

On



Active

Spectatorship

# On Active Spectatorship

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with a sweet, cooked smell and the crocodile room had a plastic floor and another room lifted a part of the floor to reveal underneath (very tiny) and there was a film we had no time to watch and there were concrete sculptures with collapsed details and magazine foundations and a room with aluminium foil elephants (1x toxic)

Art theories do not so much offer truth, but rather illustrate strategies of navigation. Art history is thick with theories, each presenting water-tight ideas built through their own logics. Forming an ever-expanding constellation of contradictions, these theories reveal not the existence of truth and falsity, but rather the existence of many paths; paths that pick their own way through the vast landscape of art, each perspective revealing a different kind of sense.

In *Kant After Duchamp*, art theorist Thierry de Duve uses Marcel Duchamp as an anchor from which he centres a web of research and ideas. Brian O'Doherty, author of *Inside the White Cube*, employs an ever-expanding frame through which he looks at art and centres his path. In *What is an Author?* Michel Foucault frames proper-nouns as a category through which meaning is arranged, while Suhail Malik's lectures *On the Necessity of Art's Exit from Contemporary Art* refuses to acknowledge any individuals at all – artists becoming entirely absent from his theory as a conscious blind spot.

And all the while artists engage from the other side of the dialogue: Justin Matherly objectifies Nietzsche's thoughts in the form of a rock, while Tim Hollander covers Obrist by telling him what he himself wants to know. And if the artworks themselves don't directly make connections to the theoretical, textual, philosophical landscapes that they find themselves embedded in, then selling paintings to fund publications – such as Asger Jorn did for the Situationist International – ensure the interaction between theory and art stay strong.

This field of activity spurs the cross-pollination of roles: theorists are framed as artists, artists as curators.

served its purpose early and I did not bother to let it talk further, it lay slumped in the front corner, almost an advertisement to me and the rest was then also very quickly seen I remember being finished before I was ready to be finished and all the open-office workers ignored me as I went out feeling bizarre.

Philosophers are invited to curate and writers are asked to exhibit. But all the while, little is asked of the spectator. Or rather, little is heard of the spectator's position in relation to art.

it is stable. Still craving archival type of museum setting, study rather than tourism, maximum work to see rather than maximal white wall on view - who wants to see white walls? Do we need the 'pause' of white space between works to clear and start again, or are we in fact building a conglomerated view and therefore need still experiencing

## What is a Spectator?

According to the dictionary being a spectator is related to an activity: it is defined by the action of observation. We can all be spectators at some point, but we cannot be spectators all the time. Defined as 'a person who watches a show, game or other event', the term is traceable to the Latin *spectare*, which means to 'gaze at, observe', allowing the spectator to exist only in relation to something that it is adjacent to. A spectator gazes at something and it is this relationship, as well as being a 'person', that defines it.

When spectatorship occurs in relation to art, it develops its definition in other ways, starting with its expansion from the term 'spectator' to include 'viewer', 'perceiver', 'observer', 'beholder' and a whole array of similar terms. These terms are predominantly derived from notions of looking, going as far as whittling the term down to 'the eye'. The terms are used interchangeably in texts written about art and still carry traces of the dictionary definition. But even though this definition is the terms' starting point and they still point towards the action of observation, the spectator's activities in relation to art are described by art theorists as more than just looking and more than being a one-sided relationship. Dutch art theorist Janneke Wesseling describes a spectator of art as someone who uses all their senses, the entire body<sup>1</sup>, to gain an experience of the work. Irish art theorist Brian O'Doherty describes the spectator's body as a 'data-gatherer' and the artwork as 'an active partner in perception',<sup>2</sup> which is another opinion that he shares with Wesseling. They outline the relationship between an artwork and a spectator as a reciprocal one – not the one-sided 'gazing at' that the dictionary defines – concluding that the action of the spectator in relation to art is 'not an ordinary way of looking'.<sup>3</sup>

- 1 Janneke Wesseling, *The Perfect Spectator* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2017) p.76
- 2 Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube* (California: University of California Press, 1999) p.55
- 3 Wesseling, *The Perfect Spectator*, p.79

only casually flipped through books, floating through rooms, not getting much of an idea-focused experience, not one that got my brain going, but one that got me feeling slightly inadequate, slightly perplexed, slightly inspired, slightly amused, ~~or~~ impressed and jealous - which often arises in bodies of work with a) lots of it and b) pieces that are large in scale.

