



pen



issues

number three

“A thing is a hole in a thing it is not.”
—Carl Andre.

The Artists Interviewed In This Issue:

1. Maarten Janssen
2. Lucas Lenglet
3. Susanne Kriemann
4. Bettina Carl
5. Christine Rusche
6. Jack Segbars

Limited Edition:

Winter, 2006

It is February 4th and at the moment I am sitting in Prenzlauerberg, Berlin, Germany watching snow fall to the street from my 4th story apartment window. Blue sky is beginning to breach the clouds, although the temperature has begun to sink to the expected -13 Celsius (8.54 Fahrenheit). Besides a warm jacket, I have outfitted myself with recording gear, questions of thematic importance to spatial relationships in the gallery/exhibition space, and a directive to research and discover the accessibility of the city of Berlin to artists from abroad.

“A plague of artists has descended upon Berlin,” is one way it has been put to me. In other words, Berlin is chock-full of artists. But, as a result, the artwork exhibited in the younger galleries is engaging, often beautiful, and overall, the range in artistic style is great and the quality high...and as other artists from abroad have mentioned to me, artists/people work hard to live in Berlin, work hard to make artwork and to survive—this is an attitude that is in my memory of living in the United States, but not part of the general situation I have experienced in the Netherlands (with the caveat that many artists in the Netherlands *are* working hard to achieve success in the studio and out...but, there is an overall relaxed/easy-going attitude that is supported by a grant system in the Netherlands that I think keeps the critique and dialogue about Art sluggish).

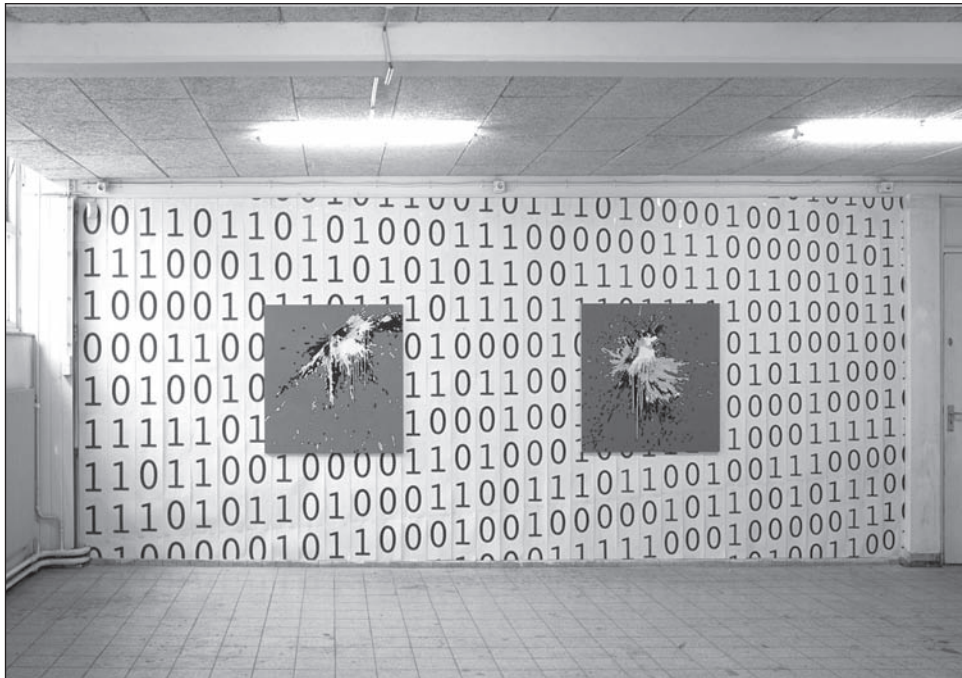
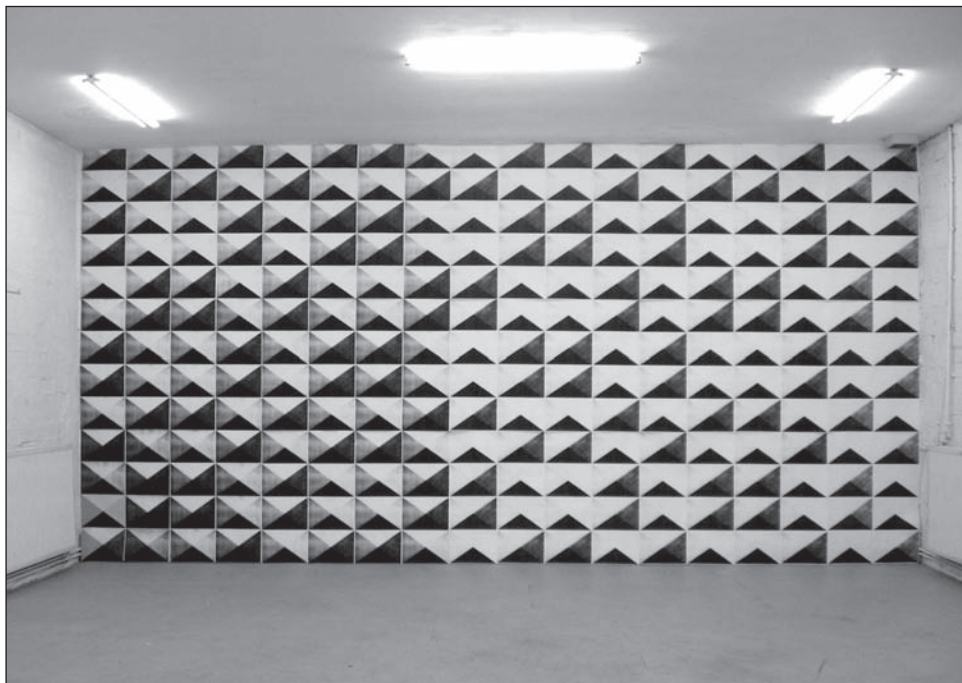
To talk about Berlin, as a city for artists to further develop their career, is also to discuss the energy within a city—any city—and its effects on the creative process, a feeling of living that can influence and challenge the artist to create new work (or further develop old works...) and get sharper in the process.

Still, the galleries in Berlin seem closed to artists from abroad, in the sense that curators are mainly exhibiting the work of artists who come recommended through their personal network(s). The options then for artists interested in Berlin are: to relocate yourself to Berlin and attempt to enter these networks, or, depending on whatever city/country you currently live in, work towards establishing connections with people who already have connections to Berlin, and let that network bring your work to Berlin on its own. Of course, Berlin is no different than other cities in that gallerists/curators locate artists first and foremost on the quality of the artwork, which is always the *main factor*, according to sources questioned here in Berlin. But, I don't believe that is the only factor, nor the complete truth...

I believe that a random conversation, a night on the town and/or maybe a few drinks with the right people can bring you an exhibition opportunity just as much as anything else. And, this is not a bad thing. Why do I say this? Because Art creates a dialogue between ideas that relate to a *social context*, so why shouldn't the social context come first? Artists are people, art is for people, art makes connections between people: artist=artwork=viewer.

Open Issues therefore is made to further the dialogue and support the social context of art. Herewith, in this zine, you will find an alternative vision of an “interior” exhibition space for ideas and opinions.

—S.R. Kucharski



above: Geiger, Autocenter, Berlin, 2006
below: *untitled*, Composites.Patterns.Outcomes, Rotterdam, 2005

Maarten Janssen

This interview took place in Berlin on February 2nd 2006. Maarten and I sat in the kitchen of the Polaris “Koffer” in Berlin. We both ate peanuts, although I drank tea while Maarten, after a long day of taking down a recent exhibition at AutoCenter in Berlin, had a relaxing beer.

SRK: Would you like to make a short statement about your current projects or how you are active as an artist in both Rotterdam and Berlin?

MJ: I am active as an artist in Rotterdam, most of the time, where I have an atelier in Duende, in Crooswijk. Starting in the last three years, I go to Berlin two and half months a year—usually in pieces, not always at once. Sometimes I rent an atelier from people I know, and sometimes I just rent a house for a short period of time.

The first time I came to Berlin was just after the Wall came down and I found it very attractive and sensational, especially at that time, with the certain defined contrast between East and West. At the same time, there were interesting similarities to be found...

SRK: When you first came to Berlin, did you come with ideas to bring your artwork here or to work in Berlin as an artist?

MJ: No, not at all. I was just interested in visiting friends and enjoying the city: how it's built, all the strange things about it that I wasn't used to in a bigger city, coming from Rotterdam. That was the beginning of the nineties, and I kept coming back every three years or so, on the same basis of visiting friends and to experience the city. That was until a couple of years ago when I felt a need to get out of Rotterdam, and I rented an atelier in Berlin, Oranienstrasse in Kreuzberg.

That was in Juli 2003: long days and a heat-wave in the city of temperatures around 35-40°C. The Oranienstrasse was cooking during those three weeks. On the streets, images tumbled over each other. An incredible amount of graffiti, ads and ad bashing, thick packs of posters glued on top of each other every day again, a permanent stream of people doing nothing but showing their heavily tattooed and pierced body's, and glass from broken beer bottles everywhere...—an atmosphere of exhausting self-expression and iconoclasm, all against everything...

For my kind of artwork, it really isn't important whether I am making it in Rotterdam, or Asia or America or anywhere else. But, I found out that in Berlin, in this cultural environment, it wasn't so easy to start producing artwork—it was hard to “come into” such a different place, different situation and with so much going on outside. Even though I had brought with me some ideas to start new artworks, it was quite difficult to be in my studio. Most of the time, I found myself bicycling, just looking around at things and exploring: not just hanging out at Kastanienallee but sightseeing

in Marzahn, Gropiusstadt, Lichtenberg, Karlshorst and Oberschoeneweide.

SRK: So, the first time you came to Berlin to work as an artist, it really wasn't an easy task!

MJ: No, it was actually quite heavy to just start with something. I found out that—and this might sound contradictory—you first have to know your surroundings before you can eventually make artwork that in the end has nothing to do with it. Or, maybe something I didn't know, is you have to have some connection first in order to disconnect—to have things about your working environment mirrored in the artwork, somehow. That was my conclusion. You have to first collect information about a place and to know how to deal with it before you can forget about the place and just concentrate on your work.

I found a tag with a claw and I was excited. I thought it was a summons to steal (“Klaue” means both “claw” and “steal”). Later, I saw a similar one again and I came to the disappointing conclusion that it meant: “against dog tax.” Okay, let's go to the studio...

SRK: So that experience must have been good for you in the long run, because you have kept coming back to Berlin and working here?

MJ: Yes, I find it very exciting to get out of a known social circuit, mine being Rotterdam, and come to Berlin, to concentrate on things. And, to have distance to the things you are used to doing everyday, to find new connections, new ideas...

SRK: And after three plus years, more or less of coming to Berlin, do you still feel that way?

MJ: Well, no actually. I would say it's a pity now that I feel so at home here. I bicycle through Berlin now like I bicycle through Rotterdam—from time to time, I still notice something that is different or unexpected. But most of Berlin is familiar to me now, and I have all sort of connections with the city of Berlin that relate to the times I have been here before: there are definite forms, defined memories of the last three years and areas of time of being in Berlin, working in Berlin. In Rotterdam, my time there is less clear, about when this and this happened, exact dates and such.

SRK: So you can actually look at series of work and know that that piece was made during a time in Berlin, or through an influence of being in Berlin?

MJ: Yes, like from what atelier I had or what was the weather like in Berlin at that time.

SRK: How do you feel about the differences between having a long time invested in Rotterdam and a shorter but clear investment in Berlin? You must feel that
8 being in both cities is a benefit to your work or practice as an artist, no?

MJ: It is a kind of freedom, to be the person you are *at that moment*, and not the person you have been for the last ten years, that I feel in Berlin. I feel more free to develop myself in Berlin...maybe in Rotterdam, I am more stubborn, where I think I have to do this and this and this—I got a different attitude from being in Berlin, stepping outside of traditions found in art in the Randstad_ in Holland. I became less severe in my work from spending time in Berlin. Like how drawing has come into my work, where as before I considered myself a painter’s painter, and that painting was the only thing worth spending time on. Another thing that came of this open attitude was the mural works that I now produce.

SRK: The paintings that you have made, the series that involves rolling large dice along the canvas and then painting the marks made by the dice into the canvas, are those a series of works that came about from working in Berlin?

MJ: Actually, no: that is an example of my language before I first came to Berlin to live and work. The first works I made in Berlin, I have mostly destroyed! Only the paintbombs survived.

SRK: What about the mural work, the photocopied patterns that are arranged and create a certain pattern on the wall?

MJ: Those works are from after experiments made in Berlin. An example is the work I made for TENT three years ago titled *Prepare*. More or less, it was a coming together of my working with chance machines—like a website producing chance-numbers—and a here-and-now situation: a mural in TENT. For this occasion—temporary and immobile—during the Architectural Biennale and on “de kromme,” I wanted to use the image of this website to make a work specifically within this context. *Prepare*, a here-and-now word, was formed out of the O’s and i’s from a binary code, referring to computer programs to construct BLOBS. The columns in the artwork with the zeros and ones continued the rhythm of the windows and the gateways of the exhibition space. I also wanted to give this message – prepare - to create a kind of vanitas, a memento mori. Previously I wouldn’t have done in my art practice.

SRK: It is interesting that with the piece *Prepare* you had these relationships to the space of TENT—the repetition of the windows and forms—and that the piece would “fit” to the space...

MJ: Yes, that was something quite opposite to the paintings I make, which are images that are not meant to “fit” a space—they fit in themselves. The paintings try to be independent from the space they’re shown.

SRK: With the paintings you are known to make, more or less, “explosions” of form and/or color, and if you were to place them in a normal white cube space, they would really jump off from the wall. Do you have a certain concern in your work, within both the series of paintings and the mural work, for specifically

addressing the space they're shown in? I have noticed that recently you also have combined both the paintings and the murals together, and I am interested where you see yourself going with that.

MJ: I have tried with the mural work to define particular parts of a space and to activate that particular part of a space (space meaning where the work is exhibited). In the background to the work is an idea that a white cube space is also an "activated" space—here we say the space is normal, *as if* white is normal—but the space doesn't say *why* it's white. The white space isn't neutral: a century ago, you wouldn't have found a white space for artwork to be shown in. The white space is a certain creation, coming out of the nineteen-fifties or so, having a white space for art, and a false creation of the white space as neutral space. This is one of the things that I think over and over again, this idea that neutrality is a thing that is actually customized.

SRK: You mean that making a space white is a particular decision?

MJ: Yes, a certain dogma, let's say. It is all these ideas that white or grey is actually neutral. Since the creation of the white cube space is so related to a specific period of time, it just *can't* be neutral. In the same way you can question the neutrality-solutions of the minimalists.

SRK: But you're talking about where work of this genre came from and how it was established. When work from the fifties minimal artists or before needed a new environment to support the meaning and effect of the minimalist aesthetic itself, the exhibition space *then* became customized to show the work as being special.

MJ: Yes, it defines very much the attitude of a gallery, by having it all painted white or not. So, with my mural work, I am trying to break the white space in a way, in order to show how the white wall is not just a blank or empty space. Instead of "speaking out" about the conditions of the white cube space, I am trying to show my feelings for it through the actual work. It is my idea of the murals, like the white galleries they sit it, they are nothing and something at the same time—they have to be un-neutrally neutral!

SRK: Now that you are placing your paintings on top of these murals or wall-patterns in a more or less site-specific installation, do you have a name for the series or can you describe what your intentions are within the combination?

MJ: The mural pieces, or walls, and the paintings are together because I want to setup a situation where the process on the wall is different from the process in the paintings. There should be some kind of unequal movements in the installation, different dynamic.

10 SRK: One could look at this situation you have setup, where one can look at the paintings on their own as unique pieces—and you can just hang them on a

wall and they could activate the wall on their own—but now you are going ahead and activating the wall a second time with the murals as a sort of background through repetition or fades...yet, you're not actually calling it an installation with a purpose. Can you elaborate on your specific interest in activating the walls and the exhibition space?

MJ: The idea is that because walls in an exhibition space are *already* active—this is a presumption—and there is something I wish to achieve: the paintings have a border, and there is no way that the paintings can go further on the walls than their borders. I don't want them to breathe. I consider the walls stopping the painting.

SRK: So you work within an opinion that a painting or image *does* end at its borders or frame? Is it that you wish with combining the mural-image and the paintings that you setup two limits, two borders to keep the image closed?

MJ: Yes, that is the idea.

SRK: It seems to me that this recent work then is also concerned with looking outwards to the gallery, to the viewer—it is an opposite viewpoint to painting being a window onto another view, another world...are you concerned with an interior/exterior dialogue within the gallery space?

MJ: I don't try to bring the outside world into the gallery, or that I use the history of the space. An example is my most recent show at Autocenter in Berlin, which is a former car repair shop. I didn't use this reference. But on the other hand I choose to install this particular work because of its references to the outside world. Although it's a structure based on an autonomous construction-process, I found similar forms in the concrete, interior-garden ornaments of East Berlin. So, no history or actual situation—I don't bring these ideas into the work, but I like it when connections to things outside the gallery are made. That again has everything to do with the fact that I don't believe in lack of references.

My paintings are quite strict and they are built up in such a way that I hope the viewer can see the painting for what it is, on its own, why it is as it is. But Color, structure and iconography are all things that make other ideas come to the work. I have to get used to this fact, and remain a bit ambiguous to its happening.

An example to outside references is language, which is in itself something constructed. Language is therefore quite accurate to communicate the dry stuff—this is so and so, because of that and that. But, when I want to explain what I'd really like to achieve with the things I'm doing in my art practice, I can only point at the artifacts as examples of my artistic thought.

So, some questions that are important to ask when viewing my work are: why is there something, versus nothing? Why this color? Why this structure? 11

One could say my images have relationships to biology, cosmology, sociology...maybe because they are dealing with the same questions about origin and growth, but that's not the reason I make them.

SRK: Yes, but I hear you making a point that you wish to create a visual language that speaks to other fields of study, like the sciences...

MJ: I would rather have my paintings and murals as multi-interpretable as possible on this level. I used to clinch more to an idea of self-creation and process and image, in a pure way, but now I let the work become about other things...

SRK: In your previous exhibition at Galerie West in Den Haag, Netherlands you presented a wall mural of photocopies with two paintings on top or in front. Was this "installation" prepared specifically for this exhibition space or was it a pre-designed artwork just waiting for the right place to install it?

MJ: Well, in fact, I developed the initial ideas for combining the murals and paintings during time spent in a Berlin studio, which was really the beginning of using photocopies or computer prints for the murals. I did, however, customize the work for Galerie West. The opportunity to exhibit at Galerie West was quite nice because itself, the gallery is not a white cube: it is an un-renovated, almost trashy room. In this case of Galerie West, I was no longer concerned with de-neutralizing the space but instead defining the space from itself. I decided to take the most presentable wall in the space to place my combination of mural background and paintings on, and then consciously leave the rest of the space very raw, very *unused*.

SRK: Was it interesting for you to take into account the raw aesthetics of the space?

MJ: Yes, I liked it a lot. I like the dialogue between this crappy aesthetic in the room with the very clean paintings/art I make. I think it was a good combination, and it spoke to my personal idea that art should be presented in a *certain* space...

SRK: Do you mean that artwork should find its perfect exhibition space? That certain artwork fits a certain space, so to say...

MJ: It depends. In presenting the paintings I make, if you put them in a white cube, then they look quite good—you know, abstract art in a white cube is very fitting! But, there is also the attempt to generate a different way of looking at abstract art, as in Galerie West, to try to get other ideas into abstract art, to try and break down certain dogmas.

SRK: Was it then a test to see if your abstract paintings could function in a trashy, un-renovated space like Galerie West? That the images could still "live" in that environment, like what we have talked about earlier, in contrast to this "neutralized" space of the white cube that has been designed specifically to emphasize and frame abstract works of art, minimalist works of art...

MJ: Yes. I think that a white cube with paintings hung in it is already an installation, a certain, defined theater.

With the exhibition at Galerie West, it would have been fine to just hang my paintings alone on the walls, to see that contrast itself, between image and the quality of the background, the walls, floors, etc. But, I find that less interesting to witness or experience, so I became interested in addressing *multiple* contrasts in the gallery.

SRK: You mean like double borders: border of the paintings, border of the mural, border of the wall to the floor and ceiling...is this the newest direction in your artwork?

MJ: Maybe. I participated in the exhibition *Compositions.Patterns.Outcomes* last Spring in Rotterdam, and that was the first time I exhibited this combination of murals made from photocopies and computer prints as a pattern with the paintings mounted on top. So now, I have been reworking this idea several times in my studio, showing it to many people. And the Galerie West exhibition was a continuation of this.

In my most recent exhibition at AutoCenter in Berlin, I presented a setup where the paintings were now in the wall or mural—the paintings were works on paper that had started a process of how the rest of the wall-mural was built up.

SRK: Were you working specifically in/for the space at AutoCenter then?

MJ: No, I had started this work in my Berlin studio about one half year ago, but I re-made the work specifically for AutoCenter on a larger scale.

SRK: Are these pieces becoming more like installations for you now? I know I keep asking this...or, do they remain some form of extended painting? I ask this because to go into an exhibition space and make a “thing” that transforms the space or addresses the space *has* been referred to traditionally as an installation art-piece, and I want to make sure we agree on the language of it. It doesn't really matter on the medium used, instead it is the *attitude* to alter the exhibition space that begins to define the work as an installation setup.

MJ: In general altering the space is second; first, I want to alter what's in it. Besides that, the space also alters the wall-works, being a “measure” for these works. Also - via “competition”, I want to create a kind of un-idealness in the hope to alter the view. So I think there are elements of extended painting, as well as installation, in these pieces.

SKR: I am very interested in how artwork addresses and speaks to the aesthetics of a space—an example being this AutoCenter in Berlin, where it has a certain car shop aesthetic, and how that aesthetic is used or ignored by the artist working in or with the space and their own artwork. It is maybe a harsh question: when does art activate a space and when does it just decorate a space?

MJ: Well in the case of Autocenter, it is also a white cube but a trashy one: the walls are rough and of a very heavy, brick material and not smooth. The floor is grey and worn down by visitors, with neon lights on the ceiling. I find it a quite ideal space to show my work! (laughter) But in this case together with Machiel van Soest, I concentrated on making a framework, breaking the whiteness and breaking the silence.

To decorate is also a way to activate...to decorate sounds a little negative but within my objective it's not so bad—I'm looking for a kind of nothingness.

The aesthetics of the Autocenter space—and how one *feels* about the space—comes very close to my preference for a certain atmosphere for the work to exist in: a space not striking in its aesthetics, but not plain either. The exhibition space has to be accepted for its particular aesthetics and former use...

SRK: Is this preference just for your own work, or do you also like to see the work of other artists in this particular aesthetics relationship, between rough and clean?

MJ: It is hard to say. I think it doesn't make that much difference for me—when I look at artwork, I look at the artwork as independent of the relationship the artwork might have to the exhibition space. Of course, the exhibition space always has an *impact* on the art. I think sometimes this question is best answered by the viewer, because as a spectator you can better judge the influence of the space on the artwork, because as the artist you naturally are already familiar to your work, and that is established outside of the influence of the exhibition space.

