

WHAT'S THE POINT OF GIVING YOU ANY MORE ARTWORKS?

Stefaan Dheedene (BE)
Wolfgang Plöger (D)
Jack Falanga (USA)
André Kok (NL)
Pierre Ardouvin (FR)
Olivier Maarschalk (NL)
Frederik van Simaey (BE)
Raf Rooijmans (NL)
Eric von Robertson (USA)
Ruben Kindermans (BE)

An exhibition curated by
pietmondriaan.com





Exhibition view with title board (after Bethan Huws)

WHAT'S THE POINT OF ASKING ANY MORE QUESTIONS?

A simple office announcement board reads: *'What 's the point of giving you any more artworks when you don't understand the ones you've got?'* This 'word vitrine' by Bethan Huws addresses the audience directly and provocatively. Notably, the question is whether or not she should give any more artworks, making implicit the difference between making and giving, between producing and presenting. This difference seems to imply that the production of artworks has not become obsolete, but that the dilemma lies in the presentation of the work. In other words, Huws' focus is on the communication that occurs between the artist and the audience, and the 'necessity for an agreement on what it is that constitutes the artistic value of the object.'^[1]

The form of the text - a question - implies doubt, and the work therefore also refers to the universal fear of being misunderstood. And when a work of art is not understood the way it was intended, what is then the point of making it? Perhaps this is why the text is written on such a mundane surface which makes it easy to erase and replace with another text. And yet, the text is there, right in front of us, confronting us with a paradox: for by presenting this question, the artist also presents us with a work of art. The medium used - language - is one that has an implied transparency. The understanding of the meaning of letters and texts are based on a shared convention: in this case the English language. So by sharing the same convention as the artist I can understand the question, which is the work of art.

Unsurprisingly, Huws is greatly influenced by the work of Marcel Duchamp, and more specifically the questions and doubts that were cast upon the art world by his ready-mades. The importance of these questions and doubts has been overtly illustrated by the large number of artists that since Duchamp have questioned the role and value of art, most notably during the sixties and seventies

by artists whose work is generally grouped under the header 'conceptual art'. Think for instance of John Baldessari's repeated lines that read: *'I will not make any more boring art.'* Or Bruce Nauman's realization that 'art is what an artist does, just sitting around in the studio.'^[2] These and other artists refused to add more objects of art into the world, and instead chose to question the very foundations of Art and what it means to be an Artist. Huws' investigations into the idea of the ready-made are therefore not isolated, but continue to haunt artists in the production process ever since Duchamp's Fountain. Perhaps then, it is not so strange, even 100 years after the first ready-made, and decades after the heydays of conceptual art, to compose an exhibition made up exclusively by artists whose work investigates these very same questions.

What's the point of giving you any more artworks? is an exhibition in which all artists, Huws included, are concerned with exploring their own creativity, engaging themselves in a constant process of asking fundamental questions on the meaning and reason of art, in which the act of asking is always more important than the finished product.

The work Billy by the Belgian artist Stefaan Dheedene is a case in point: the work exists of a standard Billy bookcase from Ikea and is accompanied by a video of the making of just such a bookcase. Subtle as Dheedene work is, the bookcase being fabricated in the video is not an exact copy of its original. Made out of a slightly different kind of wood and by the hands of a carpenter, Dheedene's version is absolutely unique. However, the version on show in the space of exhibition is not the one handcrafted by the artisan, but one of the many Billy's one can find all over the world. So where did Dheedene's Billy go? No one knows: it was returned to Ikea by the artist and now rests somewhere in a home of people who are completely oblivious to the fact that their bookcase is a 'real work of art.'^[3]

The questions the work raises are manifold, and open up discussions on topics such as originality, authorship, ownership, the value of the work of art, and art as commodity.