The interactive relationship between a spectator and an artwork can be traced back to Impressionism, the first paintings to physically 'harass' the spectator. Through the employment of loose brushstrokes, impressionist paintings describe pictures when seen from afar, but when an attempt is made to verify the subject from up close, it disappears. This slipping of content from the surface of the canvas plays with the spectator, forcing them to run back and forth to view the image.

O'Doherty describes this as a harassment of the spectator, deployed by the artwork itself and states it is a characteristic that is 'inseparable from most advanced art'.<sup>4</sup> This dialogical relationship between an artwork and a spectator begins to use the term 'spectator' in an entirely different way, which is most clearly outlined by O'Doherty through his description of the spectator as a 'wondering phantom'. A spectator, according to O'Doherty, is not a human being but a fictional figure who lives in the gallery space and is literally *looked-through* when experiencing art. In his essay *The Eye and the Spectator* O'Doherty paints its portrait through a collage of general descriptions:

It has no face, is mostly a back. It stoops and peers, is slightly clumsy. Its attitude is inquiring, its puzzlement discreet. He - I'm sure it is more male than female - arrived with modernism, with the disappearance of perspective. [...]  
The Spectator seems a little dumb; he is not you or me. Always on call, he staggers into place before every new work that requires his presence. He tests them patiently and does not resent that we provide him with directions and responses: "The viewer feels..."; "the observer notices..."; "the spectator moves..." He is sensitive to effects: "The effect on the spectator is..." He smells out ambiguities like a bloodhound: "caught between these ambiguities, the spectator..." He not only

natural light filters strongly from the perforated roof. The (grey lettered) labels are printed directly on the walls and are very low, giving the eye a nice bouncy track up + down the wall from label to art work to wall \* to next art work. Every piece has a description in the hand-out and every piece has alot of space. Every piece reflects each other. No clutter.

stands and sits on command; he lies down and even crawls... Plunged into darkness, deprived of perceptual cues, blasted by strobes, he frequently watches his own image chopped up and recycled by a variety of media... he balances; he tests; he is mystified, demystified... he is a cluster of motor reflexes, a dark-adapted wanderer, the vivant in a tableau, an actor manqué, even a trigger of sound and light in a space land-mined for art.<sup>5</sup>

This portrait of the spectator draws it as a passive and receptive puppet that bends to the will of the active artwork. Rather than describe a person in relation with something, this description of the spectator describes a personified fixture in the room – a ‘double-edged self-consciousness’ that is animated by the artwork. O’Doherty’s description of the spectator as an intrinsic characteristic of modern art draws parallels to Wesseling’s ‘internal critic’, which she applies to art in general.

In her book *The Perfect Spectator*, Wesseling defines the term ‘spectator’ by splitting it into two distinct roles: the ‘verticon’, who is a concrete spectator who exists outside the artwork and the ‘internal critic’ who is a self-consciousness present within the artwork. Wesseling’s idea of the internal critic is derived from reception aesthetics, a study that focuses on the interaction between artworks and spectators, rather than the intention of the artist. The ‘voice’ of the artwork described in reception aesthetics is what Wesseling calls the internal critic, which comes very close to O’Doherty’s resident phantom. While O’Doherty’s phantom occupies the gallery space, Wesseling’s internal critic resides within the artwork. But what they both express is a self-consciousness coming from the artworks themselves, a voice independent from the artist or the person who views them.



I visit Stedelijk more? No I don't know. Should  
 I visit other exhibition spaces more? Probably. Am  
 I tired? Yes Am I enthused? I was yesterday  
 after visiting 6 exhibitions Am I confused?  
 Yes. Are these notes a 'work'? I don't think  
 so. Are they work? Yes I do think so.  
 Sketches I guess. What am I sketching out?  
 My position in regards to absorbed media  
 (exhibitions, films, books, artworks etc.).