With the AutoCenter, there was a specific idea to keep the exhibition space rather open, to let the space exist, and to make a different approach to showing work in the space as a contrast to previous uses of the space by other artists, which were in general quite heavy installations and very expressionistic—good work, but I don't do installations like this. I found it interesting to work with an idea of spaciousness, in relationship to the artwork that I placed on the wall.

SRK: I am interested if you think artists should pay attention to how artwork fits to a space, even to whether the artwork is *appropriate* to a space? This is not just something that installation artists need to be concerned with, I think.

MJ: There is a general idea behind my artwork that it can fit into many different kinds of exhibition spaces. Of course, I make a decision to show certain works based on the limits or situation of each particular exhibition space. It is important to take into account the *atmosphere* of the exhibition space.

SRK: I think it is important for an artist to know and have found the best type of exhibition space that can support the artwork, support the experience of the artwork.

MJ: Well, I also say to myself that I don't care about the exhibition space, that my work is context independent, that I can show it everywhere! At least, this is how I would like it to be.

SRK: Do you ever think there is a greater or lesser experience of your work that is dependent on the place in which it is shown?

MJ: The space in which I would like my artwork shown should not hamper the evocative quality of the work, but it shouldn't be too sacred either. That is my ideal.

SRK: After this AutoCenter exhibition, and even before it, do you have future opportunities to show and work in Berlin? In the three plus years of working between Rotterdam and Berlin, is one city more responsive to your activity as an artist?

MJ: You have to know people in Berlin, just like in Rotterdam, if anything is going to happen for you. I think Berlin functions through connections within different "scenes" of artists—it makes it easier if you are part of one of these scenes. But, that really is something that happens everywhere...

SRK: So, you aren't working on and off in Berlin because of abundant opportunities for exhibiting your artwork?

MJ: I was very curious to see what was happening in Berlin within the art scene from the start. But, I don't receive special attention from being from Rotterdam, let's say...

SRK: I noticed that there are quite a few artists from Rotterdam that have managed to live and work in Berlin over the last few years. I wonder how it was for them, that Berlin became just a place to work and be inspired—like you, Maarten have said was your initial relationship to the city—or whether there was follow-through and that these artists also began to show here and that the art scene opened up to them and their participation? I want to identify if there is not only a sharing of space going on but also a sharing of perspective between the Rotterdam-based artists and the Berlin art scene.

MJ: I have the idea that Berlin is *very* international. Certainly, if you go to the gallery spaces in Berlin, you see them internationally active with international groups of exhibiting artists. Some galleries aim to work specifically with Berlin-based artists. I have noticed a certain expressive, expressionism-like style, almost fauvist, coming out of Berlin: "bad attitude" guys making a lot of noise with their art. But, that is just my perspective. On the other hand I've met curators who are quite stylish—young curators interested in art with a designed look and a certain refined quality.

SRK: Do you ever compare Berlin to Rotterdam and see a huge contrast, something that inspires you to maintain a foothold in both these cities—something particularly influential to you or your practice as an artist?

MJ: Well, I like to move between cities simply for the change of environment. But, maybe Rotterdam feels a bit like a little Berlin—both cities have a “rebuilt” character about them, being heavily bombed during the Second World War.

I know Rotterdam for a long time now, and when I arrived, the city was very open (underdeveloped) in many places and the harbors were deserted. I enjoyed these empty strips of land very much in Rotterdam. When I came to Berlin, that same emptiness was still all around, quite present in the atmosphere.

SRK: In previous issues of *Open Issues*, the international context that the art scene in Rotterdam finds itself has been a hot topic. Albeit a small art scene when put directly into comparison with Berlin, still, I find it very active: artists from all over the world make Rotterdam their home, and then travel extensively to exhibit their work or work site-specific somewhere under an invitation. I am curious if you have any perspective on Berlin as also a city that supports this activity of coming and going. Have you in your three plus years of working in Berlin found it difficult to show your work here, feel that you have been successful in Berlin or more active than when in Rotterdam? What sort of reaction have you had to being specifically a Dutch artist in Berlin?

MJ: I have the idea—and again, it is only one persons idea—that the Germans are heavy on categorization: you do this and this and this, or that and that and that, and there is no jumping between the two. I have the idea there is some trouble with accepting artwork based on process, based on abstraction that tries to alter the traditions, or to mix categories—that isn’t so well understood here. These are ideas based on the latest reactions I received to my own work shown here in Berlin, from Germans.

What I also find about the German art scene is that people here are quite thorough—they like to know everything, and when they get to know something, they respond quite positively to it, even if I sometimes have the idea it was an interrogation! Still, there remains some “question” between my artwork and the audience in Berlin that I have experienced so far. It is slow going.

SRK: But this seems like an attitude you got from the strict gallery scene. How then was it for you to show in the AutoCenter, which is definitely another of these art-related networks...another platform with another audience.

MJ: Yes, that’s true. I feel that I can move around more now, that my artwork can have more places to be exhibited than before, in Berlin. Because Autocenter is quite well known and a good space, it is obvious that it benefits me to show there.

SRK: Is it your goal to keep up your connection between Rotterdam and Berlin, to remain just as dedicated to splitting your time between the two cities and pursue opportunities in both?

connection to Berlin, this usual “coming back” to Berlin feeling. Since I come to Berlin two to three times a year, it does feel a bit like I live here.

SRK: Well then, do you see yourself bringing aspects of your relationship to Berlin back to Rotterdam with you, how you react on people and of course how you look to the art scene in Rotterdam?

MJ: Well, it is mostly now related to my self and how I feel about myself—it is a known thing to me, to work and sometimes live between these two cities. The earlier struggles I had are gone...and sometimes this is a pity, because I don't look around so much at the city, but more towards the people—instead of being a city of buildings, Berlin is more a city of people. This creates a small but different relationship to a place.

SRK: How is it that you decided to make a habit of living and working in Berlin a few times a year, yet never decided to completely move to Berlin?

MJ: I think it would be different if I stayed in Berlin, supported by a cultural institution from Holland, which would make it easier to stay longer. For me personally though, the step is too big. It is satisfying like it is now—maybe I should say that. I don't have to make this choice. I like Rotterdam too, you know? I have friends in Rotterdam.

I have had troubles before, being away from Rotterdam, coming back to Rotterdam, feeling like an alien towards certain issues and people you love. Sometimes it feels like you're not participating or that you are escaping all the time—you become a traveler that people don't feel they can invest in.

SRK: Well, that statement is very...present, for me too, coming from California and living in Rotterdam, yet maintaining a foot in both those places. Even though most of the time I live in Rotterdam but keep active in both places, what is the percentage point in which you are a Rotterdammer, a Californian or a Berliner? What percentage of time spent in a place allows you to be seen as a true participant in that city?

MJ: The danger is always that you become neither, and that is something in which as an individual, you need to have a certain character about you. I for one don't have it.

The pull to live in Berlin, for me, was stronger in the beginning, much more than it is now. I think that has to do with feeling that everything in the city is open to discover, but with all my different periods of coming to Berlin, I have had the experience of the city—the “spell” of the city is over. I can imagine that if you start living here for a half year, and you have the opportunity to stay longer in the beginning of a relationship with Berlin...well, in that case, had I had that, I would have stayed.

SRK: How do you feel about the “spell” of Rotterdam? Rotterdam was also not your original city, so how would you say that Rotterdam has grabbed you, and then obviously never let go? 17

MJ: It is both personal and practical reasons, really. However, I *would* like Rotterdam to be more adventurous of a place than it is now. Not so much happens in Rotterdam, to my perspective, in the arts...in comparison with Berlin at least.

SRK: I do think that Rotterdam does have places and people who make the city active and adventurous, but it is also related to the size of the city—you have to find these things and also be active yourself. And, we have to be honest that Berlin is on a totally different scale than Rotterdam, also in a different country with a different attitude found in the people. I think that you and I, two people living in Rotterdam, are there for a reason, that we find something so good there, or good enough, that we stay there.

Even if Berlin has this big lure to it for artists, and we both can easily imagine or already do make ourselves active in Berlin, why are we still in Rotterdam?

MJ: I have to be realistic that my opportunities in Holland are bigger than in Germany, or Berlin. That is part of my hesitation of leaving Rotterdam. I must say that I like the particular setup of the Randstad here in Holland—living in Rotterdam, you also can easily experience Den Haag, Amsterdam, etc. In fact, that is quite nice. When you are in Berlin, it can sometimes feel like you are on an island!

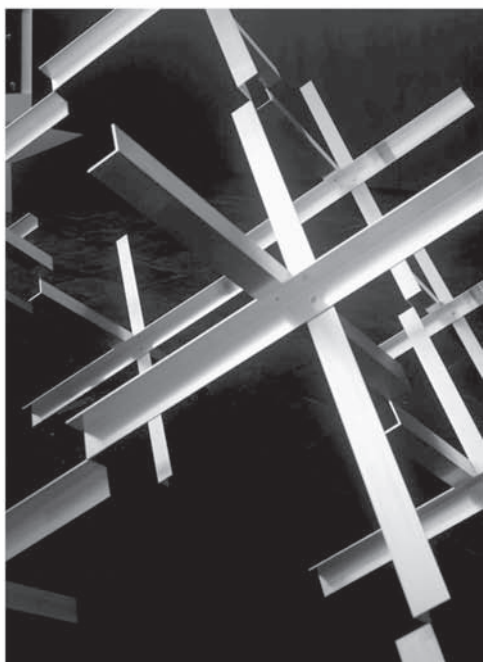
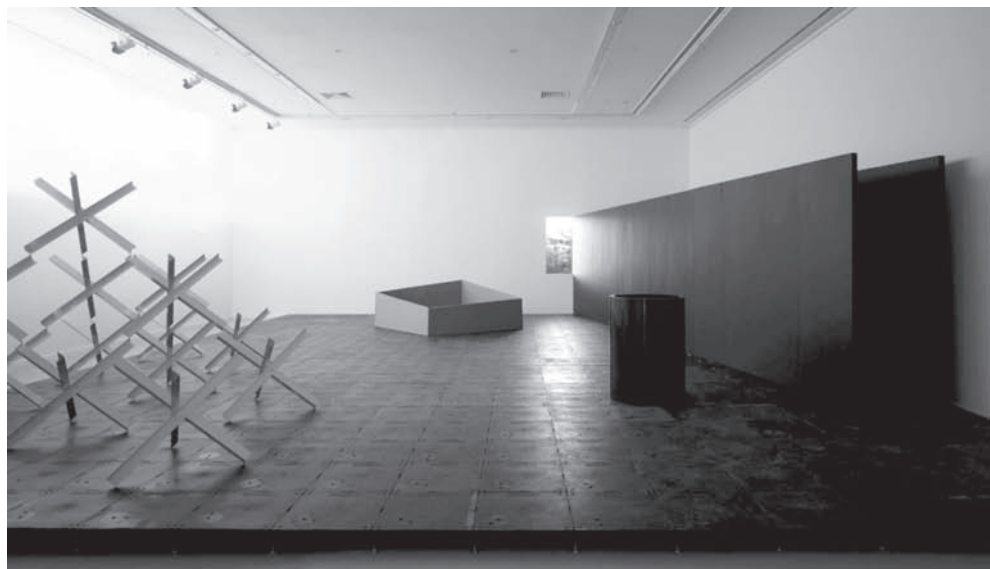
SRK: I think you're talking about some sort of feeling here, where living in Holland, because it is so small, you can afford to jump over to Amsterdam, Den Haag, Utrecht, etc. You can get away. Where as when I am in Berlin, it does seem like you could just spend all your time in Berlin and never leave...

But since I know you are shortly returning to Rotterdam after this exhibition at Autocenter, what is coming up for you in Holland? Any exhibitions, or just working in the studio?

MJ: For myself, for my standards, I have done a lot in the last year's time. I mainly made exhibitions and also worked specifically for exhibitions, and I look forward to being in Rotterdam for some time, for at least half a year, to get back into some sort of studio rhythm, to realize things that were in the back of my head. At the moment, I feel like I have only been sitting on my ideas for the last year...

But, I hope to be back in Berlin in the fall...

*More information on the artwork of Maarten Janssen can be found at:
<http://home.hetnet.nl/~f2hjanssen.m>*



tools for rescue/tools for hiding, 2006

Lucas Lenglet

This interview took place on February 3rd 2006 in Lucas's studio at the Bethanien Residency. I provided some excellent cookies from a Turkish bakery and Lucas made the tea. I had just seen Lucas's exhibition at Künstlerhaus Bethanien and was excited to discuss it. But first, we started out discussing the previous editions of Open Issues...

SRK: ... I distribute *Open Issues* for free in the Netherlands... a condition of Tomorrowism is to give the information away for free, and I think this allows for *Open Issues* to fall into strange hands, because I never have to worry about the economical value issue, or someone deciding it is or isn't worth one Euro, five Euros, etc.—just pick it up and read it, no hassle...

Lucas Lenglet: You're not doing it for the money...

SRK: No, not in the least. What I do get out of *Open Issues* is being fortunate to interview artists who are interesting (and doing quite well at the moment). I admit I am getting more interest in *Open Issues* because of that, as I continue the project. Also, I consider many whom I invite for an interview good colleagues, and this makes some interviews especially exciting to conduct—I like to support their activities as artists—and, I am often quite familiar with their work to begin with. My knowledge of what certain artists are concerned with, in their art, directly influences the themes for each issue. What *Open Issues* starts with is concerns I find present in contemporary art, then themes are generated and then artists are asked to the interview in order to support/discuss/dispel the themes—I do research beforehand, that each artist has a connection already to the themes.

This particular *Open Issues* is about artists working with space, or the exhibition space, in their art practice. Mainly, artists who have an art practice that either directly acknowledges the exhibition space by manipulating it somehow, or who are busy with a discussion on the use of exhibition space, say historically or contemporary. There are also the questions related to working or referencing the interior/exterior of an exhibition space, simple issues of aesthetics, etc. or, building their own spaces, which is why I specifically invited you to talk with me about themes related to exhibition space and using space as an artist.

LL: I am happy that you make something like *Open Issues*, because I think this format is something that is missing, these type of initiatives, the simple initiatives. Not in content, but in how it is presented. Please don't go and get a big subsidy and make it full color, etc.!!

SRK: Well, I don't plan on making *Open Issues* more than it is now—photo-printed, home grown, cheap as possible. This format makes it easy to distribute and it just works. As long as the text is readable, you know? That is more

important. And, there is a lot of text, which means *Open Issues* is something to pick up and read now and then, and get some opinions by contemporary artists.

LL: That is usually how I approach these types of magazines, too.

SRK: And I must say that *Open Issues* really is a continuation of curatorial work I did in US America, previously. It was my initiative to just show work and not be commercial—selling work was not in my interest, although possible—I wanted to show the work of artists that had no gallery representation, as an alternative to other galleries active in the Bay Area of San Francisco that I didn't agree with, let's say.

When I moved to Holland, I had less support and less ability to organize a gallery space and *Open Issues* took over the curatorial desire and became a new platform.

LL: Yes, it is a platform, a sort of stage...I don't know how all the texts are, but it could be an exhibition in itself.

SRK: For me, it is an exhibition of artists because collectively, they all speak to something, and hopefully something similar in their artwork...

LL: Do you consider it then a group show, or a combination of solo shows?

SRK: That is a good question! I would like to leave it up to the reader to make that decision.

LL: You mainly know all these people before you interview them?

SRK: Yes, but often it is a mix of known and unknown. That is also a final bonus for me, in that I get to familiarize myself with new work by artists I would otherwise never get to have this personal discussion with, and the artists and I make a particular connection through the interview process.

LL: I was actually discussing this situation of the interview this morning, because today a group of critics came to Bethanien to see my exhibition, and I think they were invited by ArtForum to look around Berlin and the various institutes here. I was asked to give a small introduction to my work for this group, but these ten people just rushed in my installation, touched everything with hands instead with their eyes. I began to give this introduction and I think only half of them gave me maybe...two minutes! The rest, well, they just more or less ran away. I don't think any of them gave more than ten minutes with the installation...I appreciate getting personal with the artwork, because you share some sort of intimacy, when you really get into it.

SRK: Yes, you can say you were on show, just as much as your work was on show, and to then to have none of them really giving you the opportunity to represent your work—it isn't always the case that a reviewer of an artwork gets

a chance to speak with the artist.

I think this is a good point of departure to begin talking to you about your current installation *tools for rescue/tools for hiding*, because I spent some time in the exhibit and I have some reactions...

LL: How long were you there?

SRK: I think I was in the space for about 25 minutes or so...I made some notes and such...

LL: Well, you broke the record!

SRK: Nice. My initial thought when I walked in your installation, having never seen any of your artwork in person before—but having familiarized myself with your previous work from your portfolio, which gives me a little bit of a background into your activities—was that since the installation is quite minimal, or that there exists a closed set of objects placed in relation to each other—as well as one hidden object, a photograph behind the wall running through the installation—that there is something required to spend real time in the space, that it is important to the artwork to just spend time looking at it, to let your brain work on the piece, more or less.

Because I feel that there isn't any one object to blow you away visually in the setup... but, everything has been carefully constructed, so...one thing about just looking at the piece, standing in the space, I began to wonder what was your relationship with this installation and the "outside world" of the gallery space. Maybe you can talk about how the installation sits in the gallery space and how you have organized it, and if you are making any direct connections to outside the gallery space.

LL: I am almost always working on the gallery space itself, because...well, I should start somewhere else: one of the reasons to work three-dimensional is it relates most to the world I am living in—I am surrounded by three-dimensional objects—and, because I have a difficult time with art in general because it is always re-presenting reality, I as an artist am always trying to get as close to reality as possible, starting from the imagination, my imagination. I *choose* to work three-dimensional, and I think working in this dimension has a sort of self-evidence to it. In that way, I work with objects within a given space, an exhibition space...but the exhibition space *has* to be changed, because my objects are there for the moment, for the length of the exhibition, so I adapt the gallery space to support the presentation of the installation of objects.

I refer to the outside world only by linking my installation to a world that surrounds me, like relating to the violence that surrounds me. With this work, I look to the other side of this violence and try to create a safe situation with objects that refer to this idea of safety, or getting into a safe situation—I am really thinking of an *action or act*. For me, the fact that this installation is made in Bethanien, and

Bethanien is in Kreuzberg, which is a specific neighborhood in Berlin that is further in Germany, well, that doesn't particularly matter.

I am however influenced by the whole Berlin art scene. I was so fascinated by all these painters here, how everyone was painting in Berlin, and I don't know how to do that: painting. But, it looked sort of...attractive to do. So, normally, if I created an installation like this, I would want the different objects to not only to be seen as an installation, but also as a sculpture, on a whole. But with this particular work, I tried to make it more two-dimensional, so that if you stand in front or around the objects, the view *onto* the work is two-dimensional...

SRK: I would also interject that you have a very strong color relationship in this installation, with use of lights and their effect. And this color effect, or dealing with color attributes in artwork, is something usually reserved or understood in painting. One could definitely talk about the safety of yellow, when discussing this new artwork, so to speak.

LL: You said earlier that you reacted to the photograph from this latest installation to be "hidden." It is my perspective that I was just giving it a safe place, by placing it behind the wall sculpture-object...

In this installation at Bethanien, what I tried to do, in a formal way, is to make a second floor (stage) and "colonize" the space, and each object-sculpture sits on this floor, and every wall-object has its "way out:" there is a window, the lighting, the photograph and the exit/entrance to the gallery. These "aspects" are what constitute the installation in the gallery.

If you work in a three-dimensional way, it is time-based in that you have to move around the objects, spend time in the space, otherwise you don't really see the work.

SRK: When I first walked in I noticed this specific orientation you present: there is the original floor, left unused, that forms an L-shape, then there is your built platform-floor filling the rest of the gallery—it seemed that you as the artist setup the space so I could specifically walk about the installation, so I could take specific views on the installation. It wasn't until I saw that the wall-objects that sit on the built floor form a corridor and that at the end of the corridor is a photograph, so that I realized I could walk into the installation. At that point, I felt I was invited to walk through the installation.

I did respond to the photograph being hidden because one couldn't fully see it unless walking down that corridor, and into the installation. And, once I was in that space, I did feel more or less hidden away from the rest of the installation, the rest of the gallery.

24 Also, looking at past work from your portfolio, I also related to the "hiding" or "being hidden" aspect of being in a box, a shelter or a fort. I guess it could be either a situation to provide protection or a situation of hiding away...

You mention that you are trying to address the violence in society with your work. Is there anything in particular that you think is special about using interior spaces to address social/exterior spaces? Do you also feel that you could develop work for outside the gallery space?

LL: The good thing for me as an artist, regarding the gallery space, is that most of the time traditional, white cube exhibition spaces are neutral and easy to alter. That is what I like to do and it is then easy to work with these spaces, to make your mark. The classical exhibition space also provides a certain level of concentration: you know you are going to look at art, and that is a specific mood or attitude.

I'm not sure I am actually addressing social issues. As a general thing, there is something specific I have observed and then translate into my artwork. It is more that I am thinking of my own issues and translating them into the artwork.

What exactly do you mean with social issues, and how broad is your question?

SRK: From reading your portfolio text, and from what you just said about addressing issues of violence in our society and because you are using some specific objects in your recent work—like the anti-tank crosses—there are real references to say, war, where some very significant countries in the world are at war. I am not asking about social issues in any specific sense, as in: are you addressing the war in Iraq? But, in the sense of a social issue that deals with protecting yourself...

LL: It is a double-sided issue: I find it interesting that violence, on a collective scale, is almost...accepted. Then, on an individual level, it isn't. As example, if I punch you in the face, then I'll be in deep shit for that action. I sometimes have these feelings, these individual feelings of violence and aggression. In order to be violent on a collective scale, you have to organize a lot of people, have a lot of material...and with that comes these certain aesthetics. I reuse this issue of collective aesthetics on an individual level, to achieve a certain aim—I more or less apply a type of "formalized violence" in my installations. I do this *because* I have difficulties with violence, so in this way, I address a social context of violence through the personal. I don't want to make any particular political statement, to say I am against this or for that, because I don't think art is the right platform for being definitive about political issues.

SRK: It is interesting that you talk about a formalization of violence, and how this can be or is an aesthetic, that you use and an artist—that you make a translation of things we associate with violence, such as the anti-tank crosses, and use their aesthetic properties for a certain effect in the installation...

LL: I like to be a bit naïve with it as well. This is often misunderstood: when I use the anti-tank crosses, people can only refer to war and they can't see it as a metaphor to just stopping things in general. Once you put up a barrier, such as these crosses 25 are put up, the question is about whom you want to stop? Are you inside, or

outside? This relates to an idea of shelters, these safe places... resulting from situations of conflict on whatever level.

I like to create a place that I feel safe, that I feel comfortable. This is one thing in my work. Another thing is if you make art, it is always about “visuality,” and once you start to make people invisible, there is something “going wrong,” there is a friction.