More questions, but of a different kind, are to be found in the work of Ruben Kindermans. His work seems to be solely inspired by boredom: each of the three videos shown in the exhibition shows the artist in a series of the most stupid, futile and useless acts of play and destruction. The images are accompanied by the sound the artist makes by aimlessly plucking an electric guitar. The fact that the videos resemble the ones Nauman made in his studio, only makes the question posed in the title of the show all the more pertinent. What is it that makes an artist an artist? Is it true, like Nauman claimed, that anything an artist does can be considered art? What does the world expect from an artist, and can art have a social significance? Stupefied by the heavy burden these questions unload upon the artist, the studio feels less and less like a place for creative freedom, and instead becomes a place to act out ones frustrations. Since having a studio is no longer a requirement for the artistic profession (also referred to as the post-studio era), many artists leave the restrictive, claustrophobic space of the studio and venture out into the world to create their work.^[4]

In the case of Eric von Robertson's Traveller (2010) the artist doesn't even make a new work, but simply intervenes in the already existing work of another artist (giving a whole new meaning to the term ready-made). On the back of a poster showing part of Duane Hanson's life-like sculpture Traveller it reads: *'On March 12, 2010, Eric von Robertson will embark on a series of excursions to find Duane Hanson's displaced Traveller. This search continues in the months or years to follow, until all four sculptures have been encountered.'* By conducting a search of the missing sculptures

Von Robertson becomes a traveller, mimicking as it were the original, but does he then also become a work of art? And does he, by intervening into the works of Duane Hanson, such as changing the batteries of the watch of one of the sculptures, also partly become the author?

As minimal as the interventions of Von Robertson are in Traveller (you just have to believe the artist actually does what he claims to do), some of the works on show are - even for the trained eye - almost impossible to recognize as works of art. For example Raf Rooijmans' Bloemenrek (2010), André Kok's En en/of of (2010), and Frederik van Simaey's Hard Brake (2009) are all works that show (almost) no distinction from objects to be encountered outside an art context, and therefore confront us with the ultimate unanswerable (and really annoying) question: what is art?

So what's the point of asking all these questions? Ultimately, what the catalyst work of Huws, and all the other works in this exhibition, shows is that a large part of being an artist today, after Duchamp, is about asking questions. It is about infiltrating into the usual and asking unusual questions that can change our perception of the everyday. Through the eyes of these artists art seems to be one giant unanswerable question, and by that rule, the question really does become the work of art.

Irene de Craen, 2010

[1] 'Bethan Huws' CCCS Art, price and value. Palazzo Strozzi. 11 mei 2010 <<http://www.strozzina.org/art-priceandvalue/huws.html>>

[2] Bruggen, Coosje van. Bruce Nauman. New York: Rizzoli, 1988: 14.

[3] The artist did include a certificate of authenticity with the one-of-a-kind Billy, but so far no one has reported finding it.

[4] Davidts, Wouter and Kim Paice, eds. The fall of the studio. Artists at work. Amsterdam: Valiz, 2009: 6.



Raf Rooijmans, 'Flowerrack', fresh flowers and rack



Exhibition view



Olivier Maarschalk, 'Second Actuation', inkjet print



Jack Falanga, 'Leap into the void', flatscreen monitor, filmstill from Dirty Dancing



Ruben Kindermans, 'Playing', *three videos*



'Playing (Tires)', *videostill*



Exhibition view



Eric von Robertson, 'Addict Palm', small bags of designer drug 'Methadrone (Meow meow)' hidden in plant



Eric von Robertson, 'Traveller', free editioned poster



Ruben Kindermans, 'In the Woods', *video*



'In the Woods', *videostill*



André Kok, 'Footwear', wood, ceramic sculpture, cameras, projection, mirror, various materials



