of our camera-mediated knowledge of war,”<sup>184</sup> wrote Susan Sontag.

This explicit and implicit asking of questions about the way we live and die is an important role art performs through engagement with collecting and archiving.

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<sup>183</sup> We will return to the complexities around images of conflict and war with reference to Susan Sontag in Room IV, where we will have a look at *WAR AS EVER!* (2013), a project that Tracy Mackenna and I developed for the Nederlands Fotomuseum in Rotterdam in which newspapers bought on April 1, 2003 play an important role.

<sup>184</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 21.

## SCIENCE FICTION

Tracy and I also bought a copy of *The Mirror*, one of the newspapers Feldmann collected, on 9/11. We used its front page in our collage *Hundred Thousand Lunatics* (2013). Printed as a poster this work was our contribution to *Micromegas > Powers of 10*, the first in a series of publishing projects and portable exhibitions that will ultimately result in a collection of 49 folded artworks.<sup>185</sup>

Taking up the role of participants, curators and graphic designers we invited six other artists, Pavel Büchler, Dora Garcia, Jonathan Monk, Scott Myles, Thomson & Craighead and the designer Marco Stout to create an A0 poster in response to *Micromegas* (1752), a story by the French philosopher Voltaire (1694–1778) that was published after his death, and which acted as the creative catalyst for this durational project.<sup>186</sup> The scholar Mark Dorrian contributed an essay, *In the Abyss of the Infinitesimally Small*.

Evolving around themes such as scale, human foible, superstitions and scientific ruse Voltaire's small but expansive and witty fable is widely regarded as one of the first examples of science fiction.

The other black and white image used in our poster shows my sculpture *Dad* (1992),<sup>187</sup> which was described by Roberta Smith as a “tongue-in-cheek paean to mindless normalcy”<sup>188</sup>. The poster's cut out text is a quote from Voltaire's satirical tale, which functions as a conversation piece between two aliens, giants on their way from Sirius to Saturn, and human philosophers of whom one states “For instance do you realise that as I speak a *hundred thousand lunatics* of our species, wearing helmets, are busy killing or being killed by a hundred thousand other animals in turbans, and that everywhere on Earth this is how we have carried on since time immemorial?”<sup>189</sup>

During their exchanges *Micromegas*, who is astonished by the earthlings' smallness and small

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<sup>185</sup> *Micromegas > Powers of 10* was produced and published by DCA, Dundee Contemporary Arts in an edition of 24 copies. Our associated academic paper, *Republished Matter: a philosophical story translated through time, medium and space* was presented during Impact8 International Printmaking conference (*Borders and Crossings: the Artist as Explorer*, Aug-Sept 2013) and is published in the Impact8 publication (2014).

<sup>186</sup> The text we used was translated by Theo Cuffe and published in 1994 by Penguin as part of their *Syrens* series.

<sup>187</sup> Mixed media. 150 x 80 x 60 cm, Caldic Collection, Rotterdam.

<sup>188</sup> Roberta Smith, “Art in Review,” *New York Times*, May 7, 1993, accessed July 22, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/05/07/arts/art-in-review-575593.html>

<sup>189</sup> Voltaire, *Micromégas*, trans. Theo Cuffe (London: Syrens Penguin, 1994), 30. We came across *Micromegas* while making work for the exhibition *Peace* in Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst Zürich, Switzerland (Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen, 1999-2000). Our contribution included a remake of one of John and Yoko's *War is Over!* posters from their early 70's peace campaign (Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen, 2003). Inspired by this quote, our *WAR AS EVER!* wall drawing was made at the point where war with Iraq looked imminent, for the exhibition *Normality is Obscene Nowadays* and for our project with the Nederlands Fotomuseum and the Atlas Van Stolk, both in Rotterdam (See Room IV).

mindedness, asks the humans to “tell me what your soul is and how you form ideas.”<sup>190</sup> After listening to the human philosophers’ citing of Aristotle, Descartes, Malebranche, Leibniz and Locke, the 36.5 km long super-genius promises to write a philosophical work for them that would reveal the “nature of things”<sup>191</sup> but which, upon being opened revealed merely blank pages.

In the Pier Arts Centre in Orkney in 2014 the first seven digitally printed posters were shown with a selection of books by the participating artists and from the Artists’ Book Collection (abcDundee) of Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Voltaire, *Micromégas*, trans.Theo Cuffe (London: Syrens Penguin, 1994), 33.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

<sup>192</sup> *Micromegas > Powers of 10: 58°57’53” N - 3°17’45” W*, The Pier Arts Centre, Stromness, Orkney, 2014.

## WHERE PORTABILITY AND MOBILITY MEET

A subsequent series of posters was produced as part of *Vagabond Flux*, a durational and mobile flat pack exhibition project that consists of collapsible white cardboard boxes in various sizes to be used by the commissioning curators for building variable exhibition structures in any type of space.<sup>193</sup> The second boxed collection *Micromegas: Vagabond Flux* (2015) includes posters by Bik Van der Pol, Jacques Longuecolline, Jonn Herschend, Laure Prouvost, Mick Peter, Stefanos Pavlakis & Tobias Kauer, Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen and the text 'Dog Star: Dreaming transmissions from a cosmonaut bitch' by Emma Bolland.<sup>194</sup>

Tracy Mackenna and I gave our *Micromegas: Vagabond Flux* contribution the title *The Fall*. Our initial poster *Hundred Thousand Lunatics* evolved by adding more images to the original collage, all somehow related to flying, falling or space travel. The underpinning idea is to continue accumulating visual material for future instalments of the poster for the on-going *Micromegas* publishing project, which provides us with a creative framework for a sustained exploration of issues central to our shared art practice; visual publishing, portability, appropriation, recycling, reproduction and artist-led curatorial practice.

Defying the containment of the image in a screen-based society, Tracy Mackenna and I celebrate the physical and material qualities of printing and prints. In our text about the *Micromegas* project we wrote, "Printed and published matter retains vital individual characteristics such as the way it asserts its occupation of space or quietly waits to be used, is purposefully stored and archived, staged or carried. Each of us still embodies age-old haptic, sensory knowing, learned and passed on by people. This project resists the offer of a substitute realm, where the viewer-reader-handler must first detect a route, then navigate and operate material within a defined digital frame. Unlike the byte file, susceptible to corruption with each iteration, this material's completeness will never be undermined."<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> *Vagabond Flux* was commissioned in 2014 by the *Nouveaux Commanditaires*, students on the Master CEAC Exhibition-Production course at Lille 3 University, France. The edition *Micromegas: Vagabond Flux*, including a publication containing Emma Bolland's essay, was published by artconnexion, Lille in partnership with Ed & Ellis PS, produced by Paul Harrison, Visual Research Centre, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design, University of Dundee and designed by Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen.

<sup>194</sup> The first presentation of *Micromegas: Vagabond Flux* took place in the Bibliothèque Centrale, Université Lille 3, Villeneuve d'Ascq, France (2015), followed by Maison de la Culture de Tournai, Belgium (2015) and Project Space Plus, The University of Lincoln, England (2016).

<sup>195</sup> Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen, "Republished Matter: a philosophical story translated through time, medium and space," in *Borders & Crossings: the artist as explorer*, eds. Paul Liam Harrison, Emile Shemilt, and Arthur Watson (Dundee: Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design, 2014), 152.

Many of our publications, often made up of collections of printed cards, invite the activated *reader* to pick up the images and take up the role of editor or curator of the presented printed matter. “Printing’s capacity for repetition establishes the act of sharing and dissemination. Those who experience the same material in varying environments themselves contribute to the nuancing of content. Tactility in the printed image in this case resonates with the tactility inherent in a gathering of those who come to look and touch; energising and pleasure-giving, temporary fields of energy link individuals.”<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

## DRAINED OF ITS FORCE

The tangible quality of images is also evident in Gerhard Richter's archival project *Atlas*.<sup>197</sup> A build-up of visual material, which the artist started at the age of 29 shortly after he fled from East Germany to West Germany in 1961, it also features the incomprehensible destruction of the *Twin Towers*.

Richter's work in progress comprises of a growing number of sheets with a wide variety of juxtaposed images organised by repetitiously using a standard grid. Initially consisting mainly of family photographs and holiday snapshots of landscapes probably collected for sentimental reasons, *Atlas* developed over the years into a photographic corpus of found images, pictures taken by the artist, visual references and designs for paintings.

This spread from the *Atlas* publication shows sheet number 743 (*Diverse Strukturen und Silikat*, 2006) and number 744 (*Streifen, WTC*, 2006).

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<sup>197</sup> The term 'atlas' was originally used for bound compilations of geographical and astronomical maps. Atlas, the Titan of Greek mythology who supported the heavens lent his name to these kinds of publications after he was depicted on a frontispiece of a collection of maps. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century 'atlas' described a collection of systemised knowledge in book format but the term is also used to define a collection.

Marcel Broodthaers also produced an *atlas*. His tiny book *The Conquest of Space: Atlas for the Use of Artists and the Military* (1975), which reduces and reproduces maps of eight countries to exactly the same size in silhouette, mocks the impartiality of maps, their purpose as information providers and their forms of representation.

BULGING BULK

The development of Richter's heterogeneous series of numbered and labelled assemblages can be followed through exhibitions<sup>198</sup> and regularly updated publications like the one depicted here. This instalment of the expanding *Atlas* book brings together 733 panels created by Richter from 1962 to 2006.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> The first exhibition of panels from the atlas took place in the Netherlands: Gerhard Richter, *Atlas van de foto's en schetsen*, Hedendaagse Kunst, Utrecht, 1-30 December 1972.

<sup>199</sup> Gerhard Richter, *Atlas* (Cologne: Walther König, 2006).

## MEMORY CRISIS

Benjamin H.D. Buchloh reads Richter's *Atlas* as an artistic response to what he calls a "memory crisis."<sup>200</sup> With reference to an earlier *memory crisis* caused by the rise of the mass media in the 1920s as identified by people such as Kracauer,<sup>201</sup> Buchloh argues that mnemonic impulse "is activated especially in those moments of extreme duress in which the traditional material bonds between subjects, between subjects and objects, and between objects and their representation appear to be on the verge of displacement, if not outright disappearance. Undoubtedly this would have been a condition foundational to post-war German culture in particular."<sup>202</sup>

Richter and compatriots were coming to terms with the traumas of the recent past against the backdrop of comforting consumerism stimulated by an expanding use of images in the media. But denial and repression of historical truths threatened a shared understanding of the monster that had grown in their midst.

The sheet number on the right<sup>203</sup> of the spread shows five images of Adolf Hitler and a view of the main room in the Reich Chancellery in Berlin. In this space Hitler and his henchmen took many decisions that were to have devastating effect. The building was demolished after it was badly damaged during the bombing of Berlin during WWII.

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<sup>200</sup> Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*: The Anomic Archive," in *The Archive*, ed. Charles Merewether, (London: Whitechapel/Cambridge Mass.: the MIT Press, 2006), 95.

<sup>201</sup> See IMAGE II - 14.

<sup>202</sup> Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, *Gerhard Richter's Atlas*, 95.

<sup>203</sup> [133] *Hitler 1969*, 51.7 x 36.7 cm.



PAINTING TABOO

Anselm Kiefer, born in 1945 in the same year in which Hitler killed himself and the war ended, is another German artist who tries to come to terms with the incomprehensible horror and terror of the Nazi regime.

In the 1980s Kiefer, well known for tackling some of the uncomfortable truths that many Germans may prefer to forget, produced a series of monumental and symbolic paintings that focussed on the Nazi past. Some of these mixed-media canvases depicted buildings and spaces that were associated with the *Third Reich*. He used the same black and white image of the Chancellery as Gerhard Richter<sup>204</sup> for his painting *Innenraum* (1981).<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> See IMAGE, III - 25.

<sup>205</sup> Oil, acrylic and paper on canvas, 287.5 x 311 cm, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

## LYRICAL SUBJECTIVITY

Returning to Richter's *Atlas*, the sheet on the left<sup>206</sup> shows three portraits of the German artist Blinky Palermo (1943-1977) who was for a while a huge influence on my work. Visiting the same overview exhibition of his work<sup>207</sup> in two different museums impacted profoundly on my creative development, and stimulated my interest in the power of display, spatial context and curatorial narratives.

In the early sixties Blinky Palermo studied with Joseph Beuys<sup>208</sup> at the Dusseldorf Art Academy where he befriended fellow student Gerhard Richter. His colourful abstract painterly objects combine the qualities of a geometrical approach with lyrical subjectivity based on creative sensibility. In his rather bombastic text about the artist, Erich Franz argues that Palermo's art "covers the poles of human comprehension and observation" ("umgreift die Pole menschlichen Bergreifens und Wahrnehmens").<sup>209</sup> I would describe Blinky Palermo's art rather as an expressive response to a surrounding world, which is perceived by the senses, not just through the gaze, and which accumulates in abstract visual poetry that escapes comprehension rather than including it.

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<sup>206</sup> [43] Palermo 1971, 51.7 x 36.7 cm.

<sup>207</sup> Palermo: *Werke 1963-1977*, September 18 – November 11, 1985, Kunstmuseum Winterthur and Palermo: *Werken 1963-1977*, March 30 – May 12, 1985, Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven.

<sup>208</sup> Both Joseph Beuys and Blinky Palermo came to Edinburgh in 1970 to participate in *Stategy: Get Arts*, a project developed by Richard Demarco for the Edinburgh Festival. For this exhibition Blinky Palermo created a wall painting in the Edinburgh College of Art, titled *Blue/Yellow/White/Red*. In autumn 2005 the Talbot Rice Gallery staged *Palermo Restore: The Bonn Archive*, an exhibition of Palermo's documentation of his creative process that included drawings and photographs of his Edinburgh wall painting.

<sup>209</sup> Erich Franz, "Spurwechsel: Palermo's zweiteilige Arbeit Kat. 77," in Bernhard Bürgi, ed., *Palermo: Werke 1963-1977* (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 1984), 96.

## A TRIP TO WINTERTHUR

When confronted with Palermo's actual work, instead of experiencing it through reproduced images, I was struck by the elusive quality of Palermo's three-dimensional paintings and by the way they were carefully arranged on the walls of the Kunstmuseum in Winterthur, Switzerland.

This was the first time I *consciously* experienced the impact of well-considered display on my perception of artwork. The spatial arrangement turned a wide variety of sometimes enigmatic objects and the surrounding architectural space, with its neo classical but minimal features, certainly not a white cube, into a beautiful constellation of shapes and colours. I expressed my appreciation of the exhibition and the closeness with Palermo's art on the first page of the accompanying catalogue I bought: "Winterthur, Switzerland, 23 October 1984 (With Rob Platteeuw), Impressive exhibition! So near I have never felt before! What could be added?"<sup>210</sup>

Curatorial sensitivity and profound engagement with the dead artist's poetic abstractions added a new dimension to Blinky Palermo's oeuvre, which was unfortunately completely absent when I visited the exhibition in the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven half a year later. Here the art works were mainly presented in a series of small *white cube* spaces resulting in an unloving and fragmented exhibition. A different spatial environment to that in Winterthur and the related curatorial approach had an enormous impact on the experience of Palermo's delicate art.

By visiting both presentations, in Winterthur and Eindhoven, I had become aware of a key concept in contemporary art: *context*. I also learned that *context* is at play when art is produced in the artist's private domain *and* when the resulting work is shared or presented in the public sphere. Art, and contemporary art in particular, has indefinite and undefined meanings. Every time the work of art is presented to, or activated by audiences, social, cultural, spatial and institutional contexts will affect the experience and understanding of the work.

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<sup>210</sup> Bernhard Bürgi, ed., *Palermo: Werke 1963-1977* (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 1984). Rob Platteeuw was my companion on my study trip through Switzerland and former West Germany.

LESS RATIONAL

At the time I visited the exhibition of Palermo's work in Winterthur I was looking for ways to progress the formal organisation and execution of my early work that was initially inspired by artists such as Sol Lewitt, Robert Mangold and the Dutch artist Ad Dekkers. I was in search of a freer and less rational approach to art making. Palermo's light-hearted work inspired me to move to a more intuitive and more carefree way of working, and to use a wider variety of materials such as wood and fabric. These pages from one of my notebooks show some sketches that I made during my trip to Switzerland and that informed the works depicted in the next image.

II - 30

## DIAMONDS AND TRIANGLES

The photographs on the pin board were made in my studio at the Ateliers '63 in Haarlem in 1985. This institution is now known as De Ateliers and based in Amsterdam. The triangular painterly object on the right, *Untitled* (1985) ended up in the collection of the City of Rotterdam. The works on the left unfortunately didn't survive my periods of doubt.

II - 31

## NEAT RIGIDITY

Returning to Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*, these images<sup>211</sup> show how Richter repeats the formal structure of the grid in the way he exhibits his framed sheets.

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<sup>211</sup> Gerhard Richter, *Atlas*, 1964-, Installation views, Dia Center for the Arts, New York, 1995. Photos: Cathy Carver, printed in Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2008), 17.

## WAR ON LE MONDE II

Gerhard Richter's methodical approach resonates with the way Hanne Darboven worked. During the late 1960s, Darboven (1941-2009) who was also German, explored numbers and repetition as a way of 'writing without describing'.<sup>212</sup> In most of her work the artist used the repetitive and structuring quality of grids and tables as an organising principle to capture the movement of time.

Darboven's epic work, *Kulturgeschichte 1880–1983* comprises of 1,590 sheets each measuring 70 x 50 cm, and nineteen sculptural objects. By combining a wide range of visual material such as postcards, covers and pictures from illustrated magazines, pin-ups of film stars, music scores, calculations and repetitive writing, images of Darboven's previous works and objects including mannequins, animal figures and a robot, the archivist Darboven documents idiosyncratically a key historical period that includes the 'fin de siècle', two world wars and the cold war era.

Similar to other artists-as-archivists Hanne Darboven uses appropriation as a key strategy to question the interpretation and representation of our past. By assembling, mixing and recycling historical material artist-led archival practice disrupts our constantly repeated cultural narratives and the way we construct, organise and reshape our vanishing collective memory. Artistic archival projects unsettle what Michel Foucault calls a "preserved discourse"<sup>213</sup> and describes as "a practice that causes a multiplicity of statements to emerge as so many regular events, as so many things to be dealt with and manipulated"<sup>214</sup> by offering alternative positions from which to look at our cultural universe.

"The archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events. But the archive is also that which determines that all these things said do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass, nor are they inscribed in an unbroken linearity, nor do they disappear at the mercy of chance external accidents; but they are grouped together in distinct figures, composed together in accordance with multiple relations, maintained or blurred in accordance with specific regularities; that which determines that they do not withdraw at the same pace in time, but shine, as it were, like stars, some that seem close to us shining brightly from far off, while others that are in fact close to us are already growing pale."<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Hanne Darboven, quoted in Lucy Lippard, *Hanne Darboven: Deep in Numbers*, Artforum 12, no. 2 (1973), 35–36.

<sup>213</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. (London And New York: Routledge, 2006), 146.

<sup>214</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>215</sup> *ibid.*

Okwui Enwezor, the curator of the exhibition *Archive Fever*<sup>216</sup> believes in the potential of art to activate the archive: “Yet, against the tendency of contemporary forms of amnesia whereby the archive becomes a site of lost origins and memory is dispossessed, it is also within the archive that acts of remembering and regeneration occur, where a suture between past and present is performed, in the indeterminate zone between event and image, document and monument.”<sup>217</sup> Enwezor’s exhibition *Archive Fever* underpinned his statement and included, amongst other artists, Christian Boltanski, Hans-Peter Feldmann and Walid Raad.

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<sup>216</sup>The title *Archive Fever* is taken from *Mal d'Archive: Une Impression Freudienne* (1996), a book about the nature and function of the archive written by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. The exhibition with the full title *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* took place in the International Center of Photography, New York in 2008.

<sup>217</sup> Okwui Enwezor, “Archive Fever: Photography Between History and The Monument,” in ed. Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2008), 47.



THE GERMAN MIRROR

With her *Kulturgeschichte 1880–1983* Hanne Darboven occupies this undefined space identified by Enwezor. Dan Adler recognises this and recounts his experience of the exhibition of this mega work in the Dia Center for the Arts.<sup>218</sup> “The work compels me to dwell within a critical place that interrogates, questions and evaluates the *concept* rather than the *practice* of producing and using knowledge.”<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Darboven’s *Cultural History* is currently in the collection of the Dia Art Foundation, New York on long-term loan from the Lannan Foundation. The most recent exhibition of this huge work took place between May 2003-March 2005 at Dia:Beacon, New York and was previously shown at the former Dia Center for the Arts, New York (1996) and the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (1986).

<sup>219</sup> Dan Adler, *Hanne Darboven: Cultural History 1880-1983* (London: Afterall Books. 2009), 92.

## HOME SWEET HOME

Opposite to what the title *Kulturgeschichte 1880–1983* suggests Hanne Darboven's juxtapositions, and the way they are displayed, do not offer a comprehensive reading of our cultural history. The vast amount of cultural material that the artist archived, processed and represents in *Kulturgeschichte 1880–1983* lacks obvious or didactic interpretation. The scale, and the excess of material prevents the viewer from grasping the work as a whole and makes observing it a rather overwhelming visual experience. One can get a sense of the fragments (and the cross references) of this spectacular puzzle by zooming in and out but the 'bigger historical picture' remains uncertain and a coherent 'taxonomy' unidentifiable. "*Cultural History* is relentlessly resistant to being read in terms of an overriding system. Idiosyncratic linkages, a few spatial patterns and perhaps even narrative cohesiveness are apparent here and there, but the images do not 'admit' any interpretive insights into what sort of cultural history Darboven is providing" Adler notes.<sup>220</sup>

Darboven's *Kulturgeschichte* is open-ended and stops short of communicating a particular meaning. I would like to think that the framed blank sheets in her gigantic pictorial universe are a reference to the book without words that Micromegas' "wrote" for the minute philosophers to reveal the "nature of things."<sup>221</sup> If one looks at this assemblage of postcards one can only guess what the artist tries to evoke. Peaceful pictures of towns, landscapes, an interior and a child are violated by their combination with an image of Adolf Hitler, Germany's homegrown symbol of evil.

Her exhibition of visual thought resists singular interpretations and seeks to remind us that we should be suspicious when turning our heads. History, with its master narratives that become increasingly singular over time, has the impulse to become streamlined, structured and filtered. "... the history of thought, of knowledge, of philosophy, of literature seems to be seeking, and discovering, more and more discontinuities, whereas history itself appears to be abandoning the irruptions of events in favour of stable structures."<sup>222</sup>

Artist such as Christian Boltanski, Gerhard Richter and Hanne Darboven have a "melancholic understanding of culture" according to Charles Merewether.<sup>223</sup> In their mnemonic projects that display the commemorative power of art, they all deal in some form with the aftermath of traumatic

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>221</sup> Voltaire, *Micromégas*, trans.Theo Cuffe (London: Syrens Penguin, 1994), 37.

<sup>222</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London And New York: Routledge, 2006), 6.

<sup>223</sup> Charles Merewether "Art and the Archive," in ed. Charles Merewether, *The Archive* (London: Whitechapel/Cambridge Mass.: the MIT Press, 2006), 14.

events connected with the Second World War and use the photographic image as their main document. Engaged in a form of pictorial pseudo archaeology these artists shape the (re-) creation of memory and restore fragments of a past, which according to media pessimists is under siege by amnesia.

Richter's *Atlas* and Darboven's *Cultural History*, each a multitude of juxtaposed photographs of people, thought, references, memories, histories and events, bring to mind the *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1924-1929)<sup>224</sup> developed by the German art historian Aby Warburg (1866–1929). Using Surrealist montage techniques and utilising the dialectic powers of juxtaposed images, Warburg developed an extensive series of pin boards for scholarly and educational purposes.

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<sup>224</sup> The full title is *Mnemosyne, A Picture Series Examining the Function of Preconditioned Antiquity-Related Expressive Values for the Presentation of Eventful Life in the Art of the European Renaissance*.

## NEW DIMENSIONS

For Mieke Bal's book *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (1996) in which the cultural theorist examines the effects of display and presentations in museum displays, paintings and postcards, I created a series of juxtaposed images on pin boards. *Das Gesicht and der Wand - The Face/Stain on the Wall* (1996) combines the illustrations that Bal refers to in her text with reproductions from my own image collection resulting in an alternative reading of the visual material analysed by Bal. In her response to my remix she states: "His work adds an invaluable new dimension to my arguments. It replaces the more conventional illustrations, undermining the illusion of veracity and emphasizing the notion that a scholarly work like this one is also based on a 'private collection' of images."<sup>225</sup>

It was Aby Warburg who invented the science of 'critical iconology'. His unfinished *Mnemosyne Atlas* reveals the ambiguity of the image in Western culture. By collecting and juxtaposing photographic reproductions without any textual explanation Warburg aimed to construct a collective historical memory, an art history without text. Philip-Alain Michaud describes Warburg's project in the following way: "In this great montage of photographic reproductions, Warburg substituted the question of the transmission of knowledge with that of its exposition, and organized a network of tensions and anachronisms among the images, thereby indicating the function of the otherness and distance in understanding the past."<sup>226</sup>

In his analysis of Gerhard Richter's *Atlas* Benjamin Buchloh recognises in Warburg's project 'an almost Benjaminian trust in the emancipatory functions of technological reproduction and dissemination'.<sup>227</sup> Like many others, Buchloh connects Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* with Benjamin's *Passagenwerk* and the collage and montage techniques developed by artists such as Kurt Schwitters and El Lissitzky.

Through the creation of the *Passagenwerk* Benjamin explored the different qualities and inhabitants of contemporary public and civic space in nineteenth century Paris using categories such as types, places, architectural forms, fashion and commodities. Benjamin, a surrealist

<sup>225</sup> Mieke Bal, "Acknowledgements" in *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* by Mieke Bal, (New York/London: Routledge, 1996), 12.

<sup>226</sup> Philip-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion* (New York: Zone Books, 2004), 37.

<sup>227</sup> Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Gerhard Richter's Atlas: The Anomic Archive", in Charles Merewether (ed.), *The Archive* (London: Whitechapel/Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2006), 88.

explorer, regarded the arcades as the most significant architectural form of the nineteenth century. His initial ideas for his magnum opus matured over time and started off with the title *Pariser Passagen: Eine Dialektische Feerie (Paris Arcades: A Dialectical Fairyland)*. This unfinished but ground breaking work, which spanned 13 years is essentially a collection of (literary) images commentaries and quotations that anticipates our current culture of downloading, linking, copying, appropriating, reproducing, mixing and recycling fragments from our past.

