

Ways of Working, According to an Office Desk

Exhibition from 12 April – 3 May 2014

Venue: Upominki, Kapelstraat 32, 3024CH, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

I am in the studio, it is admin time. I open the mailbox, there is a new message from the photographer that documented my latest exhibition. He has provided the images of my work in tiff format only, so I convert the set to low-res jpegs in order to update my website and portfolio accordingly. Then I forward an earlier video work from 2008, via WeTransfer, to an artist-run space in Brussels. They are hosting a symposium on 'Clean Aesthetics,' but I won't attend since my travel expenses cannot be reimbursed through "sudden budget limitations." At the same time – upload time estimated at 2 hours and 41 minutes – I try to work through a pile of receipts I kept from my short residency in Riga earlier this year, as VAT returns are due in two days. Can I declare food and drink costs? The studio visit that was planned for later this afternoon was cancelled by the curator, and instead I spend some time on Facebook and Mousse Magazine's website, rather than starting to read "Bells and Whistles: More Speculative Realism" by Graham Harman. Supposedly, this text could inform a new series of work... I leave the studio. I am taking over a shift from a colleague at the espresso bar...

The group exhibition *Ways of Working, According to an Office Desk* brings together works by Anca Benera and Arnold Estefan, Céline Berger, Dina Danish, Jakup Ferri, David Horvitz, Sally O'Reilly and Colin Perry, and revolves around the question: "How to profess, rather than how to professionalise?"

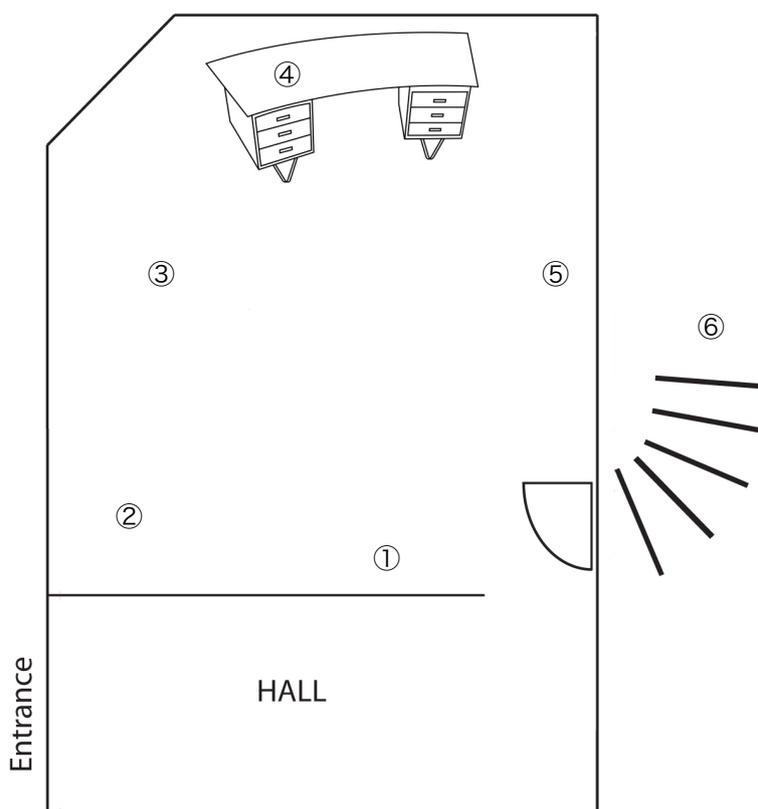
In our time-pressured culture of high-performance, the position and activities of the artist remain subjected to an imperative to perform. In that, a substantial part of the artistic working field maintains a climate that relies heavily on a market(ing)-driven way of thinking, in which the value of professionalisation is firmly embedded within, for instance, the systems of art education, market mechanisms, the majority of grant application policies and public art commissions. This ongoing articulation of "professional practice" undoubtedly has a strong influence on the ways artists conduct their work, and by what means they relate and respond to a system in which professionalisation has become inherent to self-organisation: the artist taking the role of the manager-without-team, single-handedly facing the world. At the same time, from an external perspective, one could sense an incongruity between the different ways in which artists' work today, and how this is being perceived and informed more generally, through common thinking and behaviour, and predominantly by means of media (mis)representation. For example, the idea of impoverishment and scarcity – a vow-of-poverty – as a tool for critical thinking and production that remains a viable myth.

Ultimately, the exhibition intends to strike a balance between the urges of professionalisation inherent to the arts, as opposed by some persistent stereotypes that overshadow the ways in which artists practice and profess today. In that, the works put forward different perspectives on, for instance, the condition of the artist who needs to support his or her practice through a day job (Anca Benera and Arnold Estefan), or the frustration triggered by the amount of time spent on administrative tasks, and to remind oneself to

prioritise studio time instead (David Horvitz). Other works look into the role lists with artist names play, exchanged among peers, in order to further inform and advance one's practice (Dina Danish), the dominant position of International Art English within the contemporary art world, and by what means the centrality of this language affects non-English speaking artists (Jakup Ferri), or the rapprochement of the art and the business world in the Netherlands, addressed through a risk analysis workshop (Céline Berger). Finally, the work *Do I Really Look Like That* (Sally O'Reilly and Colin Perry) presents a montage of misrepresentations of art and artists on television.

Curated by Niekolaas Johannes Lekkerkerk (The Office for Curating, Rotterdam) in the framework of the *5½ Proposals to Work and Live in the Current Millennium* programme by Oblique International (Patrícia Pinheiro de Sousa and Susana Pedrosa), in collaboration with Weronika Zielinska (Upominki, Rotterdam).

Acknowledgements: Gemeente Rotterdam; Romanian Cultural Institute, Brussels; Tent, Rotterdam.



- ① Dina Danish, *Names of Artists*, 2006-ongoing, pen-on-paper, dimensions variable
- ② Jakup Ferri, *An Artist Who Cannot Speak English Is No Artist*, 2003, video, colour, stereo, 3'56"
- ③ David Horvitz, *Deprofessionalize*, 2014, poster stack, A2 posters
- ④ Sally O'Reilly & Colin Perry, *Do I Really Look Like That?*, 2011, video, colour, stereo, 35'37"
- ⑤ Anca Benera & Arnold Estefan, *I work, therefore I'm Not*, 2012-ongoing, mixed media installation
- ⑥ Céline Berger, *Rare birds in these lands*, 2013, video, HD, 16:9, black & white, stereo, 10'51"