'Footwear', detail



Exhibition view



Stefaan Dheedene, 'Breaking News', handmade furniture, modified Time magazines



'Breaking News', detail



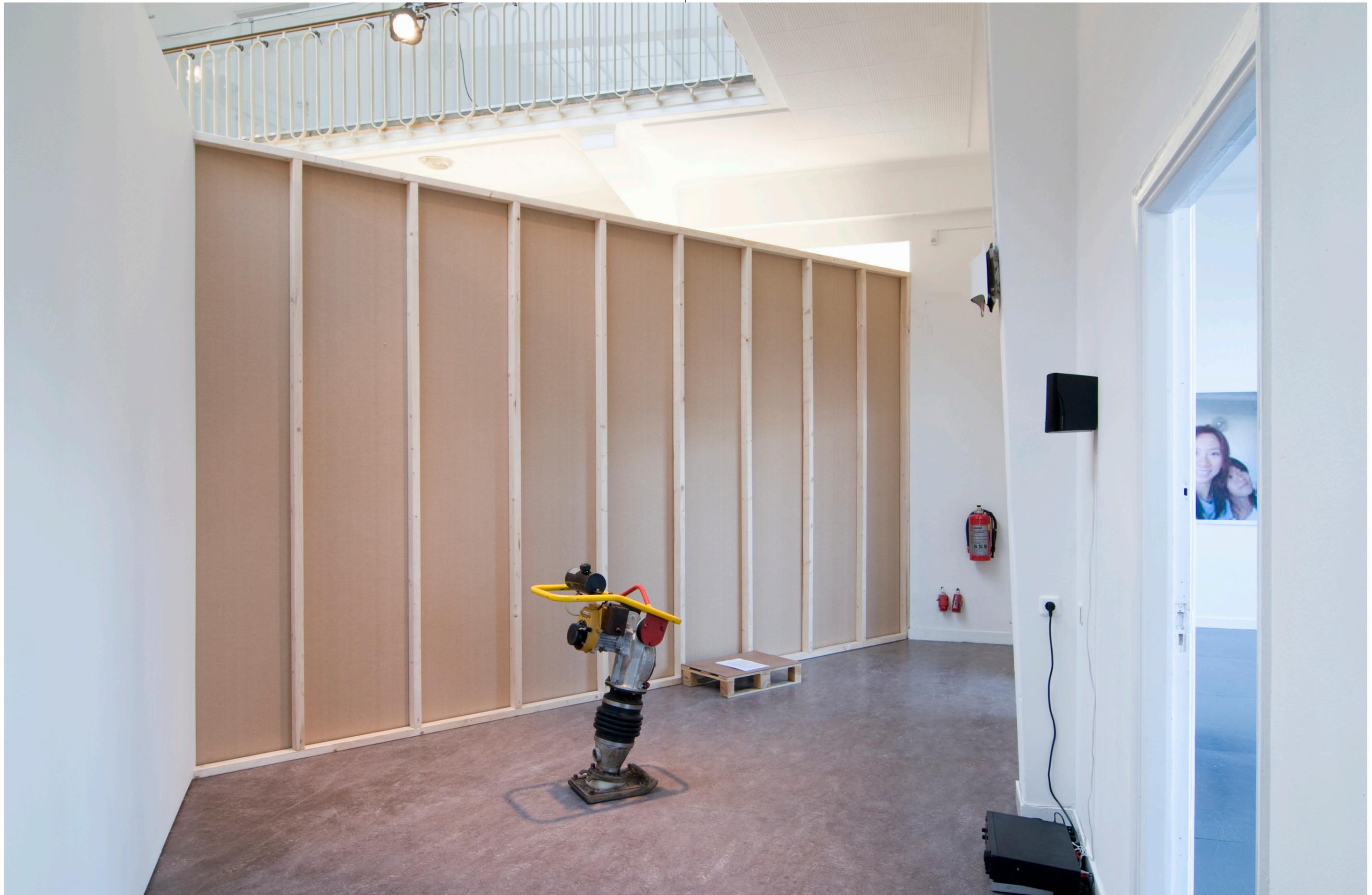
Stefaan Dheedene, 'Billy', IKEA bookcase and video



Wolfgang Plöger, 'Me in front of', three handmade books with found internet images