Walter Benjamin took great care in arranging and designing his texts and publications. Aware of the power of the visual, he carefully considered structure and layout of his texts. Many of his scraps and notes reveal an aesthetic sensibility and an exceptional attention to typography, graphic form and spatial arrangements. Benjamin's eye for the visual qualities of the written and printed text is evidently part of the allure of his oeuvre. As a *curator of culture and thought*, he thoroughly considered the possibilities of the book as a platform, a site for the exhibition of words, images and signs.

Similar to an artist, Benjamin offers us access to his inner life and his perception of our world through visually well-considered juxtapositions. Art as an attempt to make sense out of a wide range of apparently meaningless muddled experiences and observations that one collects, archives, alters and represents using mainly visual means, as a desire to move from chaotic disintegration to some kind of aesthetically inviting coherence.

## RECONSTRUCTION WORK

For The clusters in Warburg's *Atlas* are not organised on the basis of visual similitude or iconographic resemblance but rather on associations or connections informed by textual sources. Warburg's critique of academic art historical practice, which emphasised the hierarchal difference between high and low culture, applied rigid categorisation and focused on stylistic and formal descriptions, resonates strongly with those artists who are involved in archival and collecting practices, and/or the representation of history.

This postcard shows a reconstruction of the *Mnemosyne Atlas*,<sup>228</sup> which was designed by Thomas Kierlinger and the artists Anne and Patrick Poirier.<sup>229</sup> Both born during WWII in 1942, this French couple's practice is profoundly shaped by their experiences of destruction and the conviction one may have that historical oblivion should be prevented. Inspired by archaeology and classical architecture, their often large-scale public sculptures mimic fragments, ruins, and ancient monuments, evoking a sense of loss and collapse.

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<sup>228</sup> The reconstruction of the *Mnemosyne Atlas* was first shown in Vienna in 1993 as part of an exhibition of the "Transmedialen Gesellschaft Daedalus" at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna. The panels are now in the collection of the Albertine Museum in Vienna.

<sup>229</sup> "Aby Warburg the Mnemosyne Atlas," Galeria Centralis, accessed July 24, 2015, <http://osaarchivum.org/galeria/catalogue/2008/warburg/index.html>.

## SEX MUSEUM

Aby Warburg's aesthetics and methodology are also clearly recognisable in an installation which was exhibited at the Migros Museum für Gegenwarts Kunst by the Danish artist Henrik Olesen (1967).<sup>230</sup> Similar to Gerhard Richter and Hanne Darboven, Olesen developed an approach to combining images that obviously mimics Warburg's *Mnemosyne Project*.

*Some Gay-Lesbian Artists and/or Artists relevant to Homo-Social Culture Born between c. 1300-1870/SEX-MUSEUM 2005-2007* consists of seven DIY timber panels positioned across the gallery space. A wide variety of images and texts made up the casual displays, grouped around categories such as *Some Faggy Gestures*, *Monsters & Sodomites*, *Masculinity*, *English Lads*, *Cross Dressers*, *Lesbian Visibility*, and *American Dykes in Rome*.

Olesen's counter archive uses a subjective taxonomic system to show our dealings with same sex relationships. To present the viewer with an alternative reading of a history of oppression and intolerance the artist combined a variety of themes and topics in a homosexual context. *Some Gay-Lesbian Artists and/or Artists relevant to Homo-Social Culture Born between c. 1300-1870* offers associative juxtapositions that invite the viewer to reflect on our social attitudes and on the lives of people that escape the norm. Heike Munder describes the consequences of our tendency to exclusion as follows: "Coercion against that which deviates from the norm forces it obfuscatingly to the margins, and pressure to conform, as well as further repression affected by the distortion of historical documents, serve to render the memory unutterable."<sup>231</sup>

For his visual and historical investigation into the representation and repression of homosexuality Olesen incorporates the roles of artist, sociologist, researcher, collector, archivist and curator. He utilises curatorial practice as a social, political and educational strategy to celebrate homo-social culture and otherness, and to reveal what is hidden and disguised to a mainly heterosexual public. New visual associations are created by, what Heike Munder calls "contextual shifting"<sup>232</sup> in order to offer a reinterpretation of established art historical narratives.

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<sup>230</sup> Henrik Olesen: *Some Gay-Lesbian Artists and/or Artists relevant to Homo-Social Culture Born between c. 1300-1870/SEX-MUSEUM 2005-2007* took place between June 2 and August 12, 2007.

Tracy Mackenna and I presented our installation *WAR IS OVER! if you want it* in the Migros Museum in 1999/2000 as part of the exhibition *PEACE*. This work incorporated a public studio and marked the beginning of our *John & Yoko Drawings*, an ongoing series of (wall) drawings that addresses a range of social, political and cultural issues.

<sup>231</sup> Heike Munder, "Some Faggy Gestures," in Henrik Olesen, *Some Faggy Gestures* (Zurich: JRP | Ringier, 2008), 166.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*

TORSOS, BUTTOCKS AND PENISES

After the exhibition in the Migros Museum Henrik Olesen created an artist's book with visual and textual details of the seven panels that make up *Some Gay-Lesbian Artists and/or Artists relevant to Homo-Social Culture Born between c. 1300-1870/SEX-MUSEUM, 2005-2007*.<sup>233</sup> This portable variation of the exhibition in the Migros Museum, *Some Faggy Gestures* brings to mind another key example in the history of artistic exploration of museum culture, Andre Malraux's *Musée Imaginaire*.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> The exhibition as book and the notion of portability runs through many art projects that involve some form of curatorial practice such as collecting, archiving and representing. Other examples in *The Museum Within Us* include Marcel Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise* and Christian Boltanski's *Kaddish*, Gerhard Richter's *Atlas* and Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen's *Micromegas* project.

<sup>234</sup> André (Georges) Malraux (1901-1976), French novelist, adventurer, art historian and minister for culture developed the notion of *Le Musée Imaginaire* (1947). This concept, commonly referred to in English as *The Museum without Walls*, embraced the representation of art through images without applying traditional museum groupings such as period, style or country. Malraux's ideas regained significance in the 1990s when the Internet established itself as a global and 24 hour disorderly platform for collecting, sharing and displaying images.



THE MILLIONAIRE ARTIST

This photographed page from *Some Faggy Gestures*<sup>235</sup> shows a detail of panel V in the category 'MELANCHOLY' and focuses on the remarkable French artist Gustave Caillebotte. The top section of Olesen's caption reads: "Born in 1848, Gustave Caillebotte was trained as a lawyer. He was also a naval architect, a sailor, a philatelist, a horticulturist, and a millionaire. Although he participated in many impressionist exhibitions, he was noted mainly for generosity as a collector and as a patron of expressionist artist. Remaining true to modern Realist principles, Caillebotte incorporated in his works the psychological effects of new environments on individual lives, particularly the sense of isolation and the effects of idleness of a new economic class, as the *Young Men at the Window* (1875)."

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<sup>235</sup> Henrik Olesen, *Some Faggy Gestures*, 107-108.

THE MILLIONAIRE ARTIST

Henrik Olesen indexed Panel VII using the following headings to organise the names of actresses and female artists:

1. LONDON GOTH

ANNE SEYMOUR DAMER

2. PARIS FEMMES

ROSA BONHEUR, LOUISE ABBÉMA, SARAH BERNHARDT, VICTORINE MEURENT

3. AMERICAN DYKES IN ROME

HARRIET HOSMER, EMMA STEBBINS, CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN, MATHILDA HAYES

This page<sup>236</sup> is dedicated to one of Édouard Manet's models, the artist Victorine Meurent. Olesen identified eight paintings by the French painter, including the famous *Olympia* (1863)<sup>237</sup> and *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863)<sup>238</sup> in which she appears. Manet offered Meurent money if he should succeed in selling the paintings for which she sat.

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid, 139-140.

<sup>237</sup> Oil on canvas, 130.5 x 190 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

<sup>238</sup> Oil on canvas, 208 cm x 265.5 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

AND THE PROSTITUTE

In *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, which was most likely painted in the artist's studio, Victorine Meurent is accompanied by a fusion of Manet's brothers Gustave and Eugène, and the Dutch sculptor and his brother-in-law Ferdinand Leenhoff, according to Paul Hayes Tucker.<sup>239</sup>

Both *Olympia* (1863) and *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* are dominated by the gaze of the nude woman directed at the viewer. The suggestion that we are dealing here with a prostitute shocked the French art-loving public when they were confronted with these paintings for the first time. Henrik Olesen probably wonders how the Parisian bourgeoisie would have reacted to Manet's enigmatic painting, if Meurent had been depicted picnicking with two dressed women.

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<sup>239</sup> Paul Hayes Tucker *Manet's Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998), 24. The composition of *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* is based on Raphael-inspired engraving *The Judgement of Paris* (c. 1515) by Marcantonio Raimondi.

## FABULOUS FABIOLA

More than twenty years after Manet painted Victorine Meurent as a woman of the night the French artist Jean-Jacques Henner (1829–1905) made a portrait<sup>240</sup> of the fourth-century saint Fabiola (1885).<sup>241</sup> This painting of the Roman patrician angel is unfortunately lost but Henner's imagined Fabiola lives on through the sheer amount of copies in the form of paintings, embroideries, brooches, cameos and pendants. Francis Alÿs (1959) collected 273 of these 'Fabiolas', made around the world by mainly anonymous devoted Catholics, to create a striking display of depictions of this religious celebrity. This postcard shows Alÿs' installation in the National Portrait Gallery in London.<sup>242</sup>

In the accompanying publication Martha Buskirk discusses the collection-as-art work. She points out that "The collection of objects that the artist simply assembled, but did not rework introduces an ambiguous area of overlap between the roles of artist and curator as well as artist and collector."<sup>243</sup> Artists who merge these roles follow in the footsteps of Duchamp and challenge with their 'ready made collections' more traditional understandings of art practice and involve the creation of original artefacts using artistic skills and techniques.

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<sup>240</sup> *Fabiola*, 1885, Oil on canvas, 33 x 42 cm

<sup>241</sup> Fabiola was a member of the famous Fabia family and part of Bishop Jerome's circle before she divorced her self-indulgent husband. After the death of her second husband she devoted her life to charity. She founded the first hospital and hospice in the West. "St Fabiola," Catholic on Line, accessed July 4, 2015, [http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint\\_id=634](http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=634).

<sup>242</sup> *Francis Alÿs: Fabiola*, 2 May-20 September 2009.

<sup>243</sup> Buskirk, "Consumption and Production, 43.

## WOMAN IN GREEN

Henner didn't really know what Fabiola looked like. David Morgan assumes in his contribution to the catalogue that accompanied Alÿs' exhibition that Henner partly created his portrait on the basis of the eulogy St. Jerome wrote after Fabiola's death. Morgan wonders if Henner had studied some of the plentiful Roman busts of women such as Livia, (postcard on the right) and had taken a close look at Piero della Francesca's portrait of Battista Sforza (1488) to invest a sense of nobility into his aristocratic Fabiola.<sup>244</sup>

Numerous reproductions of *Fabiola* have appeared as postcards. Because the painting disappeared before the existence of colour photography, the manufacturers of these postcards had to make some crucial artistic choices. The postcard on the left for example shows a rare reproduction of Henner's portrait of Fabiola facing the opposite direction with a green cloak and hood. Copies of Henner's *Fabiola* painted by unknown artists have often been misattributed to Henner and many captions like the one on the back of this postcard falsely suggest that work is in the collection of the Louvre, Paris.<sup>245</sup> All these interpretations and inaccuracies contribute to the enigmatic nature of Henner's most famous painting.

To accompany the presentation of Alÿs' Fabiola collection in New York<sup>246</sup> the Dia Art Foundation produced a comprehensive publication, which includes a catalogue of all the works in Alÿs' collection plus the 26 substitutes that were secretly produced by the Estonian organisers of an exhibition of sixty-two Fabiolas in 1997. After the twenty-six works disappeared in mysterious circumstances they commissioned, without disclosing the loss to the artist, copies of Alÿs' 'original' copies.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> David Morgan, "Finding Fabiola," in *Francis Alÿs: Fabiola: An Investigation* (New York: Dia Art Foundation, 2008), p 11-13.

<sup>245</sup> "Addendum," in *Francis Alÿs: Fabiola: An Investigation* (New York: Dia Art Foundation, 2008), unpaginated.

<sup>246</sup> *Francis Alÿs: Fabiola*, Hispanic Society of America, organised by the Dia Art Foundation, New York 2008).

<sup>247</sup> Unknown author, information text in *Francis Alÿs: Fabiola: An Investigation* (New York: Dia Art Foundation, 2008), unpaginated.

## OUR FABIOLAS

These two Fabiola's are in the possession of Tracy Mackenna and me. The one on the left was bought in Lille, France in 2014 during one of the trips we made to prepare two projects, which developed in collaboration with the art organisation artconnexion.<sup>248</sup> The printed version on the left must be a reproduction of a copy of Henner's lost painting based on a black and white image.<sup>249</sup> I paid half the price that is written on the white sticker.

Shortly after I visited Francis Alÿs' exhibition in London in 2009 I travelled to Orkney where I came across a needlepoint rendering of the famous Fabiola in a second hand shop in Kirkwall.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> *Friendly Invasions 2034* (2014) and *Vagabond Flux* (2014–). See Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen's website, accessed October 13, 2015, [http://www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/Friendly\\_Invasions\\_2034.html](http://www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/Friendly_Invasions_2034.html) and [http://www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/Vagabond\\_Flux.html](http://www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/Vagabond_Flux.html).

<sup>249</sup> 20.5 x 25.5 cm, including frame.

<sup>250</sup> 24.5 x 30 cm, including frame.

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MADE IN DENDERBELLE

When I opened the frame I found to my surprise the following text written in Dutch on the back of the cardboard support:

made by H el ene Siccard  
Widow of Pieter Herman Vanderpoorten  
born in Denderbelle<sup>251</sup>  
8 September 1887

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<sup>251</sup> Denderbelle is a village in the Belgian province of East Flanders.

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## Curartists

The artist as curator

The Museum Within Us

MADE IN FAR FAR AWAY

In the previous room we looked at artists who have made archival practice and the creation of collections a key component of their practice. In this room, Room III of *The Museum Within Us* we will shift our focus to the artist-as-curator and explore a selection of exhibition projects that were developed with artefacts from existing museum collections. What we will see is that the notion of the curatorial is for many artists strongly related to ideas of appropriation, recycling and authorship.

Nowadays the word curator is used to describe a wide variety of roles within the broad field of cultural production and curatorial practice has developed into a popular academic subject beyond museum studies. In *The Museum Within Us* 'curator' is used in a rather institutional sense to refer to somebody who works in a museum and cares for collections, does research and produces exhibitions.

Since the 1970s a wide range of artists have been invited by museums to create displays and installations with works from a collection. James Putnam regards Andy Warhol's *Raid the Icebox* (1970)<sup>252</sup> at the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence as a forerunner of a new trend that involves inviting artists to take up the role of curator.<sup>253</sup> While instigating a creative dialogue with the audience and curators these so-called 'curartists' are engaged to work with the collections<sup>254</sup> and to explore the museum as a self-reflective space, resulting in interventions and presentations that subvert and enrich the museum and gallery experience.

To stimulate the imagination these artist-led curatorial projects engage both creatively or critically with the museum by creating unexpected interpretations and idiosyncratic juxtapositions of objects from the collection. Often these displays propose new cultural narratives, question notions of ethnic cultural difference and hierarchy, address post-colonial issues, and reveal an affinity with ethnography, natural history and archaeology. Many artist-as-curators have no qualms in mixing their work freely with objects from other cultures, contexts or disciplines.

The artists foregrounded in this room all took up the most appealing aspect of the curator's job, creating displays with objects from the museum collection. We will start our tour with Eduardo Paolozzi's *Lost Magic Kingdoms and Six Paper Moons from Nahuatl* (1985) and Grayson Perry's

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<sup>252</sup> Andy Warhol's curatorial approach resisted any form of selection resulting in an exhibition of the entire collection of the museum.

<sup>253</sup> James Putnam, *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 18.

*The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* (2011), two exhibitions that were developed with a similar curatorial approach and that revealed the artists' shared fascination with craftsmanship, utensils and magic. The first image in this room shows the same photograph in the two publications that accompanied Paolozzi's and Perry's exhibitions at the British Museum.

MADE IN MEXICO

Both Eduardo Paolozzi (1924-2005) and Grayson Perry (1960-) foreground the influence of American, African and Oceanic indigenous cultures, previously referred to as 'primitive', on their art. They share an interest in popular culture and emphasise their belief in the power of museum collections.

Paolozzi's *Lost Magic Kingdoms and Six Paper Moons from Nahuatl* was staged in the former Museum of Mankind that between 1970 and 1974 housed the British Museum's ethnographic collection. His selection focused partly on less favoured, or overlooked objects.

Unfortunately there are few photographs available that show the actual displays created by Paolozzi. Nor does the accompanying catalogue include any images of the exhibition. This juxtaposition of artefacts shows amongst other items a papier-mâché skeleton (1978), a male figure wearing a dance costume including hat and mask (1982), and a painted papier-mâché church interior, all from Mexico (1969).

For the *Lost Magic Kingdoms* exhibition Paolozzi selected "...a number of pieces of less than total authenticity,"<sup>255</sup> as Malcolm McLeod the Keeper of Ethnography at the time, put it. The inclusion of these fakes questions the value system we apply in the West when we perceive and classify artefacts from other cultures. McLeod states that one of the red threads running through the *Lost Magic Kingdoms* exhibition is "... the ways in which collecting, organising and displaying material from exotic societies may communicate a variety of meanings, and how such meanings are created or translated from one culture to another." Not bothered by the specialist views of archaeologists and anthropologists Paolozzi realised a flowing exhibition of wonders and leftovers.

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<sup>255</sup> Malcolm McLeod, "Paolozzi and Identity," in *Eduardo Paolozzi: Lost Magic Kingdoms and Six Paper Moons from Nahuatl* (London: British Museum Publications, 1985), 46.

The aforementioned publication functions rather as an additional platform for Paolozzi's exhibition of objects and images than as a catalogue that documents the realised displays. In this printed version of the *Lost Magic Kingdoms* the artist follows his urges and wide ranging interests resulting in a book that offers the reader an idiosyncratic selection of objects and photographs from the British Museum's collection combined with reproductions of some of Paolozzi's own prints and sculptures, which are accompanied by captions written by the artist.

The cover shows one of the assemblages created by curator Eduardo.<sup>256</sup> It incorporates pieces from different continents including a light bulb converted into an oil lamp from Ghana, a wooden bird-man from Easter Island, a charm from North America and a decorated human skull from the Torres Straits.

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<sup>256</sup> In English the meaning of Eduardo is 'wealthy guardian.' The Oxford Thesaurus on my computer tells me that this word also means 'curator.'

## NEW LAOCOON

Museum visits were an important part of Paolozzi's creative life. The artist was particularly attracted to artefacts that were overlooked and undervalued. "I find a visit to a museum always profitable. Sometimes, in a shadowy show-case of a neglected provincial museum, I discover some miraculous object that seems to be greeting me with desperate signals, as if we had always been destined to meet at this mysterious tryst that would rescue it from oblivion, the anonymity, the deprivation of any real existence or appreciation which, even in a museum showcase, is after all the same kind of thing as abandonment and devaluation on a trash heap."<sup>257</sup>

While studying art at the Slade in the 1940s Paolozzi frequently visited the British Museum, especially the Ethnography Department, which triggered his imagination and informed his understanding of creative transformation. He saw change, adaptation and recycling as potent drivers for his own practice and for cultural evolution in general. In the artist's own words, "I suppose I am interested above all in investigating the golden ability of the artists to achieve a metamorphosis of quite ordinary things into something wonderful and extraordinary that is neither nonsensical nor morally edifying... I seek to stress all that is wonderful or ambiguous in the most ordinary objects that nobody stops to look at to admire. Besides, I try to subject these objects, which are the basic materials of my sculptures to more than one metamorphosis."<sup>258</sup>

This spread from the *Lost Magic Kingdoms* publication shows two objects from the British Museum juxtaposed with two enigmatic sculptures by Paolozzi constructed with parts of machinery such as wheels. The sculpture on the left is titled *Towards a New Laocoon*.

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<sup>257</sup> Eduardo Paolozzi in conversation with Edouard Roditti, reprinted in Edouard Roditti, *Dialogues on Art* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1960), 158.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid*, 155.



## MUSEUM AS CATHEDRAL

Laocoon also features in Paolozzi's *Blue print for a new Museum* (1981).<sup>259</sup> In this print the artist combines imagery related to technology with a line drawing of the Cologne cathedral and a reproduction of the statue of Laocoon and his sons being attacked by a monstrous sea serpent.<sup>260</sup> In the *Lost Magic Kingdoms* publication the artist explains his intentions behind this work, part of a series of six in which the museum loving artist proposes a new kind of cultural institution that would "...bridge that strange gap between sophistication & primitive" showing "a selection from the history of things."<sup>261</sup> He resisted "our tendency to isolate the phenomema and impose seperateness of the object" and argued for "The arrangement & juxtaposition of the objects and the sculptures suggesting another philosophy. Not only superb originals but fakes combined with distinguished reproductions both in painting & engineering."<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Screen print and lithography on paper, 55.5 x 37.5 cm.

<sup>260</sup> Assumed to be from the first century AD and excavated in 1506, Vatican Museum, Rome.

<sup>261</sup> Eduardo Paolozzi, *Lost Magic Kingdoms and Six Paper Moons from Nahuatl* (London: British Museum publications, 1985), 7.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid* (Spelling mistakes by Paolozzi).

As a fierce collector of stuff Paolozzi accumulated objects such as toys, copies of Greek and Roman sculptures, magazines, comics and books. This postcard shows some of the toys, which are part of a donation made to the Tate Gallery in 2014 by the Paolozzi Foundation<sup>263</sup> that included scrapbooks, diaries, photographs and collected items.

Photographs of his studio of which some are printed in the *Lost Magic Kingdom* publication show amongst the vast variety of things, casts of every day objects; x-rays of skulls, Marvel action figures, wheels for all kinds of machinery and a pictorial biography of Albert Einstein. One of the images in the publication shows an area in the artist's London studio. The caption written by Paolozzi reads, "Controlled Chaos: Studio table covered with working materials. A moving endless shifting melange of artefacts for Transformation. Scientific sources as significant as cosmic origins."<sup>264</sup>

Much of Paolozzi's work is informed by what he collected and stored around him. His art performs renewal and celebrates copying. It is full of recycled reproductions and found imagery from popular culture. Paolozzi pays tribute to the act of "faking" because the artist believes that "... it not only requires technical skill and a creative understanding of earlier styles and forms but it also asserts the artist's right to disregard or overcome the traditions of his own society, its rules about what can or cannot be depicted, how this may be done and what should or should not be considered to be art."<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Dalya Alberge, "Eduardo Paolozzi's huge personal archive donated to Tate gallery," accessed August 22, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/oct/07/eduardo-paolozzi-archived-donated-to-tate-gallery>.

<sup>264</sup> Eduardo Paolozzi, *Lost Magic Kingdoms and Six Paper Moons from Nahuatl*, 20.

<sup>265</sup> Malcolm McLeod, "Paolozzi and Identity," 47.

In 1985 Grayson Perry visited Paolozzi's museum intervention and twenty-six years later he created his own 'magic kingdom' from the vast collections of the British Museum. In *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* Perry wove together his own art works with a selection of beautiful and fascinating objects often created by anonymous artisans from 'exotic' parts of the world. Posing as a curator Perry used categories such as 'cultural conversations', 'shrines', 'magick', 'maps', 'sexuality & gender' and 'craftsmanship' to choose from the hundreds of thousands of objects in the British Museum's collection. The artist took visitors on an imaginative pilgrimage which could be seen as a reflection of the artist's self, mirrored through his selection. The 'Perry Land' tour ended with *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman*, a cast-iron sculpture in the form of a ship<sup>266</sup> which is intended to function as "a memorial to all the anonymous individuals that over the centuries have fashioned the handmade wonders of the world."<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Grayson Perry, *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman*, 2011, cast iron, oil paint, glass, rope, wood, flint hand ax, 305 x 204 x 79 cm.

<sup>267</sup> Grayson Perry, *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* (London: British Museum Press, 2011), dustcover.

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Two of the objects that can be seen in the previous image, *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* juxtaposed with a mask from Romania which was used for New Year's performances.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Ion Tutuianu, *Doctor*, 1993, paper, card, cotton, plastic, imitation fur and synthetic fabric, height 49 cm, British Museum.

## COUNTRY LIFE IN A GALLERY

In 2006 I visited Grayson Perry's exhibition *The Charms of Lincolnshire*, an installation at the Victoria Miro Gallery, London,<sup>269</sup> which combined artefacts from The Museum of Lincolnshire Life with the artist's own specially produced work. Perry grew up in rural Essex and decided to focus on country life for his selection of museum objects from the Victorian era that included tools, guns, clothes, dolls, needle works, paintings of cows and a horse drawn hearse. The exhibition functioned as an ambivalent memorial to often very religious and superstitious communities who had to endure poverty and hardship during their rural existence, which was over time slowly transformed and eroded by societal progress.

The slightly sinister exhibition that was arranged around themes such as childhood, death, hunting and Folk Art could be regarded as the precursor of *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman*. Perry's eclectic cultural blend of artefacts derived from his interest in ethnography and craft, which also guided the development of his exhibition at the British Museum. For *The Charms of Lincolnshire* the artist produced a series of vases and embroideries, and used cast iron for the first time to produce a sculpture of a child's coffin titled *Angel of the South*.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> 7 July-12 August 2006.

<sup>270</sup> "Grayson Perry, *The Charms of Lincolnshire*," Victoria Miro Gallery, accessed August 18, 2015, <http://www.victoria-miro.com/exhibitions/369/>.

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## DEATH ON TRESTLES

During my visit to Grayson Perry's installation at the Victoria Miro Gallery I bought a dishcloth with a printed drawing that depicts some of the objects in the exhibition in a rural funeral scene with a mother driven mad by the death of her child and Perry's *Angel of the South* in the foreground. As you can see the cloth is damaged, or more artistically, transformed by its intensive use in the Mackenna-Janssen household.