Wesseling's other spectator is coined the 'verticon', which is the concrete, physically present person looking at art, closely related to the one the dictionary defines. This idea of the spectator, though embodied by real people, is still a theoretical construct, a *perfect* spectator, which acts in a particular way. Wesseling believes that 'perception only really starts when the spectator decides to embark on that interaction'.<sup>6</sup> Therefore the verticon is a physical spectator, but it is only a verticon once it has decided to invest in a relationship with the artwork it is confronted with.

Wesseling's distinction between the internal critic and the verticon is an important refinement of roles that are usually referred to under the single term 'spectator'. Through her separation of these terms and roles, she acknowledges O'Doherty's harassed, fictional phantom 'inseparable from most advanced art', while giving agency back to the physical audience. By clearly outlining these inner and outer spectators and their separate roles, Wesseling redefines a space for the (outer) concrete spectator to disassociate themselves from the perpetually manipulated and harassed (inner) spectator that O'Doherty defines.

When used in art theory, the term 'spectator' mostly describes this manipulated, fictionalized, idealized, disembodied character, operating in a large field of activity of observation and reflexivity. What it describes extends beyond the definition of a physical person looking at art. It is used to describe a reciprocal action that is embodied by different people, objects and characters at different times: an action that can be embodied by more than just humans and by more than one entity.

Rather than describing a physically present spectator, the term 'spectator' is then a tool used in dialogues

the fearful mind. The desire to know the 'truth' turning the whole experience into a speed reading exercise. Into a social grace exercise. The paintings all framed according to their preciousness - collages in climate boxes, ~~pat~~ drawings behind glass and paintings, unless very valued, open to the regulated museum air. Open to touch if you really <sup>wanted</sup>.

about art to describe the inherent element of observation in relation to art, which allows the term a certain amount of plasticity. The physical person visiting the artwork, however, still exists. While their role in relation to art (what they do, how they affect and interact with the artwork) is entirely open for speculation, their existence is not. People looking at art exist and perhaps they need a clear name to define them from this plastic term 'spectator'. So I will call this physically existing person the 'concrete spectator' from now on. However, this term can only be used as a starting point, as the further one follows a line of thought, the further the reference to the spectator becomes a theoretical one, plunging the term back into a theoretical description and away from its referent.

to exist: A complete ecosystem then when audience arrive - where does EIT sit in the ecosystem? Nature / god / chance / mastermind. Absent. No hand prints, finger prints only audience boot - prints in the slowly turning mud ground slices (wires) now covered in yellow clay and infecting the sterile Burger King floor 30m down the road, round the corner -

Theoretically, the terms used to describe someone viewing art are entirely interchangeable, and is done so across texts that operate in, and define, the field. Terms such as viewer, perceiver, observer, the eye, are constantly used as synonyms to describe the figure experiencing the work. But for clarity in this text we have arrived at two distinct terms: the 'spectator' as a plastic term to describe the action of observation in relation to art, embodied by different people, objects and characters at different times; and the 'concrete spectator', a term used only to refer and locate the body of a physically existing person looking at art. The reason a concrete spectator is not used throughout the text is due to the inadvertent set of expectations writing assumes onto the referent through the line of thought developed, turning it into a fictional character that plays out the ideas of the writer or artist. But a concrete spectator is never fictional. It is a physically embodied person that will continue to exist no matter how they conduct themselves and how far they remove themselves from writers and artists' wishes; the only requirement being that they look (in the widest definition of 'looking') at art.

Perhaps a person who comes very close to speaking of the concrete spectator without fossilizing their character into an ideal is Jacques Rancière, who in his essay *The Emancipated Spectator* notes that:

There are only ever individuals plotting their own paths in the forest of things, acts and signs that confront or surround them. The collective power shared by spectators does not stem from the fact that they are members of a collective body or from some specific form of interactivity. It is the power each of them has to translate what she perceives in her own way, to link it to the unique

We are all a conglomeration of viewer, watcher, thinker, reader in one body, one body which does not cease to exist when the eyes are employed to the task of experiencing more than physical life, projecting the consciousness into an immaterial world of representation and abstract thought. What happens to the body when the mind is absent? Is viewing/watching/recording a form of meditation?

intellectual adventure that makes her similar to all the rest in as much as this adventure is not like any other.<sup>7</sup>

The only assumption that Rancière makes is that the spectator be intelligent, which is a conscious and deliberate assumption he applies to humanity as a whole. Therefore rather than ascribing a particular set of attributes to his idea of the spectator, he merely gives humanity the benefit of the doubt and leaves his description of spectatorship open to potential. Rancière believes that to be a spectator is not 'some passive condition that we should transform into activity. It is our normal situation'.<sup>8</sup> Rancière sets out to blur the lines that have been drawn 'between those who act and those who look',<sup>9</sup> to consider spectatorship as a natural state; one element of many attributed to human beings.