I am not trying to make an artwork that is difficult to read, but I like it when it is challenging to which side you choose to stand on, which side to choose in the installation...

SRK: Of course, the viewer will bring their history to the installation, and that would influence their choice to which side they choose. If one had a real, direct relationship to being held back by anti-tank barriers once in their life, that would cause a reaction, force one into a position...

Since we are talking about positions, I am interested particularly in your work based on previous installations where you made a space within a space—can you talk about your current and past interests with building closed environments within the gallery space?

LL: There is one simple thing: what I like about being an artist is being in charge. If I am invited to make an installation or sculpture somewhere, I decide how the space will look and what I can do in the space. To go over the top with it, I fix a position for myself within the space.

When I was seventeen, I met Dom. Hans van der Laan, an architect from the Netherlands who is no longer alive. He was a founder of de Bossche School. He had a very basic set of rules for how to deal with space, coming from architecture. He was a monk and living in a monastery he designed himself.

Van der Laan once invited me to walk around with him, so he could show me the actual design of this monastery. He pointed out to me something particular: that you need to have only two columns to make a space, to divide a space from the “endless space,” the earth. I was so amazed by the simplicity of this way of seeing, that if you actually stand between two columns that have a certain dimension and relation to each other, you begin to feel that you are in a closed space, or a safe space. This is something that has always stayed with me over the years, while working as an artist.

In order for me to establish a certain concentration in my practice, I need a wall. But a wall doesn't need to be a wall...I need more or less a territory to activate.

SRK: This is then one way you “claim” the space in which you are working—you place a wall, it starts dividing space, starts establishing relationships...

was, and I had to place my object in it...and I was so dissatisfied with it! I tried to make my sculpture confined in my own space, but still, for me, it never really worked.

There is something about how my installations can really “touch” a building, by making a space within a space. For the CAC in Vilnius, Lithuania, I wanted to show another Molotov piece, after the two previous versions, but I was occupied with how to present it, how to reach a conclusion or a translation with the building it would be housed in. Again it was important for me to have a relationship to the surrounding building or space, but this time by representing it without altering it.

SRK: This show you participated in, *Focus Istanbul*, there were certain restrictions for your installation, for you as an artist to “get it right” with the installation, as you say. Maybe you can talk about what you must do, as an artist, when working within these restrictions of a particular room, a particular exhibition space? And, how that works in contrast to say Bethanien, where the exhibition space/gallery is free to manipulate as you like. How do restrictions inform your practice, inform the actual installation?

LL: I always used to work through an invitation: there is a given deadline, there is a given budget and there is a given space in which to manipulate. In-between different shows, I would think about possible solutions, but never get started on them—I was always jealous of studio-based artists who could, with a piece of paper and a pen, work within those particular limitations. And, I was interested in moving towards that position as well, that I could create my work without concern for the manipulation of a given space...

I then had this *Focus Istanbul* show, and there weren't many limits except that I couldn't change the preexisting space—I became faced with just being able to put an object in the exhibition space so I had to make an object that invited people to enter a more associative space rather than a physical one. At Bethanien, I had the limitation of time and money. Here, the limitlessness of the space became the challenge: how could I limit myself within the space, in the given time, with the given budget.

Another example in a limitation of the space is when in a gallery situation, which I encountered with Fons Welters and my installation *Shamming the Shack*. Because of the limits of the gallery, I choose to make my installation in my studio instead—which I would have never come up with, had I not the limitations of the unchangeable gallery space that is Fons Welters gallery.

These special limitations related to the exhibition space give me the best challenges. In general, I find with working in an exhibition space that the sky is the limit—your mind goes everywhere, and you can recreate the entire world, if you want to. And sometimes I think I can...(laughter)

SRK: I am curious about your attitude, in regards to the Fons Welters exhibition, 27
because you decided it wasn't the right space for you to work in. So, there must

be a very strong interest on your part that your objects/installations have the “right” space for presentation. Namely, because the arrangement of objects are placed with a specific concern with the viewing space...

I think there are situations where installation artists will accept working in a space simply because it is a given opportunity, and they will “fit” their work to it, hell or high water. Your experience at Fons Welters is an example of where an artist says “No, this isn’t for me,” the space wasn’t right, so you find a way to participate on your own terms...have you come across this situation more than once, this decision to deny using a particular space?

LL: A previous work I made in Heerlen, in a modern glass-palace building, where I was invited to make an installation in a new building built to the side—also of glass—and in this patio area, maybe is a good example. The patio was completely surrounded by glass, and I couldn’t work with solid material, because it would completely block the light, and I would feel that I would be an asshole to do it, not respecting the people who work there. It was difficult, because I am very interested in solid materials and scale.

Another restriction was that it was an enclosed space and would only be seen from the exhibition space, and since the patio was situated below street level, one would have to bend over to see the work as well. I decided to use the whole enclosed space, including the floor and the airspace above it within this patio, which rose up to the street level, to make up for the lack of mass I could work with. In this situation, I completely adapted to my restrictive environment, in order to alter the space.

I have to say the whole process started with a lot of cursing and complaints, because I don’t want to be limited! (laughter). But, it worked in the end.

SRK: This is the challenge for artists working with installations, of how to bend the space to their will or their idea, *and* have it succeed, because there is always the risk that it won’t...

LL: If I were to work two-dimensional, say with photographs, I would *also* want it to be framed in a way that it becomes a space: like to have a two and a half centimeter distance between the glass and the print, that you have to look into the frame to see the picture. This is a choice, because I personally don’t feel comfortable with the two-dimensional image alone.

SRK: What an interesting position, to carry with you this particular relationship to image and a reoccurring factor in your work, this need for three-dimensionality even when considering the two-dimensional image—it is like always building some sort of invisible wall...

Can I ask you a question? Regarding this installation here in Bethanien, did you feel comfortable in the space? Simply, how did you feel?

SRK: When I first walked in, it felt quiet, in the way that I was invited to just spend time in the exhibit, to just look. Once I knew, based on observation, that I could actually walk into the piece, I began to feel comfortable in the exhibition space, because it was no longer a situation of the artists saying “look at what I put together,” instead you were saying “jump around, move around what I have built—walk here, look from this angle, get close, look in...”

At this point, I felt a relationship to the little kid in me that used to play and make forts to play in, to hide in. I realized a feeling of play. This feeling of “play” was continued in finding the photograph placed in the back of the installation, this photograph of a corridor continuing on in the photograph itself. Therefore, the world of the installation continued off into the imagination of the photographic world, and this activated a play of the imagination.

In the installation, there were still some oddities: the anti-tank crosses. Because I know what they are used for in reality, and that has certain significance, I began to feel like I was playing a type of war game, more or less, and that the installation was my game board, my battlefield. And now, I was in charge of these “pieces.” I was left with a feeling that I could move around the individual sculpture pieces, if I wanted to...realistically, only in my head, of course. I began to see the sculptures as grossly big objects that I could arrange and move in order to make my own room...

LL: You are the second person who says this, that the objects seem “enlarged.” And, this feeling of being a child in a playground...

SRK: In that sense, the installation, as a singular piece, is about manipulation of objects within a space. I thought heavily on this idea of the “arrangement of things.”

I wrote down in some notes that I was interested in the presentation of this mental playground, and because this installation is art and not a real playground. I was also concerned with other questions, like what is your relationship, on the artist’s side, to boyhood fantasies? Do the individual, sculptural parts of the exhibition have specific references, like this dividing wall in the space relating to a part of the world that is at war over one, massive dividing wall that separates two countries, two people...

LL: I am actually quite happy not many people *do* make that direct association. I wouldn’t like to be asked to talk about Israel/Palestina or East/West Germany...of course these walls were there for a reason, to keep you in or keep you out...which is of course also the difference between Israel and Germany, on the wall subject...

But, you also refer to this object in the installation as a “wall,” but it is also a 29
corridor...and that was the main reason I include it, because it is a physical

corridor that leads to the corridor in the photograph—a framed corridor—and I wonder whether people see this corridor leading to an entrance or exit. This is why I have placed the objects in the installation.

Getting back to a question you asked early on, about how I relate to the world outside the gallery space and how important is that relationship, for me, it was very important for me to open up a window in the exhibition space that looks out onto the grounds of the Bethanien Residency building. I made this setup to access the outside, because I felt the actual interior entrance to the exhibition space was not enough...

Like you said, it is clearly art. It is not a playground. Maybe it is art that calls for an *association* to a playground. But in order to make it a re-presentation, make it more than what it actually is, you have to include the outside world—you have to include a link to reality. While I treated the view of the outside world by using tinted glass, seeing people walk by outside through this single window in the exhibition space gives you some clues to the meaning of the piece. My use of this window is a complicated part of the installation, because the window is abused as an image in itself...

SRK: I liked how this single window onto the outside world exists in the installation. I was interested in how the corridor/wall runs right up to the window, and your eye is lead to the window through perspective lines within the installation.

There is this formal continuation of the installation, through this use of line and movement, which runs through the work and out the window and into the outside world. I wasn't at concerned with what it meant, or what you might be pointing me too. But, a question I do have about the work is whether you are looking out or looking in, in regards to the outside world...

LL: I am looking out, as the artist, but I want you, as the viewer, to look in.

What I want to achieve with an artwork is that you wander around in my mind. It feels a bit freaky to have you wandering around my head, but I want you too! (laughter)

SRK: In the nine months that you have lived in Berlin through the Bethanien residency, and since you have been looking closely at the aesthetics of the Berlin painters as you mentioned earlier, has you received any comments about your recent installation that you have adopted new aesthetics, new influences to your art practice?

LL: It is not that I have been hoping for a reaction of: "wow, this is so Berlin!" I don't think I would have even liked that...however, I did think people would respond more to the painterly character of the lighting within the installation here at Bethanien.

30 In the beginning of my stay here in Berlin, I kept saying to a Dutch friend: "people actually talk here in Berlin, about art!" That people in Berlin really try to understand the art, try to theorize it. But for my opening, it seemed I had

different kinds of conversations: some people were more concerned with how it was made than what I was addressing...people don't dare to ask the artist at his opening "why did you make this?"

SRK: Well, an opening is understood as a congratulatory event, where it is a celebration that the artwork was finished and presented—it brings with it a positive attitude, and no one usually feels brave enough to be critical with the artist.

LL: Well, I can do that with people!

SRK: That's good, I think, that you are honest and critical when you feel the need to be.

LL: I expect that people to be that way with me as well!

SRK: Well, this brings up a point that art isn't just about enjoyment—art is about ideas and positions and issues, and if the artwork isn't working, people *should* discuss that...

LL: I think art is super serious, that you should take it super serious—I don't like art that is only ironic, or makes fun of itself.

SRK: Can you characterize what you have experienced in Berlin in general, if the attitudes of the art viewing public has influenced you and created this desire for you to continue to live in Berlin after the Bethanien residency is over?

LL: Partly yes... what I compare between Holland and Berlin is, in Berlin, there isn't a strict distinction between the different scenes and levels within the art world. People go from one scene to another scene quite easily. That gives me as an artist a lot of freedom, and I can do whatever I want and still be appreciated somewhere. In Amsterdam at least, you have to stick very closely to this scene or that scene, otherwise you are not cool, and people question you if you move around, change your medium, hang out in different places. You're kept in, in little identity boxes...

SRK: In the last few days I have been speaking with gallery directors, assistants and curators, explaining that I am interviewing artists from the Netherlands, namely Rotterdam, who are partly working and exhibiting in Berlin, partly working or exhibiting in the Netherlands, but all have a fascination with Berlin. I explain that I am interested in finding the truth behind the big rumor that Berlin really has it "goin' on" for artists, that Berlin is the place to go, to experience...it has been pumped up. When I talked to the galleries, I asked straight away: how do you pick your artists, from who and from where are you showing work, and do you look at Dutch artists work now and then?

LL: Do they actually answer you?

SRK: Yes, they do! Because I explain my position of interviewing artists, the galleries here show some interest, because you have to know what artists think

and what they want if you are going to be a good gallerist. Most replies are: we don't take artists off the street, we don't look at unsolicited portfolios. It seems that most galleries here in Berlin are paying attention to artists mainly through recommendations by other curators, other galleries, etc. And, most galleries stick to a roster of around ten artists at one time, and that number takes up all the time the gallery can put to exhibiting, selling and supporting artists. I totally appreciated their honesty about these positions as gallerists! I also ask them their opinion about why so many artists are looking to Berlin as a new home, an important place to work and exhibit, and I ask them their opinion on whether to come to Berlin as an artist and succeed is even a reality, what can actually be achieved, coming to Berlin as an outsider?

Lucas, how do you feel about your possibilities for success in Berlin, now that you plan on staying here, to live and work as an artist?

LL: I feel that it will, in general, be a big change for me. For one, I will not be in Bethanien, and this last year has been a complete luxury for me, having the studio space, the apartment, the workshop provided for me from the residency program. Not to mention the benefits of technical help, and the studio visits.

I think because Berlin is so incredibly poor as a city, that people don't have money and that is why it is so attractive to artists: with nothing, you can achieve everything! That gives the energy. Dutch artists in general have so much time and support. Here in Berlin, artists are very much working, working, working on art! And, trying to earn money on the side! I think that it makes the decision to actually produce more true, in a way...

And, what I see in Berlin, is that the competition is quite high, but it is not competitive: the competition comes from the art scene—not from the artists.

SRK: Seems that artists here have a more open perspective about success then? Is it that artists of all levels of success, here in Berlin, are attending similar shows and participating in different scenes?

LL: Yes, because they are simply just interested in Art.

SRK: My perspective, from being in Rotterdam, is that the gallery scene is very closed to outsiders, that as a non-Dutch artist you have to fight your way in, to fight for attention by certain networks of curators, gallery owners, etc. And, that starting your own initiative isn't given as much credibility as what I have been amazed to find in Berlin, where artists are even launching their own galleries for self-representation and this has become a successful venture. I am pleasantly surprised by this attitude of just going for it, working at it, in order to make waves for yourself, establishing yourself as an artist beyond just making artwork in the studio and hoping to be discovered.

used to in America. I am very used to the American artist situation, which is sometimes a dilemma: artists work forty hours a week at a money making job, spend twenty to thirty hours a week in your studio and you sleep for ten! And hopefully, after five years, maybe after school, you will get somewhere, that the investment of hard work pays off.

LL: Well, what you are doing with Open Issues in the Netherlands, thousand of people are doing that here in Berlin: all this energy, all this strong belief in the artist's own ideas, creates this "glowing" art scene in Berlin. This energy gives me energy. People also talk in this way, giving advice and support for new ideas, as if anything is possible.

I think this is an attitude I once found existing in Amsterdam in the nineties, but it is completely dead—maybe killed off by the government, maybe artists got too much money and become lazy, I don't know. Then, the focus on energetic, artist cities switched to Rotterdam. But, maybe this is also fading...

SRK: Rotterdam, in my perspective, from when I first arrived four years ago, was on an upswing related to just being the cultural capital of Europe, and I think with all the attention paid to the city, many artists and administrators want to keep up the momentum, to keep Rotterdam super active in the artists. But somehow, I think, for many different, small reasons, there was a downhill swing in regard to energy in the art scene. But now, in my opinion as well, the scene is picking up, with renewed energy in the scene by artist-initiatives re-activating themselves, the ArtRotterdam fair becoming more and more important and seeing museums and contemporary art centers getting new and hopefully active directors, who are initiating alternative programs...I actually heard a comment that Rotterdam is like a little Berlin these days!

LL: In my own experience, here in Berlin, you are not *disrespected* because you are an artist. I have been disrespected many times in Holland and made out to be "one of those parasites," one of those "lazy bums." But in Berlin, you are an artist, and that is cool, it is ok, it is a bit special, but also just a profession! And, the intermingling between all the Arts: dance, theater and even science, that happens here in Berlin. I missed that, living in Amsterdam.

SRK: Which is a bonus for you as an artist, and your artwork, to have connections with different parts of society and not be so confined to the visual arts scene.

LL: Well, in the least, I can be part of these scenes. Because, I spend a great amount of time in my studio, and I miss out on a lot of beautiful, great events going on around me, especially here in Berlin!

There is one funny thing about Berlin: in a city that is nearly bankrupt, there are three hundred galleries! Where does all this money for the arts come from? I know that there are collectors buying work from Berlin galleries, but still...I wonder how long it will last. In a way, Berlin is like a bubble at the moment, with lots of attention...

SRK: Because your particular artwork is dependent on exhibition spaces, that you need a “place” to show your work and that you develop the work for particular places, are you then on the constant look out for appropriate gallery spaces here in Berlin or do you feel that it is something that will just present itself to you over time?

LL: I don't think it makes sense to “be on the look out” for spaces; things happen when they happen.

I don't make commercial work, that is quite clear, and it is hard to place my work in the art market. But, as I am convinced about my practice as an artist, it will continue in whatever way...

SRK: Do you feel like you require an exhibition space to make your artwork, or is it a possibility for you to start placing sculptures in open or public spaces? On your own initiative, and with this idea you recently mentioned that artists in Berlin “just do it” and find alternative solutions to being active. Any thoughts on that?

LL: I think that my artwork requires a certain type of concentration, and a certain public also. In general, I do not have real communication with “people on the street.” Showing my work to them doesn't necessarily make sense. In this way, I like the concentration that is found in the art, exhibition space—that the people who go there know why they are there, why they're going there.

SRK: There is one project you made in the past, the Mobile Studio work, which was outside, and wasn't bound to a location. It also functioned as a space within a space, like I asked you about earlier. This piece, the idea behind it, could be recycled—was this a one time project or something you consider applying to your art practice in the future?

LL: The Mobile Studio was a specific commission. I actually designed it for a specific purpose, which was really nice to do, by the way! It was nice to change my autonomous way of thinking, to an applied way. Sure, the object could be put anywhere, which is how it was designed. But, I would never do a project like that on my own initiative.

SRK: I am still interested in talking about the “controlled space” in your installation, as it stands here in Bethanien. I think it is interesting how any artist creates a controlled space within an environment, which is a subtle difference of changing perspective: from dealing with the given space to denying its limits and establishing a space within a space, another closed/enclosed environment. One can say that when you in particular create these spaces within the exhibition, that is part of your aesthetic as an artist... maybe you have your own way of explaining your aesthetics...

LL: When you stand in front of a painting, there is only one way of seeing it:
34 you have to be in front of it. And, a painter is in control of the view given to the viewer within the painting. If you work three-dimensional, the angles in

which you can look at the work...well, there are too many angles, almost. What I try to do in my installations is that the work is “right” from every angle, that I try to control the viewer’s view.

SRK: Are you familiar with the terms “a-side” and “b-side” used to describe sculptural objects? The idea is that with three-dimensional objects, there are so many angles to perceive it you choose the “a-side” for the best angle to view the work, the most important angle, which is also often chosen for documentation of the sculpture.

To translate this then to an installation, there must be a certain “a-view” onto the work... and, I would offer that this a-side/a-view idea relates directly to painting, where there is one, single frontal view onto the image, yet you in particular are thinking of multiple a-views onto your installations...

LL: If I make an object, and I have to paint it, for sure I will paint the bottom of it. I could leave it, I could not do it because no one will see it, but I think you will feel it, whether it is painted or not. I think everything should be real, that if you start working with an idea that there is an a-side and a b-side, then it becomes a décor.

Of course, I “play” with this idea of décor, with this idea of a stage set, there are certain choices, materials and a refinement—a finishing touch—that makes the installations very real, very self-evident. However, I must admit, there are some spots in this installation in Bethanien that are reluctantly not finished in this way—if you take a close look you will notice its fake—but I want you as a viewer to think it is real.

SRK: Do you think that this idea that you finish your sculptural objects in such a way that they become “real” refers to a mental space you are creating, in order to create a situation in your installations where you are not only representing reality, it is reality?

LL: Definitely, yes. In my artist’s statement, I wrote a bit about referencing a social space. This morning, in preparation for this visit by critics I mentioned earlier in the interview, I re-read my statement and I wondered to myself: “what did I mean with this social space?” I think I wrote it just after I made the *Focus: Istanbul* artwork, which was about a meeting point, which is clearly referencing a social space.

I think I reference social space because I use architectural elements in my artwork—you therefore start to make a space for people. And, not every space I build is meant for people, but it refers to having a presence in the work, the viewer’s presence. It also refers to a general feeling of being at ease or not at ease, a general uncanny feeling.

A mental space, in the end, is that you can bring everything together and take it home with you, and that you had the feeling after spending time with the art, that you walked around in someone else’s head or mind...maybe head is a better word, because then it is more spatial...

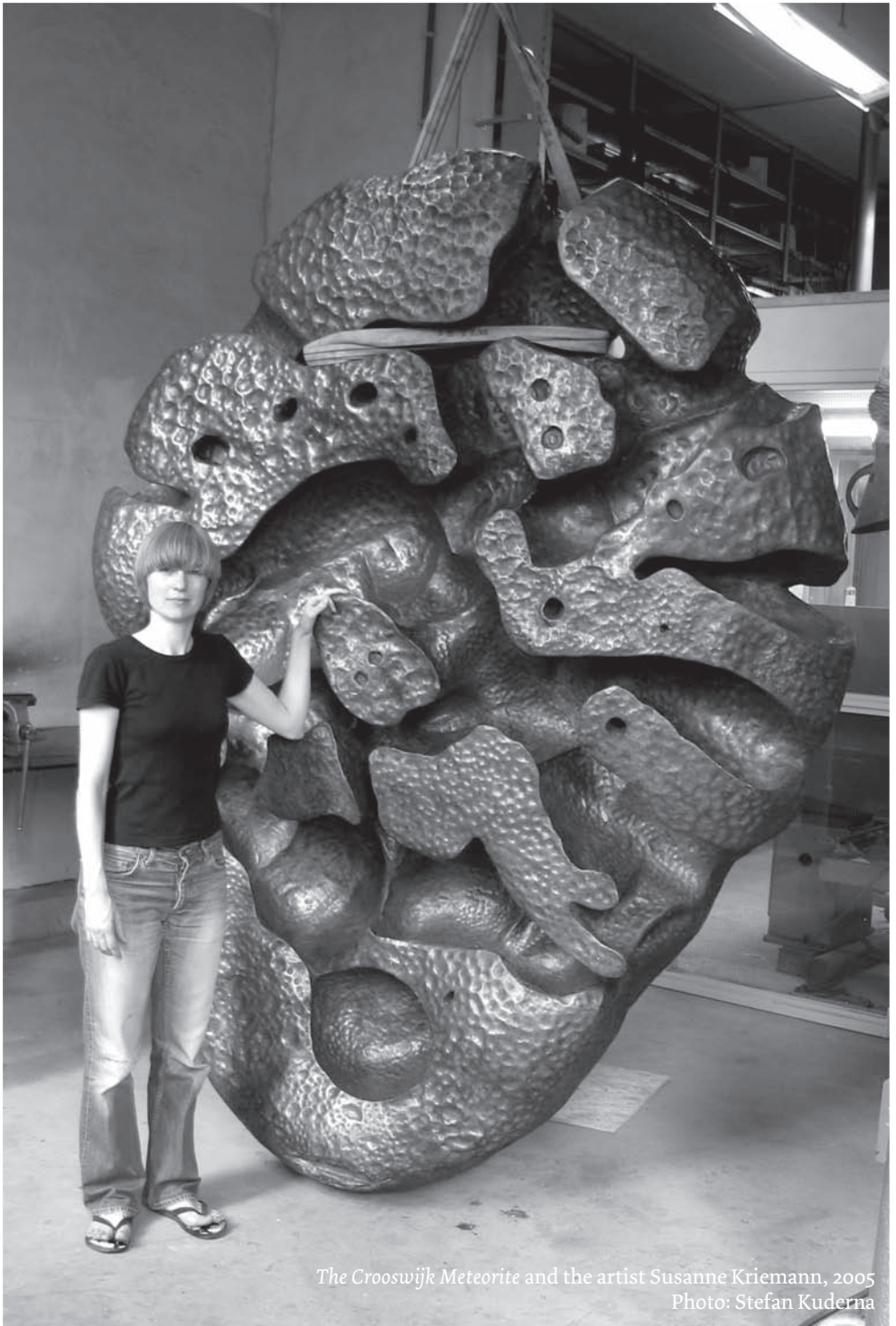
I want to add something, about my investigations: painterly, as I explored it in my last installation gave me a strong lead for a new direction in my work. Working more with color and lighting, the combination of the 3- and 2-dimensional is where my main interest lies.