## EVERYTHING IS COLLAGE

Grayson Perry, who won the Turner prize in 2003, referred to *The Charms of Lincolnshire* as “a poem written with objects,”<sup>271</sup> a description that resists intellectualisation. This emphasis on the visual and material quality and the power of the objects to compel us echoes the artist’s statement printed on the dustcover of *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* publication, “Do not look too hard for meaning here. I am not a historian, I am an artist. That is all you need to know.”<sup>272</sup> This position, unhindered by institutional limitations and conventions, hierarchical foreknowledge and preconceptions allowed the artist-ethnographer to follow freely his creative urges and preferences.

While celebrating the enormous ethnological collection the artist indulged in “finding oneself in the collections of the British Museum”, as Perry put it.<sup>273</sup> “What I mean is seeing oneself, one’s personal concern as human being, reflected back in the objects made long ago by fellow men and women with similar equally human, concerns.”<sup>274</sup> These words highlight the crucial difference in the creative freedom of a curator at the British Museum, with its institutional and academic restrictions, and that of the artist who temporarily takes up the role of exhibition maker and who can fully express himself through choosing and showing an idiosyncratic and unconventional selection of items.

During a conversation between the curator Beti Zerovc and Damien Hirst the artist compares curating with his approach to art and describes his practice as a type of cultural appropriation. “I think that everything is collage and I think that’s a good way of looking at it. So if you think of yourself as an artist, like, I’m an artist by kind of collaging things together – I take this from here and that from there and put it together to make one thing – then I think that’s also what curating is. It’s that you take an artist’s work, you put it next to another artist’s work; you make connections. It’s like arranging already existing objects. So I think in that sense there is not a lot of difference between an artist and a curator...”<sup>275</sup> This appealing but rather simplistic understanding of the role of a curator ignores the complexity of working within an institutional context with all its constraints and responsibilities.

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<sup>271</sup> Charlotte Higgins, “The past, through a glass darkly,” accessed August 22, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/jul/05/arts.artsnews>.

<sup>272</sup> Grayson Perry, *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* (London: British Museum Press, 2011).

<sup>273</sup> Grayson Perry, “Introduction” in *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* (London: British Museum Press, 2011), 11.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid

<sup>275</sup> Bet Zerovc, “You Have to Think Big,” *Manifesta Journal*, 1, 2003, 70.

Perry agrees with Hirst's understanding of art practice as a form of cultural recycling. "When an artist is invited to 'respond' to the collection it is an artificially induced version of the process that has powered world culture forever. Makers of artefacts have been 'responding' to objects made by earlier generations since the beginning of craft. I think of the history of culture as an infinitely complex game of 'Chinese whispers' where images and ideas are changed by passing through the hands of various craftsmen."<sup>276</sup> Perry's notion of "responding" to cultural products from the past recalls Paolozzi's concept of transformation and metamorphosis as discussed previously. One of Perry's ceramic works<sup>277</sup> serves here as an example. It includes a direct reference to Paolozzi's idea for a "Museum as Cathedral."

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<sup>276</sup> Grayson Perry, "Introduction" in *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* (London: British Museum Press, 2011), 11.

<sup>277</sup> *The Rosetta Vase*, 2011, glazed ceramic, 78.5 x 40.7 cm.



## RECYCLING RECYCLING

In 2013 the Centre for Contemporary Arts, CCA, Glasgow and Chisenhale Gallery, London<sup>278</sup> presented works by the Mexican artist Mariana Castillo Deball. For this exhibition *What we caught we threw away, what we didn't catch we kept* the artist took Mayan writing and artefacts as the starting point for creating an installation that responded to the work of explorer and archaeologist Alfred Maudslay, anthropologist Alfred Gell and Eduardo Paolozzi who all, according to the CCA website, “developed various techniques to analyse diverse cultural objects.”<sup>279</sup> *What we caught we threw away, what we didn't catch we kept* combined papier-mâché sculptures which were produced using Alfred Maudslay’s ‘paper squeeze’ technique,<sup>280</sup> plaster casts, prints, drawing and archival images from the artist’s research at the British Museum. Deball’s exhibition reflects Paolozzi’s fascination with overlooked curiosities and his ideas about the notion of metamorphosis. “The artist doesn’t simply reactivate the legacy of Gell, Maudslay and Paolozzi by celebrating forgotten ideas, instead she embraces the transformative potential objects can exert.”<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> 6 April-18 May and 24 May-14 July, 2013.

<sup>279</sup> “Mariana Castillo Deball, *What we caught we threw away, what we didn't catch we kept*,” CCA website, accessed August 22, 2015, <http://www.cca-glasgow.com/archive/5176a0f2fe0b61763a000003>.

<sup>280</sup> “Mariana Castillo Deball, *What we caught we threw away, what we didn't catch we kept*,” Chisenhale Gallery website, accessed August 23, 2015, <http://www.chisenhale.org.uk/archive/exhibitions/index.php?id=129>.

<sup>281</sup> “Mariana Castillo Deball, *What we caught we threw away, what we didn't catch we kept*,” CCA website, accessed August 22, 2015, <http://www.cca-glasgow.com/archive/5176a0f2fe0b61763a000003>.

## BIRDS AND FEATHERS I

In strong contrast to Paolozzi and Perry's highly subjective and self-reflective explorations, the Dutch artist Willem de Rooij pursued a completely different curatorial approach for his exhibition *Intolerance*.<sup>282</sup> His curated display at the Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin was an intellectual and more in depth engagement with the objects of his choice: pre-nineteenth century Hawaiian feather work and seventeenth century bird paintings by another Dutch artist Melchior d'Hondecoeter (1636-1695). Instead of choosing a wide ranging selection of exotic or enigmatic items from the vast collections of a single institution the artist restricted himself and opted for just two types of artefacts from various museums from all over the world. De Rooij's involvement matched closely the role of an institutional curator, developing a visually powerful exhibition with beautiful objects and paintings alongside independent comprehensive scholarly research by others that he initiated into the two subject areas of his choice. The resulting "sculptural collage expanding in time and space"<sup>283</sup> consisted of a temporary exhibition of paintings and Hawaiian artefacts made out of feathers such as heads, helmets, coats and collars and a three-volume publication: the first monograph on Melchior d'Hondecoeter, the first catalogue of all surviving pre-nineteen hundred Hawaiian feather works and a book documenting the whole exhibition with reproductions of all the works included. This page from the *Intolerance* publication shows an exhibition view in the iconic Neue Nationalgalerie, an open plan glass pavilion, which was designed by Mies van der Rohe and which resembles a huge display case.

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<sup>282</sup> 18 september 2010 - 2 Januari 2011

<sup>283</sup> Udo Kittelman, "A preface by Way of Introduction," in *Willem de Rooij: Intolerance* (Düsseldorf: Feymedia, 2010), 7.

## EXOTIC BIRDS and EXOTIC HAWAIIANS

Melchior d'Hondecoeter focussed his production of paintings entirely on birds, "a warm-blooded egg-laying vertebrate animal distinguished by the possession of feathers, wings, a beak, and typically by being able to fly."<sup>284</sup> Except for a few tromp l'oeil paintings of dead birds on wooden panels his work features domestic birds such as swans, geese and duck, and exotic specimens including parrots, peacocks and pelicans that were shipped from the Dutch Colonies to the rich motherland to serve as status symbols. D'Hondecoeter's painterly scenes transcend a straightforward depiction of beautiful and rare animals. According to the Director of the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, Bernd Wolfgang Lindeman, the Dutch master's dynamic spectacles with birds portrayed in real size and often seen from the animal's own perspective are "truly dramatic scenes"<sup>285</sup> with animals in confrontation or under threat and full of imbued or projected moral meanings. "... his pictures are narrations, and this narrative mode draws its fundamental literary legitimacy from the fables of Aesop - having been told and retold since classical antiquity, the fable experienced a renaissance in Melchior d'Hondecoeter's own century when Jean de la Fontaine rendered them with great talent."<sup>286</sup>

Its is not only the colourful quality of plumage that links d'Hondecoeter's paintings of egg-laying and flying vertebrates with the sacred objects from Hawaii. The feather works were associated with status and danger, and were to be used with caution. These symbolic objects were made to worship particular gods or honour important members of Hawaiian society; as such they had an important function in this exotic and often idealised culture. "Most important were feather-covered god images, which accrued sacred and divine qualities as containers into which certain gods could be called by prayers and offerings. Feather-covered cloaks, capes and helmets marked chiefly descendants of the gods, and these chiefly individuals wore them in sacred and dangerous situations," explains Adrienne Kaeppler.<sup>287</sup>

The painting *Eagles attacking Poultry* (1673)<sup>288</sup> is juxtaposed here with a feathered cape in the collection of Queen Elizabeth.<sup>289</sup>

<sup>284</sup> Apple (Oxford) Dictionary.

<sup>285</sup> Bernd Wolfgang Lindemann, "Preface," in *Melchior d'Hondecoeter, 1636-1695*, ed. Willem de Rooij and Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer (Dusseldorf: Feymedia, 2010), 7.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Adrienne Kaeppler, *Hawaiian Featherwork*, ed. Willem de Rooij and Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer (Düsseldorf: Feymedia, 2010), 11.

<sup>288</sup> Oil on canvas, 207 x 252 cm, Louvre Museum, Paris.

<sup>289</sup> 65 x 129 cm, The Royal Collection, her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

## DEAD MIGRANTS

The title *Intolerance*, which is described by the dictionary in my computer as “unwillingness to accept views, beliefs, or behaviour that differ from one's own” is obviously closely tied up with racism, bigotry and (post-)colonial politics. Although de Rooij's ‘museum as a wall’ could be described as a historical display it evokes associations with dramatic events such as the migrant crisis and the rise of extreme right parties that are unfolding today.

migrant ɪˈmɪɡr(ə)ntl

noun

1 a person who moves from one place to another in order to find work or better living conditions.

2 an animal that migrates.

adjective

tending to migrate or having migrated: *migrant birds*.<sup>290</sup>

This doesn't mean that *Intolerance* is a piece of political art. On the contrary, the work resists mono-dimensional reading and revels in ambivalence. The title of de Rooij's presentation could also refer to the tension between the two groups of artefacts that are put together on a grey rectangular wall without sharing any historical or cultural narrative. Juliane Rebentisch argues that Willem de Rooij uses the principle of montage to disrupt the unity of meaning and reception of the presented paintings and feather works, “In a certain way, they remain resistant, if not even allergic, intolerant, against an attitude of reception that seeks to bring them, including their content, down to the level offered, in the formal dimension, as a decorative tableau.”<sup>291</sup>

This rejection of the unity of a work of art is a key element of contemporary art and underpins many artist-led curatorial projects. Unsettling or questioning established views, attitudes and practices is an important aspect of the many projects artists have developed with items from museum collections. In the period after post institutional critique, the artist-as-curator<sup>292</sup> seems to be more concerned with creating visually engaging displays that can be experienced in various ways and that reflect the contextual complexities of ‘meaning’ and ‘content’ rather than with communicating a particular idea or ideology.

<sup>290</sup> Apple (Oxford) Dictionary.

<sup>291</sup> Juliane Rebentisch, “Montage and Late Modernity: Notes on Willem de Rooij's *Intolerance*,” in *Willem de Rooij: Intolerance* (Düsseldorf: Feymedia, 2010), 36.

<sup>292</sup> See Room I for projects that focussed on the institutional preconceptions conditions for displaying art and artefacts.

These postcards show Melchior d'Hondecoeter's *Tromp l'oeil with redwings and fieldfare* (ca. 1660-70)<sup>293</sup> and feathered-God image.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> Oil on canvas, ca. 1660-70, 84 x 65.5 cm, Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum, Aachen.

<sup>294</sup> Mamo feathers, pearl-shell, teeth and human hair, 52 x 19 cm, Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.

## EXOTIC AND FOREIGN

Melchior d'Hondecoeter painted mainly for powerful and prosperous patrons. One of the Dutch Master's clients was the young Stadholder and King, William III of Orange, co-ruler of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. While showcasing the artist's artistic skills, the paintings of exotic birds also demonstrated the wealth and power of the commissioner, a function that can still be recognised today. The contemporary understanding and presentation of the feather works is rather more complicated. These religious objects are, like most if not all artefacts in ethnographic museums, removed from their cultural context and presented as autonomous entities, admired for their aesthetic presence and their foreignness without acknowledging or knowing its maker.

Here I juxtapose postcards of two artefacts<sup>295</sup> that, as previously quoted, "remain resistant, if not even allergic, intolerant."<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> On the left: Melchior d'Hondecoeter, *Waterfowl*, (c. 1680), 188 x 133 cm, Szépművészeti Museum, Budapest. On the right: *Feathered Helmet*, height 29 cm, The National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen.

<sup>296</sup> Juliane Rebentisch, "Montage and Late Modernity: Notes on Willem de Rooij's Intolerance," 36.

## IN FLUX: SEX, GENDER AND RACE

“...the history, and not just in terms of ethnology, of sexual prohibitions: to speak of the constantly shifting and obstinate forms of repression in our own culture, and not to write a chronicle of morality or of tolerance, but to reveal the limits of the Western world and the origins of its morality are its tragic division from the happy world and from desire.”

This quote by Michel Foucault is taken from the first page of the publication about Joseph Kosuth's exhibition *The Brooklyn Museum: The Play of the Unmentionable* (1990) at the Brooklyn Museum in New York.<sup>297</sup> The American conceptual artist's installation addressed our changing attitudes towards sex, gender and race by mixing a selection of works from the museum's collection with citations from historical figures, philosophers and writers such as Adolf Hitler, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Oscar Wilde. By combining works produced in various cultures and different time periods *The Play of the Unmentionable* showed how art is influenced by political and religious circumstances and how our ideas regarding power and inequality change over time. “The mode of iconoclasm which is called censorship does not necessarily take the form of direct assault or removal. Its cunning consists in denying its own operation and leaving no scars.”<sup>298</sup>

Joseph Kosuth (1945-), widely regarded as one of the leading conceptual artists,<sup>299</sup> is interested in art theoretical problems regarding meaning and context. He is well known for his investigation into the relationship between art, language and culture, often quoting key thinkers such as Sigmund Freud and Ludwig Wittgenstein. After two years attending Art College, Kosuth studied anthropology and philosophy, which greatly informed his wide-ranging interests, including linguistics. Marcel Duchamp's rejection of morphology and his questioning of the function of art was obviously a big influence on the artist's concept driven practice, which has a strong critical component and appreciates originality. The artist stated, “The ‘value’ of particular artists after Duchamp can be weighed according to how much they question the nature of art; which is another way of saying ‘what they *added* to the conception of art’ or what wasn't there before they started.”<sup>300</sup>

<sup>297</sup>The Brooklyn Museum's Grand Lobby Projects was a series of specially commissioned site-specific installations that started in 1984. The museum offered a wide range of artists the opportunity to create large-scale works using the collection or the spatial qualities of the lobby as their main reference point.

<sup>298</sup> Leo Steinberg, “The sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion,” cited in *The Play of the Unmentionable* exhibition.

<sup>299</sup> Sol LeWitt described the role of the idea in conceptual art in his *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art* (Arforum, vol 5, no. 10, New York, June 1967) as follows: “In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.”

<sup>300</sup> Joseph Kosuth, *Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990* (Cambridge Massachusetts/London: The MIT Press, 1993), 18.

The strategy of juxtaposing quotations with works of art by others is essential to Kosuth's practice. Prior to *The Brooklyn Museum Collection: The Play of the Unmentionable* the artist produced a similar curatorial project with the title *Wittgenstein: The Play of The Unsayable*. With reference to Wittgenstein's *Investigations*, Kosuth made an exhibition that resulted from the belief that meaning could arise from what could not be said. In the Grand Lobby his concept of play was further developed and the installation Kosuth constructed, mediated visually what cannot be mentioned. Adapting curatorial practice as a *modus operandi* was a logical consequence of the artist's aim to comprehend the nature and function of art. As a creator-curator he could present the outcomes of his visual and textual exploration combining artefacts and quotations arguing that philosophy is disadvantaged by the fact it has to use language to discuss language, whereas art has a much richer vocabulary that enables it to utter meaning.



AFRICA, EUROPE AND ASIA

Kosuth's installation for the Grand Lobby incorporated a broad selection of artefacts from different parts of the world such as paintings, sculptures, photographs, prints and crockery, and from different periods in time. Many works displayed were at some stage in history regarded as sexually, politically or religiously controversial or objectionable. This installation view frames a variety of objects that reveal racial stereotypes: a nineteenth century tea set with African and oriental heads as finials, three small eighteenth century porcelain sculptures representing *Africa, Europe and Asia*, Georges Braques' drypoint etching *Fox* (1911), a photograph by Aaron Siskind of a woman dancing in a Harlem night club (c. 1937), Andy Warhol's serigraph *Untitled* (1964) which shows a black man being attacked by a police dog, Paul Gauguin's painting *Tahitian Woman* (c. 1891), Henri Matisse's *Clearing at Malabai* (c. 1916), Jacques Villon's *Le Philosophe* (1930), *All Talk and No Work* (1855-1856), a painting by Francis William Edmonds, which depicts a white farmer with a black worker and Thomas Hovenden's oil on canvas *Ain't that Ripe?* (no date), showing a boy with a watermelon.

## SEX AND AUTHORSHIP

This part of the *The Play of the Unmentionable* deals with another important theme in the exhibition. The works juxtaposed here centre around sexuality. Photographs by Larry Clark of teenagers performing sexual acts are combined with an eighteenth century watercolour from India showing sex between two male ascetics, *A Group of Intertwined Figures*, a small sculpture from Egypt (Ptolemaic period, 305-30 B.C., see postcard on the right), an eighteenth century Shunga album of Japanese woodblock prints by several artists (see next image) and paintings of partially naked children such as *A Statuette* (1915) by the American painter William Sergeant Kendall (painting of young girl with red piece of fabric around her waist).

In an interview with Rendall Short, Kosuth describes the works he selected for *The Play of the Unmentionable* as words and his exhibition as a linguistic structure: "If art is to be more than expensive decoration, you have to see it as expressing other kinds of philosophical and political meaning. And that varies according to the context in which you experience it. This particular exhibition tries to show that artworks, in that sense, are like words: while each individual word has its own integrity, you can put them together to create very different paragraphs. And it's that paragraph I claim authorship of."<sup>301</sup>

Here the artist-curator merges the role of reader and (re-)narrator. He operates in the space between the maker and the viewer, between interpretation and (re-)presentation and creates the conditions for the production of new meanings. Kosuth believes, "Art 'lives' through influencing other art, not by existing as the physical residue of an artist's idea. The reason why different artists from the past are 'brought alive' again is because some aspects of their work become 'usable' by living artists."<sup>302</sup> As we have seen several times before during our tour through *The Museum Within Us* the notion of artistic recycling drives the curating artist.

Kosuth's activities as an artist, writer and curator obviate the division between art and art criticism. With an emphasis on the importance of context Joseph Kosuth advocates a more holistic cross-disciplinary approach, positioning the production of art within a broader intellectual framework that draws on philosophy, psychoanalysis and anthropology. He perceives his work in connection with

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<sup>301</sup> Rendall Short, "An Artist Who Sees the Frame First," in *Joseph Kosuth, The Play of the Unmentionable: An Installation by Joseph Kosuth in the Brooklyn Museum* (New York: The New Press and The Brooklyn Museum 1992), 27. Originally published in New York Newsday, October 15, 1990.

<sup>302</sup> Joseph Kosuth, *Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990* (Cambridge Massachusetts/London: The MIT Press, 1993), 19.

the social and cultural co-fabrication of its content and engages with the meaning making process that impacts on the reading of his work from the moment it leaves the studio. In Kosuth's opinion art is not autonomous but the meaning of a work of art relies on its context and the viewer's foreknowledge, which is informed by his or her cultural background.

I was very fortunate to be in New York in the summer of 1990 when I was able to see *The Play of the Unmentionable*, which had a profound and lasting influence on my interest in curatorial practice. My installation *Narcissus and the Pool of Corruption* (1994), which I will return to later was partly inspired by Kosuth's critical and aesthetically pleasing exhibition project. Seeing Kosuth's exhibition made me realise something that seems now, twenty-five years later, so obvious; our being in the world, where we come from, our feelings and desires have implications for the way we, artists and audiences alike, produce and project value. In *The Play of the Unmentionable* publication David Freedberg observes, "...we ought to renounce the old Cartesian distinction between experience and reality. The only reality is experienced reality: we cannot stop the emotions from interfering with the judgements that supposedly form the basis of scientific knowledge, and we must acknowledge the repression of sensuality under domination of rationality."<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> David Freedberg, "Joseph Kosuth, The Play of the Unmentionable," in *Joseph Kosuth: The Play of the Unmentionable: An Installation by Joseph Kosuth in the Brooklyn Museum* (New York: The New Press and The Brooklyn Museum, 1992), 31.

## OBSCENITY AND THE EROSION OF FREE EXPRESSION

At the time Joseph Kosuth worked on *The Play of the Unmentionable* in the United States, artists, cultural institutions and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) that supported his exhibition, were under attack from conservative forces in American society. In the previous year the Rev. Donald Wildmon of the conservative American Family Association of Tupelo, Missouri, criticised the NEA for funding an exhibition of work by Andres Serrano, which included *Piss Christ*, a crucifix submerged in the artist's urine. This frontal attack was followed by the cancellation of a retrospective of Robert Mapplethorpe's photographic works at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington because the institution was threatened with the withdrawal of funding by some conservatives in the American government.<sup>304</sup> Joseph Kosuth developed his curated game of text and image partly as a response to this politicisation of cultural production and the conservatives' attempts to restrict artistic freedom. In a statement that accompanied the exhibition Kosuth wrote: "One objective of 'The Brooklyn Museum Collection: The Play of the Unmentionable' is to show that, while no one has problems with the authority works now represent as 'masterpieces,' the cultural power that so legitimizes them flows directly from the provocative nature of the history of ideas as experienced through the lives of real men and women. Beyond any individual's opinion of what 'obscene' may be, it is the responsibility of this society not just to protect but also to nourish, the conditions within which the free flow of ideas will flourish. In many ways art history is the residue, the record of these human conditions. As a process itself, art protects as it empowers the right to self-expression. Its history is the history of capacity of all our freedoms to put consciousness to form, and thereby manifest their self-perception. Protecting this consciousness that art produced is an important part of the protection of our political liberty."<sup>305</sup>

During the aforementioned interview Rendall Short and Kosuth discuss the inclusion of several quotes from Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, which Short recognises as a direct reference to a political situation as described above. The interviewer wonders if the comparison between the ideas about 'degenerate' art as developed by the Nazis and the curbing of artistic freedom by rightwing politicians in America might go too far. Joseph Kosuth's response echoes the proposition of the function of art as a reminder, which I identified in Room III of *The Museum Within Us* when we looked at some artist-led archival projects.<sup>306</sup> "We've reduced the Nazi period to a set of images

<sup>304</sup> Source: Margaret Quigley, "The Mapplethorpe Censorship Controversy," Political Research Associates website, accessed August 25, 2015, [http://www.publiceye.org/theocrat/Mapplethorpe\\_Chrono.html](http://www.publiceye.org/theocrat/Mapplethorpe_Chrono.html). The American social justice think tank's current website can be found here: <http://www.politicalresearch.org>.

<sup>305</sup> Reprinted in Charlotta Kotik, "Introduction," in Joseph Kosuth, *The Play of the Unmentionable, An Installation by Joseph Kosuth in the Brooklyn Museum* (New York: The New Press and The Brooklyn Museum 1992), xiv.

<sup>306</sup> See Room II: Christian Boltanski's *Kaddish*, Gerhard Richter's *Atlas* and Hanne Darboven's *Cultural History*.

and soundbites in popular culture, and I wanted to remind viewers that there was a very specific mentality that preceded Nazi domination and made it possible. When we see the success that the radical right has had with this issue, we have to remember that this is really the beginning of a kind of evil. And voices must be raised.”<sup>307</sup> In contrast to Willem de Rooij who resists a purely critical or political understanding of his *Intolerance* exhibition, Kosuth sees curating as a political act. Although the artist accepts the role of the audience as a co-producer of meaning, Kosuth asserts the power of the artist to direct the reading of his intentions and to use art for taking the moral high ground.

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<sup>307</sup> Rendall Short, “An Artist Who Sees the Frame First,” 27.

## OUR PHYSICAL SELF: THE MOVIE

In the year following Kosuth's exhibition I visited in my hometown of Rotterdam the installation *The Physical Self*<sup>308</sup> by British filmmaker Peter Greenaway (b. 1942). This atmospheric exhibition showed a selection of a wide variety of artefacts from museum Boijmans van Beuningen's varied design, craft and art collections. Peter Greenaway's experience as a cineast was evident in the way the presentation was structured and designed. His typical framing of the exhibits in theatrical settings with dramatic lighting simulated a filmic experience while moving through the exhibition. The artist used a range of modes of display to explore the human body in all its facets and some vitrines even included living people.

This page from the catalogue that accompanied *The Physical Self* shows on the left page a billboard with one of the posters designed between 1982 to 2000 by Oliviero Toscani (b. 1942) for the clothing company Benetton. The Italian photographer's worldwide advertising campaign consisted of often shocking images that address taboos and controversial topics such as aids, homosexuality, racism and capital punishment. This poster shows a baby seconds after it was born. Regularly doubting the relevance of art, and certainly doubting the museum and the gallery for its elitism and narrow focus on isolating culture from daily life as the most rewarding platform for sharing outcomes of artistic practice, I looked with a certain envy at Toscani's uncompromising photographs that confronted a wide range of social issues. I admired his choice of subjects, straightforwardness and the communicative power of his widely distributed images that stirred in me a desire to create work that had greater social significance and that would reflect my own daily existence. I came to realise that art could engage people more directly by dealing with more inclusive subjects and drawing from shared experiences. It took me some time to fully realise this more public and socially engaged approach, which only really happened after I met Tracy Mackenna and started to collaborate with her in 1997.

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<sup>308</sup> The exhibition took place between October 27, 1991 and January 12, 1992.

