Dear Jack Segbars,

As I am writing this email you are probably working on the preparations for the show at 1646. I hope all is working out nicely, and considering the temperature outside, I hope your studio has central heating. It is my intention to make some inquiries into your work, and into the upcoming show in particular. I started by doing some reading about it.

As I understand it, your work examines the work of art as exhibited, such as text-as-art, critique and reflection. It also addresses the various roles that are involved in this, including that of artist, curator and reviewer.

I understand that the upcoming show in a way revolves around a previous show, namely ‘How to Look Out’ by Marijn van Kreij at the Hallen in Haarlem. In fact, there is this previous show, a text by Nickel van Duijvenboden that accompanied it, and a published review of it by me, that are together taken as a point of departure.

I can see how the various actors and forms of discourse are set into place here. Also because you have invited Marijn and Nickel to participate, which makes you curator of the show, and then your artist accomplices.

When reading I came across the notion of ‘transitory environment’. It seems to refer to a process that is somehow important in your work. What do you mean by it? A state wherein roles and forms of discourse briefly merge into each other and produce the conditions for each other? Is this what you are aiming for with the show? An intriguing thought. I am sure you have something to say about it.

Dear Maarten,

Thanks for your questions. The idea for the show is to take the constellation of positions of art-production as starting point and to forge on solely that of the artist position. By this I mean to focus on the different positions besides that of the artist as producer of artefacts, that together constitute the conglomerate of art-production. Besides the figure of the artist this means the figure of the curator, the institute, education, critique, theory and politics of course. These together produce the artistic field in which the notion of and on art is formulated, and in which through cross-pollination and feedback the very notion and function of art is generated.

For this show I bring into play two of these positions that normally are considered problematic toward and/or have an ambivalent relation with what is conceived as the artist-ideas: curatorship and critique.

The last years I have focused on curatorship and writing as artistic practice. I have been engaged in a curatorial program called Brak in Rotterdam in which I took on the role as curator and worked with artist along this clear divided working relation: I produced shows in collaboration with these artists. Result of these shows in the form of photographs of these shows will be part of the installation at 1646.

The other element is the position of critique. I’ve been engaged in writing reviews and writing in general on art-related topics the last years and in producing projects and publications in which, of course, the role and form of writing is prominent.

The review of Marijn’s show at De Hallen became a perfect vehicle to explore these relations between the ‘original’ artwork and the usual considered derivatives: curatorship and writing/reflection since Marijn himself has addressed these issues in his work: he has incorporated the writing of Ad Reinhardt (and reflections on Malevitsj’s work) into his show and has acted as curator. As interpreter in the form of critique my review, again is a new reflection in the long chain of reflections we call tradition, and in which theory, appropriation and the notion of originality play their role.

It was perfect that in this set-up Nickel van Duijvenboden, who is well versed in the topic of the relation between the artistic event and experience and the translation of these qualities into text/literature wrote an accompanying text in the catalogue that accompanies the Hallen show, he is a friend of Marijn and they share a history together. With this an extra element comes into play: that of the subjective history, the individual history and genealogy of artistic ideas. So here we have a set-up of an intricate and complex relationship between text and image, curator and artist, original and derivative, appropriator and appropriated. To again take this as a starting point and to invite them both in a new show, all these issues are once more re-set. This maybe is the ‘transitory environment’ you mentioned in your question. It’s the moment of overlap and transition. In this case between, which I believe to be insufficiently addressed relations.

JS

Dear Maarten,

This seems like a good moment to break in and elaborate a bit on the history of our collaboration. In September 2012, Jack and I met at a gallery opening of Marijn’s and discussed my participation in Jack’s ‘Brak’ programme (a duo with Renco Torenbosch). It was immediately clear that we shared an ambivalence toward art production, and attempted to make sense of it through writing, each in our own way. At that point, I had grown disillusioned with literary writing within the art context – it felt like fighting a rear-guard action – but Jack managed to reconvince me that this position was relevant and valuable, maybe even crucial.