SRK: I want to invite you to announce in this interview any upcoming projects, investigations or events. Is there anything that your audience should be made aware of?

LL: I will be working in Poland, close to the Ukrainian border, in a big group show that opens 8th of July called *Ideal City / Invisible Cities*. I am invited to make a work outside, in the city. I don't have a clue what I will do! This will be, most likely, a completely different work than previous examples, mainly because it will be made for a particular place and for the city, for the idea of it being an "ideal city"—and if I am right—it is a seventeenth century city designed by an Italian architect, according to a very strict grid structure. I would like to make a relationship between this characteristic and my own grid/stage/floor structure I work with in my installation pieces.

Otherwise, I will be here, rockin' Berlin!

More information on the artwork of Lucas Lenglet can be found at:
<http://lucaslenglet.com>



The Crooswijk Meteorite and the artist Susanne Kriemann, 2005
Photo: Stefan Kuderna

Susanne Kriemann

This interview took place in Berlin, again in the kitchen of the Polaris “Koffer,” on February 4th, 2006. Although undertaken between late-lunches and gallery openings later on in the evening, we managed to relax over a pot of tea and pastries and dive right into discussing Susanne’s recent artwork...

S.R. Kucharski: There are three themes that I would like to frame this interview around: using the interior, exhibition space in order to reference the exterior, social or physical space; aesthetics of the exhibition space versus aestheticizing the exhibition space, related to décor; how outsiders to a city, and in this case Berlin, can enter a new scene, and become activated, energized by it, and how this relates to your personal experience of both Rotterdam and Berlin.

Would you like to introduce yourself, and to further say what you are busy with at the moment as an artist or what projects you are currently working on?

Susanne Kriemann: Well, my name, my number, my birth date, we will skip that, ok? (laughter) I will start with mentioning the media I am mostly working with at the moment, which is photography, within the larger theme of investigating *re-production*. I think that is one of the most interesting subjects for me at the moment—looking at how reproduction exists in our society and how it represents different forms, different issues and different situations. Photography, in this sense, might sound a bit old fashioned as a medium, but I am interested in all types of photography: archival, Internet, analog, snapshot photography. I like photography not as a possibility for copying things but for re-producing things, and in my own work, sometimes those photographs can be further re-produced three-dimensionally.

I am sometimes involved in a process of taking a three-dimensional “surrounding” and putting it in a two-dimensional setup, then re-editing the two-dimensional back into a new three-dimensional object.

The subjects of this process are also often related to the idea of representation as well, because *re-production* and *re-presentation* as ideas link together—the possibility of re-producing your self has also the issue of re-presenting your self. However, I am not interested in the subject of Ego or the individual person, instead I am interested in the subject of history. And, my focus in that subject is history in relation to value, and eventually economical systems. To also be a bit careful in saying that, I must mention I am not interested in capitalism or socialism. I am making a specific research into the details of how value is connected to certain historical re-presentations.

SRK: Would you like to give an example of a past or current art piece that embodies your working context?

SK: I can give a short description of a current project that also is related to Rotterdam the Netherlands.

What I have made is a replica of the Willamette Meteorite—the story of my replica of a meteorite is: I found a photograph of this Willamette Meteorite on the Web that visually interested me, first of all—there was this immediate recognition with the object, and I knew I wanted to be busy with this kind of object, somehow. Not only because of its form, but also because of its *weight* and its central position in the Natural History Museum in New York City...

SRK: Do you literally mean its physical weight?

SK: Yes, that fact that this meteorite weighs fifteen tons. I have figured out, in myself, that I really respond to heavy objects. Somehow, there is a personal attraction to weight, and also connected to the photographic representation of such a heavy object—I will never have to actually handle such an object, never have to move them or be in their possession, but I can manipulate the re-presentation of such an object, as an artist.

SRK: In that process, are you interested in a certain way of photographing these heavy objects in order to express their weight, to photograph them in a way to show their weight?

SK: There is a transformation there, because not every heavy weight object is my interest. The weight in the photograph—what I try to relate to—is the *historical weight* of the object.

As an example with the Willamette Meteorite, in my research I found out that it originally landed in Canada, thousands and thousands of years ago and was eventually transported to Oregon in the United States via glacial movements or floods. It was found lying in the woods of Oregon, and it had a very strange outer appearance or form because it is made from iron and nickel, and the lighter iron slowly was washed away, leaving it to look much like a brain, or a mushroom or some wild nineteen-fifties sculpture! (laughter)

It was for a long time a sacred item of the Clackamas Indians of Oregon. The Clackamas tribe was relocated at the end of the nineteenth century by the U.S. Government, and the meteorite was left abandoned in the woods until a Welshman found it. I have a nice and fascinating story about him as well: he, his son, one horse and a wood sled transported this meteorite one and a half miles through the woods, and this action took him two months! Obviously, he was also really attracted by the meteorite! (laughter) He then put it in a shed and asked people 25 cents to have a look at it.

But, there was an iron and steel factory that “owned” the land on which this Welshman found the Meteorite—after the relocation of the Clackamas Indians—and the factory tried to claim possession of the meteorite as well. So, there then was this question of the meteorites value. In the story, the Welshman got fifty dollars

from the factory for the meteorite, while this factory received twenty thousand dollars in the same week by selling it to the Museum of Natural History in New York City.

I am not interested in the moral issues related to this meteorite and its relation to the indigenous people, etc. But, I note this moral history through my research, reading newspapers on the subject, corresponding with the museums, etc. I trace down where parts of the meteorite exist in other museums and collections around the world. I found out how the meteorite was actually cut up into smaller pieces, how the Clackamas Indians wanted their holy object back, which is another interesting story in itself, in terms of value: in 1991, under the Repatriation Act passed by the United States government, museums all over the U.S. were forced to give back many of the sacred objects to the indigenous people, collected or bought by those museums. Of course, there were many problems with this, and the Willamette Meteorite was one of them. When the Clackamas Indians asked for the meteorite back from the Natural History Museum of New York City, the museum had just made a twenty million dollar renovation, and the meteorite couldn't physically be removed from the museum—the museum would have had to tear down all the newly built walls, etc.

Where the whole story begins to gather a certain weight for me, a complex weight so to say, is how the value of the actual object changed, whether economic, social, etc. What the Clackamas Indians received, in the end, was a full replica of the Willamette Meteorite placed in Oregon and an allowance to fly once a year to the Natural History Museum in New York City to celebrate their rituals in the museum with the actual meteorite.

For me, as an artist interested in history, this whole story is extremely fascinating!

SRK: And now, after gathering all this information on the meteorite, you have replicated the meteorite for installation in a public project in Crooswijk, Rotterdam?

SK: Yes, the whole story of the relocation of the Willamette Meteorite, in many different forms, makes me very interested in the moment where the name of an object can attain many different values—the Willamette Meteorite is now not one object but many objects in many different forms. There is also the fact that in many instances, in Natural History Museums, only replicas are shown on display, and that the original objects are kept in storage, so as to not be damaged. For me, there became one moment where I had to ask: “why does a museum then even need the original?”

I decided for Crooswijk in Rotterdam that since the neighborhood is also in the middle of a type of relocation and redevelopment, and also because it is a neighborhood with a rich and mixed cultural background and many different cultural roots, I thought it would be interesting to create a public space that in the center has an object (The Crooswijk Meteorite) with absolutely no related root, but in itself so many roots: the root of the idea as an artwork, the root of its replication between documents made in New York and production process executed in China, the root of the relation to an original and its transportation to New York City, and how pieces

of it have been cut off and sent off all over the world, a further transportation and spreading new roots...

My decision to make a public space—and not interfere directly with the neighborhood or the people of the neighborhood—in which people could meet, with a pleasant atmosphere and with a central object, this meteorite, which could either be seen as a sculpture or a natural object. For me and for this project, I thought a lot about the history of public space in Rotterdam and social issues with art in the public space.

I also will publish a book *Not Quite Replica* about the original and the replicas intermingling histories in English and Dutch languages that will be available to people living in Crooswijk. For the installation, I collaborated with a Polish architect named Monika Konrad who designed another reproduction, which is a scaled down version of the crater of the Crooswijk Meteorite. Monika calculated the form of the meteorite and what kind of crater it would have made, had it landed in Crosswijk, then scaled it down to fit the sixty square meters we could use for the project itself.

In the end, the project is one total re-production of many different parts to exist as a new object, with its own story and history behind it, dedicated to Crooswijk.

SRK: I am interested in how you are placing this “object,” which is made for the purpose of placing outside, in relation to your other past artworks, which range from a large sculptural object that contains photographs of an object that exists outside—the 13,000 ton Load-Test Body in Berlin—to the Camouflage Museum project, which even at one time existed in a completely non-physical space: the Internet. Looking over your portfolio, I noticed you are now involved in making large scale photographs of interior spaces and associating them with the Camouflage Museum, as if they were specific views within this non-existing museum.

Can you talk about how you then use the exhibition space to present your objects, your sculptures and photographs, which clearly re-present exterior bodies and places?

SK: I think the line between all those different artworks is the re-presentation of an object within a public or semi-private space. For example, the sculpture titled *Arc de Triomphe - revisited 2005*, it is essentially a storage system, a shelf that is usually a private object presented in a public exhibition space.

The recent photographic work—*TCM-Space1*, *Space2* and *Space3*—show public spaces: airports, waiting halls and museums spaces where something inside the photograph is *already* a re-presentation, like a sculpture or photograph inside another photograph.

It is exactly at this point where I use something that exists outside in the social space, such as the Load-Test Body from Berlin in my artwork *Arc de Triomphe - revisited*
42 2005, which is a historical monument—even though many people know nothing about it and it itself is not publicly accessible—and re-place it in a

storage system that is something for a private space that I can make this link between exterior and interior relationships.

SRK: When you are working with this subject matter and with these specific artworks, and you want to place them in an exhibition space, do you find that they need to be placed in a group, that you need multiple pieces—sculpture, photographs, video—to create a story, a link between the work itself as well as the subject matter? I ask this because how strongly the actual single artworks reference specific places or locations—the artworks are like satellite objects to the real object.

SK: There are two things: one thing is that in my mind, I have this plan for the future, where every work is one point in a long investigation about historical narratives and/or fictions and how I transform the subject matter to make my own relationship to the narrations, and how I make my relationship to the objects transparent. There is also a question about how I can continue to work this way, because if I were to place all my previous artworks in one exhibition, I think they would look quite diverse and maybe look like group show by many artists! (laughter) At the same time, I would hope that the content would link them all and about this idea of *re*-presentation, reproduction of an image and historical reproduction.

The second thing is that when I am invited to make a show of my work, I must first look to where I am invited, what is the context and what is the condition of the exhibition space itself. An example is when I participated in the recent Prague Biennial, I thought it was a very ideal place for my work because in the actual exhibition, my work was between two other artworks by other artists that were more or less about personal history and social history related to a city. Because these works address certain types of historical narration, and my exhibited work was also about a certain history, there was an interesting narrative line created in the exhibition space.

SRK: And that was a pleasant surprise, and something you didn't expect to happen, that the surrounding artwork in this group show supported your own artwork, and vice versa?

SK: Of course, credit must be given to the curator of the exhibit for allowing for this connection between the artworks to be made.

SRK: I am interested in how with the Crooswijk Meteorite project you have created a book, which is a piece of the whole public art project. Because the book contains all the relevant information regarding the project and history of the meteorite, and it can eventually exist apart from the actual public sculpture of the meteorite, it has a slight different context as an artwork...

SK: It is like you said when you used the word satellite...I think the book will be the part of the project that will move around, and the meteorite replica-sculpture will become a *fixed* part of the public space, apart from whether people read the

book or not—the sculpture itself can be just experienced for what it is and where it is.

The book is something that will travel beyond Crooswijk. I know from experience that not many people will visit the meteor after the opening, but I hope that the people of the neighborhood will be able to continue to enjoy the sculpture itself, because of the investment in the architecture and the placement of the object.

SRK: One thing that has come up in the interview(s) is an idea of space-within-space, and how artists are working within this context. And, how artists are mostly working with space-within-space via installations, sometimes literally a new room within a room—a new controlled environment. I am interested in how your books, from *Rocket Trees* to the *The Camouflage Museum*, exist as a certain space, that there is this place for information and the art content between two covers. But, also how that transforms into, for lack of better words, a “mental space.”

Tell me how books play a role in your art practice, and maybe as a type of mental space for viewing art?

SK: First, I want to say something about this “controlled environment” within a space. The books should not be for this. I think that the actual object/sculpture—such as the Crooswijk Meteorite—should be able to stand on its own where I don’t have to control the interpretation of the object through a book with information related to it.

However, one reason I make a book within a project such as the Crooswijk Meteorite is that for one time, at least, I can make a very precise interaction with an audience—with a book, there is one person reading it. With the book, I can make one very concentrated download of the history of the sculpture and the ideas that lead to the realization of the project.

The books, in general, feel sometimes alien, but they do show my mind and the way I was thinking as an artist, at a certain time: for example, how I was thinking and working within the project *Rocket Trees* in 2001. It is also nice that I cannot re-edit the book—which is something I can do with creating an exhibition. An example of that is where I re-edited a presentation of the *Camouflage Museum* five times already—depending on the exhibition space or context of the exhibition.

This all connects to my permanent, ongoing research into the *re-evaluation* of my own mind towards what is contemporary artistic practice. And, how I can contribute to the history of it. How I see my art practice is the continual re-editing of vision. The books, therefore, act as objects that remain concrete, something I can’t re-edit, something I can no longer change—they become real points of reference, and therefore I like them very much because I can revisit my own brain from time to time.

44 SRK: How did that then manifest with the *Camouflage Museum* going online, where it not only functioned as a type of online portfolio for you as an artist,

but also something that, as a viewer, you questioned its “real” existence? I am glad you talked about the books as existing as concrete reference points to your art practice so far. But, I see the Camouflage Museum had become this digital space, this online “mental space” that you could constantly change and edit.

How did you decide to create the Camouflage Museum online, and furthermore, why is it now “closed?”

SK: The Camouflage Museum was a good idea and project, still a good idea and it does still have the possibility to exist in the future in certain situations. I think for the future it will exist mostly in the exhibition space context, in the white cube context, where I can “implant” something into the exhibition space.

The Camouflage Museum has its right to exist, but at one moment in the past it became a real obstacle to me: everything I had or worked on was Camouflage Museum! All my photography became Camouflage Museum. I became very trapped by my own system, so I had to stop it altogether for a time—since it is called Camouflage Museum, it *can* go into camouflage!

At one point, I made it *visible* on the Web, which is a time-based medium, so I can take it off, because there isn't the same sort of continuity of other mediums, like a book. So, the museum will stay in camouflage until I have an idea to make it appear, where I can maybe change the museum into another form of a representational space.

I am interested in organizing lectures, and I like to get people into a conversation—I am regularly emailing people with questions and responding on their answers—within common points of reference. At the moment, I am creating this email archive of my conversations, which are more like a dialogue. This archive could become a new form of the Camouflage Museum, for example, where this exchange of information between two people is made visible.

SRK: I have a specific question to ask related to the Camouflage Museum: did you feel that you were getting to a point with the Camouflage Museum “act” that people started to believe the fiction, and that you couldn't step outside the fiction?

SK: What I realized with the project Camouflage Museum is I dislike fake but really like fiction. There was this moment in the project where, whenever the Camouflage Museum creates something fake, or creates a *possibility* of fake—a misunderstanding, a doubt or the viewer becomes unsure if I am honest or trick them—I really disliked it. From many discussions I had with colleagues about the project, I new that the possibility for “fake” had to go out.

And then, there was this moment where I asked myself whether my name was important to me or could I just skip my name—there was a big doubt about that, a phase of: do I want to be Susanne Kriemann or do I want to be the Camouflage

Museum? The answer was I wanted to be Susanne Kriemann.

I am not the only artist has been exploring this act of “disappearing” in the artwork or quasi-institutional acts, and they have explored the subject of this so marvelously, and I knew for myself I could never go so far. So, with the Camouflage Museum, I found a personal limit. And, I found it was more extreme and more *daring* to do art under my own name.

There was also a relationship to the Rotterdam art institutions and the Camouflage Museum that became too close: in my close observation, the Rotterdam art institutions have become too much of a showroom, related to spectacle and give less space to go and contemplate art, to be inspired through contemplation of artworks. There has been, in these institutions, too much focus on the outside being brought inside, and I already experience the “outside” outside—I don’t need it again in a museum!

I decided that this activity I just explained, in relation to how I setup the Camouflage Museum—to take things from the outside, put then in the museum and camouflage them—was exactly not my goal. I had somehow endangered my own time-space-working notion-consumer relationship to art.

What I wanted to say, in my artwork, about the museum space, was that it had become endangered. Then, I decided I needed to re-edit my thoughts about the Camouflage Museum, so I shut it down. I still like the Camouflage Museum as an idea, because it allows me to be critical about the white cube exhibition space: when you go into a white cube gallery, it doesn’t mean one has to become traditional, but you can spend time *thinking* about the art in the space—something I find liberating.

SRK: Ok, let’s talk about the aesthetics of the white cube exhibition space, and your identification of the manner in which, especially Rotterdam-based exhibition spaces, present art as a “spectator sport,” instead of setting up a situation in which the viewer can gain something from the art, spend time with it, learn from it.

SK: Well, this is without a moral attitude: when I am in these art institutions, both as viewer and as an artist, I personally feel more like a witness than an interpreter.

There are two examples of what I mean: one time in Minsk at the European Humanitas University Gallery (now closed) and in the Galerie der Stadt Erlangen where I was doing a project in a self-created “situation” where there were very specific art-related themes. In Minsk, I introduced a new currency system, The Golden Six, but announced it as type of theater-play—it was clear from the beginning there really wasn’t a new currency system but the idea was that in the gallery space: for around forty-five minutes, there happened a discussion about a possible, rich, prosperous currency for Belarus, which is currently in a time of economical crisis. The project was successful, people reacted to it very well, and the performance was reported on by the eight o’clock news on television. My performance was interpreted by a journalist who spoke

of how in the territory of Art, there existed this territory of money. I really liked that interpretation.

However, when I showed this work to other artists or curators, namely a few from the U.S.A., they really couldn't believe that somebody would believe my action to be fake, in other words, that I was trying to convince people of the "faked" situation. But, that wasn't my intention. My intention was to open up the mind, as an idea that one can make a fictional situation, a "camouflaged" situation in the exhibition space, which is really about making a conceptual event that only really happens in the mind...especially because there never was the actual product, the money itself!

The second example is when I exhibited in the region of Germany where I was born. There, I made an interview-based project called *The Quiet American* where a group of journalists, in the artwork, interviewed an American, a fictional scientist, yet within the project it was so overly absurd that nobody should think I am trying to fool them with it being truly real. It is so weird to me that people actually were convinced it was real, somehow, and I was frustrated from this, and I had to ask myself what I actually did that made people see the work so.

It was not my intention, with these projects, for them to become "real events" for the viewer. And, that people further saw them as moralistic tales—I was only attempting to create fictions that would reference ideas, not convince the viewer of anything. So, I have begun asking myself, as an artist, how I can re-edit my art practice to avoid this situation.

My last thought about this is that now, certain projects or events related to the Camouflage Museum will become one time events, and where they do not exist before and after that event, becoming really camouflaged in the end.

SRK: Doesn't this cause a dilemma for you? It is a traditional thought that art is meant to be lasting, to be kept around, where you can take the piece with you, that it has some sort of value, that it can exist maybe in a museum context and "live" for a longer time than just the moment it was made...these performance and events are now disappearing—except for when they are recorded in a produced book—and where do you go from there?

SK: I want to have the possibilities to show in a space, like as I just described, with a specific modus: creating a momentary situations and opening up certain issues I wish to discuss through the artwork, or to simply place my photographs in an exhibition space, for what they are.

SRK: Let's jump to another subject—I know it's kind of abrupt—because I want to discuss your interest in working in Berlin and how you have worked with a subject existing in Berlin, namely the *Arc d' Triomph*, *Revisted* artwork, which is inspired by a specific architectural monument in Berlin called the Load-Test

Body (Schwerbelastungskörper).

SK: It is just the start of a larger project, and I am just really getting started...

SRK: So then, how, if at all, is your aesthetic or your art practice becoming influenced by spending time working in Berlin? I am interested in your personal take on the city, what is possible for artists here...and how you related it to your connection and living/working situation in Rotterdam.

SK: The reason why I am particularly interested in German history is because I am German. But, with the Load-Test Body, when I first came across it, saw it, it somehow “visualized” how I had been thinking about my own country’s involvement with history for a long time, and especially since I have been able to look at Germany from the outside, not having lived there now for almost ten years. I think that both in Berlin and in Rotterdam, each city has such a large history that just exists built (implanted) into the city itself. This fact has motivated me to just start working with history in relation to a city, and because I have a point-of-view as an outsider, as well as being personally interested in how objects can exist as a *visualization* of history.

When working with history, I must step back from it: an American artist colleague once said to me that it is difficult to make a comment about a country when you are living in it, to criticize from within. I totally don’t agree, but if I myself don’t know why I am criticizing, I don’t do it, which is where I step back. So, this is why I have focused mainly on German history, because it is my country and I do have an interest in the history, and I can look at Germany from the perspective of living in Holland...

In the example of the artwork related to the history of the Load-Test Body (Schwerbelastungskörper) in Berlin, it was my interest to re-situate the object, remove it somehow from Berlin—by photographing it and placing it in this shelving system to form another context for the object to be seen—and change the point of view towards this object into something more universal. Which I think is very important in working with such specific histories.