## TO SET AND DRESS

Peter Greenaway was initially trained as a painter, hence his interest in Flemish and Baroque painting. He developed a curatorial approach for *The Physical Self* that evolved around groupings such as 'Man and Woman,' 'Mother and Child,' 'Age,' 'Touch,' 'Hands,' 'Feet' and 'Narcissism' that confronted the visitor with their own physicality. Ignoring traditional distinctions between art and non-art he presented his items of choice that included sculptures, drawings, paintings, prints, furniture and clothes, as props in a theatrical configuration. The film director followed his usual working method and brought in the Dutch art directors and production designers Ben van Os<sup>309</sup> and Jan Roelfs "to set and dress the gallery."<sup>310</sup> Greenaway's edited version of Museum Boijmans was contextualised in the publication through the artist's own writing, providing the viewer with valuable information about the mainly hand-made objects and the cultural narratives that shaped them.

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<sup>309</sup> Ben van Os (1944-2012) worked on several of Greenaway's films including *A Zed & Two Noughts* (1985), which was filmed in Rotterdam. He was nominated twice for an Oscar in the category 'Best Art Direction-Set Decoration', for *Orlando* (1992) and *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (2003).

<sup>310</sup> Peter Greenaway, "Acknowledgements," in *The Physical Self* (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, 1991), 5.

While Peter Greenaway used the notion of narcissism as one of the categories for his exhibition *The Physical Self*, I applied this human trait as a loose framework for my installation *Narcissus and the Pool of Corruption* (1994) in the very same Museum, Boijmans Van Beuningen. In the spirit of Eduardo Paolozzi I created a spatial assemblage with originals, fakes and reproductions, questioning ideas of authorship, value and the aura of the artwork.



## HOME GAME

*Narcissus and the Pool of Corruption*, my second major solo exhibition, took place in this room in Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen and combined paintings and sculptures from the museum's collection with borrowed and copied artworks, photographs and photocopies using framing devices such as museum storage racks, pin boards and mirrors. What has become for me a seminal exhibition, was inspired by Joseph Kosuth's *The Play of the Unmentionable* and a quote by George Bataille (1897-1962) in which he expresses his view of the museum as "the colossal mirror in which man, finally contemplating himself from all sides, and finding himself literally an object of wonder, abandons himself to the ecstasy expressed in art journalism."<sup>311</sup>

Mieke Bal's theories about the interpretation of visual culture and the role of the artwork and its viewer in the production of meaning provided me with an intellectual framework and reference point for the portrayal of the museum as Narcissus' home. Bal examines the problems of cultural representation and the politics of display. According to Bal, artefacts (and their reproductions) produce interpretations of their own cultural context and as a result enable viewers' subjectivity.

Against what is still normal museum practice I insisted that it should be the artist who writes the foreword in the accompanying publication rather than the museum director. In my short introduction I tried to explain the 'curatorial' in my art and the way I use existing material, reproductions and objects/artefacts made by others.

"A few years ago, accompanied by the director of a small museum in Belgium, I went to see one of my exhibitions. Having heard about me from a colleague, this director wanted to mount a presentation of my work. The man looked at the exhibits attentively and was very enthusiastic about what he saw. He was particularly taken by with the black-and-white drawings. I told him that choosing the right drawing is indeed very important. The director asked me what I meant by 'choosing the right drawing'. 'Well,' I replied, 'you see, I have boxes full of illustrations, picture postcards, photographs and suchlike. After reproducing these pictures in a certain way, I use them in my work.' Half disbelieving, half baffled, this lover of the fine arts hesitantly enquired: 'you mean

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<sup>311</sup> George Bataille, "Museum", October, no. 36, 1986, 25; trans. Annette Michelson. First published in Documents 2, no. 5, 1930, 300. Cited in Kynaston McShine, *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 10.

you didn't do the drawing yourself?'. No, there was no Edwin Janssen exhibition in that small Belgian museum."<sup>312</sup>

Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam is one the most important museums in the Netherlands.<sup>313</sup> It was this close-at-hand art venue that informed my early understanding of art history and contemporary art. Regular visits to the museum triggered many questions about art of which several were initially explored in my reflective installation at Boijmans.

During my strolls through the museum I was frequently confronted with exciting, visually rich and thought provoking exhibitions that made unusual connections between artefacts from collections that would normally be separated.<sup>314</sup> My early creative development was informed by looking at artworks and exhibitions rather than by exploring a wide range of techniques and materials or through hands-on modes of making. I have always been more attracted to the role of spectator, observer<sup>315</sup> and, following Baudelaire and Benjamin, to being a 'flâneur'<sup>316</sup>, creating juxtapositions in the mind through looking at objects, pictures and images already in existence and produced by others. "For the perfect flâneur, ... it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow ... To be away from home, yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the center of the world, yet to remain hidden from the world - such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial[!!] natures which the tongue can but clumsily define. The spectator is a prince who everywhere rejoices in his incognito ... The lover of universal life enters into the crowd as though it were an immense reservoir of electric energy. We might also liken him to a mirror as vast as the crowd itself; or to a

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<sup>312</sup> Edwin Janssen, "Foreword", in Edwin Janssen, *Narcissus and the Pool of Corruption* (Rotterdam; Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, 1994), 4.

<sup>313</sup> Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen opened in 1935. The initial collection was donated to the city of Rotterdam in 1849 by the lawyer Frans Jacob Otto Boijmans. Unfortunately a large part of his generous gift was lost in a fire in 1864. The museum added in 1958 'Van Beuningen' to its name after it acquired the Van Beuningen collection. The spelling was subsequently changed from Boymans-van Beuningen into Boijmans Van Beuningen by Chris Dercon, the current director of Tate Modern who led the museum and its refurbishment between 1996 en 2002. The museum website states "A visit to Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen is a journey through the history of art. Dutch and European masterpieces provide a comprehensive survey of art from the early Middle Ages to the 21st century, from Bosch, Rembrandt and Van Gogh to Dalí and Dutch Design" and "A young generation of visual artists such as Eliasson and Cattelan bring the museum's art collection up to date." Accessed September 6, 2015, <http://www.boijmans.nl/en/374/about-the-museum>.

<sup>314</sup> During the directorship of Willem Beeren and Wim Crowel a wide variety of artists and curators such as Martin Kippenberger, Hans Haacke and Harald Szeemann were invited to develop exhibition projects using the collection as their muse.

<sup>315</sup> I became interested in the visual arts when I was studying sociology at the University of Groningen. Although I didn't finish my studies I believe that my choice of this subject was informed by a continuing urge to observe and understand how the world works. My discipline changed, I moved from social science to visual art, but the questions remained.

<sup>316</sup> The term "flâneur" has the basic meanings of "stroller", "lounger", "saunterer", "loafer and derives from the French verb flâner, which means, "to stroll." Charles Baudelaire embraced the notion of the "flâneur" as a person who walks in order to experience the city. Following Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin often uses this concept. in particular in the context of the exploration of urban phenomena in the light of modernity.

kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness, which, with each one of its movements, represents the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all elements of life.”<sup>317</sup>

The idea of the flâneur is not limited to the Baudelairian sense of performing a peripatetic stroll but can also include a reflective way of living and thinking and a process of wandering through different forms of knowledge. The artworks and exhibitions I experienced during my flâneuring had a profound impact on my way of thinking and influenced greatly my future creative activities including *Narcissus and the Pool of Corruption*.

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<sup>317</sup> Baudelaire, “L’Art romantique” in “Le Peintre de la vie moderne”, quoted in Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Massachusetts/London, England: The Belknap Press Of Harvard University Press, 1999), 443.

## LE SINGE LECTEUR

This installation overview shows six sculptures, each looking into a mirror, two of the three pin boards and two of the three storage racks that made up my show that took place in my home city. The chimpanzee reading a copy of the *National Geographic* magazine is a work of mine. As introduced in Room II, it is called *Dad* (1992)<sup>318</sup> and was based on a sixties postcard of a dressed chimpanzee and *Le Singe Peintre* (1739-40), a depiction of a painter as a monkey by the French painter Jean-Siméon Chardin. Chardin's painting was inspired by the monkey scenes, also called 'singeries', that made Abraham Teniers (1629-1670), a brother of David Teniers the Younger (1610–1690) famous. This comical genre of painting in which humans are replaced by monkeys originates in the sixteenth century and was particularly popular amongst Flemish painters. Inspired by Dutch seventeenth century paintings I made a series of works that reintroduced the monkey and the fool as allegorical figures. Many artists in the seventeenth century used the monkey and the fool or jester as a way to embed the depiction of entertaining social situations with moralistic warnings. I will return to this subject matter later.

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<sup>318</sup> Now in the Caldic Collection, Rotterdam, the Netherlands..

A GOOD LOOK IN THE MIRROR

In addition to *Dad*, which was my take on 'singerie', the row of narcissistic sculptures consisted of a skeleton, *Pierre de Wissant* (1885-6) by Auguste Rodin (1840-1917), *Nana Négress*, (1971) by Niki de Saint-Phalle (1930-2002), *Seated Child* (1974) by Duane Hanson (1925-1996) and *Family of Robot; Aunt* (1986) by Nam June Paik (1992-2006). Paik's video work was borrowed from Gallery Ronny Van der Velde in Antwerp to add a contemporary commentary on human sculptural representation.

24-HOUR SELFIE

One of Nam June Paik's earlier works, *TV-Buddha*, (1974)<sup>319</sup> resembles Narcissus' self-centred contemplation. The artist replaced the mirror with new technology, a video camera connected to a tv screen in the shape of an astronaut helmet. This evocative work by the Korean pioneer of video art plays with what was at that time a rather new window on a world that could be experienced without leaving your home. It also predates the introduction of the social media we use today that has radically altered the way we see and share ourselves with others.

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<sup>319</sup> Video installation, closed-circuit, 18th-century Buddha statue, 160 x 215 x 80 cm, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

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NANA AND CHILD

Front view of Hanson's *Seated Child* (1974)<sup>320</sup> and de Saint-Phalle's *Nana Nègresse* (1971).<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Polyester, and lacquer, 65 x 87 x 75 cm, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam.

<sup>321</sup> Polyester, resin, fibreglass, oil, textile, artificial hair, wood, chocolate bar, 84 x 50 x 63 cm, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam.

DROSTE EFFECT<sup>322</sup>

One of the storage racks, and its reflection in the mirror, behind the Rodin. The racks were specially constructed for the exhibition. This one combines a framed mirror with the painting *Narcissus* (1636)<sup>323</sup> by Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) and photographic reproductions of *Democritus* (1628)<sup>324</sup> (on the left) and *Heraclitus* (1628)<sup>325</sup> both by Hendrick Terbrugghen (1588-1629), *The Painter in his Studio* (1629)<sup>326</sup> by Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (1606-1669) and the *Self-Portrait in Convex Mirror* (c. 1524)<sup>327</sup> by Parmigianino (1503-1540).

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<sup>322</sup> Droste is a major Dutch cocoa powder and chocolate brand. In the early years of the twentieth century the company introduced illustrated boxes for its cocoa powder showing a nurse holding a tray with the same box and a cup with her image. The result was an endless stream of reoccurring boxes of cocoa powder.

<sup>323</sup> Oil on canvas, 14.5 x 14 cm, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam.

<sup>324</sup> Oil on canvas, 85.5 x 70 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

<sup>325</sup> Oil on canvas, 85.5 x 70 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

<sup>326</sup> Oil on canvas, 24.8 x 31.7 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

<sup>327</sup> Oil on convex panel, 24.4 cm diameter, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.



### III - 30

#### PAINTER IN OUR STUDIO

The fake Rembrandt currently hangs on the wall in our studio next to a framed photograph of the interior of Paul Cézanne's studio and a postcard with one of On Kawara's *Date Paintings* (23 Jun. 1996), which was made by the artist in a hotel room in Rotterdam.

## MAKING A MONKEY

*The Quack*<sup>328</sup> by Gerard Dou (1613-1675), one of the works I selected for my *Narcissus and The Pool of Corruption* exhibition, is a good example of the type of genre painting that combines delight and instruction. On Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen's website *The Quack* is described as follows: "In this large panel Dou depicts a quack at the annual fair in front of Leiden's city gate. On the table is a monkey, which symbolises that the quack is 'making a monkey' of his audience. The painting is a warning against being fooled by charlatans. The artist can be seen leaning out of the window behind the quack."

This presence of the artist and his position suggests that we as viewers are invited to compare these two masters of deception. Gerard Dou, one of the best paid artists of his time, and contemporaries such as David Teniers the Younger, created artworks that were amusing, delightful, instructive but also, like most paintings, illusionary and deceptive.

In *The Quack* the moral themes in progress are easily identified but what makes this painting remarkable is Gerard Dou's virtuosity, the reference to the role of the artist and the addition of several less explicit motifs such as sexuality and hygiene.

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<sup>328</sup> *The Quack*, 1652, oil on panel, 112.4 x 83.4 cm, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam.

## METHODOLOGY REVEALED AND DOUBLED

The centre spread in the *Narcissus and the Pool of Corruption* publication, reflecting parts of me in my current studio, where most of *The Museum within Us* was produced. The idea of mirroring was explored in many ways. The placement of several mirrors in *Narcissus and the Pool of Corruption* created a dynamic play of changing vistas when moving through the space, which emphasised the questioning and critical intentions of the exhibition. Alongside my own reflective explorations I approached the Dutch cultural theorist Mieke Bal for a contribution to the accompanying publication.

After studying Bal's *Reading 'Rembrandt'*<sup>329</sup> in which she applies her method of literary analysis to examine a series of works by Rembrandt and to explore "...the potential for an interdisciplinary methodology between literature and visual art,"<sup>330</sup> I became very interested in her way of looking at art. Her ideas at the time mirrored my creative urge to invest the objects I experience with meaning or extract meaning from them through projection, juxtaposing or context shifting.

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<sup>329</sup> Mieke Bal, *Reading 'Rembrandt': Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

<sup>330</sup> Mieke Bal's website, accessed August 8, 2015, <http://www.miekebal.org/publications/books/reading-rembrandt/>.

## VISUAL TEXTS

My request to Mieke was not for a thoughtful text about my work or the exhibition; I was rather, more interested in a piece of writing that could exist next to my spatial visual essay. I was hoping for something that could help me to get my brain going. As I had dropped out of university and Art College I hadn't really been trained to think critically or reflect with reference to theory. Therefore I invited Mike to apply her method of cultural analysis to three of the paintings that feature in *Narcissus and the Pool of Corruption*.

Bal responded with her essay *Imagination: Manifestations of Narcissus* in which the paintings by Rubens, Rembrandt and Parmigianino that I suggested, are interpreted as “visual texts” in order to discuss the relationship between the viewer, the reader, and the artwork. Psychoanalysis is called on to explore four notions of reflection that are at play when engaging with artworks. Both the artwork and the reader mirror the creator and the self, while at the same time they bring about the process of self-reflection. The production of meaning involves the artist, the work and the reader. In Bal's view “the work is the result of an act of representation which the maker is impelled to perform by a force which enters the work in the form of meaning. In that meaning is enclosed the force, which motivated the making of the work. By force I mean the meeting-point of energy, imagination and what Freud expressed by the untranslatable word *Trieb*. This point of encounter becomes part of the meaning, a surplus, an illocutive aspect... According to that view a person affected by the work will react to it with either identification, protest, denial or acceptance. Reactions to art are thus reactions to the traces of the force which produced the work - and produces it again, but differently.”<sup>331</sup>

Mieke, currently Professor Emeritus in Literary Theory, has a Ph.D. in French and Comparative Literature. Her understanding of the process of meaning making resonates with the notion of “dialogic expression,” which was developed by Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) in the context of his linguistic interests. Maurice Berger notes “Dialogic expression refuses to accept the arrogant assumption that there is one language, one image, one isolated story through which the absolute can be articulated. It acknowledges the conditional nature of presentation – that the

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<sup>331</sup> Mieke Bal, “Imagination: Manifestations of Narcissus,” in Edwin Janssen, *Narcissus and the Pool of Corruption* (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 1994), 47. Mieke Bal suggests in a footnote that the word “drive” comes closest to the meaning of *Trieb*. I had to look up ‘illocutive’. It didn't show up in the Oxford dictionary but wiktionary website tells me that it means ‘not comparable’.

meaning of any utterance or object or image is ultimately dependent on the words and objects and images around it and the reader who interprets it.”<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> Maurice Berger, “Viewing the Invisible: Fred Wilson’s Allegories of Absence and Loss,” In *Fred Wilson, Objects and Installations 1979-2000* (Baltimore: University of Maryland Baltimore County, 2001), 12. See Mikhail Mikhailovich Bahktin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 258-422, for more on “dialogic expression.”

## THE WORLD AS A STAGE

My own interest in reflection led in the early 1990s to art works that used the mirror as a moral device. Bewildered, maybe naïvely, by human weakness, egotistic pragmatism, nationalism and war and with reference to two irreconcilable notions in Dutch history, commercial gain and Protestant morality, I started to recycle symbolic characters that feature regularly in sixteenth and seventeenth century painting and literature such as the monkey and the jester. Interested in the combination of instruction and entertainment I invested my reflective and reflecting art with some humour and absurdity, resulting in works such as *Dad* and *Monkey Business Part II*, and presented here, *Theatrum Mundi* (1993). This installation with a live component was produced for *Oppositionen & Schwesterfelder*, an exhibition at the Wiener Secession<sup>333</sup> initiated by the German curator and art historian Sabine Vogel. *Oppositionen & Schwesterfelder* brought together a group of young artists who each shared an interest in everyday reality resulting in various transformations of social and political concerns into aesthetic outcomes.

*Theatrum Mundi*, the work I made especially for the exhibition combined a diagramme of my *Monkey Business* project, a video fragment with a chimpanzee burned at the stake (dramatised) and an actor playing the role of a fool.

“*Monkey Business* is the name of the project, *Theatrum Mundi* one of its versions. Monkeys (and fools) are the actors in Edwin Janssen’s works. Monkeys in art historical depictions, stories, as living sculptures: the history of mankind, ideas of morality and customs; metaphor for existence and connecting element in the project *Monkey Business*. In the middle ages the monkey was a symbol of the visual arts, artworks as imitations of life and the monkey as an imitator of life. monkeys and fools reflect social norms - discovering absence through presence (I can’t be in the mirror), connecting with the surrounding space (as a virtual point perceptible),” wrote the curator.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> July 14 - August 25, 1993.

<sup>334</sup> Sabine Vogel, “...Represented, Challenged, Changed...,” in Sabine Vogel, et al., *Opposition & Schwesterfelder* (Vienna: Wiener Secession, 1994), 29.

## ERASMUS, CHARLEY, EVA AND MARIO

The figure of the jester, fool or clown also features in *Erasmus the Clown* (2014-)<sup>335</sup>, a work produced with Tracy Mackenna in collaboration with our son Erasmus (1999-) who was named after the Dutch Renaissance humanist theologian, educator, social critic and priest Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536).

On our website we describe this work in the following way: “The main inspiration for the installation *Erasmus the Clown* is the painting *CLOWN voor RUÏNES van ROTTERDAM*<sup>336</sup> by the Dutch artist Charley Toorop (1891-1955). The role of the clown in the video is performed by our son Erasmus (1999-) who was born in Rotterdam and loves theatre and acting. It is also he who addresses the public in a letter that reveals the web of references that informed the making of *Erasmus the Clown*. This letter is printed in a mini newspaper that will be offered to you for free when you visit the exhibition.”<sup>337</sup>

“My parents thought it was important that I should tell you about the work, as museum and gallery information is often very brief, and mostly written by the curator. This letter is directed at you, with the intention of revealing some of the ideas and personal connections that have informed this work.” These lines that Tracy and I wrote on Erasmus’ behalf, encapsulate also the intentions of *The Museum Within Us*:\_revealing a complex of ideas, strands, contexts, interests, associations, transformations and references that in some form shaped my, and that now partly drives *our*, practice, a creative site that enables a variety of activities including exploring, making, sharing, presenting, debating, educating and reflecting. Tracy and I are the curators of that amorphous site that is normally branded as Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen but sometimes operates as *The Museum of Loss and Renewal*. In Room V we will engage with this durational project, a museum in progress, dedicated to exploring and utilising the role of art in mediating issues around wellbeing, dying, material culture and memory.

In the video component of *Erasmus the Clown* Erasmus animates silently Charley Toorop’s *Clown*. While watching the preoccupied clown the visitor hears recordings of bombardments mixed with an

<sup>335</sup> See “Erasmus the Clown,” Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen’s website, accessed October 13, 2015, [http://www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/Erasmus\\_the\\_Clown.html](http://www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/Erasmus_the_Clown.html). *Erasmus de Clown* followed from our *WAR AS EVER!* project which is the main focus of the next room in *The Museum Within Us*.

<sup>336</sup> *Clown voor de Ruïnes van Rotterdam* (1940-41), oil on canvas, 150 x 110 cm.

<sup>337</sup> Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen, website, accessed 13 October 2015, [http://www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/Erasmus\\_the\\_Clown.html](http://www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/Erasmus_the_Clown.html).

unknown violinist playing the melody of the famous ballad from *The Wizard of Oz, Somewhere Over the Rainbow* and the voice of Mario Lanza.<sup>338</sup>

'Erasmus' ends his letter with the lyrics, so dramatically sung by the Italian American tenor and actor who was active in the 1940s and 50s. "And so, my friends, I'm going to finish with a few words that link me to some of the things that are stirring in this work - loss and love and staging. The tenor Mario Lanza, whose father was from my great-grandmother's tiny Italian village Collemacchia, from which she had to leave for economic reasons, sang these lines in the aria 'Vesti la Giubba' or 'Put on the Costume' while dressed as Canio the clown in the opera 'Pagliacci' by Ruggero Leoncavallo ...

Put on your costume and powder your face  
The people pay to be here, and they want to laugh  
And if Harlequin shall steal your Columbina  
Laugh, clown, so the crowd will cheer!  
Turn your distress and tears into jest  
Your pain and sobbing into a funny face – Ah!"<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Mario Lanza, who was world famous in the 1940s and 50s, was born in USA in 1921 as Alfredo Arnold Coccozza, a son of Italian immigrants. He died in 1959 at the age of thirty-eight. Tracy Mackenna and I are the unofficial directors and curators of the now dormant Mario Lanza Museum in Collemacchia. In the future we hope to revive this memorial to the 'son' of the great Enrico Caruso.

<sup>339</sup> Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen, *Erasmus' Letter*, first English version, unpaginated. The English translation of the original lyrics of *Vesti la Giubba* can be found on the Wikipedia website, accessed October 14, 2015, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vesti\\_la\\_giubba](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vesti_la_giubba). Here you can also find a sound file with Enrico Caruso singing *Vesti la Giubba*.



“Now hanging in the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo in the Netherlands Toorop’s painting depicts a pensive clown filling almost the whole canvas, painted in red and yellow and white. The background shows Rotterdam in ruins, derived from a photograph by Eva Besnyö taken after the aerial bombardment of Rotterdam by the Luftwaffe on 14 May 1940, during the German invasion of the Netherlands. The actual clown depicted in the painting was Bumbo, a circus performer who fled to Bergen in the Netherlands, where Toorop worked and lived with her sons.”<sup>340</sup>

Eva Besnyö was a Hungarian photographer and Charley Toorop’s daughter in law. She took this photograph in July 1940, two months after the German destruction of Rotterdam city-centre and shortly before Toorop started her powerful painting.

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<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

Let's return to *Oppositionen & Schwesterfelder* and the issue of ethical living. (You must have noticed that I regularly have to disrupt continuity to be able to reveal particular connections between fragments of a rather elusive art practice). For the publication that accompanied the exhibition I co-wrote the text '*Prodesse et Declare*' or to *Instruct and Entertain*, in which the currency of moralism is questioned against the backdrop of historical references. "No, the heyday of moralism is over for good. Idealism seems to have gone out of fashion as well. Commitment has been replaced by concerns for one's own wellbeing, and irony is far more suave than protest. Who wants to moralise, and nowadays who is interested anyway?"<sup>341</sup>

In the eighties and early nineties of the twentieth century artists seemed more occupied with their own success, the market and the commodification of their creative activities. Things have changed radically since then. A recession induced-art market followed the soaring prices of the eighties crash in the early nineties. "During the First Gulf War, the lack of liquidity of major financial markets combined with the bankruptcy of financial institutions and the economic climate of recession affected the art market and its prices shrank by 55% between 1990-1993." notes Elisa Hernando on the *artpulse* website.<sup>342</sup>

This dramatic collapse of the art market had a sobering effect. It made many artists reconsider fundamental questions regarding the role and value of art. It also stimulated a re-engagement with the notion of a creative life beyond the art world. Newly focused artists started to develop a more reflective, critical and discursive practice, often partly in an academic context, tackling social and political issues, and considering a variety of publics and/or participants. I was one of those artists who benefitted from an existential crisis regarding the place of art.

Raised by two parents with very different and often incompatible social, economic and religious backgrounds I was predestined to explore the moral conflicts that inform our human existence at some stage of my (artistic) life. Both my mother, brought up by loving working class, pacifist socialist protestants and my father, ostracised by his strict catholic, well-off merchant family because he fell in love with a woman from the wrong social class and the wrong faith, taught my siblings and me to measure the world and its inhabitants without bias.

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<sup>341</sup> Edwin Janssen and Menna Laura Meyer, "Prodesse et Declare' or to Instruct and Entertain" in Sabine Vogel, et al., *Opposition & Schwesterfelder* (Vienna: Wiener Secession, 1994), 104.

<sup>342</sup> Elisa Hernando, "Art Market Crisis?", *artpulse* website, accessed October 13, 2015, <http://artpulsemagazine.com/art-market-crisis>.

Our moral education was shaped by our parent's traumatic experiences of wars at home and in Indonesia. Countering their own negative views of the human race with its tendency to discriminate on the basis of class, ethnic group, gender, religious beliefs or cultural background, and to behave selfishly and violently, they urged us to live our lives in a critical and self-reflective manner and to make the eternal question of 'how to live a good life' one of our main concerns.

To me it is evident that my upbringing and the resulting short spell at University to study sociology, paved the way for becoming an artist. At Art College I struggled with the emphasis on materials and production, and the focus on formal and conceptual concerns. Questions about the politics of every day life were not raised in any meaningful way. 'L'art pour l'art' was the dominating attitude which didn't really match my desire to use art as a way to explore social issues and reflect on the way we live our lives. It took me a couple of years, including two years at Ateliers '63 (De Ateliers) before I could fully realise the potential of my reflective and curatorial approach. With the realisation of *Narcissus and the Pool of Corruption* I reached a certain (successful?) stage in my artistic 'career' and accumulated profound questions about art and my relationship with what I then understood as the 'art world', and about issues of social engagement, audiences and platforms. How to progress creatively from here?