When I first read the title *The Emancipated Spectator*, by Rancière, it immediately provoked my imagination into predicting that the essay would discuss an *autonomous* spectator – a character whose definition and activity is untied from an artwork (, show, game or other event). Rancière's essay does do this (as is quoted above), but the focus of the text is in bringing the spectator closer to the work, into the work even, rather than refining it to a point that it can step away, emancipated from the object that defines it. And while I thought I'd let my pre-empted synopsis of *The Emancipated Spectator* go, now that I'm writing this text, it dawned on me that I might be attempting to write the essay I'd been hoping to read. An essay about a spectator that is not defined by an attachment to one work, but through engagement with many – a spectator that builds her own collage out of snippets of works that inspired her and left her touched: a concrete spectator who gives *herself* the description 'spectator', one who defines and exercises her own role, who trusts her own

7 Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2011) trans. Gregory Elliot, p.16

8 Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p.17

9 Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p.19

quite a casual (daybook) form of reflection into the activity of gardening and being part of this Münster garden community, seeing the joys - parties, dinners, harvests, flowers and the pests - animals, plant problems, etc. through photographs, letters, charts, ephemera of community events and community meetings with JD coming every now and then to check this fluxing 10 year project.

readings, builds her own connections and embraces her subjectivity as a valid framework – embarking on the ‘intellectual adventure’ Rancière briefly outlines.

My pre-emptive interpretation of Rancière’s title brings me back to an interview with a musician I once heard through one of those YouTube-binges that mixes personal curiosity with YouTube’s algorithmic suggestions. Or was it recommended through a friend?

No matter. The point being that I stumbled across this interview, and in doing so – arriving to it with no clear structure to trace back on – I have lost the name. My inability to trace the source raises the potential that what follows is my own thoughts projected into an authenticating body – projecting my subjectivity into another’s mouth to give it the guise of objectivity.

I offer this paragraph as a disclaimer.

Talking about listening to other musicians’ songs, musician \_\_\_ \_\_\_ said if an idea for a song came to him while listening, he would stop the song mid-track to immediately write down his – so as to give life to the tune that had just been inspired in him (I’m sure it was male not female) and to simultaneously avoid accidental plagiarism. While I *have* read the essay behind Rancière’s title, I can still identify the words ‘The Emancipated Spectator’ as being the three words of his essay that impacted me the most – his words within the text, at least initially, imbuing my thoughts unconsciously more than actively inspiring them. The effect of Rancière’s title having a somewhat comparable effect to the opening notes of a song for \_\_\_ \_\_\_.

Taking the object of the book quite literally, it was the exterior – the surface – of *The Emancipated Spectator* that provoked thoughts that were already forming in my own head. Rather than delivering to me the author’s intention, the cover of the book presented the author’s

often somewhat paradoxical way now I am talking about the actions of his work in general I guess, am I then even talking about his work or just describing the action of my own brain activated by the words and pictures that describe his actions and his thoughts and his decisions? Is the work then in my head or in his actions, the combination I guess this line of thought has ambled to a very superficial speculation.

thoughts as a surface (the title), and it was this surface that served as a springboard to my own thoughts. 'Reading' an essay in this way could be described as 'jumping the gun', so to speak. But theorists who focus on spectators' activity in front of artworks, such as Zahava Doering and Janneke Wesseling, offer extended research in relation to these thoughts. These theorists outline why being inspired by a title, the opening notes of a song or the aesthetic surface of an artwork and coming to a reading that bypasses the author, artist, or musician's intention, is not something we should necessarily turn away from.