Wolfgang Plöger, 'My ugly sister', inkjet print of found internet image



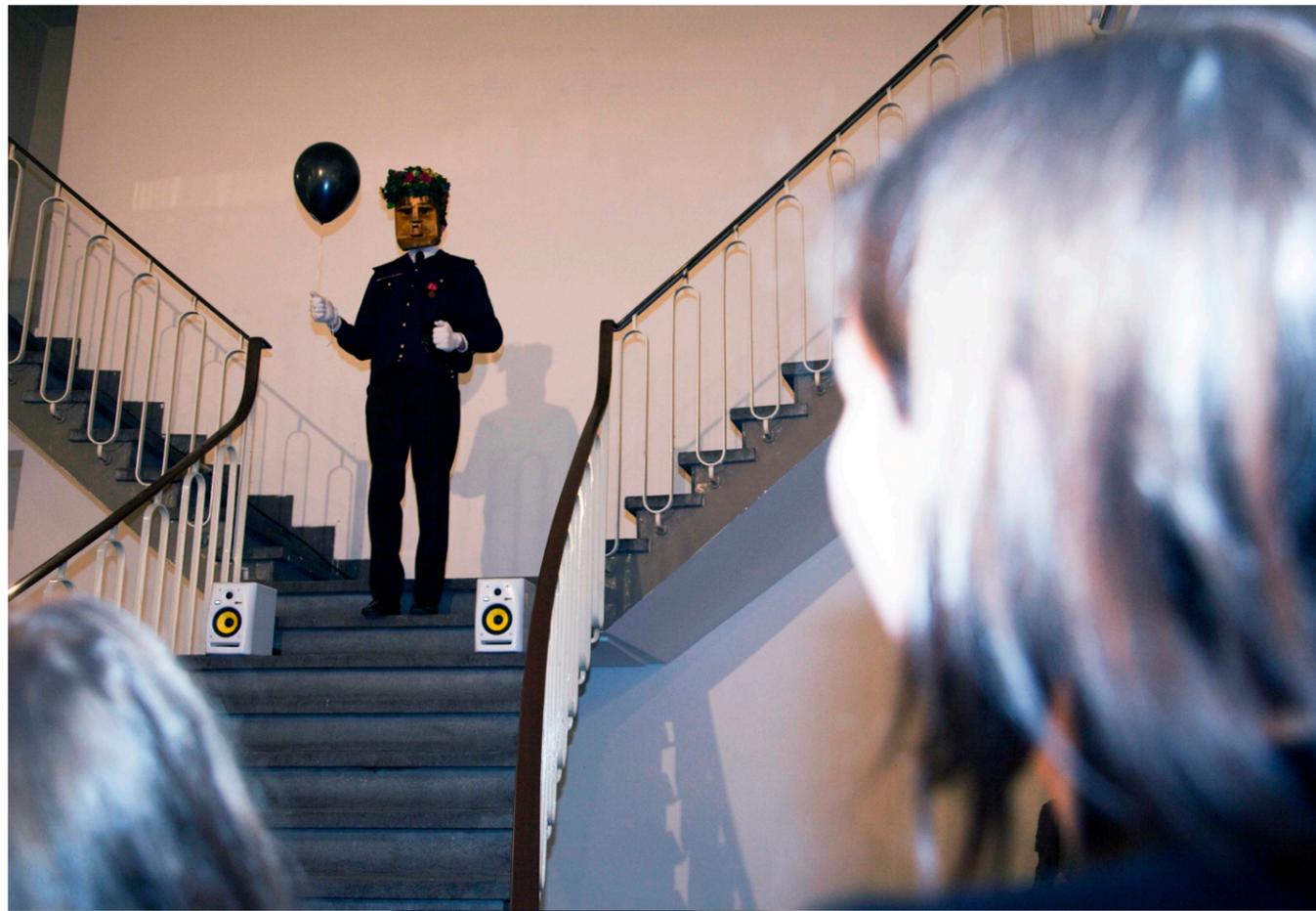
Olivier Maarschalk, 'First Actuation', rammer, take-away text and audio



Exhibition view



Frederik van Simaey, 'Hard Brake', fan, plinth and empty cans



Olivier Maarschalk, 'Second Actuation', performance during opening night



Pierre Ardouvin, 'Tout l'Univers', rotating table, light, bird in cage, fish in bowl and plant in pot

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An exhibition curated by pietmondriaan.com
(Simon Kentgens & Michiel Huijben)

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Stichting KOP
Speelhuyslaan 171, Breda (NL)
www.kop.nu

Participating artists:
Stefaan Dheedene (BE)
Wolfgang Plöger (D)
Jack Falanga (USA)
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Pierre Ardouvin (FR)
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Frederik van Simaey (BE)
Raf Rooijmans (NL)
Eric von Robertson (USA)
Ruben Kindermans (BE)

Text:
Irene de Craen

Photos:
Simon Kentgens
Michiel Huijben (work Raf Rooijmans)
André Kok (detail work André Kok)
Rachelle Delcroix (performance Olivier Maarschalk)

First page: exhibition view (detail); last page: 'En en/ Of of' by André Kok

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<http://pietmondriaan.com>



Exhibition view with custom built exhibition structure.