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# IV

## WAR AS EVER!

Visual representations of images of war and conflict

## LOVE LOVE MODE

After wandering through three rooms filled with three visual essays accompanied by written snapshots of ideas, artists' projects and information, we have now entered the first of two rooms dedicated to two projects that I developed and am developing, with my partner in love, life and art, Tracy Mackenna. The writing that opens up this ROOM IV of *The Museum Within Us* is partly composed of fragments of texts that Tracy and I have written about our work. The subject of this room, the *WAR AS EVER!* project,<sup>343</sup> will be considered after introducing our collaborative practice more extensively. As you will see *WAR AS EVER!* brings together some of the themes that I have explored in the previous rooms including museum culture, cultural recycling, art as reminder, montage, archival exploration and new notions such as the art of encounter, performativity and process as modes of production, all informed by a way of curatorial thinking that manifests itself in different guises.

Tracy (1963 -) is a Scottish Italian artist whom I met during the first edition of the mobile Biennial Manifesta, which took place in Rotterdam in 1996. I was part of a group of cultural producers including artists, a philosopher and a journalist who called themselves *NEStWORK* and who aimed to connect the local cultural scene - 'local' meaning based in Rotterdam - with international audiences.<sup>344</sup> Financially well supported by the Dutch Mondriaan Foundation *NEStWORK* had a strong curatorial emphasis, developing a variety of events during the course of Manifesta including debates, talks and a Hip Hop concert in Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, and as intended it brokered lasting relationships between Rotterdam-based and visiting artists. Tracy Mackenna was one of these incoming artists and our meeting led to one of those lasting relationships.

*NEStWORK* was initiated by the visual artist and curator Jeanne van Heeswijk (1965-) and as a collective was meant to be a temporary collaboration that would end when the Manifesta circus left

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<sup>343</sup> Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen, *WAR AS EVER!*, Nederlands Fotomuseum, Rotterdam, 21 January-25 March 2012.

<sup>344</sup> In 2016 Manifesta will stage its eleventh exhibition, in Zurich. On the 'About the Biennial' page of the Manifest website one can read "Manifesta purposely strives to keep its distance from what are often seen as the dominant centres of artistic production, instead seeking fresh and fertile terrain for the mapping of a new cultural topography. This includes innovations in curatorial practices, exhibition models and education. Each Manifesta biennial aims to investigate and reflect on emerging developments in contemporary art, set within a European context. In doing so, we present local, national and international audiences with new aspects and forms of artistic expression." These lines suggest that Manifesta is a pro-active and site-determining institution. The reality is that cities and regions propose a project and pay to be the next location for a Manifesta biennial often with concerns other than artistic, educational and curatorial innovation in mind. Promoting their city or region by providing the international art world and well to do art audiences with a temporary platform and a less obvious tourist destination is often the main objective. *NEStWORK* made sure that people based locally would not be excluded but would benefit from what the influx of the international art world would bring to Rotterdam.

town. However, some *NEStWORK* members enjoyed the experience of togetherness and the group's success so much that activities continued a little longer until they finally had to concede that the strength of *NEStWORK* was its timely and ephemeral nature.

Tracy was invited by the Manifesta 1 curatorial team to co-devise and subsequently participate in the *Laboratory of Comparative Studies* which was temporarily based in CBK Villa Alckmaer<sup>345</sup> and was established as a language laboratory, where a group of artists were engaged in a dialogue relating to the needs and objects of translation.<sup>346</sup> The other participants were Joseph Grigely, Yuri Leiderman, Luca Quartana and Uri Tzaig.

Tracy set up studio on the third floor where she worked publicly on a text blanket that took shape over the course of Manifesta 1 through dialogue with visitors. Tracy and I met when, as a representative of *NEStWORK*, I approached her to offer the artists working in the *Laboratory of Comparative Studies* a page in a newspaper produced by *NEStWORK*.

This drawing of Tracy was made on the computer with a mouse using Claris Works, software that came with the early Apple computers. The portrait, together with one of me in the same style, was used in our *Ed & Ellis in Dublin* project initiated by the Sculptors Society of Ireland in 1998.

The idea of the 'public studio' has become a key feature in the shared practice which started a year after we met. Tracy's conversational approach<sup>347</sup> introduced me to something that I had never envisaged before. Instead of being socially engaged from a distance I could interact directly, with her and with visitors. I could see them, hear them and even smell them. Art could be alive and could be lived.

Opening up, sharing ambitions and anxieties, and analysing mistakes and disappointments suddenly became easy, the result of an immersive and growing bond with another artist, "Gradually we discovered similar states of discontent with how our work was developing within the structure of the art world. Shared doubts, queries, dissatisfactions. We knew from the start that together we could find another way of doing things. Making art could again be pleasant and exciting." we wrote

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<sup>345</sup> The beautiful villa has since been swallowed by Museum Boijmans van Beuningen during its extension in 2003. CBK (Rotterdam Centre for the Arts) activities now take place in TENT, Rotterdam, which is located on the ground floor of the same building as Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art.

<sup>346</sup> Rosa Martínez et al., *Manifesta 1* (Rotterdam: Manifesta, 1996), 91.

<sup>347</sup> In her contribution to *Curating and the Educational Turn* Irit Rogoff states, after a critique of 'pedagogical aesthetics', "I would not wish to give up the notion of conversation, which, to my mind, has been the most significant shift within the art world over the past decade." Irit Rogoff, "Turning," in Paul O'Neill & Mick Wilson, *Curating and the Educational Turn* (London: Open Editions, 2010), 43.



in a text for the brochure that was produced as the invitation for our exhibition *Normality is Obscene Nowadays* (2003) at the Kunstvereniging Diepenheim<sup>348</sup> in the Netherlands.

In *Naming a Practice* Claire Doherty notes, “In many cases the ‘social context’ or ‘situation’ can be seen to have replaced the studio as site of process. Though Mackenna and Janssen’s response to context has often been to construct temporary studios in Tokyo, London, Birmingham and Glasgow – these sites have been public points of assembly and collaborative process, rather than private studios in the public domain. The museum or gallery is occupied by the artists so that the dialogical process of making becomes exhibited, with the end-results (previously blankets embroidered with edited texts or online projects) being circulated as by-products.”<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen, *Normality is Obscene Nowadays*, Kunstvereniging Diepenheim, the Netherlands, 29 March–10 May 2003.

<sup>349</sup> Claire Doherty, “Naming a Practice,” in Klaas Kuitenbrouwer et al., *One Clover and a Bee* (Leeuwarden: Stichting Voorheen de Gemeente, 2003), 29.

Rein Wolfs describes the functioning of our blanket projects and the public studio clearly in his text for the publication about our work, *A Perfect Image of Ourselves*<sup>350</sup>. He understands our discursive and process-led activities as “performative installation”<sup>351</sup> and points out, “Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen managed to extend the shelf-life of their performances and their works and to increase the level of public participation.”<sup>352</sup> The dialogical and discursive quality of our practice was activated the moment we started to collaborate and has since been extended to our audiences. Wolfs continues: “Mackenna and Janssen’s performative installations are wonderfully fluid. Art enters into a dialogue with theatre, language, design and craft. Or maybe one should say that this art form is precisely the result of mobilising all these different elements, and all in the service of communicating with the public.”<sup>353</sup>

These words resonate with what Leo Tolstoy argued in his essay *What is Art?*, “Art is not, as the metaphysicians say, the manifestation of some mysterious idea of beauty or God; it is not, as the aesthetical physiologists say, a game in which man lets off his excess of stored-up energy; it is not the expression of man’s emotions by external signs; it is not the production of pleasing objects; and, above all, it is not pleasure; but it is a means of union among men, joining them together in the same feelings, and indispensable for the life and progress toward well-being of individuals and of humanity.”<sup>354</sup> Tolstoy is convinced that art has a role to play in improving humanity. Maybe that is true. What I certainly believe is that art can help us as individuals to lead a better and more fulfilled life. More about this subject matter to follow in Room V (*The Museum of Loss and Renewal*).

Our projects involve the creation of temporary social spaces in the sense of Tolstoy’s “means of union among” people and often provide additional events, as moments for gathering. We have become the curators of our project sites, often redefining the role of the institutional curator as that of producer. We take control and keep the direction firmly in our hands. As the title of Rein Wolfs’ essay suggests, together we are strong. Our association has shifted the balance of power between

<sup>350</sup> Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen, *A Perfect Image of Ourselves* (Glasgow: CCA Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow, 2005).

<sup>351</sup> Rein Wolfs, “And together they are strong,” in Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen, *A Perfect Image of Ourselves* (Glasgow: CCA Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow, 2005), unpaginated.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

<sup>354</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art?* (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 59.

artist and curator, which can be challenging for art institutions that are used to fully commanding their exhibition projects.

The grid with four images combines in a series of split seconds four projects that were participatory, dialogical, and process-led and involved the creation of temporary public studios.<sup>355</sup> Clockwise:

*Ed and Ellis in Tokyo*,<sup>356</sup> 1998, P3 art and environment, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Contemporary Art, Nadiff Gallery and the streets of Tokyo.

*Ed and Ellis in Ever Ever Land*, 2001, CCA, Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow.

*Friendly Invasions 2034*, 2014, artconnexion, Lille, France.

*Big City Small Talk*, 2000, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham<sup>357</sup>

Doherty notes, “In Nicolas Bourriaud’s definition of relational aesthetics, ‘spectator participation’ is defined as one of the primary characteristics of current art practice. Thus simulated play or service registers as ‘relational’, as it involves human interaction. This differs significantly from another notion of participatory art practice – namely Littoral Art (as defined by Grant Kester in a seminal paper ‘Dialogical Aesthetics: A Critical Framework for Littoral Art’). Kester suggests that Littoral Art breaks down the conventional distinction between artist, art work and audience – a relationship that allows the viewer to ‘speak back’ to the artist in certain ways and in which this reply becomes in effect a part of the work itself.”<sup>358</sup>

Doherty continues, “Mackenna and Janssen’s work lies somewhere between these two definitions. They are certainly interested in the aspect of human inter-relations and employ everyday objects and familiar procedures to encourage interaction (relational), whilst incorporating the participants’ voices into the work (littoral), but they still remain the editors or directors of the process.”<sup>359</sup>

These ‘relational’ and ‘littoral’ qualities make words and talking key components of our creative activities: we interact, converse, discuss and share. We also materialise and print words; words

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<sup>355</sup> For information about these projects visit our website: [www.mackenna-and-janssen.net](http://www.mackenna-and-janssen.net), accessed October 16, 2015, <http://www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/Projects.html>.

<sup>356</sup> Only weeks after we met Tracy had to leave for Japan. During her five week absence we faxed back and forth daily, growing closer through writing and drawing. Two imaginary characters who were to become part of our work, emerged: Ed Vent and Ellis MacMeisje, *Ed and Ellis*.

<sup>357</sup> The documentation of our projects is a continuous subject of debate between us. We are acutely aware that a couple of images can’t in any way comprehensively capture the quality and nature of our wide-ranging activities undertaken during our public orientated works. Please bear this in mind while engaging with the still images of our work presented in *The Museum Within Us*. How do we record the different voices and experiences and how do we enable people to engage with the essence of our work afterwards? (To be continued.)

<sup>358</sup> Claire Doherty, “Naming a Practice,” 29.

<sup>359</sup> .Ibid.

make up one of several languages we use in our art and are part of a far more complicated language, a language constructed of several languages; textual but also visual, sensory, physical and spatial.

Directing a social space created for temporary use is indeed also an important aspect of our approach, as pointed out by Doherty, but beyond our interest in social interaction and education, we love touching materials, making objects and installations, creating still and moving images, undertaking research, and enjoy juxtaposing artefacts and collaging text and images; all activities that we can do without any audience in sight. But when we do these things in a public setting we see it as our role to create welcoming, multi-sensory and visually engaging environments but without suggesting that we offer the prospect of full, shared authorship. What we provide are opportunities for exchange and reflection in constructed temporary sites where events are staged, and what lives within us is exposed through words, objects, images and presence.

Through temporary discursive environments we enable audiences to add their voices, for example, to text blankets. We set the framework and guide the process, but not the content; and depend on the audience for meaningful contributions. Participatory offerings can also be disappointing at times. To lessen reliance on what is uttered by visitors we began to give our own voice more prominence and started exploring a new visual language, which resulted in a series of video and slide projections such as *Eighty Years and One Day*, part of the *WAR AS EVER!* exhibition. *Differences under the Skin* (2000), the first two channel video installation, was shown alongside a public studio as part of the *Ed and Ellis in Ever Ever Land* exhibition at CCA in Glasgow<sup>360</sup> which explored Scottish identity from the perspective of Tracy's Scottish-Italian family. It marked a shift in our work; keen to use our own everyday experiences as a source, we exposed a more private dimension in our art. This confronting of the 'public' and the 'general' with the 'private' and the 'personal' has become a recognisable feature in our practice.

The art of encounter is extensively debated. Discussion around social art practices tends to focus on interaction with the public and often neglects other aspects of a more artistic nature such as chosen media, use of materials, modes of display and spatial arrangement. The notion of 'the public' is just one of the themes that Tracy and I explore in our shared practice.

Grant Kester foregrounds the political potential of the dialogical practices he discusses in his frequently cited book *Conversation Pieces*. Nicolas Bourriaud's concept of 'relational aesthetics'<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> 26 October -23 December, 2001

<sup>361</sup> Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods, (les presses du réel, 2002).

that emphasises 'conviviality' has been extensively questioned by Claire Bishop who argues that the exchanges that unfold as part of art projects are less cosy than suggested by Bourriaud. She highlights the unease, awkwardness and in some cases discomfort that occurs between the artist, participants and wider public. In her publication with the provocative title *Artificial Hells* Bishop takes Rikrit Tiravanija's work as an example. The following quote refers to a work called *Untitled, 1993 (flädlesuppe)* that involved the creation of a social environment for cooking and shared meals and that was in use only in the week before the exhibition<sup>362</sup> opened. "One of the paradoxes of Tiravanija's practice is that in intensifying convivial relations for a small group of people (in this case, the exhibiting artists), it produces greater exclusivity vis-à-vis the general public."<sup>363</sup>

Bishop's analysis of participatory practices foregrounds the troubled relationship between artists and various types of publics. In making the blanket projects, we have learned to consider audiences carefully. Over the years we have shifted away from a continuous sustained presence in the exhibition space to more considered, organised encounters with different groups of audiences. Focussed, subject-led gatherings have proven to be most meaningful and more productive. These allow for the integration of our educational roles<sup>364</sup> in creative explorations that include research, production, presentation and exchange.

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<sup>362</sup> Backstage, 1993, Hamburger Kunstverein.

<sup>363</sup> Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London/New York: Verso, 2012), 209.

<sup>364</sup> Tracy and I both teach at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design, University of Dundee.

This image shows a page from our visual publication *Till Now*<sup>365</sup> with images of the *WAR IS OVER!* project at the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zürich, Switzerland in 1999-2000. A performative installation was realised during an uncharacteristically peaceful period in human history, hence the title of the exhibition, curated by Rein Wolfs: *PEACE*.<sup>366</sup> Our contribution included a remake of one of John and Yoko's *War is Over!* posters which Lennon and Ono initiated for their early 70s peace campaign, a photograph of us re-staging one of the 'Bed-in' happenings and the making of a text blanket in the museum that incorporated audience contributions made through live conversation, and text sent to us via email and fax.

*WAR IS OVER!* inspired the beginning of *The John & Yoko Drawings*, an ongoing series of drawings, posters, wall paintings and badges that address a wide range of social, political and cultural issues. *WAR AS EVER!* was the second work in this series. The text was executed as a wall painting for the exhibition *Normality is Obscene Nowadays* (2003) at the Kunstvereniging Diepenheim<sup>367</sup>. This exhibition opened three days before our daughter was born and a couple of weeks after the beginning of the Iraq war. The significance of this information will become clear when we reach the main subject in this room, the *WAR AS EVER!* exhibition which took place in 2012, nine years after making the wall painting.

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<sup>365</sup> *Till Now* was published by Ed & Ellis Productions in 1999 and gave a visual overview of three years of collaborative practice in 171 small images.

<sup>366</sup> *PEACE*, 6 November 1999 - 9. January 2000.

<sup>367</sup> Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen, *Normality is Obscene Nowadays*, Kunstvereniging Diepenheim, the Netherlands, 29 March–10 May 2003.

IV - 04

## SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL

You may remember that in the second room of *The Museum Within Us* I introduced a quote from Voltaire's *Micromégas* story. Here it is again, because these words encapsulate something that is key to the *WAR AS EVER!* exhibition and that captures an observation that has a saddening and ongoing relevance today: "For instance do you realize that as I speak a hundred thousand lunatics of our species, wearing helmets, are busy killing or being killed by a hundred thousand other animals in turbans, and that everywhere on Earth this is how we have carried on since time immemorial?"<sup>368</sup>

This assemblage reveals how the recycling of our own work is an important part of our practice.

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<sup>368</sup> This closing citation is taken from Voltaire, *Micromégas*, trans.Theo Cuffe, (London: Syrens, Penguin, 1994), 30. This story also triggered the ongoing poster project *Micromegas*. See image II - 21 and II - 22.

## COLLECTING WAR AND TERROR

With this fifth image in Room IV of *The Museum Within Us*, and after alluding to it several times, we have finally arrived at the starting point of *WAR AS EVER!*, the Van Kittensteyn album which is in the collection of the Atlas Van Stolk.<sup>369</sup> More than five hundred prints record key historical moments during the so-called “Eighty Years’ War” (1568-1648), the Dutch struggle for independence from Spain, and portraits of monarchs and military commanders who played major roles during a string of wars. The album also contains some pictures that depict related events in other parts of Europe such as France, Germany and Britain. This religious and prolonged war wasn’t just affecting the Low Lands.

During a research visit, we met the director of the Atlas Van Stolk, Lina van der Wolde. After discussing the project *Shotgun Wedding*<sup>370</sup> that we were developing at the time for the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in Edinburgh about the union between England and Scotland, Lina invited us to explore the Van Kittensteyn album. Most of the prints that relate to British history had been removed at a certain moment in time and have probably been sold to other collectors. One of the pictures showing the beheading of Mary, Queen of Scots was traced back to the same Scottish National Portrait Gallery.<sup>371</sup>

Although exhibitions featuring material from the collection are organised on an ongoing basis, the main focus of the Atlas Van Stolk is collecting, preservation and research. Due to the changing funding climate in the Netherlands the organisation has come under pressure to intensify its public role and to broaden the range of audiences to which it reaches out.

As one of the most important but also the most precious objects in the collection the album could be shown only behind glass, with one double page spread open at a time.

Lina van der Wolde recognised the potential of an artists’ engagement with the artefact as a way to bring to attention the current relevance of this hidden treasure. “War scenes are in the majority. This has inspired Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen to use a selection from Van Kittensteyn’s prints as a point of departure for their project *WAR AS EVER!* After all, the album proves that war

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<sup>369</sup> The Atlas Van Stolk is a collection of approximately 250,000 pictures which is regarded as one of the most important collections on Dutch history. The timber merchant, Abraham van Stolk founded the collection around 1830.

<sup>370</sup> *Shotgun Wedding*, 2007, February 9 - May 6, 2007.

<sup>371</sup> Lina van der Wolde, “The Van Kittensteyn Album,” in Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen, *WAR AS EVER!* (Eindhoven: Onomatopée, 2013), 95.



is a common phenomenon of all times. The album has in fact documented half a century of European warfare with the Netherlands as the centre from which the developments are observed.<sup>372</sup>

Lina van der Wolde's initial interest in our practice was stimulated by her subsequent visit to the *Shotgun Wedding* exhibition, which also dealt with a historical subject that, even after last year's Scottish Referendum outcome, continues to be relevant today.

On our website we describe the work that was exhibited exactly three hundred years after the signing of the Act of Union in 1707. "The video installation and publication *Shotgun Wedding* explore the Union of 1707 between Scotland and England and engage the various conflicts that run through the history of Scotland and Britain. Material of varied cultural standing, such as artworks, artefacts, photographs and documents from the collections of the Scottish National Galleries, Edinburgh, the Atlas Van Stolk, Museum Rotterdam and a range of other sources was reproduced through video to create six different filmic juxtapositions. Close-up filming of the artworks and artefacts explored hidden narratives and emphasised the pictorial and the visual qualities of the objects rather than their historical and political status."<sup>373</sup>

During the research and development stage of *Shotgun Wedding* we collaborated with Christopher A. Whatley, at the time Professor of Scottish History at Dundee University. Aware that artefacts such as paintings, drawings and engravings, informed many of his findings Whatley was keen to share his research with artists. His book, *The Scots and the Union*,<sup>374</sup> amongst other sources, informed our understanding of this contentious subject matter.

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<sup>372</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>373</sup> *Shotgun Wedding*, Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen's website: [mackenna-and-janssen.net](http://mackenna-and-janssen.net), accessed October 18, 2015, [http://www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/Shotgun\\_Wedding.html](http://www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/Shotgun_Wedding.html).

<sup>374</sup> Christopher A. Whatley, *The Scots and the Union* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

## QUARTERED

Many of the hand-coloured sheets in the Van Kittensteyn album show shocking and violent scenes, battles, execution by decapitation and burning, slaughter, torture, plunder and fleeing refugees. The power of the pictures lies in what they record rather than in their artistic merit. The figures who populate the towns and the battle fields are schematic in nature and their colouring has been hastily done using a limited palette.

This etching of a horrific spectacle shows the quartering of the Huguenot Jean de Poltrot in Paris on March 18, 1563 and was made by Frans Hogenberg who, after he fled Leuven, based himself in Cologne.<sup>375</sup>

Most of the pictures of battles and sieges in the Van Kittensteyn album were produced by Hogenberg who was also the publisher and distributor of the etchings. He “gathered his information from on-the scene informants.”<sup>376</sup> notes van der Wolde. This approach makes of these depictions of historical events a form of journalism, of contemporary war reporting and a manifestation of early news media. These were considerations during the development of our visual interpretation of the Van Kittensteyn album. Combined with the desire expressed by the Atlas Van Stolk to reach a broader audience, we decided to shift the presentation context of *WAR AS EVER!*, to look for a more contemporary setting in which to present the work.

The Nederlands Fotomuseum is a relatively young institution, founded in 2003 and located in Rotterdam. On the museum’s website one can read, “With its impressive collection of more than 5,000,000 photos, the Nederlands Fotomuseum in Rotterdam is the leading national museum of photography in the Netherlands. The museum shows every facet of photography: documentary and experimental, contemporary and historical. In addition to exhibitions of major names in Dutch and international photography, the museum regularly presents work from its in-house collection. The collection comprises an important part of the Netherlands’ visual heritage.”<sup>377</sup> Frits Gierstberg, Head of Exhibitions at the Fotomuseum, immediately understood why his museum would be the right place to show our reworking of historical war reportage and to bring together two different collections each covering a different era in Dutch history.

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

<sup>377</sup> “About the Museum,” Nederlands Fotomuseum website, accessed October 18, 2015, <http://webshop.nederlandsfotomuseum.nl/en/about-the-museum/>.

The Atlas Van Stolk and the Nederlands Fotomuseum, although based in the same city, had had no previous dealings with each other. As part of our quest to present our reworked selection of the van Kittensteyn album in a contemporary environment we brokered a relationship between two institutions that are completely different in terms of objectives, approaches to exhibition making and how they are funded. We quickly realised, beyond the fact that they represent different types of museum, that both art organisations share a particular concern in that they collect and present visual culture. We also observed that many of the images accumulated by both institutions are visual records of violent historical events. Frans Hogenberg's etched witness accounts and Geert van Kesteren's photographs<sup>378</sup> of the aftermath of the Iraq war have similar purposes in that they show what we don't want to see, and tell what we don't want to hear.

The explicit, not for the faint-hearted, imagery compiled in the Van Kittensteyn album confronted us with a huge dilemma. How can this kind of gruesome material be represented to an audience without putting them off, how can we as artists without firsthand experience of war mediate pictures of suffering and how can we as artists make these historical images evoke meaningful reflection and speak to us today?

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<sup>378</sup> See image bank on the Nederlands Fotomuseum website, accessed October 18, 2015  
[http://collectie.nederlandsfotomuseum.nl/en/collections/image-bank/indeling/grid?q\\_searchfield=geert+van+kesteren&language=en-GB](http://collectie.nederlandsfotomuseum.nl/en/collections/image-bank/indeling/grid?q_searchfield=geert+van+kesteren&language=en-GB).

After five slow years of development and by presenting the outcomes of our exploration of conflict and war, answers to the above questions emerged. The project we envisaged included the juxtaposition of digitally reworked pictures of sections of the Van Kittensteyn album with fragments of news reports on Iraq published in the Dutch and British newspapers that I bought on April 1, 2003, the day that our daughter Esméemilja was born. Before visitors were confronted with a constantly changing, projected collage of enlarged details of etchings and newspaper pages we introduced these combined representations of violence through quotes from *Regarding the Pain of Others* by Susan Sontag<sup>379</sup> in the form of text posters. Furthermore, a performative component took elements of *WAR AS EVER!* beyond the museum gallery, onto the streets of Rotterdam and the world wide web, embodied in the character of *The Print Pedlar*. To ensure the project's afterlife we co-designed and produced a publication in printed format.

Tracy and I described the above in a slightly more distancing language in an abstract for a journal article titled *WAR AS EVER! Art Practice as Interface*.<sup>380</sup> "Through a process of visual interpretation and photographic re-presentation and the activation of a performing character in the public domain, the artists explored similarities between historical and recent political and religious conflicts leading to the repositioning of the collection in a contemporary social perspective and its presentation in a museum distinct in nature and remit to that of Museum Rotterdam, the Nederlands Fotomuseum, Rotterdam. The project's framework activated an art practice as the interface between museum culture and the problematics of the public sphere, to action ideas and practices of engaged citizenship on the part of the artist-researchers. Consideration of diverse curatorial approaches, experiments in exhibition practice and the public presentation of artistic research were enabled through a programme for exhibition, dialogue and exchange, and blogging. Testing a critical model and strategies for linking artistic research and the contested concept of 'the public', the coming together of two museums and the extending of their normal domains was negotiated by the artists."<sup>381</sup> .