Looking specifically at the relationship between spectator and artwork, Doering's research focuses attention on what a spectator brings with them as they contemplate art. Doering calls this a 'Visitor Entrance Narrative',<sup>10</sup> and describes it as a pouch or bag that concrete spectators always have on them while contemplating art. Doering divides the contents of this bag into three categories: Values, Information/Expectations and Personal Experiences. These categories cover anything from the person's social status, gender, race, education – to what they had for breakfast; how long it took them to get to the [museum]; their state of health etc. All these details are then considered as part of the context from which the work is seen – a lens through which a concrete spectator views a work.

Though she does not make the connection herself, Doering's conclusion runs parallel with the idea of the 'aesthetic object', a concept outlined in reception aesthetics, and explored by Wesseling, to describe the meeting point between an artwork and a concrete spectator. The theory argues that no artwork has an inherent meaning within itself; rather that meaning is created through the relationship between the artwork and the spectator. This generative relationship between

10 Zahava Doering, "The voice of the visitor", Museum Guides Now Symposium, Rijks Museum, Amsterdam, 2017



projekt - About 20-30 people milling through an almost made clay beneath the surface concrete of the once-used surface. Windows triggered open by cogs, feeding grass and clay pots, both triggering sounds I don't remember hearing, app animation applied via attendant via screen of some sort. A bit similar to school. A bit schoolish and small (school is microscop)

spectator and artwork is the key 'object' of observation in reception aesthetics' exploration of how art works. Artworks are portrayed as having a 'voice' of their own (an idea reflected by Wesseling's internal critic and O'Doherty's resident phantom) which is independent of the artist's intention and it is with this voice that spectators engage with in a dialogue. What this approach to art does is step away from intentionalist theories in which artworks are viewed as pure manifestations of an artist's vision.

Coming back to my projected expectation of *The Emancipated Spectator*, the interaction can be seen as an aesthetic object: the essay as a work (object) whose material (language) forms a voice for itself; and me, the concrete spectator, arriving to it with my own context (visitor entrance narrative). Though I am describing an interaction between a book and myself, I use the word spectator rather than reader because all this came from contemplating the cover (reading the title) – extracting my own definition through my encounter with its surface: reading becoming an expansion of the act of looking. The title of the essay became a meeting point between object and spectator, just as the opening notes to a song for \_\_\_\_, just as the surface of an artwork for Wesseling and Doering. If the words spectator, viewer, perceiver etc. are interchangeable due to their reference to a plastic, theoretical role, then it only enriches our vocabulary to add the word reader as well. With this approach to language, we could describe aesthetic objects as the viewing of books and the reading of paintings, the contemplation of titles and the quoting of brushstrokes. Rather than delineating an exact relationship or action, we can use language to describe a potential image of how the relationship or action might be. And if this can be detached from its relationship with an artwork; if we can expand the notion of the aesthetic object to include book covers

simple etches by some and now I'm doubting  
all the works I saw and which names  
they attached to, but the images are clear -  
especially this one of 3 curling papers  
depicting 000- on an orange wall. And  
the embossed petrol station. And the  
legal document (C) about the mention of  
George Orwell that one impressed me so  
much and now the details are all fuzzy ~~oh~~  
<sub>non</sub>

and beyond; if we can collect these aesthetic objects  
and include them in our Visitor's Entrance Narratives -  
perhaps we can start to find this autonomous spectator  
I was hoping to find via Jacques Rancière after all.



~~about~~ <sup>from</sup> a narcissist's point of view about a  
 relationship and then on loop and diagonally  
 in the middle of a large room and  
 remember being tired and glad to sit down  
 and at first the video was yes yes yes  
 and then at some point unable to  
 keep the concentration, analytical  
 confusion coming in and a generally  
 feeling of I enjoyed this but I <sup>can no</sup> longer <sup>point</sup> <sup>where</sup>

In his book *Kant After Duchamp*, art theorist Thierry de Duve de Duve explores how art is defined, outlining how the statement 'this is art' often stems from subjective feeling and personal taste.<sup>11</sup> De Duve postulates that art is defined by collections of personally selected examples and that it is these selections, rather than overarching theories with regulative criteria, which outline what art is. Just as O'Doherty did for his resident phantom, de Duve traces this line of thought back in the 1800's and the beginning of Modernism.

The beginning of Modern art is aligned with two important technological innovations: the invention of photography and the availability of industrially manufactured paint (oil paint was commercially available in tubes from about 1830–1840 onwards). While photography is often discussed as being the big disruption to the painting tradition, de Duve identifies the manufacture of paint as a crucial shift: one that abstracted the concept of art from medium-bound crafts and brought the roles of artists and spectators onto level-ground.