SRK: So, it is then your plan to remain in-between these two cities, and these two countries of Netherlands and Germany, in order that you can investigate history with a certain outsider attitude and distance?

SK: I don’t know really, because I don’t live in Berlin...yet. I think Rotterdam is a great base, not only because of the city itself but because of the art scene, which in some way is permanently traveling. And in my case, that makes me not the only artist constantly coming and going who lives in Rotterdam—there is no one moment of discomfort in the fact that I am a constantly traveling artist—because so many of my friends are also traveling with their artwork as well. Because my husband Alexander Komarov
48 is working now in Berlin, that is why I am here at the moment. At the same time, I feel a strong connection with Berlin as a city.

SRK: Can you explain to me what some of those feelings of connection with Berlin are? I am interested in your experience of the Rotterdam art scene—how there is this unique situation where your artist friends are very much travelers—and if there is some specific contrast in the Berlin art scene that attracts you?

SK: I think Berlin is just a very special city. I think the art scene here in Berlin is much more focused on Berlin, and in my opinion, it is because the city is so large and there are so many artists working here to pay attention too. The scene is so diverse here: whatever you want mirrored in art, you will find it. Also, for me personally, what attracts me to Berlin is that German is my first language and that people in Berlin really discuss art and theory is discussed on a high level. Also, bookshops, as I can find anything I am looking for here in Berlin for my research. As for Rotterdam, I really love it living there, but there is this intellectual vacuum there, in comparison to Berlin or Paris or New York.

But, to think of moving here to Berlin is not important at the moment, because I want to keep my position of being a traveling artist as long as I can, and before I move away from Rotterdam, I need to think very hard on this: I have changed my living situation many times already, and I am not in the hurry to lose the contacts—not just with artists and the art scene—but with the city, its streets, buildings, shops, etc. I don't want to quickly give up the knowledge of a city you accumulate over the years in order to make daily life possible.

As you can see, I am going to stay based in Rotterdam for some time to come.

SRK: I also agree that Rotterdam has a special group of constantly traveling artists who reside outside of Rotterdam for short and long parts of the year at either residencies or to install/create artwork...and they all still come back afterwards. I don't necessarily consider myself one of those artists, although I probably am since I too have to make constant trips back to North America...

SK: I experienced a funny situation with this at the beginning: I moved to Rotterdam in 2000, and until 2003, people kept asking me “are you still here?” I think this is a typical reaction when you do live in a city where the people—artists and friends—constantly come and go. There are also plenty that leave and never come back...

SRK: And, it isn't that artists, like you and I and others in Rotterdam, are “city hopping,” so to say.

SK: Another thing that Rotterdam provides, and this is very true for me personally, is it gives me a certain concentrated time to work. In Berlin, it is very hard for me to work: everybody is always calling you up to see shows, hear concerts or just go to things out in the city. There is just so much happening in Berlin!

In Rotterdam, there is a slower agenda but more space and time to get done what you need to do, so you can produce your artwork. The quality of the working 49

time in Rotterdam is high, for me.

SRK: When you are in Berlin then, do you feel then that the art scene in Berlin is “welcoming” you?

SK: Hmm, that is an interesting question. I think that on one hand I have the foreigner bonus because of coming from the Netherlands, and on the other hand, because I am originally German, I feel almost at home here in Berlin. It is a strange and special situation: I have lived in Berlin now for small periods, one or two or six months at a time, and each time, the friends I have made here stay my friends, no matter how long or short I stay or stay away. This is really marvelous, and my connections keep growing...

I really trust in these friendships, in the German people and in the way that German artists are interacting with those people who are always coming and going, like myself. I think this also has to do with the size of Berlin. But, I think there are certain groups of artists in Berlin that are hard to access, probably because there is an over-saturation of newly arriving and leaving artists here.

This is a feeling I have never had in Rotterdam—from the first moment of living in Rotterdam, no one really acted unwelcoming towards newcomers in the art world.

SRK: Well, I have been to Berlin many times, but this is the first time I am here for a specific reason and for certain research: *Open Issues*. I have taken the time to walk into galleries and start talking with curators and directors in order to get a feeling about how it works here in Berlin, related to the art scene and the gallery network, the artist network. The people that I have talked to are honest in mentioning that there are certain walls around certain networks in the art scene in Berlin that you cannot climb over, that certain groups of people are closed off to the outsider, for one reason or another.

My experience of Rotterdam is that the networks of artists, gallerists and curators were much more open in a purely social context, but I was never convinced that people were actively helping out newcomers or looking out for their artist colleagues in a way that I could say the networks supported each other.

I want to put this all into perspective, which is my interest in this *Open Issues* to speak about the reality or fantasy tale that Berlin, say in comparison to Rotterdam, is an open city to the newcomer artist, to either support or dismiss this rumor that Berlin is the best city for artists to live and work in at the moment in Europe.

SK: I also wonder about the reality of this, too. Did you find an answer for yourself?

SRK: Well, ninety percent of the commercial galleries I visited, focusing on the ones that promote young or emerging artists, were very blunt in saying they only
50 work with artists they know personally or have been recommended to by friends or curators, and that the galleries are so busy with the promotion of eight to

fourteen artists at a time, they are unable to review or consider portfolios or artists from “off the street.” For me, this translates into a situation where it would be very hard for a newly transplanted artist to Berlin to find a commercial gallery to show their artwork... in the beginning at least.

SK: Well, for me—and I have known this for some time now—it is very weird subject. I think it just sometimes takes longer with these galleries to get into the right circles.

I don't think, concerning the subject of galleries and their accessibility, there is anything related to nationality either: I think there are many artists and curators in Rotterdam—and I include myself—that try to go beyond that “border” or nationality and locality issue. If you see how many foreign artist are accepted as Dutch artists...

This is all a very complicated situation, and I don't think there is any one answer to how to fit yourself in an art scene—one can also talk about how “open” Dutch galleries are to foreigners, even if you are living in Holland, and how quickly you as an individual adapt to the Dutch art world...

SRK: Then there is the question about what artists can do for themselves, as foreigners or nationals, in any one city, in either Rotterdam or Berlin.

SK: I think, or have the feeling, that there are far more possibilities to form groups and get involved in activities in Rotterdam than there is in Berlin.

SRK: Well, you personally can say with truth that you have put many years investment into the Rotterdam art scene, with membership in the collective Het Wilde Weten and also by attending the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam, which create a history of involvement that connects you to the place in a very literal way.

Of course, it goes without saying that no one should expect to be able to walk into a city and start turning everyone's eyes on you and your artwork, but one can have a feeling about a city and what the particular possibilities are in a city...

SK: Well, for example, when I walk the streets of Berlin, I have this amazing feeling of inspiration...so, I like for example how Berlin can just do this.

SRK: That is exactly the feeling that everyone says they have, but I am interested in what people can actually *do* with it, as an artist. Is it just to get you working in the studio, or does it make you step outside of ones art practice and “get involved” in the art scene?

SK: Well, at the same time, I think Rotterdam and Berlin are very much related, because for many years, the situation in the cities constantly changed, like how for both cities, for years, have been under complete reconstruction—everything has to be renewed, re-edited. For example, how in Rotterdam, everything from the nineteen-fifties is being torn down to make way for new structures and

buildings, how the harbor has been rediscovered as totally hip...and how Berlin had the same thing with Potsdamer Platz or the Mauer area, how both the East and West sides of Berlin could be changed into something “new.”

This is something directly to do with the city, the environment of place, and not necessarily the art world. I think this is also why these two cities can inspire the artists from those same two cities, how they can feel different but also very much related. Both the cities are in a state of change, and the energy from the local environment is what makes artists themselves, active.

*More information on the artwork of Susanne Kriemann can be found at:
<http://rotterdamsekunstenars.nl>*



above: *Schlechtes Gefühl* (Bad Feeling), mixed media on paper, three parts, 24 cm x 35 cm each, 2003
below: *Attrapé*, mixed media on paper, installation view, Berlin, 2003

Bettina Carl

This interview took place in Berlin at Bettina's studio in Prenzlauerberg on February 6th, 2006. Sitting in two relaxed studio chairs, holding cups of warm tea and facing recent artwork hanging on the walls around us, we began the interview in the late afternoon on a very gray, winter's day.

S.R. Kucharski: When I saw your artwork recently exhibited at Showroom MAMA in Rotterdam the Netherlands—in the exhibition titled *The Future is Stupid*—I visited your website and noticed that you have a curatorial relationship with MAMA as well. And, because you are working in a curatorial position in the artist-run space CAPRI here in Berlin—in a dual role of artist/curator—I invited you for an interview because of this unique perspective you have in regards to the interior exhibition space, the use of the gallery by both artist and curator. It just so happens that your artwork, your presentation of your drawings, is related to the conversation on how artists utilize the exhibition space, by either manipulating the exhibition space, decorating the exhibition space, etc.

But before we talk about your curatorial role in the visual art scene in Berlin, let's talk about how you present your drawings. Do you consider, when you exhibit the drawings within an exhibition space, that you are building installations?

Bettina Carl: In general, I present my drawings in site-specific installations. I attempt to escape from the limitations of one image, one piece of paper or just one format. I use the wall I present the drawings on as another white surface to arrange a “greater” image. So, I do organize the multiple drawings I present specifically to the place I exhibit them in, which is close to an idea of working and re-working a space - though it is not necessarily three-dimensional.

SRK: How much are you interested in the aesthetics of the exhibition space? Sometimes, artwork can function as a sort of décor—I don't want to just label this a negative term when artwork aestheticizes a viewing space, because I think visual art *does* have this function to enliven a space or a wall—and when I saw your drawings arranged so specifically in an exhibition space, I wanted to know how you perceived them *functioning* in that space, on what level is your engagement with the exhibition space aesthetically, or maybe historically or socially?

BC: I would not say that my drawings explicitly address a space's history or character when exhibited. That is: my work is not about the space I exhibit it in. In that sense, I am certainly dependant on the preposition of the white cube as a formally neutral background. If one sees the white cube then as a *function*, it can mirror the function of the empty, white sheet of paper. That means both backgrounds are instrumental: they are “made” and not self-evident, and this is an aspect I want to be visible. 55
I am interested in proceeding from what I attempt to create in each singular

drawing's composition; the content of each drawing can possibly carry on all over the walls and the space. I am interested in the fragmentary nature, in the uncertainty of what is happening in a drawing, the uncluded, provisional character of drawing. Therefore, I am dependant on a space's specific features. I would say I mainly want to use a space's formal impact on the actual installation.

You could say I try to work *outside the paper* as such, and to take over the wall as another mental space where a lot of things are happening—even while you're not sure what is happening, where it starts and where it ends—something you could not translate into a sort of coherent narration.

SRK: These installations you make with your drawings, are they premeditated? Or, do you arrange the groups of drawings based on seeing the exhibition space, orienting the choice of drawings and this “uncertain narrative” in relation to the exhibition space?

BC: The ideal situation would be for me to take time and just work out the arrangement of drawings for each individual space, but that isn't always manageable. I do always want to know the space's exact measurements and looks, in general. Then, I make plans for the installation here in the studio. Here, I mostly have to figure out the starting point of my installation in regards to the exhibition space, then later I have to find out how it actually works in the space...

SRK: Your previous installation *Attrapé* is one particular arrangement where I was interested in how you sometimes group together square frames—singular drawings—and that contrasts with other parts of the same installation where the arrangements are more organic: site-specific forms or arrangements of small drawings that “float” around the wall. I wonder if the drawing arrangements are at all related to how one might look at the arrangement of frames, like a storyboard that lays out a film narrative...

BC: When I began making these arrangements of drawings in 1999—that is, to utilize the wall space as a second level to the individual drawings—I started by cutting up sheets of paper, then drawing on them. The shape of the cut paper would determine, restrict and influence the drawing's outcome, and then, of course, also the composition or installation on the wall: the empty spaces in-between the drawings become active elements within the composition as a whole. In this way, my practice of drawing *occupies* the space I exhibit my work in, it invades the walls instead of confining itself to a frame, or the paper.

This is an important issue in my art practice, to question this tradition of having an image—whether a drawing, painting, photograph, etc.—exist as a “window” to an enclosed space where something is happening, within a square format. In my work, of course such “windows” will appear at times, too, and I do like to work with the viewer's expectations towards that convention. But my point is to show at the same time that you can transgress it: to go beyond this agreement of the square-like, enclosed format. I think sometimes this treatment of the paper's format has

the effect to suspend the drawing as such—as if it would be moving along the wall or towards the viewer, or one’s mind, if you want to.

You mention films, and I think that is an important clue to what I am interested in my work: thinking of the temporality that exists in filmed narration and its mostly linear progression...what you can do within a drawing, however, and other forms of still, non-moving pictures, is to work with a multi-layered, non-linear arrangement of signs, a particular simultaneity.

I would say that drawing is very close to thinking—drawing has a particular ephemeral nature, it doesn’t have such a material weight as say painting or sculpture—and although thinking is very much bound to verbal language, it goes far beyond the linearity of verbal language.

SRK: Are you talking about particular “movement” within the image, and how you are interested in expanding that outward in the exhibition space? Because you are interested in the square format, enclosed image—as well as remaining doubtful of that—how much are you referencing the world outside the exhibition space, and whether the artwork is “looking out” from the wall...

BC: Well, this relation of “inside and outside” is very similar to a complex process of translation, I would say. I think my working method is one of translation and distortion, and I am also very much interested in allegory, the cooked-down nature of the allegorical, the fragmented nature of this kind of enigmatic narration...and, how far you can distort that. Also, how conventions have to reproduce themselves, because they are necessary in order to read an allegory, to recognize those complex sign systems. These uses of signs and images is very much related to my interest in language—I am interested in visual art *escaping language*...and I mean verbal language, which may be virtually impossible.

Sometimes I work in a thematically defined field: as, for example, in the installation titled *Montes Sovietici*, which is a body of work about the images of space produced during the Cold War. The work departs from the name of a mountain range discovered by the Soviets on the far side of the moon...it nominally existed until the end of the eighties, when references to this lunar mountain range began to disappear from maps and books unannounced—and there is no exact reason why. There are two possible explanations: either the East and the West couldn’t agree on a new name for the mountain range, because calling them the Soviet Mountains was obsolete with the end of the Soviet Union as a governmental body, or the other possibility, which is more plausible, that there is no such mountain range, that it was only dust on the lens of the camera! It probably never existed! For the “superpowers” exploring space, naming topographic features of celestial bodies and taking pictures of them were the essential means to claim them, that is, *to occupy territories in space*. I find this process, this attitude towards pictures and names quite absurd, but also very fascinating.

SRK: In this body of work titled *Montes Sovietici*, was there some sort of allegory or distortion of the truth that you found in the original story that you were trying to re-create in the exhibition space, by particularly arranging the drawings on the wall and how you also included a sculpture made from acorns that resembles almost a complex, unidentifiable molecule structure?

BC: This work was related to *perceived* non-fictional stories—as, for example, this mountain range discovered on the far side of the moon. So, the installation is not about space, but about what we are told about space and in which way this has been done. I took certain aspects that I found most interesting as a departure for this work: the ingenuity in accepting as “true” what can be presented as a photography, or the creation of heroes, or the deeply romantic, wishful character of images of, say, darkness, of almost nothing...which is connected to the discrepancy of Man’s efforts to discover and document on one hand, and the “powers” and dimensions of “truth” they deal with on the other hand.

This installation of mine, *Montes Sovietici*, aims to reflect these aspects: the naivety and the presumptions, the romanticism and the uncertainty, of our parameters in defining everything. If one manages to produce a rectangular, one can apply terrestrial parameters to it: like the Cartesian system of left, right, top and bottom, which renders the image something like a territory...there is this metal placard that is placed on man-made space craft. Engraved on this placard is some basic information about human beings. I find this most amazing, this thought that if there are aliens around in space, and given they make a little bit of effort to examine the placard, they will be able to decipher what we are communicating about who we are and where we come from...

I think that the way I make and present the elements of the installation *Montes Sovietici* mirrors such gestures, the act of how human beings, especially the ‘occidental subject’ try to get a hold of the world, to gather knowledge and control. I want the hand-made character and this jig-saw or provisional nature of the installation to visualize the absurd aspects of acts of conquest...speaking of conquest, on the level of the exhibition space, one could say my installations are also claiming and occupying their own territory.

SRK: I am hearing you talk about your artwork creating a dialogue about attitudes and ways society thinks—like a naïve attitude or an attitude that all things can be understood—the concrete belief in ultimate knowledge, let’s say. And, of course the dominance of language, be it visual or written language. Before, you mentioned how you are interested in “disturbing” those attitudes...that you are framing something particular for the viewer, maybe it is a specific narrative, but it remains nicely unclear if the narrative is to be read left to right, top to bottom or however...

BC: The arrangements in the exhibition space are about making visible a certain perception on certain content, that is: one element, one drawing cannot answer
58 the entire question I have within the subject matter of the work. That is the reason why my drawings have a wide range of formal elements, why some

are quite expressive and others are brittle or sober, or that I bring in photocopies and photographs when necessary to add to the installation. I am also interested in the conventions related to mark-making, where people interpret a scratchy image as being expressive or about psyche or emotions, while on the other hand, a compound of straight lines and angles is believed to rationally (meaning impersonally) present a spatial setting ... I think these “plays” on conventions are only determinable through the way people “read” the arrangement of the drawings. However, I as the artist do not at all pretend to completely pre-determine the interpretations of what is going on in a particular drawing or an installation! But I definitely want this question to be present in all of my works: why do you as the viewer read the work in this way or that way?

Regarding my installations, of course, I am aware that the way people normally approach a drawing may not really work here, but I am interested in the problems that are created from this setup—partly, of course, this is what most visual artists are doing: we are looking for a problem, we invent a question nobody has asked, and then we try to solve it...or rather, we ask the viewer to solve it.

SRK: Do you ever consider that there is a “right” or “wrong” exhibition space that can provide an optimal space to see the contrasts in the drawings themselves, like these conventions or ways of seeing artwork that you have just mentioned?

For example, when you create a certain arrangement of drawings in your studio, can this just easily be transported into a gallery space and do you want to *re-produce* the environment in which the drawings were made?

BC: No, not at all. That would mean I consider my studio space the ideal exhibition site! I would love to have the possibility to work out the presentation of the drawings entirely on the exhibition site, but like I said earlier, this isn’t always possible. So, evidently the studio work has to prepare for the site-specific installation, which includes, of course, the thematic or concept of the exhibition.

SRK: I am curious about how in your installations of drawings you arrange them in groups or you lay them off to the side separately—it varies—and how that reflects you as the artist, reflects *personal choices*...I am assuming that the drawings are not made in that group at once, and that the building up of these groups, the arrangement itself, is an unlimited, ongoing process...

BC: Basically, it is unlimited. It also depends on the specific work, because my choices in the arrangements are far from arbitrary. If I re-exhibit an installation that has more or less been finished for some time, I get it out in my studio and look it over...and most of the time I add something new to it, even before I begin the process of installing the work in the exhibition space. It is somehow necessary for me to rethink the piece every time. But this does not mean at all that these installations are endlessly re-combinable arrangements of drawings.

Because I am interested in certain content-based topics that I work with over long periods of time, each singular installation does come from a certain line of thinking, and one could say that a singular installation might relate directly to one made previously or one made after. I think this is quite a natural procedure for myself, and other artists as well, I suppose—there are always subjects that continue to occupy you as relevant subject matter, issues that keep recurring your thoughts.

SRK: I see your arrangement of drawings functioning as an installation of ideas. I think that these installations reflect time, as in being time-based, reflecting the personal moment of the artist...

BC: The installation of the drawings is really just a last step in a long process, and shouldn't be considered just the act of finally displaying something already concluded.

SRK: And, I like how there is a certain "mobility" within the installations, which sits in contrast to having one large image that contains all the elements of the many individual drawings. I like the quality of looking at the installations and questioning what is stable or unstable in the overall image...

BC: This shifting, these motions are actually important in my drawing installations. I am conscious of their aspect of abundance: quite often, there's much too much going on, even in one single drawing. And installing multiple single works to form an "entity" will even more tend to become "over the top," so to say. I try to embrace the overload of information that can exist in either one drawing or in many drawings arranged together on a wall. Of course, it can be quite a challenge for the viewer to perceive these large installations and all that's going on within them.

SRK: I want to switch the topic at the moment, to address your artistic and curatorial activity in both Berlin and Rotterdam...and the situation of exhibiting your own artwork at the exhibition spaces you curate or direct. I know that you are one of three initiators of the CAPRI exhibition space in Berlin, plus you have worked in collaboration with Showroom MAMA in Rotterdam. Can you give some background into this activity?

BC: Different from what other people might think, I don't see any contradiction in being an artist *and* a curator. But, I would rather not introduce myself as a curator. I see myself as an artist primarily, an artist who sometimes is intensely engaged in curatorial work, as well.

Being an artist and being a curator are different fields of activity, but I think they go along with each other very well! When I am working with my artwork, there is a process of thinking, re-thinking and questioning. And, as an artist, I am also very much interested in how other artists work, how they find solutions to their own questions. I also write about art, which is the main individual contribution I make to the CAPRI art space, as there are three of us who collectively organize the exhibitions. I find it very inspiring to re-think what fascinates me in other artists' work. When

I'm curating or writing about other artists, I will do this questioning with much more intensity than I would otherwise, than say I would as a viewer to an exhibition. This certainly benefits my own artistic practice...although thinking about others' work doesn't necessarily help to answer my own artistic questions.

SRK: Was CAPRI started, not only to support your desire to investigate other artists work, but to also support yourself professionally, and support the showing of your own art?

BC: Yes, of course. In the first place, we—that is Ina Bierstedt, Alena Meier and I—were looking for a space to realize a collaborative project of ours, a site-specific installation that would blur individual authorship. That was in August 2001. And during our joint exhibition there, in a former flower shop with a quite peculiar storefront, we decided we'd like to invite other people to exhibit there. First, we only planned for six months that eventually resulted in the CAPRI exhibitions 1 to 10. We never planned on making a permanent exhibition space out of it, but when the lease was extended indefinitely, we just continued on. Now in February 2006, we prepare for our 63rd exhibition there.

From the very beginning, the CAPRI openings were full and we got very positive feedback for the exhibitions. And thanks to the peculiar pedestals left over from the flower shop, the space invites people to sit and to talk, something that is usually not the case in a regular gallery. CAPRI is a very communicative place, I think. So, we did feel that CAPRI can support and extend professional networks for artists, and for ourselves as well.

SRK: Are you originally from Berlin, and do you see CAPRI as a certain investment in the art scene of Berlin, and certain personal investment in the city itself?

BC: No, I am originally from Bavaria. I moved to Berlin in 1991 and I studied here, and yes, of course CAPRI is an investment in the art scene. Although public funding for project spaces like CAPRI does not exist here, running an exhibition space like CAPRI is something you can just do in Berlin. Unused, affordable space is what you can get easily in Berlin, as you probably have noticed. So, once we had started and had the space, and also because Ina and I had some curatorial experience already, we felt we should take advantage of this specific feature of Berlin: no money, but spaces.