Initially, we had hoped to show the Van Kittensteyn album in the Nederlands Fotomuseum, but due to the frailty of the object the Atlas Van Stolk presented the book in their own museum exhibition space with the appropriate climate control required for its preservation, during *WAR AS EVER!*

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<sup>379</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

<sup>380</sup> Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen, "WAR AS EVER! Art Practice as Interface," *The International Journal of the Inclusive Museum*, 6 (2013), 9-19.

<sup>381</sup> *ibid*, 9.

IV - 08

## WRITING ON THE WALL

Our project had progressed from us looking at horrendous depictions of conflict and trauma, and the doubt and bewilderment resulting from this, to an exhibition in a photography museum that would establish a link between a historical war which ended in the seventeenth century, and a recent war that unfolded far away from our secure lives in Europe.

The structure of the project was shared with visitors in the form of a diagramme, written in Dutch with white chalk, on the grey painted museum wall nearest to the entrance of the two exhibitions spaces *WAR AS EVER!* occupied.

IV - 09

## WELCOME TO THE HORROR SHOW

The following series of images and some textual information will guide you through the exhibition. This is the entrance area with a two-channel projection in the background. The diagrammatic wall drawing<sup>382</sup> faces the plywood panel.

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<sup>382</sup> See previous image V - 08.

IV - 10

## VOYEURS

Tracy and I designed these text posters based on extracts from *Regarding the Pain of Others* by Susan Sontag. The digital prints were placed on two panels, each 240 x 960 cm. Functioning both as warning and disclaimer, Sontag's observations prepared the visitors for what they were about to look at. The choice of confronting the audience in this manner reflected our own unease with exploring images of suffering for artistic purposes. The ten posters, together titled *The Susan Sontag Posters*, were "...the result of a close reading by the artists of Sontag's second book on photography, in which she confronts mankind with its lust for horrific images, whilst simultaneously exposing a picture's ability to variously stultify, incite violence and stimulate dissent."<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>383</sup> Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen, *WAR AS EVER! Art Practice as Interface*, 15-16.

## A VOICE BADGERS THE AUDIENCE

One's own spectatorship, the act of looking, became a primary subject due to the presence of *The Susan Sontag Posters*. This foregrounding of a critical aspect of *WAR AS EVER!* narrowed the gap between the artists, the site of presentation, the institution and the activated audience. We wanted to share our discomfort with our own act of looking at other people's suffering and the dilemma's that come with making art out of human misery and violence. Is the moral desire to remind people of something they might want to forget justifiable? Heeding Jacques Rancière, who wrote with theatre in mind, "Even if the playwright or director does not know what she wants the spectator to do, she at least knows one thing: she knows that she must *do one thing* - overcome the gulf separating activity from passivity."<sup>384</sup>

Is there not a danger of becoming patronising? One could argue that the red and white invitations "to pay attention, to reflect, to learn, to examine"<sup>385</sup> could have had an effect opposite to that intended. Indeed, some members of the public must have experienced these reflective reminders as obstacles that inhibited them from proceeding through the metal mesh curtain that separated them from images of other people's pain. Visitors were given a choice of whether to engage, or not, with the disturbing combination of beauty and horror. It was up to them to continue their leisurely stroll ... or to resist.

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<sup>384</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, (London & New York: Verso, 2009), 12.

<sup>385</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 104.



IV - 12

## THE COLD CURTAIN

There were two reasons for placing a physical barrier between the posters on the plywood panel in the second room and the projection. Firstly, it enabled us to create two separate spaces each with its own light level. The texts obviously needed bright light while the double-screen projection *Eighty Years and One Day* required a certain degree of darkness. Secondly, at the point of entry to that part of the room where violent and horrific imagery was presented, we wanted to give the visitor a multi-sensory experience.

IV - 13

FROM THE OTHER SIDE

The interlocking loops of the curtain resemble the woven metal of a hauberk. When activated by a body passing through, the sound of fine steel strings chiming against each other is emitted. “To experience the works, the visitor had to navigate the museum spaces, crossing through a fine shimmering floor-to-ceiling chain-link curtain, the delicate physical and sonic impact occurring simultaneously with the reflex opening and closing of one’s eyes, exposing in an instant more artworks.”<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen, *WAR AS EVER! Art Practice as Interface*, 16.

PARTY AND PAIN

“The large scale slide projection *Eighty Years and One Day* showed in detail a selection of the Van Kittensteyn prints alongside excerpts of newspaper photographs reporting the Iraq war. Bought in Britain and the Netherlands on 1st April 2003”,<sup>387</sup> as already shared with you, this was the joyous day that our daughter Esméemilja came into our life. That same day images of war were splattered across newspaper front covers, followed by bountiful pages proclaiming death and destruction. Public and private clashed very loudly.

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<sup>387</sup> *ibid.*

APPEAR AND DISAPPEAR

*Eighty Years and One Day* is comprised of two grids, together spanning 300 x 800 cm containing fragments, rectangular framed details of images each of which change independently to cause multiple combinations of images; records of two different but, at the same time, acutely similar wars appear and disappear endlessly<sup>388</sup> maintaining a slow, soundless rhythm.

“The Album’s pictures, enlarged through digital manipulation (the original hand-colouring exaggerated) were juxtaposed with black and white photojournalist images that belong to a canon that nullifies or skews how conflicts are represented, foregrounding an un-real quality to simultaneously sanitise the act of witnessing.”<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>388</sup> Ten minutes, looped.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

HISTORICAL SIMILARITY

The idea of historical similarity formed the basis for the “comparative method of lecturing”,<sup>390</sup> developed by the German art historian Heinrich Wölfflin, writes Dan Adler in his text about Hanne Darboven. “Similarly, by comparing images from two art historical periods in a synchronic arrangement, or an ‘on-the-table’ ordering, Wölfflin tried, with the help of photography, to construct relationships between the images that, as the products of an analytical, empirical gaze, had the rhetorical impact of historical ‘facts’ for the reader or audience.”<sup>391</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> Dan Adler, *Hanne Darboven: Cultural History 1880-1983* (London: Afterall, 2009), 48.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

## WAR AGAINST WAR!

Despite our belief that art can't change the world we were willing to embrace the role of the moral artist, as discussed in Room III, perhaps hoping humbly that our exhibition would have a moral purpose and could be understood as a soft cry against war. Not as brutal, but just faintly similar to what the German pacifist Ernst Friedrich hoped to achieve when he published in 1924 his *Krieg dem Kriege!* (War against War!).

"A photograph can't coerce," wrote Susan Sontag in her discussion of photojournalists such as Don McCullin acting as witnesses, "It won't do the moral work for us. But it can start us on the way."<sup>392</sup>

Alex Danchev, in writing on art and politics and good and evil in the modern world noted "Hope that there is, or will be, an audience of sentient spectators, viewers, readers, absorbed in the work: a community, a moral community, for whom it stands up and who will stand up for it. Art is the highest form of hope, as the painter Gerhard Richter said,"<sup>393</sup> Danchev goes on to quote Henry James "We work in the dark - we do what we can - we give what we have. Our doubt is our passion and our passion is our task. The rest is the madness of art."<sup>394</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> Susan Sontag, "Witnessing," in *Don McCullin* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2003), 17.

<sup>393</sup> Alex Danchev, *On Art and War and Terror*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 3.

<sup>394</sup> Henry James, "The Middle Years" (1893), in *The Author of Beltraffio* (New York: Scribner's, 1909), 105, cited in Alex Danchev, *On Art and War and Terror*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 5.

IF THERE'S SMOKE, THERE'S FIRE

The choice of using a grid and two screens derived from previously produced (soundless) multi-screen works such as *Easing Strangers* (2003)<sup>395</sup> and *Growth, Form and the Inevitability of Herself* (2004).<sup>396</sup> Interested in the space between still and moving image we have developed a working method that involves filming images close up and presenting the resulting videos as two linked split screen projections. Instead of creating a linear or continuous stream of moving images we embrace fragmentation and discontinuity, adding a complexity to the work that obstructs the gaze's desire to identify one unifying focal point in a projection.

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<sup>395</sup> Commissioned by Stichting Voorheen de Gemeente, Leeuwarden, the Netherlands.

<sup>396</sup> Commissioned by CCA Glasgow for the Entente Cordiale Centenary and produced and presented by artconnexion, Lille, France.

IV - 19

BLEAK AND BLACK

*Eighty Years and One Day* was different from our earlier projection work in that it was constructed entirely of still images and combined two different frame sizes. A new structural component was introduced in the form of black rectangles, to evoke a mournful mood and to offer the viewer moments of visual rest.



IV - 20

BEELDEN STORM (IMAGE/STATUE STORM)<sup>397</sup>

In an outburst of iconoclastic fury in the summer of 1566 Calvinist Protestants destroyed many religious sculptures and pictures in Catholic churches. This unprecedented act of iconoclasm took place in the context of the Protestant Reformation. The colour images on the right show the 'beeldenstormers' in the Church of Our Lady in Antwerp, which at that time belonged to the Netherlands.

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<sup>397</sup> The Dutch word 'beeld' has three meanings: image, sculpture and statue.

IV - 21

REFUGEES AS EVER

Images speak.

IV - 22

## BACK INTO THE LIGHT

On our tour through *WAR AS EVER!* we missed out a wall with a hand written text and the costume of *The Print Pedlar*. On our way back to the exit we can see this wall behind the curtain in the distance. *The Print Pedlar* character, who was performed by Tracy, came into being as a result of our ambition to take *WAR AS EVER!* outside the museum and into the city's public domain.

## BLOGGING PEDLAR

Based on the historical figure of a street vendor, *The Print Pedlar's* blogging enabled us, via Tracy, to engage with audiences beyond the confines of both museums. The idea of the social encounter was taken a step further, out of the gallery space and onto the streets of Rotterdam.

Frits Gierstberg noted that expanding the *WAR AS EVER!* exhibition from the Nederlands Fotomuseum to other platforms raised questions regarding the relationship between museum and audiences, "The decision to create the character of a 'hawker' who entered into conversation with individual 'visitors' placed the traditional role of the museum as an institutional mediator – including the traditional functions of its staff such as educators and curators – in a new light."<sup>398</sup>

Gierstberg doesn't really expand on his observation but during twenty years of practice we have gathered first-hand experience of a wide range of institutions, some of which took their audiences for granted, sometimes displaying a disinterest that bordered on arrogance. Many public art galleries and museums struggle to realise meaningful relationships with their visitors despite new feedback mechanisms (that are often requirements imposed by funders), a proliferation of educational activities, use of social media and increased numbers of guided tours. Our experience is that through artist-led interventions new types of meaningful connections can be brokered and new audiences can be reached.

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<sup>398</sup> Frits Gierstberg, "War as Ever! in the Nederlands Fotomuseum," in Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen, *WAR AS EVER!* (Eindhoven: Onomatopée, 2013), 78.

GEEN GELUL LIJST 0

In 1998 we established in Schiedam, the Netherlands, the fake political party List 0 with the actor John Buijsman taking up the role of candidate Koos van der Sluys. This arose out of an invitation by the Stedelijk Museum Schiedam to explore its troubled relationship with its publics. By campaigning on the streets with candidate Koos, we were able to stimulate conversations with hugely varied groups of people about their ambitions for Schiedam and the role of a locally situated museum of national importance.

The party's headquarters occupied a room in the museum normally used for exhibitions. The audience was lured in by us appearing in campaigning gear and positioned in front of the museum crying "FREE COFFEE!" Upon entering, visitors could watch a documentary about Koos van der Sluys, which was also broadcast on regional television, and listen to the Museum staff's *The Shadows* tribute band rehearse in the temporary social space during their lunch breaks.

This project reached a lot of people who previously would not have considered visiting a museum of contemporary art. "Our art practice was situated within the fabric of daily life, with the encounter positioned at its heart. This participatory, collaborative practice utilised documentary methods both outwith and within the art institution – filming on the street, presentation in the museum - familiar to political campaigns but relatively unknown in the locality as art that engages directly with interpersonal relations and social realities. By foregrounding use and action we developed new methods through which the museum could connect with the changing perspectives of its audience."<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> *Ed and Ellis in Schiedam*, Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen's website: mackenna-and-janssen.net, accessed October 18, 2015, [http://www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/Ed\\_and\\_Ellis\\_in\\_Schiedam.html](http://www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/Ed_and_Ellis_in_Schiedam.html).

IV - 25

LOOK

Let us return now to our *WAR AS EVER!* campaigner, *The Print Pedlar*, who on her visits to a variety of mainly cultural destinations<sup>400</sup> carried a set of prints, which she used to trigger conversations about the experiences of war and violence, the inevitability of conflict, one's sense of powerlessness, and the role of art in mediating these topics. Photographs of images from the Nederlands Fotomuseum's collection and my family album were combined with visual material gathered from various sources during the research stage of the project.

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<sup>400</sup> Including the International Film Festival Rotterdam and the Rotterdam Art Fair.

HITLER'S DEMISE

This is the picture in the previous image that *The Print Pedlar* presented to people on the street. A postcard of *Him*<sup>401</sup>, a provocative sculpture by Maurizio Cattelan, is combined with a photograph by Cas Oorthuys (1908 - 1975) and a postcard of a photograph by Louise Lawler, *Adolf (Must be eight inches from the floor)*,<sup>402</sup> of Cattelan's *Him* in a shipping crate.<sup>403</sup>

Cas Oorthuys took hundreds of photographs during the German occupation. Living in Amsterdam and a member of the resistance, he recorded the impact of WWII on people's lives and the daily suffering that was endured as a result of violent oppression and deprivation. The images of dead people on the streets, people in hiding and skin-and-bone children during what is known in the Netherlands as the 'honger winter' (winter of hunger) evoke the heart-rending accounts of hardship relayed by my uncle George and aunt Mien who lived in Amsterdam during the war.

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<sup>401</sup> 2001, wax, human hair, suit, polyester resin, 101 x 41 x 53 cm.

<sup>402</sup> 2006, cibachrome, 73 x 57.5 cm.

<sup>403</sup> See Room I for more about Maurizio Cattelan and Louise Lawler. See image I - 04 for another Lawler photograph of a work by Cattelan.

IV - 27

ACE OF SPADES, AXIS OF EVIL<sup>404</sup>

The United States military produced a set of playing cards with portraits of Saddam Hussein and his government henchmen. The cards were produced when the U.S.-led alliance invaded Iraq in 2003 and were officially called 'personality identification playing cards.'

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<sup>404</sup> 'Axis of evil' was used by George W. Bush to describe governments that sponsor terrorism and look for ways to acquire weapons of mass destruction.



IV- 028

## WAR GAME

This is a photo on our studio computer-screen, an image by Ed van Wijk (1917-1992) from the Nederlands Fotomuseum's collection that shows four boys dressed up as soldiers, shortly after the liberation of the Netherlands on May the 5th 1945. Van Wijk's archived photo was given a new life in our project. The journey undertaken by this image started with the photographer's gaze, mediated via a mechanical device. Then, transformed into a negative to be printed on photographic paper, it was digitised years later and sent as bytes to our computer. Subsequently displayed on a screen that was photographed and the image slightly altered, it was finally printed again on paper, to be carried around by *The Print Pedlar* to meet the gaze of the viewer.

SEPARATED BY WAR

*The Print Pedlar's* black and white image series introduced an additional collection of visual material to provide new access points to *WAR AS EVER!* We regard our practice as an ongoing process of creative and intellectual explorations. The material we gather during the research and development stages of projects often become part of what we show and regularly reappear in new contexts or constellations. Incorporated images like this one revealed a personal connection with the subject matter. Both my parents lived through the traumas of WWII. Their experiences shaped my relationship with the world and informed my decision to refuse to serve in the Dutch army.<sup>405</sup>

This frame shows photographs of my mother sitting in the back garden of my grandparents' house, from a family album. She is celebrating her engagement to the absent man, Wim Janssen, who later became my father. He, at that moment, was serving as a soldier far, far away in the former Dutch East Indies.

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<sup>405</sup> In 1997 the Dutch parliament suspended mandatory military service but prior to this every man between the ages of 17 and 45 had to sacrifice sixteen months of their life to be trained as a soldier. As a result of my refusal I ended up working in a contemporary art gallery for eighteen months.

COLONIAL TROUBLE

Here my father appears in a military garage in New Guinea, printed in a book<sup>406</sup> about the soldiers serving in the Dutch East Indies. During his stay Wim and his fellow soldiers experienced a radical shift against a global political backdrop, which signalled the replacement of the Japanese enemy by an Indonesian movement for independence. This change in the political landscape had a profound impact on public opinion and how the soldiers, who left voluntarily to become liberators, were perceived at home. The bitterness that arose from this conundrum and the lack of recognition after his return was slowly and painfully expressed during the final years of my father's life.

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<sup>406</sup> Willem van der Poll, *Kerels van der Daad* (The Hague: W. Van Hoeve, 1947). 'kerels van der daad' means, men of deed.

IV - 31

## LEADERSHIP

As discussed previously recycling, shifting contexts and re-presentation are key curatorial strategies embedded in our practice. Tracy and I used this picture by Pete Souza in our two channel slide projection *Seeing is Believing*.<sup>407</sup> We watch Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton and their staff, while they watch the killing of bin Laden in 2011.

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<sup>407</sup> See image II - 16.

## COLLECTIVE TRUTHS AND UNTRUTHS

*The Print Pedlar* outfit was on display in the exhibition space during the periods that Tracy was not roaming Rotterdam. Visitors to the exhibition and the people that *The Pedlar* engaged on her forays were invited to visit the blog where they could read her regularly updated observations.<sup>408</sup> Tracy's blog swelled unintentionally to more than ten thousand words, combined with images that together make a comprehensive series of reflections on art, conflict, war, images, history, memory, etc. Here are some of the words she wrote on February 25th, 2012: "This subject of war belongs to the past and the present and the future. It has its own symbols, icons and archives, complicated messy personal and public, individual and collective truths and untruths that shape the pictures and tales we know as ours. The skill in understanding lies in our ability to scratch away at the surface, to bring to light things that would otherwise be passed over, silted up. And herein lies the artist's skill – strategies of opposition, subversion and worming-in can reveal and offer to others a space of resistance and revelation through unexpected combinations of material and meaning, when the not-so-well-defined associative and open-ended can positively slow-down time (Penelope weaving a funereal robe by day, undoing by night).

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<sup>408</sup> *The Print Pedlar's Blog* on Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen's website: [mackenna-and-janssen.net](http://www.mackenna-and-janssen.net), accessed October 18, 2015, [http://www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/The\\_Print\\_Pedlars\\_Blog/The\\_Print\\_Pedlars\\_Blog.html](http://www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/The_Print_Pedlars_Blog/The_Print_Pedlars_Blog.html).

SLOW CHARACTER IN FAST TIMES

At the end of a conversation the “slow character in fast times”<sup>409</sup> gifted to each person she chatted with a *WAR AS EVER!* badge and a card with a hand written message based on the exchange that had just taken place.

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<sup>409</sup>Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen, “WAR AS EVER! Art Practice as Interface,” 18.

## EXIT, TIME TO REFLECT

Tracy and I have re-calibrated our presence in the exhibition space during projects. While continuing to be present, exchanges around the subjects and interests that drive our projects have become more focussed. Merging our educational roles with that of artist and researcher we curate events that brings together subject specialists with relevant publics.

The seminar *WAR AS EVER? The artist and the museum in the conflict zone* provided a platform for discussion around the representation of conflict and war, and the role of cultural producers in mediating this difficult and emotive subject matter. Chaired by Frits Gierstberg, speakers included art historian and curator Brigitte van der Sande, Lina van der Wolde, Director Atlas van Stolk, photojournalist Geert van Kesteren and the Senior Curator of Collections & Research at the Nederlands Fotomuseum Flip Bool. Tracy and I also spoke, which gave us the opportunity to reflect on our exhibition and its ambitions, and to hear people's opinions about *WAR AS EVER!* Participants included students from DJCAD's MFA programme, which enabled us to continue the practice of embedding our work in our teaching.

"This art practice offers museums and higher art education a model for collaboration and the promotion of exchange between disciplines, collections and people. The artists' abilities to function as inter-institutional mediators and cultural agents can assist the student to position their work in an informed understanding of the museum as a key site for presenting and creating cultural narratives. This project, made possible through constant discussion with the museums' staff, engendered the distinction between more democratic and participatory approaches, offering concurrent platforms of dissent and consent against attitudes concentrating on a fixed notion of museumship – whether a curatorial or artistic one..."<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen, "WAR AS EVER! Art Practice as Interface," 13-14.

IV - 35

## THE WAR AS EVER BOOK

Producing printed matter is an enjoyable and important component of our creative output. Interested in exploring different formats for presentation, Tracy and I always aim to produce an analogue printed work that reflects a project's qualities in another form. Publishing enables us to reach those interested audiences that were not in a position to visit the exhibitions or to participate in the related events.



NEWSPAPER PAPER

Benefitting from a longstanding creative partnership with the graphic designer Marco Stout we achieved a publication<sup>411</sup> that brought together the different aspects of the *WAR AS EVER!* project, including the voices of Frits Gierstberg and Lina van der Wolde. The quality of the paper used is very close in weight and appearance to newsprint paper.

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<sup>411</sup> Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen, *WAR AS EVER!* (Eindhoven: Onomatopee, 2013).

WASHI TAPED CONCLUSION

Our text contribution<sup>412</sup> consisted of a collage of taped, recycled and annotated texts and images. The image shows one of the twelve spreads. I have reproduced two paragraphs for your convenience. An assembled conclusion:

“A range of artworks was created that exposed juxtaposing curatorial methodologies. Audiences were offered a series of correlations from which to make new interpretations, or 'meaning'. Operating in parallel, the artists' roles and principles of behaviour as - author, collaborator, curator, director, writer, researcher, commentator - revealed processes of cultural production. The initial process of developing the artworks was one of visual interpretation through (photographic) re-presentation. Exposing visual similarities between the Van Kittensteyn Album's presentation of historical, political and religious conflicts and the ways in which current war photography images show war and violence, led to the repositioning of the Van Kittensteyn artifact in a contemporary social perspective.”<sup>413</sup>

“The exhibition's ecology of works in texts and images opened rather than censored the visual stimuli of a consumerist society that daily assaults us and with which we are now so familiar. The correlation of posters, double screen slide projection, performing character, blog, photographs, conference and publication together situated the Album in a position of contemporary relevance. This was achieved by showing the similarities of reporting in 17th Century Holland with that of today, questioning the possibility of reform of a news media that seems to thrive on disaster, relishing horror and counting on income generated from conflict.”<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen, *WAR AS EVER!* (Eindhoven: Onomatopee, 2013), unpaginated.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

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WAR AS EVER FOREVER

And the message lives on, pinned as a gift on the tops and lapels of many.

But let us now move on to Room V, where I will introduce you to the final exhibition in *The Museum Within Us*.

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# V

## The Museum of Loss and Renewal

Looking at well-being and well-dying through objects and encounters

The Museum Within Us

## LOSS AND RENEWAL

The final room in *The Museum Within Us* has now been reached and the focus will be on *The Museum of Loss and Renewal*, a durational project which provides a platform for the exploration of the role of art in mediating issues around wellbeing, dying, material culture and memory.

The discussion of the project *WAR AS EVER!* in the previous room revealed some of the curatorial strategies Tracy and I apply as part of our activities. In *The Museum Within Us* 'curatorial' is understood as something that refers to a variety of activities that include amongst others staging, exhibition, creating displays and juxtapositions of images and objects, devising activities such as talks, seminars and teaching sessions, creating collections or archives, visually interpreting objects and images.

Creating new readings by shifting an artefact's context is also covered in *The Museum Within Us* by the term 'curatorial'. In the *WAR AS EVER!* project this was made manifest through "the repositioning of the Van Kittensteyn artefact in a contemporary social perspective."<sup>415</sup> By incorporating a selection of images from the Van Kittensteyn album and combining these with contemporary imagery, sixteenth century depictions of violence were given new relevance. This re-contextualisation of existing material is also a key feature of *The Museum of Loss and Renewal*.

Found, and newly created, objects are invested with new meanings through the creation of displays that take the artists' own experience of daily life as a starting point. Repeated references to museum culture in our practice led to the development of a durational work of art that takes the museum as its form and mode of operation. Similarly to *WAR AS EVER!* but more explicitly, *The Museum of Loss and Renewal* operates as a site that merges art making, showing and reflection; where practice, research and teaching meet. The notion of the public studio as location for exchange (as in the blanket projects) merged with the traditional function of the gallery as a place for exhibition.

The above will have given you an outline idea of *The Museum of Loss and Renewal*. As in each of the previous rooms you will be guided by a collection of images and my accompanying notes in the form of descriptions, quotations and reflections.

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<sup>415</sup> Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen, "WAR AS EVER! Art Practice as Interface," 14.

*The Museum of Loss and Renewal* is regarded as a developing 'memento mori', as reminder of what can't be avoided. The death of Wim, my father, here photographed with my mother Stien,<sup>416</sup> was a catalyst for making 'end of life' an important subject in our work. The experience of witnessing a process of illness and ultimately dying had a profound impact on the way our own lives came to be considered. The death of my father, and the subsequent deaths of my mother and of both Tracy's parents, compelled us to consider our own mortality. We came to realise that, submerged within our day-to-day business, full of pressures, pleasures and trivialities we had lost track of basic priorities. Stemming from a desire to turn the question of 'how to die well?' into something productive and even healing, we embarked on *LIFE IS OVER! if you want it*.

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<sup>416</sup> This photograph of my parents on Dam Plein in Amsterdam was taken shortly after my father's return from former Dutch East Indies, now the Republic of Indonesia. As you can see he is still wearing his military uniform.



## ART AS THERAPY

As artists we are privileged; Tracy and I were able to give form to our grief and experiences of loss. Developing an art project around the death of my father had a therapeutic effect. “*Life is Over! if you want it* is the exhibition project that arose from a prolonged period during which attempts were made to give place, name and form to death, through an exploration from the position of within, of the slow and seeping immersion in grieving and mourning in which I was engaged, as an individual and at the same time with my collaborative and life partner, Edwin Janssen”.<sup>417</sup>

The time and effort that the production of art often requires created the space we needed for an in-depth exploration of a complicated constellation of emotions, memories and experiences. Staging a discursive exhibition and focussed gatherings subsequently provided the opportunity to show, share and discuss experiences of mourning with others. Art became an enabler rather than a goal in itself.

