THE MUSEUM OF UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

Haris Epaminonda, Yoeri Guépin, Tim Hollander, Hannah James, Simon Kentgens, Una Knox, Wesley Meuris, Ieva Misevičiūtė, Mandla Reuter, Wouter Sibum

curator: Niekolaas Johannes Lekkerkerk

01.05 – 05.07.2015
In the Berlin zoo, beside the pool containing the live walrus, there is an unusual display. In a glass case are all the things found in the stomach of Roland the walrus, who died on 21 August 1961. Or to be precise:

a pink cigarette lighter, four ice-lolly sticks (wooden), a metal brooch in the form of a poodle, a beer-bottle opener, a woman’s bracelet (probably silver), a hair grip, a wooden pencil, a child’s plastic water pistol, a plastic knife, sunglasses, a little chain, a spring (small), a rubber ring, a parachute (child’s toy), a steel chain about 18 ins in length, four nails (large), a green plastic car, a metal comb, a plastic badge, a small doll, a beer can (Pilsner, half-pint), a box of matches, a baby’s shoe, a compass, a small car key, four coins, a knife with a wooden handle, a baby’s dummy, a bunch of keys (5), a pad-lock, a little plastic bag containing needles and thread.

The visitor stands in front of the unusual display, more enchanted than horrified, as before archeological exhibits. The visitor knows that their museum-display fate has been determined by chance (Roland’s whimsical appetite) but still cannot resist the poetic thought that with time the objects have acquired some subtler, secret connections. Caught up in this thought, the visitor then tries to establish semantic coordinates, to reconstruct the historical context (it occurs to him, for instance, that Roland died one week after the Berlin Wall was erected), and so on and so forth.

The chapters and fragments which follow should be read in a similar way. If the reader feels that there are no meaningful or firm connections between them, let him be patient: the connections will establish themselves of their own accord....

— Excerpt from the prologue to The Museum of Unconditional Surrender, a novel by Dubravka Ugrešić (1998).

Dear Visitor,

Firstly, a warm welcome to The Museum of Unconditional Surrender. In fact, it goes without saying that your presence is much appreciated, and is deemed even more necessary for this kind of exhibition endeavour. As you will see.

You may have already guessed that The Museum of Unconditional Surrender departs from the above curious account, although — and please bear with us — we will momentarily hold certain points of view in suspense. The exhibition you are about to witness proposes a slight reversal: a twist of plot. Indeed, the plot thickens, as we speak.

The exhibition will shift its focus from the artworks and how they perform, to those objects and structures that commonly enable and advance their presentation. In The Museum of Unconditional Surrender, the mise en scène, support structures, and displays take centre

Colophon

The Museum of Unconditional Surrender
1 May – 5 July, 2015 TENT, Rotterdam

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Curator: Niekolaas Johannes Lekkerkerk
Production: Esther van Leeuwe
Communication: Josephine van Kranendonk, Marnell de Jong Beekhuijsen
Installation and logistics: Roel Meelkop
Texts: Niekolaas Johannes Lekkerkerk and the artists
Translations and proofreading: Jason Coburn and Marjolein Geraedts
Design: De Jongens Ronner

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In a gallery, installed on a white plinth, you will come across a lump of institution. Anyone visiting the exhibition is invited to give shape to the institution and leave it on the plinth. The institution changes every day, but never leaves the room. An audio guide can be activated by pressing a button. Here are examples of what it says: "Take this institution and work it into your hands several times until it gets softer. Yes, I know it’s hard to take the institution into your hands, isn’t it? And even if we do, the effect is only cosmetic. But get in there, as the change can only happen from within. [...] Now split this institution into two parts. The part in your left hand is Decisions and the part on the right is Productions. [...] This part is really important. If you haven’t touched the institution today — most of us never do — now is the time. If there is one thing you do today, it should be this: take the institution into your hands and throw it against the wall of another institution. Any wall in this room will do. I am not continuing until you do this. [...] When you are done ask yourself a question any question will do... as long as some new questions are still in there even if you can’t quite hear them. Cover up that hole you made and erase all your work. (Whisper) Critique is best when it’s invisible..."

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drawings, once printed in a large format against a black background and in the same graphic style, show these public buildings’ common denominator, whether cultural, civil, or religious. Designed to regulate our perception and behaviour, these ‘exhibition’ spaces exist the visitor through the symmetrical volumes and strategic proportions inherited from architectural functionalism and rationalism. A shopping arcade, a theatre, or large exhibition hall: the series never ceases to expand by updating the commonistics for mass entertainment and transmission of knowledge.

Yoeri Guépin
Born 1987 in Rotterdam, The Netherlands; lives and works in Amsterdam. www.yoeriguépin.com

5. Notes and Queries, 2014
Book object, 1970 pages, full colour
This collecting project takes the form of a book, and forms the basis of future projects. It consists of two activities: the gesture of collecting and the act of photographing. The subsequent book consists of all the existing editions of the Victorian anthropological field guide Notes And Queries. Each individual book is photographed page by page from various archives. These photographs are then compiled in a large, bound volume situated between an object of knowledge and a study resource. The book compares the development and edits of the various editions, as the ‘methods’ of viewing the other became redundant, redeveloped, and anachronistic. These travelling guides were developed to supply travellers with questions and instructions on how to collect scientific data in the ‘new world’. This data could then be studied and interpreted by anthropologists who in those times did not travel themselves — what could be considered armchair anthropology. The book was rewritten and republished six times between 1874 and 1951 and covers the rapid development in the field of anthropology as it attempted to archive disappear- ing cultures around the world. These guides are key to the transformation of anthropology as a curiosity-driven activity, toward its current status as a scientific discipline that classifies cultures into taxonomic systems. Central to the project is the question of how subjective perception and observation is translated to scientific facts, and how these facts are repre- sented in a complex taxonomic system as new editions emerge out of the collected data.