Until the establishment of the pigment industry, painters had been largely in control of the painting process, starting with the building of stretchers and the grinding of pigments, which were then used to make the works. This meant painters were making artworks almost entirely from scratch, taking care of the painting as a complete object through well-guarded processes passed on through the master-disciple relationship. It was the sum of these processes that framed painting as a craft and it was the handicraft of these processes that endowed almost infinite possibilities onto the work. Each master's workshop retained specific characteristics according to their individually honed processes.

11 Thierry de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp* (Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996) p.32

and not knowing the context or idea except, its in a museum, someone thinks its good.' Which then becomes a viewing action of 'really?' or 'are you sure?' To which its much easier to say no. Is it easier to agree or disagree? It becomes a question of relating to the institute's taste, and admitting comradeship with a multi-something-dollar institution is hard to admit. Easier to say 'no' no matter what is seen.

What the industrialization of paint did was take this limitless process and 'organize the act of painting as a series of choices within a standardized logic of color',<sup>12</sup> reframing the activity of the painter from one of making, to one of choosing.

Instead of resisting this new development, painters began internalizing industrialization's encroachment on the craft. Letting go of the expansive tradition, painters began mimicking the process within their own works. This was taken to its most rational conclusion by divisionist painter Seurat, who 'explicitly turn[ed] the hand of the painter into a clumsy machine that operated in steps and rejected the blending continuity of handi-craft'.<sup>13</sup> What is described here is Pointillism, a painting technique developed by Seurat that, based on scientific theory, applied unmixed colours onto the canvas in small dots. Through this process the action of mixing is relocated into the eye of the concrete spectator, whose retina blends the colours while looking and in doing so becomes 'an active partner to the artist (who is of course also the first spectator of the work)'.<sup>14</sup> Rather than resist the division of labour that industrialization had brought, Seurat's paintings perpetuated it by moving it up the line, so to speak, to include the spectator in the making process. Employing the eye, the organ of sight, as a location, or tool, through which the image is completed, these paintings are often referred to as retinal art as they literally manifest on the retina of the concrete spectator.

This redistribution of labour was further developed by Marcel Duchamp whose work expands the inclusion of the spectator in the making of art. It was Duchamp who coined the term 'retinal art' to describe art that is specifically addressed to the eye of the spectator. But while he himself defined the term, he simultaneously professed his distaste for the form. Claiming that he

12 de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*, p.117

13 de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*, p.177

14 de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*, p.178

out of whatever surken moment it has lapsed  
 into. ~~There's~~ A whole room dedicated to  
 Bracque rather than Picasso, and to  
 John Cage and that gigantic Leger - Leger  
 who I've never really admired and now  
 somewhat do, or is it just scale after  
 scaling everything down in my life, and  
 paintings not reaching a bigger size  
 than 'DRAWER!' So big the eye can't see

instead made art for the mind, Duchamp's work aimed to employ the spectator's judgment. This inclusion of the spectator comes very close to Impressionism's harassed spectator and Pointalism's human tool. But what sets Duchamp's inclusion of the spectator apart is that his works employ their ability to choose. Philosophers such as Rudolf Steiner have argued choice as being the essential definition of freedom,<sup>15</sup> so although often manipulating the spectator into an intellectual bind, Duchamp's work, somewhat paradoxically, corners spectators into applying themselves as freely thinking, independent people.

Duchamp's oeuvre is largely arranged around statements such as 'it's the viewers who make the pictures'<sup>16</sup> and equating the action of making art to the action of choosing. The clearest examples of Duchamp's works that addresses this notion are the readymades, in which he chose existing objects and baptized them with the name of 'art'. When asked to justify these works, Duchamp described his logic of choosing an object as being synonymous to that of a painter choosing with which colour to paint. To quote Duchamp in full:

The word "art", etymologically speaking, means to make, simply to make. Now what is making? Making something is choosing a tube of blue, a tube of red, putting some of it on the palette, and always choosing the quality of the blue, the quality of the red, and always choosing the place to put it on the canvas, its always choosing. So in order to choose, you can use tubes of paint, you can use brushes, but you can also use a ready-made thing, made either mechanically or by the hand of another man, even, if you want, and appropriate it, since its you who chose it. Choice is the main thing, even in normal painting.<sup>17</sup>