Alain de Botton and John Armstrong propose, “art is a therapeutic medium that can help guide, exhort and console its viewers, enabling them to become better versions of themselves.”<sup>418</sup> Darien Leader also recognises a role for art in dealing with mourning and loss. He argues that the arts could be “a vital tool in allowing us to make sense of the losses inevitable in all our lives”<sup>419</sup> and that, “The arts exist to allow us to access grief and they do this by showing publicly how creation can emerge from the turbulence of a human life. In our unconscious use of the arts we have to go outside ourselves to get back inside.”<sup>420</sup>

Embracing this idea of art as enabler for questioning publicly the way we live and die we created a temporary room where death could live. Walter Benjamin observed, “Dying was once a public process in the life of the individual and a most exemplary one; think of the medieval pictures in which the deathbed has turned into a throne toward which the people press through the wide-open doors of the death house. In the course of modern times dying has been pushed further and further out of the perceptual world of the living. There used to be no house, hardly a room, in which

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<sup>417</sup> Tracy Mackenna, “LIFE, DEATH AND BEAUTY: Art as a Way of Accessing Grief,” in Michele Aaron, *Envisaging Death: Visual Culture and Dying* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 205.

<sup>418</sup> Alain de Botton and John Armstrong, *Art as Therapy*, (London/New York: Phaidon, 2013), 5.

<sup>419</sup> Darien Leader, *The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia and Depression*, (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 6.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid*, 87.

someone had not once died ... Today people live in rooms that have never been touched by death.”<sup>421</sup>

Without reducing our art to a singular purpose Tracy and I acknowledge the power of art to facilitate activities that could bring death back into ‘the perceptual world of the living’ and stimulate healing for artists and publics alike.

My father’s process of dying of cancer took approximately six months. The news of his approaching end coincided with the difficult birth of our son Erasmus. Life met death, but also beauty. My father bravely took control over his own demise and performed the act of-, assisted by a doctor.<sup>422</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer wrote, “It will generally be found that where the terrors of life come to outweigh the terrors of death a man will put an end to his life.”<sup>423</sup> David Hume’s perspective on this controversial subject takes the wider community into consideration when he states, “both prudence and courage should engage us to rid ourselves at once of existence when it becomes a burden. It is the only way that we can then be useful to society, by setting an example, which, if imitated, would preserve to every one his chance for happiness in life, and would effectually free him from all danger or misery.”<sup>424</sup> Both Schopenhauer and Hume would have felt empathy with my father.

Witnessing the dignified passing of a loved one led to the first of our projects that was completely informed by a familial experience, and that would pave the way for the birth of *The Museum of Loss and Renewal*.<sup>425</sup>

These drawings, the originals made with felt pen as part of the ongoing *John and Yoko Drawings*<sup>426</sup> series, were increased in scale and executed as wall paintings in the exhibition space.

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<sup>421</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Storyteller: Reflections on the works of Nikolai Leskov*, in *Illuminations*; ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, (London: Cape, 1970), 93.

<sup>422</sup> Euthanasia, which means ‘good death’ was legalised in the Netherlands in 2002 by the introduction of the ‘Termination of Life on Request and Assisted Suicide (Review Procedures) Act’. This act regulates the role of the doctor and describes the cases and specific circumstances under which euthanasia and physician assisted suicide are lawful.

<sup>423</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *On the suffering of the World*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 2004),54.

<sup>424</sup> David Hume, *On Suicide* (London: Penguin Books, 2005),11.

<sup>425</sup> *The Birth of the Museum* is the title of a book by Tony Bennet about how the museum evolved into the cultural institution we know today. We will come back to this book later.

<sup>426</sup> See image IV - 03 for more information about this work in progress.

TERRORS OF LIFE

But let me go back a step to inform you about the project that anticipated *The Museum of Loss and Renewal. LIFE IS OVER! (if you want it)* was situated in the Cooper Gallery,<sup>427</sup> the main exhibition space of Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design. As you already know, this is also the college where Tracy and I teach.

To accommodate a variety of activities we created an environment for presentation, production and exchange rather than an exhibition of finished artworks. The placement of new slide projections alongside wall paintings, borrowed historical artworks,<sup>428</sup> and a public studio made an environment for looking and engagement with different types of audiences, including students, around issues of life and death.

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<sup>427</sup> January 24 to February 14, 2009. *LIFE IS OVER!* was funded by the Wellcome Trust.

<sup>428</sup> *LIFE IS OVER!* included loans from the University of Edinburgh Fine Art Collection: *The Doctor's Visit*, Jan Steen, oil on canvas on panel (c.1660) and from the collection of Perth Museum & Art Gallery, Perth & Kinross Council: *Still Life with a Violin*, Franciscus Gysbrechts, oil on panel (c.1680); *Still Life with a Lobster*, Jan Davidsz. de Heem, oil on canvas (1606-1684); *War Baby, 1918*, Robert Henderson Blyth, oil on board (1945); *The Burial of the MacDonalds of Glencoe*, Colin Hunter, oil on canvas (1892); *Flower Study*, Abraham Breughel, oil on canvas (1671); *Death of a Pierrot*, William Strang, drawing, (undated); *A Human Sacrifice in a Morai in Otaheite, the Body of Tee, a Chief, as Preserved after Death in Otaheite*, from a series of engravings from Banks' New System of Geography, published by Royal Authority (undated).

## EXQUISITE CORPSE

Present in the gallery, work was produced through dialogic reflection on the exhibition and its themes, both visually and through in situ writing by Tracy. Conversations with visitors and two public events informed the resolution of a double screen projection that was a work in progress at the moment when *LIFE IS OVER!* opened. And once again we took up a curatorial role, where, by programming discursive and educational activities we created situations so that people could meet, debate and investigate. “A series of informal encounters with visitors was triggered by my daily presence when the psychological, philosophical and ideological qualities and the implications and impact of the representation of death, mourning and loss were discussed. Conversation released stories and countered how death is usually portrayed as abject, seeking out alternative concepts and views on the subject matter in a site where questions could be posed in safety, within a space for reflection. Students, colleagues and external participants, in proximity to my own reflections on the omnipresence yet simultaneous absence of death in our societies, released thought and opinion on how our society’s severance of the relationship between living and dead disallows the continuity of social interaction and forms of social life, when death is not regarded as an extension of life, actively not incorporated into the daily rituals of the living.”<sup>429</sup>

Three of the four images show participants in these events. The odd one out, the projection at the top left, could be watched in the entrance area of the gallery. *Life, Death and Beauty: Where Darwin Meets Courbet* (2009), is made up of 48 slides of photographed details of a collection of visual material such as postcards, drawings and small objects on the theme of life, death and beauty that were assembled in our studio: our version of a cabinet of curiosities.<sup>430</sup>

In staging this project the aim was to contribute to discussions around assisted dying in Scotland without recourse to propaganda. A series of four events including seminars, a symposium, an artists’ talk and *Exquisite Corpse; a Contemporary Unfolding* a collaborative performative response to *LIFE IS OVER!* by Master of Fine Art students enabled this to happen. Artworks were offered as conversation pieces and the exhibition as a creative site for interaction.

Jan Patience wondered in her article, published in *The Herald* the day before the project started, if public debate really could unfold when, “In 21st-century Britain, the mere mention in the media of

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<sup>429</sup> Tracy Mackenna, “LIFE, DEATH AND BEAUTY: art as a way of accessing grief,” 212-213.

<sup>430</sup> *Ed and Ellis in Schiedam*, Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen’s website: mackenna-and-janssen.net, accessed October 18, 2015, [http://www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/Life\\_Death\\_and\\_Beauty\\_Where\\_Darwin\\_Meets\\_Courbet.html](http://www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/Life_Death_and_Beauty_Where_Darwin_Meets_Courbet.html).

easing the often tortuous passage from life to death elicits such a vocal response that it can seem almost impossible to have a reasoned debate about the issue of suicide.”<sup>431</sup> Several other newspapers responded to the subject of the exhibition, which shifted the debate outside the confines of the gallery space.

Marc Horne included in his article for *Scotland on Sunday* a response to *LIFE IS OVER!* by Nick Wood, a spokesman for the Pro-Life pressure group Care Not Killing: “We are surprised and concerned that a highly controversial exhibition which supports euthanasia has been sponsored by the university and apparently has the endorsement of its authorities.”<sup>432</sup> Jan Patience had a point. The fact that we opened a debate was in itself regarded as controversial.

At the time this project took place social media such as Facebook and Twitter were not widely used. Nowadays it is much easier to reach audiences and interested parties beyond the gallery space without depending on the host organisation’s ability to promote a project. Social media has become increasingly important to how our artistic explorations are shared. Regardless, the project aroused considerable interest in the subject and *LIFE IS OVER!* has been discussed in art publications<sup>433</sup> and presented in essays<sup>434</sup> and at conferences.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> Jan Patience, “The end can be a beginning,” *The Herald*, January 23, 2009.

<sup>432</sup> Cited in, Marc Horne, “University backing for euthanasia exhibition,” *Scotland on Sunday*, February 1, 2009.

<sup>433</sup> Such as ‘EXIT Express, revista de información y debate sobre arte actual’, *Arte y Suicida*, #50, in *Arte y Suicida, la mañana es la nada*, Ron M Brown (author of *The Art of Suicide*, Reaktion). Our drawing *Die with Dignity*, 2009 was printed on the magazine cover.

<sup>434</sup> *Unpacking a collaborative practice: merging art, research and teaching*, European League of the Institutes of the Arts (ELIA), Teachers’ Academy, Sofia, Bulgaria, 2009; *Life is Over! If you want it: Using art to reflect on a family’s experience*, in *The Space Between: making connections in palliative care*, Highland Hospice conference, Inverness, 2009.

<sup>435</sup> *Artist-Led Curatorial Practice: Mediating Knowledge, Experience and Opinion in Museums and Higher Education Working Together: Challenges and Opportunities* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); *Life, Death and Beauty: Art as a way of accessing grief* in *Envisaging Death: Visual Culture and Dying* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2013); *Life, death and beauty: performative writing in visual art*, *ArtMonitor/ A Journal of Artistic Research*, 8, 2010, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

V - 05

LIFE, DEATH AND BEAUTY

"Illness, fear, decision; effect on you, effect on her, effect on us. You chose your way, without discussion, found the doctor, named the date."<sup>436</sup>

One of the key works in the exhibition, *Life, Death and Beauty: The Invisible Looks Back - Fear, No Fear* (2009),<sup>437</sup> combined two still image projections. The screen on the right shows a still-life, made by me before the start of the project, with objects such as a vase with purple tulips, my father's watch and a digital photo frame containing constantly changing images. The partner projection was developed by Tracy over the period of the exhibition. Excerpts of conversations with visitors and her own written reflections on the subject of life and death were photographed and added on a daily basis.<sup>438</sup>

"The nestling of the photographs within a still-life projection ignited the exhibition project and consequently enabled the creation of a reflective space that would slowly, over the project's duration, be filled within the partner projection. On the project's public opening the partner screen was in essence empty, lit only by a projected blank slide, physical presence marking out and holding open the space in which a work would develop out of the artists' occupancy of the gallery; it would be complete on the last day."<sup>439</sup>

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<sup>436</sup> Excerpt from texts written daily by Tracy Mackenna during exchanges with participants and added each day to *Life, Death and Beauty: The Invisible Talk Back - Fear, No Fear*.

<sup>437</sup> Double screen projection, 210 x 280 cm each, duration 05:00.

<sup>438</sup> See image V - 03 for the position of this work in the gallery space.

<sup>439</sup> Tracy Mackenna, "LIFE, DEATH AND BEAUTY: art as a way of accessing grief," 212.

Someone who attended the symposium about the role art can play in mediating issues around life and death was Paula McCormack, Director of Clinical and Education Services at The Highland Hospice in Inverness.<sup>440</sup> As a result of her participation the Hospice became a partner in our exploration of life, death and beauty.

*“The Museum of Loss and Renewal* has grown from that generous, open gesture made by the Hospice when Paula attended the *Life is Over! If you want it* symposium. Within the site of the exhibition, in the art college’s public gallery and in the university, Paula’s presence sealed the hopes we had had for the series of discursive events - that beyond those multi-disciplinary specialists we had invited, people unknown to us who sensed that their concerns could be opened up, would find their way to the exhibition project,<sup>441</sup> we wrote in the first publication for *The Museum of Loss and Renewal*.

Recognising the potency of our art practice in relation to the Hospice’s aim to encourage communities to discuss the difficult issues that arise from illness and dying, the Hospice team invited us to consider the organisation’s activities and their communities as the context for a project. “The Hospice offers us the possibility of contributing to a real situation, where an art practice activates the imagining, creating and developing of beneficial outcomes, while demonstrating that art as a propositional format can make the step towards implementation in the real.”<sup>442</sup>

The Highland Hospice describes its mission as follows; “Palliative care focuses on the control of pain and other symptoms, on the reduction of suffering and on the enhancement of the life that remains. By addressing these physical, psychological and social needs we aim to enable patients to live out their life with dignity and to offer support to their families and friends, both during the patient’s illness and into bereavement.”<sup>443</sup> In addition to care and counselling the multidisciplinary team also provides education and training for other health professionals and care home staff.

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<sup>440</sup> The Highland Hospice is a specialist palliative care centre that serves adults with incurable diseases in an area that is one-sixth of the UK land mass.

<sup>441</sup> Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen, *The Museum of Loss and Renewal: Loss Becomes Object Becomes Subject* (The Museum of Loss and Renewal/Ed & Ellis PS, 2013,

<sup>442</sup> Tracy Mackenna, “LIFE, DEATH AND BEAUTY: art as a way of accessing grief,” 221.

<sup>443</sup> *The Hospice*, Highland Hospice website, accessed October 22, 2015, <http://highlandhospice.org/the-hospice>.

After several meetings, a presentation at The Highland Hospice conference *The Space Between: making connections in palliative care*<sup>444</sup> and visits to several of their charity shops (see images) *The Museum of Loss and Renewal* concept was developed, allowing us to investigate concerns further and to slowly move towards a project that would ultimately create a mobile platform for the Hospice and that would enable them to start their discussions around illness and well-being with the communities they serve in the Highlands. Where might healthcare and art meet?

Drawing on the experiences with my father's physician-assisted death and the *Life is Over! if you want it* project, our conference presentation considered the role that art can play in mediating issues of death and loss, and the place the arts can have in the process of mourning. *The Space Between* conference offered us the opportunity to meet healthcare professionals and Highland Hospice staff such as the manager of some of its charity shops, Susan Cooper. Conversations with Susan helped us to understand how we might work with the Hospice's staff and its almost seven hundred volunteers. Another key conference contributor was Dr David Reilly, who both presented and chaired sessions. David's holistic approach to healing and healthcare that involves the opening up of a reflective space for the patient resonates with many of our concerns. David Reilly will reappear later, as he contributed to one of the seminars in *OBJECT BECOMES SUBJECT*.

Initial explorations began in 2007. Visits to charity shops in towns such as Portree, Nairn, Forres and Wick revealed the Hospice's extensive network of spaces, scattered over the vast Highland region, teeming with accumulations of donated items, and run by groups of mainly elderly (and in most cases female), committed volunteers. Beyond their retail function, the hospice shops operate as informal drop-in community centres for bereaved people calling in for a chat.

Travelling from shop to shop we were met with generosity that often led to emotive talks with the volunteers. "In the first conversations we had, leaning on shop counters, nestled between vast piles of donated objects in back shops, the volunteers showed their focus and passion and their commitment to the mission and aims of the Hospice: the common goal of providing a quality of care second to none."<sup>445</sup> Many of these people became hospice shop volunteers out of a desire 'to give something back'. After the loss of a partner or family member they wished to express their gratitude for the care their loved one had received from The Highland Hospice.

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<sup>444</sup> "LIFE IS OVER! if you want it: using art to reflect on a family's experience," presented at the Highland Hospice conference *The Space Between: making connections in palliative care*, Inverness, 2009.

<sup>445</sup> Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen, *The Museum of Loss and Renewal: Loss Becomes Object Becomes Subject*, 16.



The combination of people with first hand experiences of illness and loss, and the objects for sale in the shops, often donated after someone's passing, presented us with a meaningful context for future activities.

It was clear from the beginning that it would take time to develop profound and productive relationships with Hospice staff such as Paula McCormack and Dr. Jeremy Keen, Consultant Physician in Palliative Care, Susan Cooper and the many volunteers involved in the Hospice's charity work. A process of chit-chatting, fraternising, learning, sharing and shaping would have to unfold before we could devise a facilitating project that would foreground a difficult subject and that could be offered to communities that were not looking for art.

The images that follow in this room will help you to grasp what has been established so far. Adopting the roles of curators of a museum without budget, walls, floors or ceiling we set out to develop a series of manifestations that would shape *The Museum of Loss and Renewal*. Time was a necessary component for the project's development and we were alert to the pitfalls of community art and the delicate nature of the artist-as-facilitator role. The initial stage of the museum was shaped by making artworks that would go into the museum's collection and that would help us to consider through presentation and discussion, the potential of art practice as a social agent.

The *LIFE IS OVER!* project answered the questions 'how can we link the personal with the social and the private with the public'? With *The Museum of Loss and Renewal* this question was revisited and the expanded answer lay in providing a sustained context for this question. *The Museum of Loss and Renewal* presents the way we understand our artistic, collaborative and discursive activities. "We see ourselves as creators, collectors and curators of fragments of culture, of stuff and experiences, of objects and ideas. Art, in all its forms, enables us to explore issues of existence: life, death and beauty, and everything in between."<sup>446</sup>

To date this 'museum of existence' has presented itself through four exhibition projects, a publication and an artist's edition. Currently acting as the artists, curators and facilitators we are developing a travelling manifestation of *The Museum of Loss and Renewal* in the geographical area covered by The Highland Hospice, in close partnership with their charity shop activity.

In this room however I will focus on *LOSS BECOMES OBJECT!, OBJECT BECOMES SUBJECT!* Later additions such as *The Story of the Girl and the Apple Tree* will be discussed in the future

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<sup>446</sup> Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen, *The Museum of Loss and Renewal: Loss Becomes Object Becomes Subject*, 6.

when new rooms in *The Museum Within Us* will open. The most recent project, *NO MORE LYING!*, is taking place while I am writing this text.

## LOSS BECOMES OBJECT: CREATORS, COLLECTORS AND CURATORS

In 2010 a timely invitation was received, to make an exhibition in the following year. The modestly sized Highland institute for Contemporary Art (HICA), located in the hamlet of Dalcrombie, Loch Ruthven and close to Inverness, offered the first opportunity to 'curate' *The Museum of Loss and Renewal* exhibition and to create works for what was at that time, a still-elusive museum.<sup>447</sup>

During visits to the Hospice's recycling shops we bought a considerable amounts of items of interest. Plates, vases, books, clothes, reproductions, long play records, porcelain ornaments, etcetera were accumulated without a particular reason in mind and stored for later use in brown cardboard boxes. Purchasing these objects triggered stories about their provenance and about people's experiences of losing beloved partners, friends and family members.

It was obvious from the start that *The Museum of Loss and Renewal* would evolve around objects rather than pictures. After projects such as *WAR AS EVER!* and *LIFE IS OVER!*, both of which were image-driven, the physical qualities of objects were extremely attractive as was the way they could be transformed through presentation, from their ordinary retail state into artefacts with an aura. The value of things in peoples lives and the emotional significance that people invest in daily objects became central considerations.

As humans we express ourselves through our belongings, become attached to them and in turn they become part of our identities and enable us to mark our private space. Our possessions, and the curated displays of bric-a-brac and pictures in our homes, somehow represent us. They evoke memories and tell stories about who we are. In the age of consumerism much of the stuff we accumulate will at some time become obsolete. Things will be discarded, maybe replaced and hopefully recycled. "We live today in a world of ever more stuff - what sometimes seems a deluge of goods and shopping",<sup>448</sup> noted Daniel Miller in his anthropological study of how people express themselves through their possessions. Some of this stuff might stay with us during the course of our lives and may be passed on or disposed of after we die.

"... life is all about acquiring stuff, then acquiring more stuff, maybe changing your stuff round a little, then acquiring even more stuff, then getting a bigger place because there is no room for all

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<sup>447</sup> The exhibition took place between September 24 and October 30, 2011.

<sup>448</sup> Daniel Miller, *The Comfort of Things* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 1.

your stuff, getting rid of your stuff, then getting a smaller place because you haven't got as much stuff. Then you die."<sup>449</sup>

The constantly changing collection of stuff in the Hospice charity shops presents a fascinating cross section of the material culture of Highland towns and villages. Discarded, unwanted, ugly and even useless things dominate the odd selection of objects for sale. In a rather overpowering way these random accumulations reveal a particularly old-fashioned aesthetic. Despite the outdated appearance of their goods the shops do rather well and generate approximately a quarter of The Highland Hospice's income.

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<sup>449</sup> Martin Kelner, "Theory of The Meaning of Life, the Importance of Stuff," *The Independent*, 15 May 15, 1993.

V - 08

## ORANGE

The invitation to make an exhibition triggered a solution for the use of these objects. A series of vanitas still lifes<sup>450</sup> was made with the things we acquired and the decision was taken to name the first instalment of the museum-in-the-making *LOSS BECOMES OBJECT*. These arrangements that were curated with cheap stuff were presented in cardboard display cases, hinting at the fleeting nature of these mini exhibitions and, on a metaphysical level, obviously nodding at the ephemeral quality of life. Together, the rather ordinary objects, many of which were unexpectedly aesthetically pleasing finds, evoke Frans Francken de Younger's paintings of cabinets of curiosities.<sup>451</sup>

The display case *Forces of Attraction and Repulsion* (2011) has, as you can see, a Dutch theme and combines several paintings by Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890) in different guises: as a puzzle, a reproduction in a book, a painted copy and a canvas with a black and white image, printed to guide the amateur painter in creating his own van Gogh sunflower<sup>452</sup> masterpiece.

*LOSS BECOMES OBJECT* was launched with a series of informal talks. Paula McCormack, presented the work of The Highland Hospice; Emma Nicolson, Director of ATLAS,<sup>453</sup> discussed context-specific art practice. Tracy and I gave insights into the development of *The Museum of Loss and Renewal* and its key issues.

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<sup>450</sup> Still life painting was regarded as a minor form of art because it was regarded as lacking meaning, the choice of objects arbitrary, and produced by the artist to show off his or her technical skills.

<sup>451</sup> See Room II, image II - 08.

<sup>452</sup> The sunflower is used in The Highland Hospice logo.

<sup>453</sup> ATLAS is an arts organisation dedicated to visual arts projects and education in Skye and Lochalsh, Scotland.

V - 09

## HOLLAND DEFINED

The Delft Blue plate that is part of *Forces of Attraction and Repulsion* in the Highland Hospice charity shop in Forres.

Rich families in the Low Lands collected Delft Blue in the seventeenth century but since then it has lost most of its glory. It appears to have an afterlife in the Highlands though, in the form of cheap imitations.

THE COMPLETE PAINTINGS

Another detail from *Forces of Attraction and Repulsion* with a reproduction of Vincent van Gogh's *Old Man in Sorrow (On the Threshold of Eternity)*, 1890, in a book about his oeuvre. In the text, on the page next to the image, we read, "Melancholy was inevitable, because in spite of the support Nature offered, the artist was ultimately on his own. He was no longer able to perceive the connections, to make out the plan and meaning which included him in the world."<sup>454</sup> Van Gogh died in the year he painted this desperate man.

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<sup>454</sup> Ingo F. Walther and Rainer Metzger, *Vincent van Gogh: The Complete Paintings*, Volume II, (Cologne: Taschen, 1993) p 631.

V - 11

## SUNFLOWERS

On the backs of the two displays associative visual material collected during the visual research process was exhibited. This added layers of possible interpretations of the work. The rear panels of the cases became in effect pin boards populated with images from our studio. The postcard of the man with red hair and a beard is a reproduction of Vincent van Gogh's *Portrait of Alexander Reid*, 1887. Alexander Reid (1854-1928) was a Scottish art dealer and friend of van Gogh who lived in Glasgow. Another image shows Ai Wei Wei with two hands full of some of the millions of handcrafted porcelain sunflower seeds from his installation *Sunflower Seeds* (2010) in the Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern.



V - 12

## CRYING WOMAN

The partner cardboard cabinet, *Life is Short, Art Long* (2011) brought together another selection from our Hospice shop collection including an amateur copy of Pablo Picasso's *La Femme qui Pleure* (1937) and a model of the extinct Dodo. The text blanket is an evolving object that I will return to later.

V - 13

VESUVIUS

A copy of the widely known *National Geographic* magazine with another element of *Life is Short, Art Long*, a black suit. This suit was not bought in any of the charity shops but rather, is my own suit that I wore at Tracy's father's funeral.

V - 14

OPEN TO OFFERS

Purchased in the Hospice's Portree charity shop on the Isle of Skye.

V - 15

## COFFIN CARRIERS

From the pocket of my striped suit the small card with drawing was retrieved, originally given to the coffin-bearers who carried Ronald Mackenna, or Seanair, Tracy's father.

In my hands you see a book of Surrealist Poetry, open at the pages of a Pablo Neruda poem:

### Nothing But Death

There are cemeteries that are lonely,  
graves full of bones that do not make a sound,  
the heart moving through a tunnel,  
in it darkness, darkness, darkness,  
like a shipwreck we die going into ourselves,  
as though we were drowning inside our hearts,  
as though we lived falling out of the skin into the soul.

And there are corpses,  
feet made of cold and sticky clay,  
death is inside the bones,  
like a barking where there are no dogs,  
coming out from bells somewhere, from graves somewhere,  
growing in the damp air like tears of rain.

Sometimes I see alone  
coffins under sail,  
embarking with the pale dead, with women that have dead hair,  
with bakers who are as white as angels,  
and pensive young girls married to notary publics,  
caskets sailing up the vertical river of the dead,  
the river of dark purple,  
moving upstream with sails filled out by the sound of death,  
filled by the sound of death which is silence.

Death arrives among all that sound  
like a shoe with no foot in it, like a suit with no man in it,  
comes and knocks, using a ring with no stone in it, with no  
finger in it,

comes and shouts with no mouth, with no tongue, with no  
throat.

Nevertheless its steps can be heard  
and its clothing makes a hushed sound, like a tree.

I'm not sure, I understand only a little, I can hardly see,  
but it seems to me that its singing has the color of damp violets,  
of violets that are at home in the earth,  
because the face of death is green,  
and the look death gives is green,  
with the penetrating dampness of a violet leaf  
and the somber color of embittered winter.

