

Kunstraum Definitional Disruptions with Nel Aerts, Filip Gilissen and Hedwig Houben

1 DECEMBER 2012 – 2 FEBRUARY 2013

In his seminal sociological work, 'The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life', Erving Goffman describes social interaction revolving around a gathering consensus on the definition of a given situation. Definitional disruptions are the moments, much feared by some or eagerly anticipated by others, which rock the whole boat and throw the nature of a social situation into doubt. The works by Nel Aerts, Filip Gilissen and Hedwig Houben in Definitional Disruptions place interruptions into the established relationships between artist and the works they author, clouding their assumed intention towards a notional audience.

Hedwig Houben's 'Personal Matters and Matters Of Fact' (2011) imagines a conversation between the artist and two of the objects she has created. When Houben has to admit that she is not sure quite why she has made them, one of the objects – an angular Rietveld chair – chastises her for not thinking it through before she started. The second object – a self-portrait – is less concerned with why she was made than with how accurate a likeness she is. Where it could be assumed that the artist boldly produces and sends objects out into the world, Houben envisions an extended moment of self-doubt in which the production of objects only draws the artist further into uncertainty.

Filip Gilissen's 'The Only Way is Up' (2011), documents a performance at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp where a character modeled on a charismatic salesman or televangelist voices a repetitive monologue with the refrain "It's all down hill from here!". Theories of the artist's relationship to their audience assume that the performer has an intention to evoke a particular emotional, aesthetic or intellectual response. But while this gold-suited figure is claiming to have something to impart, to make a specific statement, when the statement comes it is ambiguous and not at all what it was made out to be.

In Nel Aerts' paintings the artist takes self-representation as a subject in itself – a number of cartoon like characters re-occur who seem to represent states of mind, statements of resistance or emotional dispositions. 'Zielzoekerij' (2012) (soul seeker) is a double portrait, rendered as a singular entity, in which two faces stare placidly at one another while their loosely rendered trunks or chimney's intertwine above their heads. The work creates a slightly disturbing picture of an individual, whose double nature is intimately connected but yet strangely detached. Aerts' painting style seems to embody the same clumsy characterization; it is almost as if the paintings are self-portraits rendered by the half-formed characters they depict.

Both ideas of the artist's relation to their works, and to their audience are tied up with a mythology of the artist, and the conception of the artist's "practice" as a thing in itself, independent of the artists as an individual. Definitional Disruptions investigates the potential of the artist's own persona as a tool for disruption, and how the mythology of the artist figure can be embodied, effaced or laid bare as a means of production.

About the artists:

Nel Aerts (1987), lives and works in Antwerp (BE). Nel Aerts uses drawings, collages, photographs, (film documented) performances, artist's books, poetry and songs, to create an organic oeuvre that can be considered as a true total art work. Recent exhibitions include: *Dances around the hourglass*, Galerie VidalCuglietta, Brussels (BE), 2012; *Un-Scene II* (group show), curated by Elena Filipovic and Anne-Claire Schmitz, Wiels, Brussels (BE), 2012; and *Art's Birthday* (group show), Muhka, Antwerp (BE), 2011. Nel Aerts' works are presented courtesy Galerie VidalCuglietta, Brussels.

Filip Gillisen (1980), lives and works in Brussels (BE). Using the language of commerce, marketing and media representation, Gilissen gives a diabolic comment on the more cynical aspects of globalization and consumer driven politics. Gilissen's work has been presented in venues such as MARTA Museum, Herford (DE), 2012; Kunshalle Nurnberg (DE), 2012; Liste 17 Performance Project, BASEL (CH), 2012; Witte De With, Rotterdam (NL), 2011; Nuit Blanche, Paris (FR), 2011; MuHKA, Antwerp (BE), 2011; Museum Boymans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam (NL), 2011; Liverpool Biennial (UK), 2010; and Museum of Fine Art, Boston (US), 2007.

Hedwig Houben (1983), lives and works in Brussels (BE). Recent exhibitions include: *Five Possible Lectures on Six Possibilities for a Sculpture, /P///// AKT*, Amsterdam (NL), 2012; *Personal Matters and Matters Of Fact*, Playstation at Fons Welters Gallery, Amsterdam (NL), 2012; *Out of Controle*, (group exhibition) Nest, The Hague (NL), 2012; *Comique Géométrique*, (group exhibition), La Salle de Bains, Lyon (FR), 2011; and *Making is Thinking* (group exhibition), Witte de With, Rotterdam (NL), 2011.

About kunstraum:

Kunstraum is a London-based project space with a focus on solo exhibitions of artists based in London's neighbouring cities in Europe and the UK. Kunstraum, literally meaning 'art room' in German, seeks to form new relationships with the interconnected art scenes of Europe and the rest of the country.

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