In Brak, text was a prominent element in the art works I showed. The works I now contribute to ‘Hey you!’ forms a reprise of that show. Simultaneously, they allude to Marijn’s and Jack’s influence on my process. The diary page diptych actually displays notes made directly after conversations I had with them. I’ve been in close contact with Marijn for some years now. Our discussions offer ample space for self-doubt, to a point where this in itself has become thematic. Our correspondence has seeped through in my literary work and conversely, his envelope drawing alludes to this correspondence as well. For me, this informal triangular
discourse now forms an important element of the show – although, because of its confidential nature, it is necessarily oblique.

JS

Coming back, Maarten, your earlier question: “A state wherein roles and forms of discourse briefly merge into each other and produce the conditions for each other?” I would say it has more to do with the undisclosed status of inter-dependency: theory or conceptual thought has long since been introduced into the nature of visual arts, the institutional set-up of art-praxis has brought to light the alliance with governance and politics and the function and position of art as societal actor. The role of the curator, the institute, theory and politics are kept very much understated in the public functioning of art. For me it’s a search into what remains as quality and possible function of the artistic. And to what extent the notion of the uniqueness of the ‘artist’ and the artistic event is upheld to serve the exclusive status of the arts.

NO

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your elaborate response. Indeed, the show promises to be quite rich and multilayered. Heterogeneous might be a better word. Conceptually and materially.

With respect to the latter, I understand there will be a range of different media present in the show. I am curious to see how you will deal with the presentation of such diverse elements. It must be a challenge, isn’t it? With respect to the conceptual, I see two distinct but related strands. On the one hand, the relations of the various producers that are active within the art world – and as you emphasize, the undisclosed status of their interdependence. On the other hand, there is the genealogy of artistic ideas, the appropriation of these ideas, and the problem of originality. Underneath this, moreover, I sense a critical stance.

I like the idea of seeing your review, Marjijn’s show, and Nickel’s text as parts of a chain of reflections on a set of artistic ideas. A chain that stretches out towards you, and is continued by you, through appropriation, reproduction and adaptation. Appropriation, in a profound way, must be an important part of how artistic ideas develop.

It made me think of the use of this term in cultural psychology. Here, with respect to language, a speaker appropriates a word when he/she adapts it to his/her own semantic and expressive intention. By doing this – by bringing other peoples words into use – the speaker taps into a collective realm of meaning, one that builds on the language-users that preceded him/her, and of which he/she now becomes a part. This echoes an historical dimension, wherein ideas are recreated and revisited, and novelty and uniqueness are relative. At the same time, this appropriation is not a static given. By adapting a word – or an image for that matter – to one’s own use, that word or image is modified and becomes recontextualized. It may even transform. With the risk of overstretching this comparison, I think there are some similarities here, wouldn’t you agree?

It struck me, finally, that underneath your reflections there appears to be a strong critique of how certain parts of the art world function. I think I can understand some of it. When you say that the role of the curator, the institute, theory and politics are kept understated in the public functioning of art, I can’t help wondering: by whom? And for what reason?

JS

It’s interesting you bring up the term appropriation in cultural psychology.

It’s my firm belief that ultimately the paradox that exists in the praxis of modern art still continues and remains unresolved: art is meant to not only address life’s key questions and issues and in doing so (through reflection, abstraction and sublimation) elucidate these but finally needs to dissolve into it, in establishing an idealized co-existence between the two – art and life. In this stopian state man’s ambition, dreams and production would be synthesized. This formula and scenario is artificially kept from being realized by stating that ultimately art needs to remain in this suspended state of falling into life, the appropriation of it into either design, politics, governance or downright superficiality. In this state of suspension its political status is established: it needs to be on the threshold of this appropriated status, in order to stay art and to keep it’s political relevance and function. The end of art has often been proclaimed, the suspension of this final transition is explained as exactly this: resistance against appropriation. But obviously it is riddled by appropriation. Not only as you mention in the analogy with cultural psychology, in its own genealogy: it is an ongoing quality, building on historical tradition but certainly also in a more profound way as median that is dependent on the perception and reception of it’s users.