But death also goes through the world dressed as a broom,  
lapping the floor, looking for dead bodies,  
death is inside the broom,  
the broom is the tongue of death looking for corpses,  
it is the needle of death looking for thread.

Death is inside the folding cots:  
it spends its life sleeping on the slow mattresses,  
in the black blankets, and suddenly breathes out:  
it blows out a mournful sound that swells the sheets,  
and the beds go sailing toward a port  
where death is waiting, dressed like an admiral.<sup>455</sup>

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<sup>455</sup> Pablo Neruda. *Nothing But Death*, trans. Robert Bly, in Edward Germain, ed., *English and American Surrealist Poetry* (Harmondsworth/New York: Penguin Books, 1978).228-230.

V - 16

BLUE VALENTINE

The book's cover shows a detail of Roland Penrose's painting *Winged Domino (Portrait of Valentine)*, 1938<sup>456</sup> and depicts (more or less) his spouse Valentine Boué.

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<sup>456</sup> Oil on canvas, 60 x 44 cm, collection Penrose Estate.

V - 17

LLORET AND LILLIAN

Turn the image when you hold it; two *LOSS BECOMES OBJECT* visitors, engaged in the joint process of 'reading' the images on the back panel of *Forces of Attraction and Repulsion*.

V - 18

ART HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE

The *Life is Short, Art Long* montage of art historical references. A copy of the eyepatch Salvador Dali is wearing, made by us, is part of the still life on the other side of the cardboard panel.



V - 19

HYDRANGEA

These Hortensias (or Hydrangeas) from our garden died slowly during the exhibition but continue in their dead state, to be part of *Life is Short, Art Long*.

PARS PRO TOTO

Just like the *John & Yoko Drawings*, badges have become a regular feature in our work. The badge on the right reveals the title of the second instalment of *The Museum of Loss and Renewal*. The gifting of badges asserts a more profound intention behind our work.

Shortly after Tracy and I started to develop work with a strong process-led and social quality we realised “that every artist who has chosen to labor with a gift must sooner or later wonder how he or she is to survive in a society dominated by market exchange.”<sup>457</sup> Reading Lewys Hyde’s insightful exploration of the cultural gift helped illuminate another, more rewarding type of value in what we do. “...lifelessness leaves the soul when a gift comes towards us, for gift property serves an upward force, the goodwill or *virtù* of nature, the soul and the collective.”<sup>458</sup> The badge, *pars pro toto*, represents this understanding of our art as a gift.

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<sup>457</sup> Lewys Hyde, *The Gift: How the Creative Spirit Transforms the World* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2007), XV-XVI.

<sup>458</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

## CREATING A WELCOMING SPACE

*LOSS BECOMES OBJECT* took place far away from Dundee, the city where we live and work. To engage audiences closer at home including students, the second stage, *OBJECT BECOMES SUBJECT*, was situated in Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design (DJCAD).<sup>459</sup> Positioning *The Museum of Loss and Renewal* in our own institution enabled us to realise a manifestation of our practice as a temporary context for practice and research-led teaching. Art as site, where production, presentation and education<sup>460</sup> converge.

As artist-educators we are dealing with a difficult to define area of teaching. The inclusivity of what can constitute art makes it virtually impossible to identify a common framework for deciding on a meaningful curriculum. We guide students in figuring out what their place in the world is or could be through making art and critical thinking and what kind of skills they need in order to realise their ambitions. They are led through the jungle of contemporary art practice and made aware that an artwork is not just the final stage of an isolated, individual, self-directed artistic (and often mystified) exploration. It is rather the result or manifestation of a complex emotional and intellectual process that is shaped by a combination of personal narratives, preferences, creative drives, skill sets and external factors such as ideas, contexts, and what the Germans call 'Zeitgeist', the spirit of the time. We do this by sharing the highlights and the less successful parts of our own creative journeys and by acknowledging that students are an important part of the different publics that engage with our work through looking, participating or collaborating.

The Visual Research Centre (VRC) is DJCAD's multi-functional hub for exhibition, production and the public dissemination of research. It houses research staff and PhD students, a publishing and print unit, DJCAD's artists' book collection and Centrespace, a flexible space that can be used for exposition and seminars.

These four images show Tracy and me in the process of creating the *OBJECT BECOMES SUBJECT* environment, assisted by Visual Research Centre/DJCAD Exhibitions Technician Andrew Dodds.

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<sup>459</sup> 14 - 27 November 2011.

<sup>460</sup> The ideologies that underpin contemporary art education, the art academy's relationship to social, political and geographical conditions and the institutional structure of art schools have been widely debated in the last couple of years. We have seen a surge in conferences, exhibition projects and publications that revolve around the changing nature of art education and the positioning of education in art practice. Manifesta 6 (Nicosia, Cyprus, 2006) was even proposed as a temporary interdisciplinary art school. Unfortunately the three curators did not manage to negotiate the extremely complex political situation on the island and the Manifesta organisation decided to cancel the 6th edition of the nomadic Biennial.



ART AS SITE

The approach taken to activating the white cube was similar to that employed in *LIFE IS OVER!* in the Cooper Gallery. Centrespace was turned into a welcoming hybrid space with zones that accommodated its three core elements: presentation, production and education. Gallery, studio and seminar room fluidly merged into one.

The desire to make art accessible and expansive might lead to simplicity and a directness that ignores what Grant Kester describes as “the inscrutability and resistance of the avant-garde art work.”<sup>461</sup> Aesthetic considerations of medium and materiality have lost their significance in many dialogical art practices. Artistic concerns are completely replaced by creative facilitation and social encounters. That is however not the case in our practice, that resists the singularity that comes with naming.

Tracy and I feel positively challenged by the conflicts that arise when artists try to balance artistic freedom with the desire to be an agent of change in the era of neoliberal capitalism. Claire Bishop sees the emergence of participatory practice as a result of this negotiation of the ‘artistic’ and the ‘socio-political’. She links its development to historical “moments of political transition and upheaval”<sup>462</sup> such as the Russian Revolution and Europe’s turbulent sixties.

The revival of participatory practice in the nineties, the time when Tracy and I started to consider more seriously members of the public, presented artists who embraced participatory and dialogical approaches, with a paradox: “Even though participatory artists invariably stand against neoliberal capitalism, the values they impute to their work are understood formally (in terms of opposing individualism and the commodity object), without recognising that so many other aspects of this art practice dovetail even more perfectly with neoliberalism’s recent forms (networks, mobility, project work, affective labour).”<sup>463</sup> A conundrum that can’t be escaped when you want to appease artistic concerns with an exploration of the conditions and attitudes that shape our daily existence. We are children of our time who believe that the conflict raised by Bishop is the unavoidable consequence of our desire to be social instead of morally neutral and egotistic. We can’t change socio-political structures but as artists we can contribute to changing attitudes through creative and curated

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<sup>461</sup> Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley/New York/London: University of California Press, 2004), 13.

<sup>462</sup> Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), 276.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid*, 277.

reflections on how we live and how we do things. *The Museum of Loss and Renewal* is a sustained attempt to perform the role of social agent.

In *Loss Becomes Object Becomes Subject* we wrote, “From the outset, we were clear that good, interesting and beautiful artworks might not be the only outcome, but that rather, a central aim should be to contribute to knowledge within healthcare and art by exploring through a dynamic art practice how art can contribute to healthcare, and healthcare to art by acknowledging and celebrating different ways of thinking and working. The place of art here was as an agent for change.”<sup>464</sup> This ambition requires the nurturing of long-term relationships between artists and healthcare professionals. One of the key ambitions for *The Museum of Loss and Renewal* is to accommodate and stimulate this process of transformation. The second instalment of *The Museum of Loss and Renewal* featured the display cases presented in *LOSS BECOMES OBJECTS, Forces of Attraction and Repulsion* and *Life is Short, Art Long*, and included the daily making of a new case, titled *Over The Rainbow*. The production zone was also used as a studio for working publicly on the in-progress text blanket that is part of *Life is Short, Art Long*, and by Tracy for in situ writing. *No Neutral Representations*, a series of thirteen images of notebook pages with associated postcards developed during the research and development stage was projected on the wall in the area where most of the encounters and seminars took place.

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<sup>464</sup> Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen, *The Museum of Loss and Renewal: Loss Becomes Object Becomes Subject*, 6.

CREATIVE VIEWPOINTS

Postcards from our shared collection were inserted into Tracy's notebook to create juxtapositions that were then framed using a camera. Of this work, *NO NEUTRAL REPRESENTATIONS*, we wrote on our website "As artists who collaborate, we communicate with each other daily through the visual, the verbal and the textual. This work created space in which to convey meaning to each other, in the project's exploratory stages, through strategies that are on the whole not accessed by, or are unavailable to, those working solely with text; writers and speakers. This playful exploration contrasts what is seen (the seeable) and what is said (the sayable). It highlights aspects of signification, of visualisation, and of those junctions and spatial intersections where seeing and saying meet. Intentional ambiguity, associative processes, interpretation, the poetic and ekphrasis (the recreation in words of works of art) are all terms that we toyed with, while the evolving pages offer a growing series of construed meanings that are opened out to wider audiences at the moments of presentation."<sup>465</sup>

Tracy and I regularly create works that combine material generated during the research phase of a project as a way of visualising and externalising our processes.<sup>466</sup>

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<sup>465</sup> *No Neutral Representations*, Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen's website: [mackenna-and-janssen.net](http://www.mackenna-and-janssen.net), accessed October 23, 2015, [http://www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/No\\_Neutral\\_Representations.html](http://www.mackenna-and-janssen.net/No_Neutral_Representations.html)

<sup>466</sup> See e.g. *Life, Death and Beauty: Where Darwin Meets Courbet*, image V - 04.

HAPPY LITTLE BLUEBIRDS

The display case *Over The Rainbow* that was produced on site combines a selection of objects bought in the Hospice charity shops that somehow can be associated with the notions of hope, and of journeys. Books about utopias and dreams and objects relating to the *Wizard of Oz* and Pinocchio, are sited together with an audio compilation of covers of the ballad *Over the Rainbow* (1939)<sup>467</sup> that plays continuously and softly.

Somewhere over the rainbow, way up high  
There's a land that I've heard of once in a lullaby.  
Somewhere over the rainbow, skies are blue  
And the dreams that you dare to dream,  
Really do come true.

Someday I'll wish upon a star  
And wake up where the clouds are far behind me.  
Where troubles melt like lemon drops,  
Way above the chimney tops,  
That's where you'll find me.

Somewhere over the rainbow, blue birds fly  
Birds fly over the rainbow  
Why then, oh why can't I?

Somewhere over the rainbow, blue birds fly  
Birds fly over the rainbow  
Why then, oh why can't I?

If happy little bluebirds fly beyond the rainbow  
Why, oh why can't I?

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<sup>467</sup> Music by Harold Arlen and lyrics by E.Y. Harburg. One of the most interpreted songs ever, it won an Academy Award for Best Original Song (1939).



V - 25

## SIGNATURE SONG

Judy Garland played Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, a role, which was to define the rest of her life. The song *Over the Rainbow*, one of the most famous ballads of the twentieth century, became Garland's signature song.

## THE HEAD OF VAN M

*Over The Rainbow* also included a papier-mâché copy of one of the two versions of *The Nose* by Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966).<sup>468</sup> Giacometti's hanging Pinocchio reminds us of a skull. The head also evokes death in another, paradoxical way; it depicts a dead man shaped as a gun, being killed and killing at the same time.

In 1921 the artist befriended the Dutchman Pieter van Meurs. Giacometti was present when the 61-year old archivist from The Hague suddenly died and saw a connection between this experience and his macabre anxieties. The art historian and psychoanalyst Laurie Wilson however traces *The Nose* back to feelings of aggression and earlier sources such as Giacometti's portrayal of himself as a liar and the complicated relationship he had with his father. Wilson considers Giacometti's realisation of the difference between the artist's "guilty wishes" and the "actual crimes" against the backdrop of the Nuremberg trials and the subsequent executions of the convicted war criminals. Wilson notes, "Once the Nazi murderers were punished by hanging, he might have felt innocent enough by comparison to create these startling sculptures and to write his essay for *Labyrinthe*."<sup>469</sup> In his text Giacometti had identified the death of the Dutchman as the source of his morbid fears. He had even included a passage about a lengthening nose. 'I saw the head of van M. transform, the nose became more and more pronounced'.<sup>470</sup>

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<sup>468</sup> *The Nose* (first version), 1947, plaster, 80.9 x 70.5 x 40.6 cm, The Alberto Giacometti Foundation, Zurich.

<sup>469</sup> Alberto Giacometti, *La Rêve, le Sphinx and la Mort de T*, in *Labyrinthe*, no. 22-23 (Geneva, 1946), 12-13.

<sup>470</sup> Laurie Wilson, *Alberto Giacometti: Myth, Magic, and the Man* (New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 2003), 220.

V - 27

## HAPPY MEALS

Several books with plastic Pinocchio figurines that were part of McDonald's Happy Meals, bought in three different Highland Hospice charity shops.

V - 28

## TO HELL AND BACK

This image shows the *Life is Short, Art Long* blanket in progress. The text “I have been to hell and back” is a quote from an embroidered handkerchief<sup>471</sup> containing the same text, by Louise Bourgeois (1911–2010). The remaining part of the text reads as follows: “And let me tell you it was wonderful”.

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<sup>471</sup> 1996, 31 x 31 cm.

V - 29

## FACILITATE

Creating a text blanket while *The Museum of Loss and Renewal* is developing enables us to incorporate an increasing number of voices into the growing collection. The blanket was updated regularly, featuring extracts from daily conversations and exchanges during the public events.

## COMMUNITY CENTRE, LABORATORY AND ACADEMY

Discussing the potential that our type of practice has to bridge the gap between museums and higher education in our book chapter *Artist-led Curatorial Practice: Mediating Knowledge, Experience and Opinion*, Tracy and I cited the following sentences by Charles Esche, “Now, the term 'art' might be starting to describe that space in society for experimentation, questioning and discovery that religion, science and philosophy have occupied sporadically in former times. It has become an active space rather than one of passive observation. Therefore the institutions to foster it, have to be part-community centre, part-laboratory and part-academy, with less need for the established showroom function.”<sup>472</sup>

*Object Becomes Subject* incorporated an interdisciplinary seminar series curated and led by the artists. Content co-devised with a range of specialists, events considered some of the key issues explored as part of *The Museum of Loss and Renewal*. The first gathering<sup>473</sup> looked into the *The Museum of Loss and Renewal* in a contemporary art context. Curator, writer and artist Dr Paul O'Neill discussed notions of duration and context specificity while his partner during the session, the social anthropologist Professor Arnd Schneider presented his thoughts on the relationship between art and anthropology.

The second event<sup>474</sup> saw doctor, educator and researcher Dr David Reilly focus on the relationship between creative change and human healing. Reilly discussed his holistic approach to care, foregrounding the importance of working with the innate healing capacity in people, and highlighting the factors that impact on the way people respond to medical care and their interaction with a doctor or therapist.

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<sup>472</sup> Charles Esche, “Temporariness, Possibility and Institutional Change,” in *In the Place of the Public Sphere?*, ed. Shimon Sheik, cited in Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen, “Artist-led Curatorial Practice: Mediating Knowledge, Experience and Opinion,” in *Museums and Higher Education Working Together: Challenges and Opportunities*, eds. Anne Boddington, Jos Boys and Catherine Speight (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 117.

<sup>473</sup> *The Museum of Loss and Renewal: incomplete procedures and durational processes*, 22 November, 2011.

<sup>474</sup> *The Museum of Loss and Renewal: from fragmentation towards coherence*, 25 November, 2011.

PLATFORMS FOR LEARNING

During *Object Becomes Subject The Museum of Loss and Renewal* also hosted several teaching sessions with undergraduate and masters students that focused on the various forms of research embedded in art practice and on engaged practices. “While we see teaching as an essential component of being artists, the projects we design and curate are also platforms for learning, offered to students as a way in which to actively consider key aspects of contemporary art practice.”

“With an emphasis on the relationship between personal development and the socio-political, students are stimulated to question the professional context of their activities by interrogating the structures of the institutionalised art world and to consider the role of artistic research as tool or practice for creative exploration and discovery.”<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>475</sup> Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen, “Artist-led Curatorial Practice: Mediating Knowledge, Experience and Opinion,” 114.

## DAILY UPDATES

Creation in public was an important part of *OBJECT BECOMES SUBJECT*. In addition to producing the third display case and working on the blanket, *The Museum of Loss and Renewal* was activated by Tracy's daily writing. "The multiple ways in which writing was active in the space included Tracy translating the stuff of conversation and the two public seminars into a mass of short notes, presented visually and reorganised to form new relationships each day on a large painted pin board."<sup>476</sup> Tracy's short written texts were published daily in an online blog and summarise the conversations and seminars as they took place in the public studio.

### WEDNESDAY 16 NOVEMBER

The temporary public studio for the fusion of exhibition, production, education and research is up and running. Conversation raging on the inter-relationships between death, memory, material culture and recycling. Sessions with students well under way, prodding and provoking issues including the value of stuff and curatorial positions. Blue-skies thrash with GSA's Dr Ken Neil on the impact on art education, by situating it at the heart of our practice. All welcome to hold discussions on related talks in The Museum of Loss and Renewal at Centrespace.

### THURSDAY 17 NOVEMBER

Day of student sessions considering 'ephemeral practices' and 'art, science & visual thinking'. Discussed the merging of art, research and education – the need for a radical shift in the function of learning towards a central position for art within collaborative approaches, the fostering of networks, partnerships and play – opening up and daring to fail.

### FRIDAY 18 NOVEMBER

Day of conversation about art's ability to enable us to access grief; by showing publicly how creativity comes out of the chaos of life. Grappling with the materiality of language by making the blanket through translation of conversations into written words.

### SATURDAY 19 NOVEMBER

Different pace to conversations today: people more relaxed as stories slowly unfolded, ideas exchanged, notes made and words cut for blanket. Creative Scotland talking about possible meanings of 'place' for Scotland, referring to DJCAD-PAR+RS 2010 'Mapping the Future: Public Art in Scotland'; picked up and repositioned when the University's Architecture students dropped in, looking to stimulate the rub of disciplines through closer connection with art at DJCAD.

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<sup>476</sup> Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen, *The Museum of Loss and Renewal: Loss Becomes Object Becomes Subject*, 24.



#### MONDAY 21 NOVEMBER

Talking to a wide range of visitors every day emphasises the place of 'dialogical aesthetics', and the central position that listening to others occupies. A reminder by Murdo too, about the artist's role as someone who can highlight a community's issues: as Collingwood wrote in *Principles of Art* in 1938, 'uttering their secrets'.

#### TUESDAY 22 NOVEMBER

Seminar 1 oversubscribed! Fantastic amount of interest before, during and since the event, in Arnd Schneider's propositions on how to 'engage art and anthropology', and Paul O'Neill's question of 'how to produce the unplanned?' within the context of durational approaches to public art. Siting the seminar within the space of 'The Museum of Loss and Renewal: Object becomes Subject' brought together people with wide range of expertise whose comments, questions and conversation feed the project's future – a huge thank you to all for your contributions.

#### WEDNESDAY 23 NOVEMBER

Yesterday's seminar already impacting on the way we're thinking about 'The Museum of Loss and Renewal' – expanding thoughts about the Highlands as the site of 'The Museum of Loss and Renewal', and the Highland Hospice shops as The Museum's rooms - we work with objects from the shops' collections to curate an ongoing set of displays that focus on a range of subjects. And re-thinking artistic processes of investigation in relation to anthropology's critique of fieldwork – possible points of convergence? This relates strongly to Paul O'Neill's proposition that there is a case to be made for the consideration of 'public time' rather than space – favouring an evolving process and being prepared to embrace the unexpected.<sup>477</sup>

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<sup>477</sup> *The Museum of Loss and Renewal: The Daily Updates*, 2011, published during the project on DJCAD Exhibitions website.

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THE MUSEUM EXPLAINED

Detail, one of the many notes pinned on the painted section of wall.

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## MUSEUM SHOP

*The Museum of Loss and Renewal* is a museum without a budget. Like any other museum it depends on external funding. As part of our efforts to raise money for the enterprise a miniature version of the museum was created with Marcel Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise*<sup>478</sup> in mind. The box is titled *LOSS BECOMES OBJECT BECOMES SUBJECT* and will be for sale in the online museum shop. It contains the publication of the same name (see next image), the thirteen 35 mm colour slides of *No Neutral Representations*, a slide viewer, the posters that communicate the project titles, the two badges and a pair of white cotton gloves.

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<sup>478</sup> See also Room I, image I - 32.

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BOX IN A BOX

The publication *LOSS BECOMES OBJECT BECOMES SUBJECT* documents the first stages of *The Museum of Loss and Renewal*. It contains a collection of 48 printed cards and comes with a text by the artists in an A6 booklet which was designed in collaboration with the Dutch designer Marco Stout, our partner for many years in the making of our publications.

## THE FUTURE AND THE END

As the curators of the museum Tracy and I summarise our thoughts in the two paragraphs that conclude our text in the *LOSS BECOMES OBJECT BECOMES SUBJECT* booklet.

"The impact of The Museum of Loss and Renewal has been through the creation of new art and its ability to transcend location, audiences and form. It has from the outset been intended to bear multiple interpretations and to offer numerous points of access.

Through the project we aim to contribute to contemporary art's exploration of meaning in relation to issues, objects and spaces that may enable insight into, and understanding of, other cultural practices; here, the current culture surrounding issues of life and death and the everyday inclusion of this on our High Streets via charity shops. Our intimate involvement in this exchange through the form of this project provides ways-in to understanding contemporary art for a general public as well as for those with specialist interest in other related areas. The opening up of this dialogue, demonstrating the place art has in matters as important as life and death, can engage and build a future audience, inspiring new interest and confidence in understandings of contemporary art and significant healthcare issues."<sup>479</sup>

*LOSS BECOMES OBJECT* and *OBJECT BECOMES SUBJECT* provided the opportunity to give and to receive. All of the interactions that took place in *The Museum of Loss and Renewal* during November 2011 have helped us greatly to define our plans for its future. The process of raising funds is under way for a project that will present itself to communities in the Highland region in partnership with the highland Hospice and its eleven charity shops. The intention is to produce a work that will travel through the region devising with the Highland Hospice the conversations it wants to have with the communities it serves. Furthermore, a dedicated website will bring together what has been achieved so far and will provide the museum with an online presence which will enable it to reach out to new audiences, even more effectively.

Dear visitor, we have now reached the end of our tour through the rooms in *THE MUSEUM WITHIN US*. I hope you have enjoyed your visit and that spending much time exploring the contents of the museum has helped you gain insight into how my engagement with the curatorial is being played out in my/our practice.

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<sup>479</sup> Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen, *The Museum of Loss and Renewal: Loss Becomes Object Becomes Subject*, 31.

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## Conclusion, but not the end

*The Museum Within Us* was born out of a desire to make sense of the elusive quality, fluidity and multi-layered complexity of an art practice that is defined by four core characteristics; collaborative, social, educational and curatorial. It was mainly shaped by the following three aims: revealing the urges and interests that inform an art practice using the 'curatorial' as a guiding principle, creating an outcome that is visually led and positioning a personal and subjective artistic journey in a broader art context.

### Publicising a process of practice

My artistic and critical explorations have resulted in the artistic knowledge presented here. "Whereas in many traditional (academic) forms of research the objective seems to be collecting or noting identical characteristics between situations and contexts, often at the expense of the consideration of differences, artistic research seems critically inclined to seek out divergences more than similarities," Henk Slager points out.<sup>480</sup> The specific quality of practice-based knowledge, created through artistic production, thinking and going public, results from the tension between epistemological probing (what constitutes knowledge in art?) and the creation of aesthetic outcomes that are dialogic but also individual and unique.

The collection of images that make up *The Museum Within Us* give an insight in a wide range of artistic and theoretical issues that have played a pivotal role in the development of my individual and shared art practice. One of the obvious issues I was faced with while developing my museum was the expansive and expanding nature of my interests. The containment of the artistic research process was a major concern during the development of my project. In the context of *The Museum Within Us* art is understood as a form of curatorial practice but during the construction of the museum several other representations of art needed to be considered to do justice to my practice. I could only touch on a selection of further underpinning interests or core components of my, past and current, collaborative practice. Many other angles or topics could have been chosen as focal points for journeys to undefined destinations such as cultural recycling, artistic research, art practice and education, art, publics and platforms, modes of social encounter in art, collaborative art practice, and process-led and durational art, to name a few. All of these and many more could have functioned as productive frames of reference, for studying fragments of what is scattered and unstable in my life as an artist.

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<sup>480</sup> Henk Slager, *The Pleasure of Research* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2015), 29.



## **Visually led**

While linking most of my, and our, projects, the notion of curating could also be explored through the use of montage techniques such as collage, assemblage and referencing. A digital photo camera and computer software such as Adobe Photoshop provided me with a set of tools to create the series of images that capture pages from books and combine pictures from my visual archive that has been produced over many years of artistic research. New visual representations were created in order to reference existing art works through their depictions and existing texts were provided with new dialogic contexts.

## **Don't expect neutrality here**

As a way of preserving experiences *The Museum Within Us* forged a space for long-term immersion into past and current creative and intellectual interests. As such it has provided me with a better understanding of the historical and contemporary contexts of my own art practice. It stimulated the act of recalling, critical investigation and theoretical reflection, resulting in a more confident artist-educator and ultimately an award-winning teacher.

*The Museum Within Us* is a reflection and assertion of my individuality in the collaboration with Tracy Mackenna. A dedicated period of investigation has helped me to locate and situate a practice in a practice. Furthermore it has enabled listening to my own voice, which has consequently increased the knowledge of myself in relation to my art.

Beyond this achievement of new knowledge relevant to the creator-researcher himself *The Museum Within Us* expresses a passion for art and offers a wider community of artists, academics, curators and students original insights into a distinct art practice that is defined as a site where a variety of creative activities unfold and which is driven by a complex web of subjective and inter-subjective concerns. A unique and first hand creative experience has been narrated, recorded and made public in the hope that Tracy Mackenna & Edwin Janssen's shared and social approach to art making, that includes creative investigation and teaching, can serve as a new point of reference and sew the seeds for new ideas and alternative approaches.

## Acknowledgements

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