By opening up a gallery space, you take up space in the art scene—you claim something. So, in addition to being artists ourselves, through our curatorial work with CAPRI we present publicly what we find interesting in the visual arts: CAPRI reflects our vision. By the way, it is very important that all our shows are curated by us.

SRK: Do you ever feel that CAPRI gives you a special position in Berlin? To be simply an artist in Berlin is one thing: to attempt to exhibit your work and to survive and pay the rent. But with CAPRI, you could create your own "bubble" art scene and ignore the rest of what is happening, and like you said, you have claimed your own territory and started your own network... 61

Do you think this special position you have as artist and curator causes you any problems?

BC: Well, we don't ignore the rest! About the problems—One problem is, of course, that it takes a lot of work and time to keep CAPRI running. It is a situation that if you want to do many things at once, you have to watch out that you don't neglect your priority: your own art practice.

And then, for some people, it is difficult to accept that one person can take seriously both being an artist and a curator at the same time. Despite of the fact that this is quite common now, there are some gallerists or curators who are very suspicious of you when you carry on this dual focus.

SRK: Maybe that is a good thing?!?

BC: I think so! But this problem seems connected to the old yet still prevalent idea of the “genius” in art. The genius isn't supposed to do anything but his art work, he has to stick to one type of activity, he has to maintain an exclusive identity— besides, this is obviously a male role model. I, for one, wouldn't want to have to go to my studio every day of the year, just like I wouldn't want to only speak one language, or be able to read one type of book or listen to one style of music.

SRK: You have now extended yourself to working in Rotterdam. How did this come about?

BC: It began when I participated in several Stability/Mobility conferences, which were organized by Ken Pratt, a British curator who has also worked a lot in Rotterdam, especially with Showroom M.A.M.A. He contacted CAPRI and invited us for the Art Rotterdam 2004, to be part of a panel discussion there. That is how I started a relationship with Rotterdam.

Compared to CAPRI, Showroom MAMA sometimes seems like a big institution. In general, from our perspective it is amazing how the Dutch art scene is so much more supported by public money and foundations. So, at times it felt quite strange for me to be on a panel with people fighting over twenty thousand Euros that they wanted to get from a foundation ... then it was my turn, and I was asked “With CAPRI, what is your funding structure like?” And I just laughed, because there simply is no funding structure.

I like Rotterdam a lot, and in a sense it is similar to Berlin in that it is quite relaxed, I would say. If you walk the streets and look at the people, there is a sense of understatement instead of trying to be super fashionable. Somehow, it seems that Rotterdam is a quite proletarian city, even if the city is a major port and therefore has a strong business-money relationship and history, I suppose.

SRK: It is interesting that you feel there is a similarity between Rotterdam and Berlin, because I think that Dutch artists from Rotterdam also feel this similarity. I still can't say precisely what it is that makes these two cities similar...is Berlin just an expanded Rotterdam?

BC: This term: expansion could in fact be the similarity—the space, the gaps in between buildings, this sort of loose and wide structure, that strikes me as similar.

SRK: There is also this idea that both cities are new cities, both having been rebuilt after World War II. Both cities exist in this constant state of rebuilding, re-identification... that means that there is a certain type of energy that isn't static...

BC: Yes, I know that old Rotterdam was bombed down by German troops. But regarding Berlin, besides of the destruction of WWII, there are many other factors responsible for its architecture's specific character. For one, Berlin only has a brief history as being a city, a metropolis. Until the mid-nineteenth century, the area that is now Berlin was just a collection of rather small communities or towns. It was the effect of industrialization that created Berlin as a whole. And this is also why so much of Berlin looks the same all over—designed according to a standardized architectural style from around the turn of the twentieth century.

And now, Berlin is being shaped by another form of standardization visible throughout the city in all these post-modern office buildings. This of course is a result of the Wall coming down. But Rotterdam has less of a standardized "look" to it in my opinion—it reflects a more experimental and varied architecture.

SRK: Well, from the oral history I have been told about Rotterdam, the city itself has gone in the last twenty years from a very open land, empty buildings, deserted city to an overpopulated, architecturally active or rebuilt and experimental architecture city. And, this is exactly why artists were initially attracted and active in Rotterdam, why so many artist initiatives began in Rotterdam, because the city was open to random possibilities and self-initiated, artistic actions...not to forget the possibility for squatting large buildings and maintaining ateliers and homes for no rent. I wonder how, these days, in Rotterdam—and also Berlin—how open the cities are to possibilities for initiatives, alternative programs, etc. by and for artists? And, it is this fact, like you said earlier in the interview, that artists do go to Berlin and utilize this open, free space to make things happen that interests me in Berlin so much.

Because of your position as an artist that moved to Berlin, studied in Berlin, made Berlin your home and also created this space CAPRI and that you work as both an artist and curator, how easy to do you think it is for artists to now move to Berlin and be active as artists and get active in the art scene here? In your opinion, how easy is it to find an apartment, a studio and start exhibiting artwork?

BC: I think it is still quite easy, because the basic things—affordable places to

live and to work—they are very much available in Berlin. Of course now, you have to go more towards the outskirts of the city to find such affordable places. However, I have lived in Berlin for fifteen years now already, so it might be better to get the opinion of someone who has just moved here!

What I can say is that, for one, there is a large English speaking community in Berlin, which might help English-speaking newcomers to settle. Also, and I might be romanticizing the idea a bit, I think there is still something left of this “Berlin spirit” in which people still help each other out quite a bit.

In many respects, Berlin was important city long before the German unification: for West Germans, West Berlin was the center of left radicalism, and East Berlin was very important for the resistance in the GDR, too.

Some how I think Berlin has maintained at least some of these traditions, both Eastern and Western. Of course I found this fascinating when moving here, too. Still, Berlin continues to attract many artists, thinkers and politically oriented people, and maybe Berlin will continue to do so...

SRK: While visiting galleries and art spaces over the last week here in Berlin—galleries of all shapes and sizes—I talked with as many people as possible who work within the gallery system or as curators, and I asked them also their opinion on what is still possible for new artists recently moved to Berlin. I managed to get a wide range of opinions, but there was a common “truth” to the many statements: it isn’t easy, the galleries are full, the schedules are full and most galleries do not have time to review artist portfolios. Many galleries operate in a very closed network of referrals.

I was wondering, in the case of CAPRI, since its beginning in 2001, have you personally seen an increasing number of internationally-based artists coming to you, wanting to show you their work and wanting to show at CAPRI? Are there too many artists wanting to get shown in Berlin these days for the galleries and exhibition space to handle?

BC: I don’t have the impression that there are more international artists coming to CAPRI now than a couple of years ago. But what has continued for us and further developed are our international co-operations—like working with initiatives in Auckland, New Zealand or with Showroom M.A.M.A., and this year CAPRI will collaborate with spaces in Amsterdam and in Paris.

CAPRI’s international activities outside of Berlin have increased, but we have included the international art scene within our programming from the very beginning: After our own joint installation at CAPRI, the first exhibition we curated was of David Hatcher, an artist from New Zealand.

64 Because CAPRI does not have money to pay the artists—which is a massive restriction, of course—we have mainly exhibited international artists who

work in Berlin. Fortunately, artists were willing to work within our financial situation, and therefore a professional and varied program has been possible despite of this strict no-budget situation.

SRK: Would you say then that with CAPRI, you are out looking for art and artists to bring to CAPRI, and less that artists are coming to you, to the CAPRI space, asking for a chance to exhibit?

BC: Many, many people come to us directly! Although we in principle are always curious to see what people present or submit to us, this is also a burden, of course. It often takes several months for the three of us CAPRI curators to come together to review all the submitted proposals and portfolios.

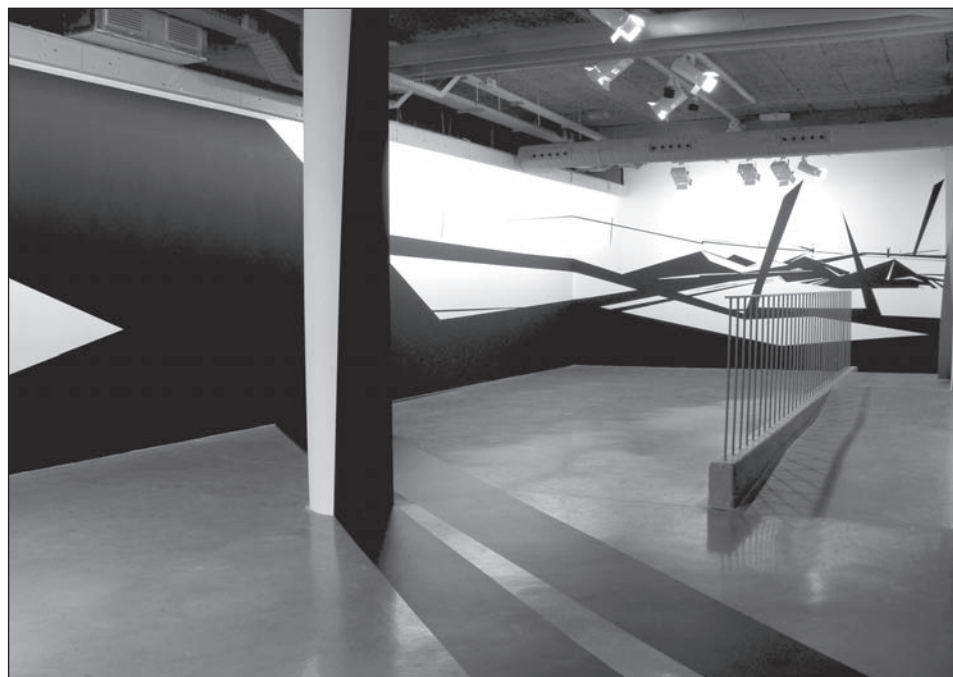
I would say that my position as curator at CAPRI has made me respect and understand the role of the gallerist much better: how difficult it can be. I now can understand how other curators don't manage to look at my portfolio for half a year, even if they were the ones who asked for it!

SRK: Are you going to continue working as a curator, both at CAPRI and singularly with places like Showroom M.A.M.A., in the future? Are there any other activities or interests in your future that you think are important to mention?

BC: We never had long term plans with CAPRI, so basically the project will continue as long as we enjoy doing it! And regarding Showroom M.A.M.A., it is probable that their Curatorial Training Program will continue this summer and I will work there as a teacher and mentor. As an artist and/or as a curator, I presently work on a couple of projects, I will exhibit this April in Amsterdam at P////AKT, and there are other exhibitions in preparation in Berlin, Paris and in Switzerland, too.

*More information about the artwork of Bettina Carl can be found at:
<http://bettinacarl.de>.*

*Information about CAPRI can be found at:
<http://capri-berlin.de>*



above: *DEUCE*, Wuerttembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart, Germany, 2005
below: *FLATLAND*, Le-Plateau - FRAC - île de France, Paris, France, 2005

Christine Rusche

This interview was held on Sunday evening, February 12, 2006 in the living room of Christine Rusche, over two large cups of coffee and some coconut cookies. I am familiar with the development of Christine Rusche's room-drawings over the last four years, and I came to the interview with specific questions related to the continued and progressive use of a combination of exhibition space architecture and personal imagery in her art practice.

S.R. Kucharski: I am interested in how you deal with a certain “space-within-space,” by making your room-drawings. In these artworks—every time you install one—you create another “world” within the confines of the exhibition space...what is your desire in that activity, what is your reason for activating a space in this way?

Christine Rusche: What I am doing is confronting an image with a space, to get new perspectives on what we know as a two-dimensional image—as in a painting or drawing—and to access that world in a more direct or physical way. Also, I am interested in re-directing a perspective on architecture, on rooms and the physical space around us.

SRK: In that sense, with the idea of architecture—whether existing architecture of the exhibition space, or architecture as an image—what you create in the exhibition space is an installed, painted image based on concepts in drawing...and how does that really influence your choices when you design a room-drawing?

CR: I don't know if it is architecture necessarily—it is space, everything like a room, a landscape, the in-between spaces, the imagination of it—it is both a fictional and a real space. I am confronting the two in room-drawings by questioning what we know about the “real” world through the image of the drawn world.

SRK: Are you trying to convince us of another world—another reality—when we enter your room-drawing installations? Or, is it only just an image of “another world,” another architecture?

CR: What do you mean by convincing us of another world/reality? Well, you can call the image “the other world, the other space”. Three or four years ago, the room-drawings were much more linear and about describing an abstracted image, abstracted objects, that could still more be read as...lets say landscapes. Now, the shapes have become more massive, describing or even appearing like volumes or three-dimensional shapes rather than drawn outlined abstractions. Currently, I am more interested in a sculptural or a physical appearance in the room-drawings, where the drawing or painting sits as “two-dimensional” shapes flat on the walls, the surface and border of a room. The forms now, themselves, are much more non-objective, mostly geometric forms. Recently I replaced forms that could remind you on a mountain, or building or whatever. 67
These big sculptural-like shapes have a physical-appearing “impact” on the

exhibition space by just what they are: they create their own space through a play with perspective, confronting ideas of what is perceived space and what is created space, *within* the exhibition space itself.

SRK: You began these room-drawings with an idea that you could create an artificial landscape within a room, which would break away the walls, ceiling and floor...and now there is a difference in that you want to “disturb” the exhibition space with a shape or form...these geometric forms?

CR: I would not make this difference necessarily. It was in the beginning like it is now: a similar interest in confronting image and space in a direct way. I see it as two things: it is a match and a disturbance of a space and drawing, at the same time—shaking up the perception of the space, but also connecting the drawn work to the physical architecture of the room.

What I have realized by making these room-drawings, both line-based, form-based and with or without sculptural elements is that the physical impact of the work comes from how we perceive a flat shape in a sculptural or three-dimensional sense. I have become more interested now in how this happens, looking towards the character of a space, how one would move through a space—in an exhibition space—if it was completely empty, and that movement I try to confront with a drawn image.

SRK: Do you get influences from the world outside the gallery, like influences from cities, roads, signage, etc. that you place in the image of a room-drawing? Or, are you only concerned with how people move around in interior spaces?

CR: When I talk about how you move in a “space,” I mean it in a wider sense of orientation: not only inside and outside the gallery space, but where you move, how you move, what makes you look towards places, choose certain places, what is your inspiration, your expectation etc, how you possibly get lost and find your orientation again. What influences me can be a relation, an idea, an imagination or visual memory of a specific place...as well as the visual outside world of landscapes, architecture and cities with its language of shapes, signs and orientation system, etc.— it is about recreating moments that you respond to as a *perception of a space*, and to create an unstable moment inside a static considered place or situation. This instability and the confrontation with something not understood in the first moments of viewing it, asks for reflection and keeps you moving (with mind and body) until you find some orientation.

SRK: Is this a quality you want the room-drawings to have: as a viewer you can walk inside the exhibition space, walk inside the room-drawing itself, and receive visual “directions” from the image, and then “get lost” inside your thoughts? Is the experience of the room-drawings about discovery and getting lost, somehow at the same time?

68 CR: Maybe so! I am interested how the room-drawings can allow the viewer to *disconnect* from where they are at the moment...it is the experience I am

interested in, how people relate to a shaped-drawn world of imagery, the experience of architecture or rooms—how people relate to places that are actually solid, unchanging spaces. They follow a line or a shape that has caught their attention when they enter the space. They follow by moving and turning around and bending over, over borders and corners to find a way into the image-world and then are dropped again the next moment where flat meets the spatial—the line is lost, the shape crashed to continue a bit off-track to some other place. It is looking and finding, following and playing and also losing what you see.

In my room-drawings, it is a “real-fictive” world...

SRK: Real, in a sense, because it is locked into a relationship with the physical architecture of the exhibition space? Or, real because the room-drawing is still an abstracted image from reality?

CR: I guess a bit of both...and neither one! The imagery is fictive. It is made up. And as an image it is real, this “drawn world.” Isn’t it rather a visualized thought or idea? The presence of, or link, to the architectural space does not make it more real than it already is. What would “real” really mean anyway?

SRK: Yes, but you can also allow the viewer to “believe” in the room-drawing, or not believe in it, or believe in the form of the image coming from a real situation...

CR: I guess you—as a viewer—decide if you want to travel through my room-drawings more than “believing” in them. I don’t want to convince anybody of anything to “believe” in. This work makes no attempt or purpose in that way—it is a visual language developed to connect image and space in a specific way where “fact and fiction” intertwine, meet, become part of each other, extending their definitions by crossing their borders.

SRK: It is interesting how you are now referring to your images and forms as a language... what group of people do you think would have a greater access or understanding to your “language?” Since we have physical bodies and relate to place, structure and form, it all has a certain “reality” to it. When I look at the room-drawings, I see them as fictional spaces, but I also identify a specific aesthetic to them: they are very sharp, graphic, black and white...and, we don’t live in a black and white world. There are all these *reductions* from reality that you make in the drawings, in order to activate the space...

CR: To point out the origin of the imagery, the black and white imagery developed as a contrast with the real world surrounding us. Also, the black and white aesthetic is a very shape-based language, which is strongest to meet the shape-based language of the architecture of a room or a building. This makes a meeting of image and space possible.

If I was to use color, as a contrast to working only in black, white and gray at this point in time, it would bring a whole different “world” of information into the 69

space, which maybe would distract from this common meeting point.

Also, I don't know the solution for how to use color within my work. I am experimenting, but did not find a way as of yet. At the moment, color seems to make the image-part appearing more flat on the surface of the walls, with less impact on space. Carrying strong, almost signal-like, color-associated information, makes my room-drawings drifting towards decoration. This doesn't mean I don't like color, but I work in black and white *because* of the experience I am trying to create with creating a common meeting point, like I mentioned earlier.

SRK: Is that a big concern in your art practice that you have to watch out that the room-drawings do not become a decoration?

CR: Decoration is not what I am interested in my artwork. If they were to be about decoration, they would definitely look very different, don't you think? In my imagination, I see color introducing an entirely new language into my work, which takes time to experiment with and learn about. But at the moment, I am still interested in the sculptural aspect of the drawn shapes as they fit into these architectural environments. And, I have only made a few of these recently quite large works, and I would like to make more...it takes a long time to realize one room-drawing, and I learn from each one, which is something I learn through the physical, actual setup and existence of the room-drawing. The real existence of these room-drawings, versus the imagination while planning and developing them, are two very different things...

SRK: In all the exhibition spaces you have worked in—the odd thirteen room-drawings you have made—has there been an instance where you felt the drawing, a particular room-drawing, “fit” the space best...in other words, there was one room-drawing that was *exactly perfect*...or maybe perfectly “wrong,” but the image still worked...

I am thinking about an instance where the room-drawing is not only made by you for a specific exhibition space, but that the drawing “attaches” itself to the space, in a more-than-expected manner or way...

CR: I am not looking for something perfectly fitting. But, I am trying to get as close to an “imagination” of my drawn-image in a particular space, as I can *at that time*. There are many options and images to put into a “space,” just as there are lots of paintings you can paint on a piece of paper. But I guess it is always the most recent, realized work—and at this moment it is the work *DEUCE* at Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, Germany—which feels like matching the most to my imagination.

SRK: Do you attribute the success with this latest work—the success you personally feel after realizing the work—with anything in particular?

70 CR: I wouldn't really call it “succeeding” with the room-drawings, because what I do with the room-drawings is actually a process, and it is only that I have

a closer relationship to this last room-drawing, in that it is the most recent artwork. *DEUCE*, as a work of art, reflects closest to where my mind is at the moment.

I just remember there was one particular moment after completing *DEUCE* that I was really happy with the work I had made and how it fit with the architecture of the room at the Kunstverein in Stuttgart: you could be inside the room with the drawing, or see the drawing through a wall of windows from the outside of the museum. The room-drawing became so many things at once: a sculpture, a room, an image, having an inside and an outside perspective...it was very dynamic!

SRK: I am interested in your artistic attitude to disturb the space with these room-drawings. I am thinking that is a very important attitude that artists hold in general—not in a negative sense, disturbing—but in the way disturbing brings attention to what your artwork is speaking about: the act of disturbing is a momentary shock which brings the viewer to attention, and further to the idea embedded in the artwork. With your particular artwork, I am interested in how you perceive this disturbance and how you keep it in control or let it get out of control...I am curious if you mean a disturbance from the sheer size and presence of the room-drawings, or if you actually mean something more...

CR: Since the size of the room-drawings always depends on the exhibition space—which vary in size and are mostly offered to me—the disturbance from the sheer size is not my only meaning: disturbance—in the positive interpretation—always happens, when expectations are not fulfilled, when you experience something you can not easily explain for yourself with the knowledge and tools you have at that time.

I guess the presence of a room-drawing and its character of an “in-between two-dimensional and three-dimensional work” is confronting the viewer with something he first needs to find an “access” to: to read it and then to find his position inside and his relation to what he sees around him—drawing and room are intertwined in many ways. Flat and spatial are next to each other and the appearance is constantly changing by changing a viewing position inside the room-drawing—perspectives go along the architecture and then break again and take their own way.

This is what can be described as the experience people have in the space, with or inside the room-drawing, and I don't exclude myself from this experience. I realize the room-drawing, because I also want to be able to stand inside the space and walk through the image.

SRK: Do all your room-drawing installations begin from investigations within drawing on paper, that you are working with smaller images and shapes on a regular basis, and this activity informs what you will make when you have an exhibition space to make a full-size room-drawing? I am curious to how much your eventual room-drawings are influenced by the physical exhibition space, or, are really pre-formed shapes and ideas coming out of your studio?

CR: The room-drawings are never made out of pre-formed shapes and ideas, which are just “projected” into the space. They always develop together with and for the specific architectural space.

Originally, the room-drawings developed from drawings on paper. Before I made my first room-drawing five years ago, I was creating black and white, abstracted landscapes on paper relating to outline graphics, comic abstraction, graphical language of signs and icons, etc. And, I was over-painting photographic imagery of landscapes and cityscapes with black, abstract, geometric shapes cutting through the pictures like huge sculptures. The early drawings eventually started “growing out” from the paper, and the image just extended itself directly onto the wall.

Out of a later exhibition opportunity, where the exhibition space was too small to show my drawings, I decided to turn the whole exhibition space into one drawing! That was more or less how it happened—I think I was close to making that step in the studio anyway, but as things came together, this is how my room-drawings began.

SRK: When you began the room-drawings, did you find yourself entering any particular dialogue in the visual arts, about space, exhibition space, using the exhibition space? Did you find that you weren't alone in your experiments with using entire exhibition spaces to realize drawings, or that other artists also saw the potential to realize drawings on such a massive scale?

CR: When I began the room-drawings, I was much more busy with and looking at painting and drawing in a classical way, on canvas or paper-based. In the time of my study, most students around me worked with video and new media, performance and installation. Only very few worked with painting, and almost nobody with just drawing. The artists I was looking at were more indirectly related to what I was interested in, like large-scale paintings which had a strong physical appearance for me, or big paintings installed in old buildings, which visually began to connect with the walls, or like the work of Gordon Matta-Clark or Richard Serra, etc.—there have been many I was looking at.