- 15 see Rudolf Steiner, *The Philosophy of Freedom Freedom* (Morrisville: Lulu books, 2017) trans. Prof & Mrs. R. F. Alfred Hoernle
- 16 de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*, p.179
- 17 Marcel Duchamp, interview by Georges Charbonnier, radio interviews, RTF, trans. Thierry de Duve

only aesthetically; the painter's brush must touch the entire canvas simultaneously, the artist's interest must be touching the entire installation simultaneously; each 'interest' mixing through each other in a well tossed salad of ideas where the flavours cancel each other out the way parsley and garlic give you no bad breathe and yet great taste.

Duchamp's definition of making art separates the action completely from any tradition or craft, opening up the idea that anyone who wants, can (and does) make art – not just those who have been entrusted with the guarded knowledge of a master. While Seurat's paintings include the spectator in the making of his works by giving them an active role in the image's creation, Seurat restricted the spectator's field of activity within the frames of his own works. He set out the outlines – the environment – and the spectator completes it, only being able to act after the provisional steps Seurat himself took care of. What Duchamp's readymades do is invite the spectator to share the position of the artist by becoming an independent and equal contributor to the piece. Rather than Pointillism's license to execute the finishing touches, or Impressionism's instructions of finding the image, Duchamp's interaction with his spectator is a dialogue. He includes his spectator by confronting them with a statement that begs a subsequent question, asking them to employ their own judgment by stating his. The dialogue unfolds something like this: *I have chosen this to be art. Do you choose this to be art?* Which can also imply the following: *And if you choose this to be art, what stops you from choosing other things too?*

The Readymades put the artist and spectator on level ground, as the maker states his action of making as choosing, and the work asks the spectator to choose: Yes or no, is this art? While a spectator of a Seurat cannot make more Seurats without the painter's guidance, a spectator of a readymade can go on to make more readymades. Not only do the works offer this through their internal dialogue with the spectator, Duchamp himself published the written 'rules', putting them out in the public, available for anyone to use. Just as painting masters passed on the guarded processes that enabled their disciples to commence their own

the overall perspective I was going for. Ceased by the feeling to make the most of seeing these objects (paintings) while they were in front of me. Going into habitual, and environment-induced-museum-peer-pressured (old ladies looking out of the corners of their eyes) contemplation. Ducking in for an inspection of a small detail, standing back to laugh.

practice, so does Duchamp. But rather than passing on the 'secrets' to his own disciples, Duchamp published his methods to the public at large. And rather than passing on the secrets of being a *painter*, Duchamp passed on the methods of being an *artist* in general. Severed from specific crafts and traditions, disciples of Duchamp, or perhaps more precisely, *readers* of Duchamp, become practitioners of art devoid of craft: art in general. All they have to do, according to Duchamp, is to choose.

De Duve takes this logic and applies it to the definition of art as a field. While Duchamp was concerned with the making of individual art pieces, de Duve looks at how the term 'art' is delineated at large. A spectator who attends exhibitions, who walks through the galleries of museums, who goes to biennales, art fairs or academy graduation shows, finds themselves navigating a vast landscape of postulated artworks. They reject some; connect with others, and in doing so organize their overall experience into a personal definition. This definition is based on aesthetic judgment, a 'quickening of imagination',<sup>18</sup> which de Duve also describes as love, subjective feeling or personal taste. Regardless of whether this judgment is naïve or informed, physically or intellectually engaged, the activity remains to be one of choosing: this or that, is it art? There is no overarching theory or set of criteria available to consult as to whether something is art or not, and so, as de Duve writes:

'[If] someone asks you to define art, it is with your taste and personal feelings that you will answer. You will say, pointing a finger at your favourite works: art is this, and this, and that. You have been asked for a definition, but since you have only your feelings as a guide, you don't feel entitled to generalize. So in place of a theory,

at some, gliding past others, back track  
 ing back to favourites. The gallery  
 attendants were reading novels. The  
 works I think were A3. And pencil? or  
 pen? I cannot remember. B+W  
 naturally. I painting. Did the press  
 release say this painting was  
 important and all these drawings  
 led up to it? I think so. I didn't  
 like it

you give examples. Each of them you baptize with the name art, one by one. The phrase 'this is art' is the expression of your judgment, arising case by case.<sup>19</sup>