And to what extent the notion of the irreversibility of the artistic and cultural canon. The same goes for the theoretical field that provides for the conceptual and intellectual groundwork and societal embeddedness of the meaning of art. And of course politics provides for the bigger framework, regulating the infrastructure expressing ideological ideas. In all of this still the figure and quality of the artist, in spite of the obvious collaboration of production, is maintained as ‘original’, ‘unique’ and despite all still the emblematic avant-garde figure. It is a nice agreement in which responsibilities and tasks are allocated, and the public front is kept. In all of this the role of text is of importance, in it the transitions of fields and positions is given shape.

The idea for this show is of course not to pretend to resolve these issues but to focus on the intertwined nature of art-production. It will be complicated to forge these three different styles of artists and to fold the rigor of the conceptual idea for the show back into a visual experience. That I believe is what connects the three of us. A need to explore and to showcase what remains as an artistic possibility in spite of it’s embedded relation and troubled history.

1. Jack Segbars
Leftovers, No agency (through the looking-glass), 2012
Plastic foil letter template
c. 50 x 40 cm

2. Marjin van Kreij
Untitled (Zwart vierkant), 2011
Acrylic on canvas
195 x 151 cm

3. Jack Segbars
Mistre, No More, once more, 2012
Acrylic on canvas
195 x 151 cm

4. Nickel van Duijvenboden
Notes of 2011, Superimposed (in progress), 2012
Typewriter ink, paper, metal
215 x 52 cm

5. Jack Segbars
No agency, 2012
Acrylic on canvas
52 x 51 cm

6. Jack Segbars
Leftovers, Mistre, No More, once more, 2012
used tape, acrylics
100 x 90 x 5 cm

7. Jack Segbars
Brothers in arms, 2010-2011
Acrylic on canvas
240 x 180 cm and 51 x 51 cm

8. Jack Segbars
Brak 2.7, gerlach en koop and Martijn in’t Veld, 2012
Photographic print on dibond
120 x 80 cm

9. Jack Segbars
Brak 4.1, Remco Torenbosch and Nickel van Duijvenboden, 2012
Photographic print on dibond
150 x 100 cm

10. Jack Segbars
Brak 5, Frederic Sanchez, 2012
Photographic print on dibond
120 x 80 cm

11. Jack Segbars
Brak 2.7, gerlach en koop and Martijn in’t Veld, 2012
Photographic print on dibond
120 x 80 cm

12. Jack Segbars
Brak 4.1, Evi Vingerling and Ton Schouten, 2012
Photographic print on dibond
150 x 100 cm

13. Jack Segbars
No agency (Remco Torenbosch), 2013
Acrylic on canvas
51 x 51 cm

14. Jack Segbars
How to look out, 2012
Pencil on paper
20 x 360 cm

15/16. Nickel van Duijvenboden
June 9, 2011, page 2: Is this a phase or is this truly who we are and will we forever keep our friends and our momentum?, 2013
Gelatin-silver print, retouche ink, glass
205 x 155 cm

Nickel van Duijvenboden
September 8, 2012, page 2: ...that being without a context was unbearable / ...that you reach a dead end eventually / That at some point you lose control, 2013
Gelatin-silver print, retouche ink, glass
205 x 155 cm

17. Marjin van Kreij
Untitled (Tags: ReadyPost, 02049, Go Folks, Go Forth, Trust Your Brain, Trust Your Body), 2013
Gouache on paper
124 x 95 cm

18. Jack Segbars
No agency, Marjin van Kreij (stock), 2017
Video, 28 min, looped

CLOSE