The room-drawings came out of the imagery I was developing in the studio, and I must say I didn't have any idea where that would lead me at the time—I didn't even know if I would make a second room-drawing after I made the first one! I was just driven by the idea of image and space combined and that drawing is its own media of expression, relating closer to sculpture, space and time based work than, for example, to painting. Much later I realized how big the impact was by seeing large-scale imagery around me, like graffiti on trains and walls, big prints covering entire facades of huge buildings, or big canvases for movie screenings installed outside. Later I recognized artists like Jessica Stockholder, Katharina Grosse, Felice Varini, who work in their own way as painters in architectural space. And now of course there is my own generation

72 of artists, who make artwork related to what I am busy with...

I was also hanging out in the video and film department a lot and also studied and worked with film/video for a while. After the first room-drawing, I started video taping in the space, to experience the space, to experience myself moving through the space. During the first room-drawing, I spent a lot of days after the opening in the space of the room-drawing just to figure out what I actually *did* there—I wanted to be inside that world, to play around, to learn about it...

The imagery, from then on, started to change with every new installation. There have always been new aspects within the imagery itself or from the architecture of the new space that influence the shape of the room-drawings.

SRK: How do you come to accept that the room-drawings are so temporary, and that you realize this huge action, a major drawing, in order to disturb a space as you say, but in the end, the work is over-painted? Because the works are not subtle, that they involve a large amount of energy and effort to realize them, how do you deal with the temporality, and how does that stand in comparison to your drawing and painting that you continue on paper?

CR: The imagery on paper has now become influenced by the room-drawings. While developing the room-drawings I created a lot of imagery, sketching on photographs of the different spaces. I became interested in if the space I constantly see and consider while drawing on these photographs would still be involved and expressed in the drawn imagery, after I separate it from the photographs of the spaces and transfer the imagery back into a two-dimensional world of a drawing on paper.

As for the room-drawings, I actually never questioned whether the work would be permanent or temporary until last year when I had so many exhibitions that producing these works started to reach a limit that my energy was running low...plus the fact that I did not make any money out of these installations. I have always considered the temporary aspect of the drawings as just being in the nature of the work. It was also something that makes the work what it is, *that it is supposed to disappear*, even if it is made with such an effort and time-intensive setup and labor.

These aspects do confront me with the problem of time versus energy when producing my artwork. After a few years of working intensely, I have only a few drawings left and just photographs of the room-drawings. I guess I might have to figure out how this type of artwork can be installed by help from assistants to exhibit it and to provide a certain “visibility.” But, with every room-drawing I am making, with so many adjustments “on the spot,” I cannot really imagine how to replace myself in the installation of these room-drawings, nor how I could maybe just give someone a model—as I make scale models for each room-drawing—to install the work. From experience, the transfer from a model to actual work is never a one-to-one transfer...

SRK: To be honest, my reaction is that no one else *could* ever make the drawings for you, because in my opinion, the room-drawings do come from your 73

experiments in drawings on paper, and you would never ask someone...

CR: ...to paint your paintings, yes, I agree. Yeah, but why not with these room-drawings? Why shouldn't this be something to consider, especially if you have more shows than you can realize with just two hands? For every room-drawing, I start from the scratch, and this way of using assistants would increase my visibility. A painting, for example, can always be sent from one show to the next one, while with my room-drawings, this is impossible.

SRK: But art making isn't just about production, in your opinion, is it?!?

CR: I guess this cannot be called an issue of production, considering that I realize between three and five pieces room-drawings a year at the moment. It is only about how to actually show your work, to give it a visibility, to travel with it to different places, etc. Look at other artists who have a lot of exhibitions: it is just a common situation for installation work, where you have assistants helping you setup the work, or have other people realize the work from exact plans made by the artist. I think there is always a situation where others can prepare parts of the installation.

I just wonder if that really will work for me, as the sketching of the drawing—fitting the work on-site to the exhibition space—is the creative work, where I have to be there at the beginning to fit and adjust the work into the space. In this way, no one can take over the decision process—if it isn't drawn right in the beginning, the whole piece won't work.

SRK: But maybe this is something important to consider in regard to your room-drawings, because from personally knowing your working process—all the investment that goes to designing, forming and creating a sketch for the exhibition space, and all the time that goes into working that space to the image as well—the room-drawing might be perceived as easy to install, but this is far from the truth. Since there are so many adjustments and considerations you make when installing the room-drawings, it is essentially that the walls and the exhibition space has replaced your canvas...

CR: Yes, the exhibition space can also be seen as the piece of paper with *a space built inside it*—like painting on a photograph, which is something I did often in the past, over-painting photographed landscapes with abstract shapes...but, the exhibition space is more intended to be seen as the carrier and a part of an actual two-dimensional image which I created, to be looked at, as one would look at a sculpture, a three-dimensional view.

SRK: Are you mostly concentrated, at the moment, with art that manipulates or affects the exhibition space, not only in your own practice but when looking at other artists and researching your position in the international art scene?

ideas, and I like variety. You have to be aware of what happens around you, also to reflect and put in perspective of what you are busy with yourself and how it is perceived and recognized as an expression. It is just one single way out of many. So, I just do this kind of work with its specific atmosphere between image and space, and I continue to explore and develop it...

SRK: Other artists interviewed for this *Open Issues* have also mentioned this search for an atmosphere, wanting to either create a certain atmosphere in the exhibition space or finding a particular atmosphere that comes with the exhibition space...

CR: Every place has a certain atmosphere or character, just like every person has a certain character—this is something we feel and perceive. When you place an object or image into a place, a place that has a unique character, the known atmosphere changes and you lose your known perception, so you must make a choice about whether to let the new atmosphere lead you somewhere...it is this type of atmosphere, one that doesn't in itself fulfill expectations in the first place, that I look to create.

There is something I want to add here about interior versus exterior space: most of my previous artworks were made inside a room, so the space is always an enclosed space, a box. It is a space you enter, a space you can enter and also leave. But in my artwork, overall, it isn't important or necessary that it is inside a room—I see the room as just a space with borders, like sculpture. In this sense I am also interested in working outside of a room, say looking at a building façade or the exterior of a building as a sculpture as well, and to develop an image related to previous room-drawings, for that exterior space or situation.

SRK: Well, you could find yourself in two different positions as an artist: on one hand, you could be working in a way that you wait for an opportunity to make a room-drawing and that becomes a process of discovery, chance and working to find solutions to practical problems. On the other hand, you can just walk around a city, find a building, a wall or a corner and you get this vision or reaction to place an image or drawing upon it...and then you just do it. It is a reaction that comes from your personal connection to shapes, forms, line and perspective, because as you said, your art practice isn't only about interior spaces per se, but more how things are constructed—it isn't your intent to limit yourself.

CR: Until I get the chance offered to me—or find a project on my own—to realize a new room-drawing, where I am confronted with some specific place and situation, I keep focused on working in a personal, fictive style by making sketches and collecting ideas in my studio....

SRK: The relationship where architecture is informing you about shape and image, has that come about from any particular experience? Has living in Rotterdam—with its varying styles of architecture—influenced your art practice in the last 75 four years?

CR: It was definitely a conscious choice to come to Rotterdam because of my artwork and because of Rotterdam's innovative role in contemporary architecture and design, and also because it is a port city, which has a big impact on its structure and appearance. But next to architecture, there were also other things before moving to Rotterdam that had an impact on the visual part of my work. One example is the film *TRON*, which I can't remember how many times I have seen! All these edgy, strict-shaped views onto landscapes—image-scapes with real people in a digital-fictional world—created a particular story in a place that was actually not existing. The world of *TRON* was related to the world we know, but physically not there.

I get asked how and if my work has anything to do with computers or the imagery and dynamics of computer game-worlds. If my work does have a relationship to computer imagery, then it belongs only to the kind of visual imagery shown in the film called *TRON*. I believe that today, computer games are trying to reach a parallel to reality, and that is about creating an illusion. *Tron* was not trying to build an illusion—there was the world inside and the world outside the computer, totally different.

SRK: The influence from *TRON* then keeps you rather strict in your art practice, in that you don't want to re-create reality in your room-drawings...

CR: I want to create an image and atmosphere that sits next to reality.

SRK: I am interested in the dialogue you get into with people about your work, which I am sure is very important to you—it isn't just about how you feel when you can be inside the room-drawings, but how an audience feels inside your room-drawings. I am curious how people who have seen multiple room-drawings have reacted, and specifically, how have people in Rotterdam, people in Holland have started a dialogue with you about the room-drawings versus people in Germany, France or America?

CR: In general, I would say, it is different country-to-country depending on perspectives and backgrounds. Also, the dialogues have different forms. Belonging to reactions on the artwork however, it is usually strong about how people feel in the space, how they directly perceive and react on a room-drawing and that seems to be very similar in all different places. People do seem to be interested in the work: the dialogue in some places is more formal and descriptive, where other times it is a detailed and more "idea behind the work" dialogue...

My room-drawings have been shown quite often since I came to Rotterdam—I have had offers and interests to make room-drawings for exhibition spaces in Holland, but also in Germany, the USA, etc. Still, regarding Holland, there is usually not much conversation about the room-drawings that follows up the installation of the work, a conversation about the ideas behind the work, the motivation. This is what I am personally looking for in a dialogue, and I find it occurring more, for example, in Germany...which might be a language issue as well.

It has been a positive opportunity to develop the work over the last years here in Holland and abroad, but it seems, it has reached a limit for me here in Rotterdam, where I can go with my artwork, how I can communicate it. Since beginning in Rotterdam four years ago, I have been living and working in Paris, Chicago, Los Angeles as well as Germany, and I have had comparably good conversations about the room-drawings with my audience.

SRK: I want to know more how the room-drawings create this dialogue between you and your audience, how you're interested in letting the room-drawings make the connection for you, between yourself and people. And, if you *could* be satisfied with the act of creating the room-drawings, installing them, then letting them be...and whether you can be satisfied without dialogue over the realized artwork?

CR: The work creates the dialogue through the experience the audience can have inside the room-drawings and that is also a part of the work. My own dialogue would not provide me with enough perspectives to experience and consider my work and learn about it, to further develop it.

I have been around, both here in Holland and other countries, and there were, depending on the setup of the art scene—and how people come together, the character of the city, etc.—many differences to the dialogue. In the case of Rotterdam, I guess it is that I had thought I reached a limit with discussing my artwork, but recently I also discover new interest in my work from others, which maybe has to do with my own change of perspective, which in itself could have occurred once I made the decision to leave.

Now, I guess I just want to move to a place that challenges my work—to find a new confrontation—and experience it in a new surrounding.

SRK: When I asked earlier how influential Rotterdam has been to your art practice, I asked because I know that you have been considering moving to Berlin—a choice of city that you feel would provide a greater dialogue, a greater communication in a deeper sense that you are looking for—because you found that the art scene there would challenge you more as an artist...

CR: This “missing of dialogue” is something that has been lacking only for the last year and a half, something that I experienced just before I went to Paris on the Cité Residency Program. Paris was a break for me, from Rotterdam and Holland and it has also put me into a new situation. When I came back to Rotterdam, I needed to be here to have the space to work again, the friends and the relaxed, known environment. I can also say I wouldn't ever give up my first years of living in Rotterdam at all! This time was extremely inspiring, and only possible by being exactly in this place.

It is just that time has run out and it is just time to move, to look for new goals and challenges, to just be in a new place that confronts you with a certain freshness, and to see how that affects me as an individual. I am looking for new

inspiration, and it is necessary to have influence and inspiration from outside of your self in order to keep on moving, keep on going.

This is why I choose Berlin, because it is a very active city, and not just because I am German and I want to go home! (laughter) I can say I have already tried to go to places like London—which isn't succeeding at the moment and is nearly impossible for me to afford—and I tried Paris which I decided isn't the place for me. I have been in America twice now, but I would like to let some more years pass before I consider moving to America again.

SRK: You must have some particular feeling or attraction to Berlin, besides it just being a larger city, besides what it supposedly can offer you? What are your real experiences with Berlin?

CR: Berlin is an international place with an interesting history, physical location in Europe and there are artists moving there from everywhere...and, it is affordable! These are all very important aspects for having the possibility to survive as an artist and participating in a cultural centre city.

Berlin is hopefully a place, for myself, where I can find these aspects, to maybe find a gallery, to settle my work, to put myself on two feet. Because my room-drawings are so particular, I have to be creative in finding ways to fund their creation, as well as for myself to survive.

I don't expect that the art-world comes knocking on my door and offers me paradise though...

SRK: I like your attitude that you plan on moving to Berlin because you see it as a real city of possibility for success for your art practice, even if you also know that it could be a struggle to survive there...

CR: Yeah, but I don't care! Life is hard anywhere! (laughter) I see that actually as an inspiring thing!

SRK: Well, what about this possibility: Rotterdam provides—and has provided—a certain environment that has afforded you time, money and energy to make your artwork as it has developed in the last four years...and somehow this city of Rotterdam, and the Netherlands, provided the unique, right environment. And, that going to Berlin might not provide the same environment?

CR: I don't know, or at least I can't say. And I don't expect that—I didn't have these expectations when I first came to Rotterdam either, I just tried it out. It is about starting something new, and working on it and the rest comes by itself.

practicing artist plus some good friends living there as well. For me, on top of that, I can *finally* solve my situation of living between two countries—Holland and Germany—and not being able to really settle in Holland because of difficulties receiving a Visa, as a professional artist. I still have a big part of my art career based in Germany, and in the last four years, it never came to a point where I could make a committed decision about staying or leaving either country and choosing one as a base station with a set up studio from where you keep on moving and traveling and return to.

I have decided to get rid of this distracting situation, to leave, and it is definitely true that Germany makes life easier for me as well! Even though, I must admit, that Rotterdam—next to the good friends I have here—provided a very comfortable situation with affordable housing, big studios to work in, etc. I know this will not be the same in Berlin and that I will have to learn to sustain a more expensive life.

SRK: In the last year, and in the coming year ahead, you have been quite active as an artist with exhibiting your room-drawings. This is interesting that most of the time the room-drawings are being shown in Germany, and maybe it has had an influence on you for relocating to Berlin, because not only is it practical it is smart to keep up the relationships you have forged with German exhibition spaces, curators and dealers.

I would like to invite you to also advertise when and where these upcoming exhibitions will take place, because the projects you are involved in for the future seem to be important steps in the artwork as well as for your career as a practicing artist.

CR: Well, I have a project in the works that involves a possible façade painting in Hamburg in a city-based project with many other artists involved—it will be a large-scale piece in a big group exhibition if it goes through.

I also have an invitation to develop a room-drawing, plus exhibit drawings on paper, at the Kassel Art Center in Germany, which I look forward too as it is a two-man show in a large exhibition space.

Since these exhibitions are just being planned, I don't want to talk too much about them.

However, I have to say it feels a little weird that all my upcoming shows *are* in Germany when I am also moving to Germany! Because, this is the exact claustrophobic situation of getting stuck in one country that I do not like. I always have wanted my exhibitions to be spread out more between different places and I feel much better to experience my work under different perspectives. Traveling in-between places creates interesting relations, strange yet interesting views of the inside and outside of a place, city or country. So, I don't like the idea that moving to Germany and having all my upcoming shows in Germany, that it looks like I am making a safe move or safe actions in my own country. Or, that I am just moving back to Germany because I have 79 these shows, because that is the exact opposite of what I want!

My situation, relocating from Rotterdam to Berlin and being so active in Germany with my art at the moment, is just how it is. So, I don't want to give it any more meaning than that.

And my plans might change anyway, change faster than I expect....

*More information about the artwork of Christine Rusche can be found at:
<http://christine-rusche.gmxhome.de>*



above: *Geef niet om hem maar aan hem*, neon, Pauluskerk, 2004
below: *Twice, till filled*, acrylic on canvas, 51 x 51 cm. 2005

Jack Segbars

This interview took place on Monday, February 13th 2006 at Jack's studio in Rotterdam. Jack supplied the espresso while I contributed some excellent pastries to be shared during our talk. After some introductory chitchat, we dove right into a discussion about Jack's artistic position within contemporary art...

S.R. Kucharski: Shall I go over the themes and general parameters for the interview?

Jack Segbars: I just re-read the information in your email request for this interview yesterday, so...

SRK: Well, I'll just elaborate a bit more, then we can jump into some questions I brought with me, then we can see where it goes...

Essentially, *Open Issues* begins with subjects I personally want to talk about, concerning the visual arts. Then, I have to find artists who can address the topics or themes, who are somehow related to those themes through their own art practice. The groups of themes have often worked themselves to the surface from subconscious ideas, which are definitely influenced by the artistic company I keep...and sometimes these themes are quite personal to my own artistic investigations.

At the moment, I want to talk with you today within the area of these three themes: using interior/exhibition space to address an exterior/social/physical space; artists utilizing the aesthetics of an exhibition space versus aestheticizing an exhibition space...I have an interest to discover the motivation behind when artists and curators as well as critics decided that paintings, well let's say image making, would no longer just "decorate" the gallery walls. And, from this change in attitude, visual art began an expansion to a state where Art started to take over the exhibition space...and how this is still manifested in the artwork of contemporary artists.

JS: Well, these are differences that are purely driven by the nature of the artwork itself, I think. Some work needs pure introspection, to be regarded by its own merits, its own rights and its own space, and in that relationship it will function properly. So, what I am saying is some artists would like to forget the context of the exhibition space, while others will focus on the qualities of the exhibition space...

There is both a blurring and segregation between these two attitudes, and you can fight about it if you desire...the curator-artist, the critic-artist...the field has become blurred. It has become a conglomerate that has built up the Art World that we participate in now. It isn't just artists that produce "artwork," a body of work—now there is a contextually driven subject that drives the artwork. And, in my opinion, most artists in the last twenty years have functioned as illustration for the view of curators.

What I am talking about is “thematization” of all exhibitions, all shows in contemporary art. And, the additional writing of long articles about the meaning and social context of the artwork...

SRK: Yes, what artwork “means” is always the first thing in an exhibition statement, how it references psychology or history *far before* talking about what the art looks like... sometimes there isn’t even any mention or discussion over the visual characteristics of the artwork on view—a situation where art only becomes a visual reference point to the importance of thinking...

JS: It is just an “act,” one of slightly noticing that there are still drawings hung up on the exhibition space, which only provoke further elaboration in text...well, artists themselves have become aware of this process and have tried to regain power—they started writing themselves, becoming curators themselves, trying to re-use the same tools that are used to construct the art world as we live in it now.

I think the position of the artist in the exhibition space has become blurred, and that is because everyone is asking the questions: what is the role of the artist in utilizing the exhibition space, what is the role of the curator in “thematizing” the exhibition and the artwork, and what happens when the artist is also a curator?

SRK: Well, I do think that these are two different attitudes—the position of the artist versus the curator—and one can obviously approach the use of the exhibition space from different angles...but should we create a border between these two positions, I don’t know?

I have a quote from your artist statement that I have a question about. You write: “... like shining with a torch in a space that is already known and mapped, where also the formal aspects of both torch and map-able space are known...and introduces aspects like tradition, the passing of time, history and innovative character of art”. My question is: can you apply this statement to the exhibition space, the white cube gallery that we have been dancing around in our previous statements?

JS: I am really happy, myself, with returning to a dialogue with the white cube gallery space. I had made a choice ten years ago that all I wanted to do was return to painting. And, to set myself these boundaries, the canvas, as the “bearer” of my artwork, what I was going to do. At that time, the interaction started—the participation started—in what we just talked about: that artists were writing and criticizing the conditions of the exhibition space, the blurring position between artist and curator as well.

I also felt this dialogue was an interesting field to be researched, but I also saw the start of the *popularity* of it, which was convenient for directors and curators who could choose from a growing group of “new” artists who could fill the exhibition space with “meaningful” and anthropological/sociological—and let’s not forget art historical—artwork.

I decided to go against that wave and return to painting, because all those concerns and aspects of creating a “debate” within the art world could be translated through painting as well.

SRK: But that is also a consideration that the paintings you make will be presented, in a space, like the recently traditional white cube space. And, that your paintings will create a certain dialogue for you...and, that you more or less know what kind of dialogue you wish to create within the exhibition space.

JS: Yes, the intention is not to change the basic ground rules of the gallery space, indeed it is presenting painting as a part of an ongoing dialogue...it is not my issue to change the ground rules...which means one has to accept the dialogue and the role people play in that.

Well, it is hard to control everything...

SRK: How do you see the difference then between your work in painting—looking to address these social/political/anthropological issues—versus artists who are working more or less conceptually within an exhibition space, and the artwork is a presentation of artifacts from their “research?”

JS: Time will tell. Because, times are difficult now: consider the Venice Biennial from two years ago, with Jeanne van Heeswijk, Eric van Lieshout and others...after this Biennial there was a discussion at the Boijmans van Beuningen museum on the changing role of the museum and/or exhibition space, and the new “participatory” art that doesn’t need those spaces anymore, that doesn’t come alive in these spaces. The work of van Heeswijk was useless, even stupid and out-of-place when exhibited in a museum...and because it was out-of-place in the museum context, the “artwork” of van Heeswijk became a relic, a shadow of what happened *outside and before* the presentation in a museum context—one has to construct very carefully this “participatory” art when presented in a museum space. And, I mean this in the sense that the artist has to make it work in the space, just as you would if you were a sculptor.

SRK: Do you mean then, in your opinion, that you are working in painting because you can control the creation of a “form,” which is fixed—that you don’t have to recreate it, it can jump from exhibition space to exhibition space—and that you are addressing an issue of a structured and closed art object that needn’t be re-made to “fit” different contexts?

JS: Yes, but in my artwork, there are these “considerations” about trying to undermine the situation of presentation—I don’t want to make every painting stand on itself, on its own. I do consider my paintings building blocks in an oeuvre, a body of work, where one work can reply, answer and build upon previous works or future artworks. It is important to say that not all the paintings are self-sufficient, that instead there is a context related to my other artworks, something I am currently building.

But, that also mimics the “game” we are discussing now.

SRK: I want to know how your objects—your painting as a finished artwork—does or does not have to be re-contextualized every time it is presented, be it a museum, gallery or somebody’s home. This is a question to how one can see themselves as an object-maker with embedded concepts in the artwork, or one can see themselves as a conceptual artist working directly with ideas, and what is the contrast in use of the exhibition space, in order to possibly reach the same ends...of course, this depends on whether the “art” addresses the same subject...but you, Jack, are saying you are attempting to address a certain dialogue in the field of Art, and I want to know how your particular art object or you as the artist works in contrast or comparison to the type of “participatory” artist we just discussed?

I don’t think this is a dilemma but an issue that artists have to consider these days, because of how the exhibition space has been manipulated to not only be a space for viewing but a space for education...

JS: Yes, a space for explaining things, for education...I think it is a difficult question, and I do wonder what the museum space will become in ten years time, because I think it is a stupid development, which is a personal perspective—I would like to see it the other way around, this current situation of the use of the museum exhibition space...