Digital C-prints on Hahnemühle
45 x 45 cm.
External Storage is part of a collecting project investigating methods of authentication, documentation, and distribution inherent to the ways various artefacts are purchased through online auction websites. Objects such as tribal masks, earth specimens, fossils, and tools from the Neolithic era are left in their transport packaging unopened. These artefacts are hidden and obscured by the packaging in which they were transported: undergoing a further process of cataloguing in accordance with the information mentioned on their packaging. The collection of unopened boxes create a space for speculation regarding the actual presence of the artefacts, in which the focus is shifted from the artifact itself towards the packaging as object represented in an image.

Tim Hollander
Born 1987 in Amsterdam, The Netherlands; lives and works in Amsterdam. www.timhollander.com

7. 50 Things One Might Encounter During an Exhibition, 2014
Wooden structure, plinth, slide projector
Dimensions variable
The work of Tim Hollander includes: (1) wood, (2) paint, (3) text, (4) adhesive, (5) screws, (6) vitrines, (7) drawings, (8) digital prints on paper, (9) lists of fictional works, (10) lists of existing works, (11) Glass, (12) screen prints, (13) books, all shapes and sizes, (14) references, (15) Polaroids, (16) mixed media, (17) signs (made of the material from which reserved-signs in bars also are always made), (18) reasonably detailed ideas, (19) ideas that can better be executed later, (20) various materials, (21) primer (22) conflicting institutional critique, (23) conceptual installations, (24) posters, (25) pencil on paper, (26) collages, (27) pretentious titles (28) useless floor plans, (29) scale models, (30) marble, (31) slide projec- tions with only text and little else, (32) performances, and (33) paintings.

A4, unlimited print run, Perspex case
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Hannah James
Born 1985 in Nottingham, United Kingdom; lives and works in Rotterdam.

9. The Wrestler and the Crab, 2015
Audio 15’09”, headphones and stool
Digital film 24’32”, monitor and mat
A crab is an animal that has an armour, a bodily architecture. He uses this camouflage to look like a rock, a stone or a sandy seabed. This mimetic creature attempts to assimilate himself to his surroundings, to become one, to become lost. Language is also a tool we use to become familiar with our surroundings. We alter our accents, flatten our vowels and accentuate our consonants as a means of fitting in. Wrestling is a sport played between two bodies, where one body attempts to get their opponent’s shoulder to make contact with the ground. These three corporeal entities: voice, wrestling and a crab, all unite in their attempts to negotiate place and assimilation, in the ongoing battle between bodies and boundaries.

Simon Kentgens
Born 1978 in Waalwijk, The Netherlands; lives and works in Rotterdam. www.simonkentgens.com

10. Revolution, 2015
Wood, glass fibre wallpaper, motor, motion sensor
Approximately 550 x 300 x 300 cm
A rotation is a circular movement of an object around a centre or point. A three-dimensional object always rotates around an imaginary line called a rotation axis. If the axis passes through the body’s centre of mass, the body is said to rotate upon itself, or spin. A rotation about an external point, e.g. the Earth around the Sun, is called a revolution or orbital revolution, typi- cally when it is produced by gravity. Mathematically, a rotation is a rigid body movement that, unlike a translation, keeps a point fixed. This definition applies to rotations within both two and three dimensions (in a plane and in space, respectively). All rigid body movements are rotations, translations, or combi- nations of the two.

Una Knox
Born 1980 in Vancouver, Canada; lives and works in London. www.unaknox.com

Audio, digital film, monitor
11’28”
Examining social interactions through notions of mental and physical labour, I am interested in an unconscious identification with built spaces as a reflection of something metaphorical and unspoken.
A: I don’t like using those kinds of words but it does capture what I am trying to say.
B: And by a spiritual being. You mean ... what? I don’t quite... A: Ooh. What’s a spiritual being? Not a bad question.
B: Not a bad question?
A: I don’t think ... Yeah, what is, is what is a spiritual being.
B: Yeah. As opposed to a terrestrial being?
A: Well, when you think about it — We are invisible. You and I are invisible.
B: Invisible to What?
A: I’m invisible — my “I”, my ego is invisible to you — or at least to your senses. It’s not actually invisible.
B: So, sooo?
A: We are invisible beings.
B: So in order to say something is invisible, right. Are we presupposing that it is an object that has a presence?
A: Yeah. An object that has a presence?
Object. Maybe a characteristic. You might say the primal duality is per-cept and con-cept.
B: Right, so you’re stuck on... A: Percept is given, Concept comes through us.
B: Stuck on some dualism.
A: I would be if I didn’t then say — Well wait a minute, what in me is saying percept and concept?
B: We have to take this crate I guess.
A: I would say — It’s thinking — thinking is allowing me to say ‘percept’ and ‘concept’. I mean one of the neat little phrases of Steiner says that... Oh sorry, I should concentrate here, indeed I should, sorry, this is artwork!
B: Oh, We can take it like that.
A: Yeah. It has to be liberated first. I mean then thought can embrace language again.
B: What I don’t know. What does it mean to say one liberates thinking from language?
A: Well like anything else, one liberates the meaning from its word. Instead of thinking of... How does a word come into being? To me that is a great, great mystery.
B: How does a Word?
A: How does a word come into Being?
B: Well, I guess the thing is you have to look at it within a network of words.
A: Hmm ... You can phrase the meaning with words. You can clothe the meaning with words. But the meaning is already there. The meaning is invisible but it’s there. It always has been.
B: We’ll probably need this one, right?
A: Yeah, I think so.