SRK: What is the “other way around?”

JS: The current development of the museum is towards education, to make the museum child-friendly, to make the display of art, and displays themselves, interactive, to introduce media, computers, sensationalism...an example to this end was the recent Dali exhibition in the Boijmans van Beuningen museum. It was a carnival instead of an art exhibition.

I am talking about when the museums lower the level of thinking and understanding, because there is an anti-elitist attitude or trend. I think this anti-elitist trend is also very Dutch...

SRK: Where do we go with that, in your opinion?

JS: Maybe, the supposed old-fashioned autonomous art might be the answer? I really wonder in what direction we are heading when looking at the use of the museum with art.

What do you think?

SRK: I think that, in my opinion, I am also sitting on my own questions, hence
86 I am asking questions of other people, to make my own research—from an artist’s perspective—because I am very much interested in what artists have

to say about these conditions of utilizing an exhibition space, because as I see it, the exhibition and even museum space, is our platform, to talk to the world about whatever issues we see fit. I am not asking for a soapbox, to expound social, religious or political views through a vocalization...but maybe artists do that through their artwork.

So, what is our—the artists—given platform? I argue it is the exhibition space. But, the exhibition space, in many artists opinion, is not a neutral space to begin with, not a free space—it is *very* constructed, *very* controlled...and, very closed to people outside the realm of art, which maybe touches on your identification of elitism. Let's face it, the exhibition space, the museum space, is owned, and therefore not free. Unless, of course, you form your own autonomous group and/or space...but then you are faced with not reaching a certain audience. And, it brings you to another level in the art world, because you are not only creating the art but creating the platform, and these issues about what makes life more complicated for artists to communicate, it sometimes forces artists to re-adjust themselves in such a way—to manipulate themselves—and I am interested in the conditions and the end result.

JS: But, what you describe opens up new possibilities, I think. I really wonder what the next step in Art will be, for the next ten years, because I wonder how artists will address the question of power positions and therefore freedom to be active...which are questions that are not always very interesting to me.

I have a really naïve belief in the final result of how artists can get their message across into society. It is also very boring to see artists just interested in the power question, desiring to be free...this question, I think, limits the artistic focus...but then, this artistic investigation of power structures will lead to the artist becoming the next museum director in ten years time, where the cycle of rebelliousness and alternative-ism gets incorporated into the next power structure, automatically. Basically, that is the biggest danger, something to be aware of at least, this old modernist cycle: you try to invent and come up with a new way of looking at things, the new way of making art that evokes a new sensation in your brain—a new way of seeing and thinking—and this “new way” eventually becomes the new standard.

SRK: From my experience, in America, this is how the academy works: typically, you have artists who work in new and innovative ways, or ways of presenting art, then twenty years later they are determining curriculum at the academy...and then anything that is established, well, the next generation wants to break it down. You tell me if it is the same or different here in Holland.

In reference to this power struggle/structure, talking about the exhibition space—and what artists can do inside and outside its context—forty to fifty years ago the exhibition space was re-designed to present a certain type of artwork: minimalist artwork. It was re-designed so that one could see the artwork more clearly, that the white cube provided a sub-structure for the minimalist aesthetic structure. This attitude 87 took such a foothold over concepts of what makes a “proper” exhibition space,

that twenty years later, you have artists fighting the good fight to break down the white cube...now, twenty years from them, and in the last ten years, this fight over the white cube has somehow created interest in opening up museums to the showing of contemporary art, something which was not the original point of the museum, which in my understanding exists under a concept that a museum is a place to display history. Maybe, this is just my own naïve view.

So, you have this constant reversal of roles that further doubles upon itself, and yet artists *still* are searching for the right place to show their art, to speak out through their art.

When talking about your activity as a painter, you write about in your statement a “problem with objectivity,” a question about what an artist is capable of “doing” within their artistic practice. Can you elaborate more on your statement about the problem of objectivity, and if this has a relationship to an idea of aesthetics?

JS: It is a reaction towards the minimalist, utopian promise of objectivity, where a promise was put forward that we could reach some sort of objective art, or way of thinking. I recognize that this romantic search for objective truth is a paradox...and it is very human at the same time.

SRK: Do you think objectivity is close to the term “pure?” Is the search for something pure just another desire behind the yearning for objective truth?

JS: Well, if you go back to the roots, the desire for objectivity is a purely logical synonym to a philosophical construct to what can be “known,” how you can describe it, the problem of description and so on, which is a basic attempt at understanding how things work. If you build on what I think are “impurities of thinking,” you reach a point, or construction, that seems to be objective but isn’t. The search for objective truth is built on false premises to start with.

I am really interested in the drive for purity, for objectivity, for truth, in that sense. This is something I think artists should be most interested in: I think, it is the artists role, and that artists stand *only slightly* to the side of mainstream society—which maybe an old-fashioned view, but I think it still functions—and the artist indeed tries to comment on what society is doing, what Man is doing. And, in that sense, I dislike an alternative-ism in Art where artists consider themselves really “apart” from society and supposedly free to comment upon society without having to be an active part of that same society. I am more interested in the artist who sees himself as part of society than just commenting on society.

In general, I think artists should be more introspective and realize what their drives are, what message you want to give when you step on a platform, to be cautious,
88 to be honest to yourself about what your intentions are: artists want to have a voice, you want to have power and become the next big art star...and you want

to address social issues as well? C'mon, that is a lot to expect, in being an Artist.

So, you have to be really careful, to take one's own considerations into account, before you go further with a position of being an Artist...

SRK: I responded to this "problem of objectivity" in your artist statement—what you are or are not looking for when making paintings—because I feel the same way you do in regard to the exhibition space, in the sense that it seems like the exhibition is setup to be as objective as possible: blank, white and square...and available as the last place to establish a concentrated dialogue between artist, art and the viewer. Or, there is at least the *desire* for the exhibition space to support an objective, and possibly free connection. But, I am very cautious about *allowing* for this objective, free space for art. Because, there is a lot of history involved in each exhibition space: who designed it, who owns it, who is allowed in and for what economic cost, who feels comfortable there—and taking into reference your comment on humanity, what percentage of humanity is welcome in a fine art gallery? So, if the artist is supposed to be a part of open society and be free with everyone around you in society, how can an artist accomplish that—and hope to accomplish that—in a white cube space that is quite elitist, quite closed to the public... even to the extent of being unfriendly in its pure, white neutrality? Is this the impetus to public art?

What do you think about that?

JS: Well, I am pretty comfortable in being elitist! (laughter) Ok, who made the promise that art could have an overall, democratic function? Where does that drive come from, the total understanding for total humankind?

Do you believe in that desire and attitude?

SRK: Personally? No, I don't. First, I don't believe Art is made for everyone, nor do I believe Art is in the interest to everyone. If it was so, we wouldn't have sports or philosophy or astrology...

JS: This is just the thing about it: art is just one niche, a faculty of the larger human mind. Which not everybody understands or is even interested in...

SRK: But I also feel that the way artists are working—the way they can work by establishing their own methods of communication, be it text, running an exhibition space or the art-image-object itself—puts artists in this contemporary position that they have to use and manipulate the exhibition space to educate a public that Art is a reflection of humankind and therefore Art *must* mean something in order for its existence...

JS: Yes, that is the biggest issue and problem with Art: that it has to mean something. That art is an illustration for something bigger... 89

SRK: As in “illustrate an idea?”

JS: Yes, that is why we look onto the art object as being harmless.

SRK: Coming off this current topic, can we talk about your neon text sculptures? In my opinion, I think you take a different position with these works in contrast to your paintings, and I don't just mean because of medium. How do you yourself see the neon works functioning in regard to your paintings, and that they are very public artworks that exist outside of the closed environment of the gallery or exhibition space?

JS: The piece *Van Alles is Weer Waardeloos* (All Sorts Of Things Are Worthless) directly addresses an original, poetic line in a book by the poet Lucebert that reads “Alles Van Waarde Is Weerloos,” which translates as everything of value is defenseless, which in itself is quite beautiful. Lucebert who has become famous and fulfilled a role of “poet” in Dutch society: being the true visionary, the shaman and the artist. And, that role that he plays in Dutch society is what I wanted to comment upon by creating the line “Van Alles Is Weer Waardeloos,” and anagram of the original.

You can see how Lucebert has been given this role by society, as society needs this poet to reflect upon itself, but also to not really reflect upon itself—if you put him in the niche of the crazy/creative poet and you only use what you need, what messages that are relevant to us now and what we can use for in self-serving reasons—by ignoring the purity of the line, where the line “pops” into his head and he writes it down...it is near purity, let's say.

So, it gets put into a book, gets into the world of poetry, the poetry is placed into society and someone many years later gets the idea to put this one out-of-context line up onto of an insurance building!

Maybe, yes, the organizer of this action also thinks it is a purely beautiful sentence, but how do we finance an action like this? We must find sponsors: an insurance company! An insurance company is the perfect opposite of the essence of the line in the first place.

SRK: Yes, that value is defenseless, therefore you need insurance to make sure nothing happens to it! (laughter)

JS: Right. Still, people like the text, like the scale of the artwork. This is just an example of re-contextualizing artwork. The negative aspects of this process is what I wanted to comment on with my piece *Van Alles is Weer Waardeloos*, that via an anagram, the original has been reshuffled, re-contextualized, and given new meaning. Using the same building blocks—the letters—and using the same medium of neon sculpture, except where I changed the type font to a script or handwriting font, which
90 was a reference to the activity of the poet writing. I wanted to comment on the negative process of something pure becoming tainted and that which loses its

original meaning through the use or re-contextualization...as well as addressing Dutch public art rules, that all new buildings in Holland must allow a one percent of the total budget for public art, either put on the building or near it. This, in itself, is a stupid thing. First, artists should start with addressing a building from a need, there has to be a *real need*, and not some top-driven idea that art is necessary...

SRK: This is exactly my point in bringing to the table the theme of art aestheticizing a space...at first, I was concerned to address the interior aestheticizing, but maybe it is even more fitting to related this theme with public art, which today is often a top-driven decoration to show that you are culturally hip, or that you support these crazy fuckin' artists through one percent of a multi-million dollar budget...

I still see a big contrast in your own work between the paintings that speak to minimalism and traditional image-based topics in art versus the neon text-based artworks, where you literally are working outside the gallery context, where there is no image to look at but an idea-image that is something to walk around with in one's thoughts...

How are you managing these two roles?

JS: Pretty well. I really like it. But, you should know the context in which my activity as an artist has come about: none of these light, neon sculptures have been commissioned—they are autonomous ideas that I have been meaning to produce in “real life” for some time. Each one has a necessity to them with different origins: one is a discussion about the role of art that I wanted to challenge and provoke, and another is a purely political challenge—the neon sculpture I placed on the façade of the Paulus Kerk in Rotterdam that is titled *Geef niet om hem maar aan hem* (Don't care about him, but give to him.). The origin of this piece comes from being provoked by a political party in Rotterdam that used the public space to present their message, which I personally found appalling: an anti-begging campaign by the city of Rotterdam in 2003 where they advertised to not give money to the homeless.

This anti-homeless campaign immediately provoked in me a response of anger and disgust, which made me consider who actually owns public space...

SRK: Which is a similar question to asking who owns the exhibition, museum and gallery space, and what can you, as an artist, do within “conditions” of a space...which can also be a city-wide space, right?

JS: Yes. This situation in the public space, I felt, *needed* my response, but instead of making the response the subject of my art, I wanted to make an immediate response, and I did this by reversing the original lines which were used as a slogan: “Geef om hem, niet aan hem!” (Care about him, but don't give to him!), found on posters placed within the city center of Rotterdam. And, I put my new version in the center of town, in a place that this political party was trying to control...plus, my text was placed on the façade of the Paulus Kerk, a homeless shelter in the center of town, which

was trying to be “cleaned up.” At the same time, I played a role as the artist, to use my role as “Artist” to be active politically. My anagram in itself, is dumb, is simple, and has no real extra—in a purely artistic sense—no “art” in it. The neon sculpture is also a comment on how art *doesn't* always need to be artistic. I wanted to address other artists who want to be politically significant, but remain in the realm of Art, in the museum, within some aesthetic tradition.

In this case, I made an “artwork” which wasn't really “creative,” but had a direct impact on the political situation in Rotterdam.

I knew that by doing this work, I put myself on the line, as an artist. It was difficult and dangerous for me, because it wasn't a painting, it is a stupid thing: it is too stupid, too simple. Artistically, it is way too simple, but I had to do it as a political comment. But, as an extra level to the action, it also commented on the idea of artists remaining “artistic.”

SRK: At first, when you started talking about this subject, I thought you were making a contradiction—like we talked about earlier in this interview—how art should not have to play a political role in society, and how you oriented yourself, your art practice, in go back to painting, to work through that medium and possibly accomplish the same goals as what a political or participatory or conceptual artist tries to achieve. Now, with the neon sculptures, indeed you are specifically “going after” a political agenda, as well as denying the art object.

But, if you don't see the neon sculptures as art, what are they?

JS: That isn't true—I do see the neon sculptures as art. But, the difference is I want to limit myself in my practice in painting, but Art itself should not be limited, never be limited.

With making these neon sculptures, I can broaden the realm of my artistic activity.

SRK: I am going to side-step a bit and ask you another question: can certain activities by artists be manifested *and not be labeled art*? Can an artist just be a normal person with a good idea, who has the forethought and need to make a thing...it is just like saying the opposite, that not everyone who has a creative idea is an artist! For example, can a car mechanic stay a car mechanic if he/she paints a painting on the side of his/her shop building, or do we now say they are a painter as well?

JS: I think Art has its own dialogue and stream of development. It is a question for the artist if he or she stays in, or steps out, of that dialogue, what their intention is, what is *put forward* by their actions. Is the artist seeking a new answer, trying to develop new possibilities for Art? Or, is the artist trying to entertain or educate people, like through art therapy with disabled people...the difference is obviously there. It has a lot to do with one's awareness to their position as an artist, I think. Or, you

use outside actions *for a specific reflection* on your artistic practice.

SRK: Here is another curious situation: you, Jack, have this sentence out in public space—Geef niet om hem maar aan hem—and it references a public, political situation that is taking place already in the public space. A specific link has been created.

What happens then if you were to place this same sentence, this same neon sculpture, in a gallery space? Does this then make the piece a certain kind of Art? Does it give it a certain kind of context that destroys the original purpose and meaning behind your “artistic” response? And, what dialogue is created between the interior and exterior space with art, and when is something an action with political consequence or an artwork that is “supposed” to be political?

JS: Interesting! I am not going to put this neon sculpture in a gallery, but I will try to find it another home when the Paulus Kerk is knocked down in the near future. I will try to find a place in Rotterdam, preferably away from the center, maybe on the border of the Maas River, where it can be experienced as a poetic line with obscure origins. Not many people even know about the original slogan used by the political party, my original reference...which I think is nice, because you have an origin, which becomes something else, then becomes a poetic line, a sort of reverse situation to what I identified with the first neon sculpture text we discussed “Van Alles is Weer Waardeloos.” So, I would like the work to further function as a poetic line that can be interpreted in any way, which is a potential that the line has in itself.

SRK: Do you see these text-based works—being quite specific on a Dutch cultural level—having anything to do with something you mentioned way back in the being of this interview, this problem with “this Dutch way of doing things,” when we were talking about how the museum space was being used, under this turn towards anti-elitism?

Because you have spent time living and working in Berlin, I am interested in how your activities as an artist are received there versus in Holland, and if the desire on your part to be in Berlin is related at all to the motivation behind the text-based works or this anti-elitism, “participatory” arts concepts you seem to be fighting against?

JS: Well, I think it is even worse in Berlin! (laughter) No, it isn’t true...

My desire to work in Berlin *does* have something to do with your question: German artists, within the last ten years, have really stepped into the political arena, addressing politics or the reality of social life, social issues, much more in a direct way than say in a poetic way, which is reflected in British or even American artists—which is maybe a generalized statement. And, living in Germany, were various Dutch artists who still held onto a more autonomous, art object practice. I tried to find out what those Dutch artists were doing there, in Germany.

During the same time in Holland—as well as in Germany—you had autonomous artists being upheld by the museums, so I identified an interesting situation or contrast between the museum context and the contemporary context of the political-conceptual artist, let's say.

SRK: And, because of this context in which the German artists were working in one manner and the Dutch artists worked in another manner and on the side of these German artists, you went to Berlin in order to figure out why?

JS: Yeah, sort of like that.

SRK: Tell me how that worked for you and did it directly influence your way of working as an artist, or was it just some sort of research?

JS: A lot had to do with the “buzz” of being in a big city like Berlin, an international city, and the history of the city—in Holland, there are hardly any artists in the last fifty years who haven't somehow been dealing with the second World War. All the writers, artists have dealt with the issue...

SRK: Do you mean just the famous artists, or really all artists in Holland have had to, at one time or another, “come to grips” with the Second World War?

JS: I think it is only within the last twenty years that the Second World War has subdued as the main issue. But, it has been such a big issue and really framed our historical make-up.

So, in Berlin, after the fall of the Wall, there was an influx of Eastern Europe: Poles, Russians, etc. And in the years since, Berlin has really changed to become a melting-pot. I was curious to be in that situation, to find out what direction the city, the atmosphere would take: would it generate more politically-based art, more autonomous art—what is the role of autonomous art—and how would that reflect on me being from Holland.

SRK: Do you really think that Berlin, as a city, has that strength or power to influence and shift directions of the main focus in Art, whether in Germany as a whole, or of Europe? Would it be fair to even say Berlin has the desire to shape contemporary art investigation or practice? I mean, can't artists just be in Berlin because it is interesting and there are many alternative visions, and not any one push or style?

JS: I am not too well informed in a global sense to say what the “power” of Berlin is, or to compare it to the power of London or even Miami, where the supposed hottest art fair is. But, do you know what the effects of Berlin will have, as a major influence on art, in the next twenty years? For a direct influence on art practice, no, I don't think it will do much. But, as a building block, as a huge center for the Arts, and for its physical location as a center of Europe, I do believe it will have some meaning and influence over time, in what direction Art in Europe will take...

SRK: Especially as it is a meeting point between East and West Europe, as the borders come down and the Eastern Block is welcomed into the European Union...

JS: Yes, this is also what I mean.

SRK: The reason I ask about Berlin is because of an idea behind the situation of New York City sixty years ago, which was re-defining and influencing Art practice on a worldly scale. Then, ten to fifteen years ago, the focus was on London, England with the Young British Artists re-defining the “role of the artist” with the flash and the splash of extreme art practices. And, I know that the Art World likes to have a center, a hot-spot, a nexus of bad-ass art that all art can be compared too.

Because I know that a fair share of Rotterdam-based artists are working in or are looking to Berlin for excitement and influence—plus artists speak of Berlin in such generalities as “it is the best city for painting in Europe”—and to see Berlin under these pretences that Berlin would just be awesome for any artist...could it be that one, this isn't at all the truth but two, it isn't the point to even look at any one place to provide a solution to art and art practice.

JS: Exactly. If ambition is the only thing you are driven by, then thinking about places and cities in this way, like Berlin, maybe is an option to motivate you. But, I don't think it is a wise option...

SRK: Well, maybe it helps to see Berlin as a more critical environment for a dialogue in Art, and that is a contrast to say, Rotterdam, for example...as in Rotterdam might be a great city to work in, have a studio and be productive and introspective, but if you want to talk about art and have a real, ongoing dialogue about not only your own work but the “state of art” in general, maybe Berlin is the city to go to...

JS: Still, Berlin is more open, and it is a place where art isn't as settled. I think that in Holland, the Art Scene is very settled: roles are distributed, like ideas that Rotterdam artists are like this, Amsterdam artists are like that...and this attitude has absolutely no importance. So, does this have anything to do with why Dutch art doesn't mean so much anymore internationally?

Also, in a changing World, it really doesn't mean so much anymore where you're located...

SRK: Well, yes, there is a level being reached, like in your and my situation, where we can live in Rotterdam and be as active as we want in Berlin, and it only depends on how often and with how much investment we put into traveling that one hour on a plane from city to city...

I would like to then ask you a question, maybe a bit personal question: because you have spent time in Berlin and you found it interesting and influential on 95

different levels, why are you still here in Rotterdam?

JS: I really like Berlin, and if it is possible, I would like to carry on in both places, both cities—to have two locations, and maybe I will do just that in the future. On the other hand, I need my center of concentration, and that is here in Rotterdam, at the moment. I am not that easily adaptable to change, and that is the main thing for me, personally. Also, the knowledge that Berlin is a great center of importance in the Art World can be choking, or push you in directions that you really don't want to go as an artist.

So, I think that what I want to say is: one needs a certain calm to achieve one's own desires...

*More information about the artwork of Jack Segbars can be found at:
<http://segbars.nl>*

NOTES:

THE THEMES:

Using the interior (exhibition) space to address the exterior (social/physical) space, or vice versa; Identifying and utilizing aesthetics of the exhibition space versus aestheticising the exhibition space; The Berlin/Rotterdam Connection: How outsiders can apply certain awareness to the contemporary issues and/or activate themselves through a place, a city.

THE PROJECT:

This project is about discussions, with artists, about art, recorded within one hour's time. Here then is a collection of conversations, partially based on the artist's work, but also on themes, with an idea to put all the interviews together, showing the different voices, but maybe also showing that they share some same perspective, and that these methods and creative processes are things I think are important to Rotterdam(NL) and Berlin (D) as well as important to all artists in relation to contemporary art practice. The zine is called *Open Issues*, because that is how I feel about these conversations—we aren't giving you a set of answers or solutions to the themes, only showing you that there are some out there...

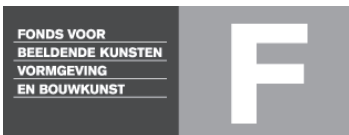
Open Issues, a product of Tomorrowism: sustainability, engagement, a focus beyond reduction, a wish to improve upon common knowledge by understanding the past or the root of knowledge—a need to understand today's *desire* of tomorrow.

Authored by S.R. Kucharski and the artists interviewed herein. Logo design by Freya van Dien and SRK. **Thank you to all the artists who contributed their time to this issue!**

Printed at and with support by:

DRUK EN KOPIE, 1e Pijnackerstraat 146, 3035 GX, Rotterdam, NL - +31.10.465.79.30

Met dank aan:



**For questions, comments or suggestions email:
srk@tomorrowism.org**

Standing For Something

The Gallery
a place to articulate
a critique
to draw you in
glass-floor-heart-pulse

I am driving this.

- symbolic -
- material -
- embedded -

hey text-man Mr. Guston:
“a forum for art was established in the living rooms of avant-garde artists in...”
that’s what I say,
or what I said.

The Alternative™

to
a burgeoning-battery
of historical-retro figures

don’t be looking for answers
in the new public-media-space

hardware-association
of editorial logic, but
not this time...
not this time...

his response was:
it has a lot to do with...granularity

her response was:
it looks a lot like information...to me

my response was:
see the randomness of shapes...and how in the end they mean everything.