This logic outlines spectatorship as a generative activity as each spectator – consciously or not – inherently builds their own definition of art through accumulation of gathered experiences. This is also affirmed by reception aesthetics' through the idea of the aesthetic object – the interaction between artworks and spectators: A spectator who engages with an artwork creates an aesthetic object by embodying Seurat's accomplice, Impressionism's footman; by speaking to O'Doherty's phantom and Wesseling's internal critic. This process hosts a Duchampian dialogue of, 'Yes or no, is this art?' resulting in the recognition of an artwork depending on the spectator's subjective feeling and personal taste. A spectator who then engages with two or more artworks creates a *series* of aesthetic objects and in this process chooses which they prefer and which they do not. The accumulation of these preferences outlines the definition of art as framed by de Duve. Spectatorship as a practice of creating aesthetic objects then, qua character, runs parallel to the practice of the artist, who makes an oeuvre of artworks bound together by their activity of making, which is outlined by Duchamp as one of choosing. The circuit between the artist and the spectator comes full circle. Two opposing bodies merge, the tension slackens: the narrative is complete.<sup>20</sup>

19 de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*, p.32

20 See dual-focus narratives in Rick Altman, *A Theory of Narrative* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008)



of making being important, generous and revealing. And then the second thought of 'if every body does this, then how does it matter?' The eternal question of 'so what?' but then visiting this exhibition and experiencing small moments of recognition, of alignment, kinship, becomes the 'because' answer. The indirect speaking, speaking through a mirror and not that not an idea for an illustration of what art is to be materialised

Other activities concerned with spectatorship, such as 'the dérive' created and practiced by the Situationist International in the 1960's, shed further light on how spectatorship can be considered a practice, and how it can be conducted as a generative activity.

The Situationist International were a philosophical group born through a deep mistrust in the superficiality of Western Society, taking it upon themselves to break through society's façade through a number of theoretical and practical strategies, including the dérive. Literally meaning 'to drift', a dérive meant to set out into the city with no plans – allowing the 'psychogeography' of the urban landscape to propel one's movements. Psychogeography, coined by the Situationist's founder Guy Debord, describes the 'constant currents, fixed points and vortexes [in urban landscapes] that strongly discourage entry or exit from certain zones'.<sup>21</sup> Though the dérive is often mistaken as an extended stroll, the Situationists constructed it as an activity that specifically aimed at mapping the metaphysical landscape that Debord describes. A dérive was therefore never considered complete without a 'psychogeographical report' and it is here where the idea of a practice in relation to spectatorship, can be found.

A psychogeographic report mostly took the form of a written summary that was to be submitted to the Situationists in order for the dérive to be considered complete. The incompleteness of these reports was unforgivable (often leading to expulsion of the group). However, while extreme significance was laid in their completion, these reports were an absolute incoherent mess of subjective reflections, with no research structure applied. Never amounting into a body of knowledge, and never used to further develop the Situationist's

21 Guy Debord, "Theory of the Dérive" in *International Situationiste* #2:1958, trans. Ken Knabb, p.1

one - great to personal me - I'm sure  
 there were others that were more politically  
 great than my individual ignorance  
 managed to blind myself to, but I guess  
 I learnt that Nixon was a dick head (in  
 Guston's pencil) and sometimes it transcended  
 the political exasperation and ~~be~~  
 touched on other human truths' or  
 essences or you know, I guess those  
 were the ones I took photos of

concepts as a philosophical and political movement, the writing of these reports remained an isolated activity that belonged to the *dérive* alone.

Taking this into consideration, I would propose that it was the *action of reflection* of these reports that offers them lasting importance, rather than the content generated within the reports themselves. While the *dérive* was an act of rebellion against the work-driven society the Situationists found themselves in – the reflective character of the psychogeographical report seems to break passivity – a condition the Situationists considered being a disconcerting symptom of Western society. While allowing the ‘currents, fixed points and vortexes’ of a city to dictate ones movements is essentially passive, conscious allowance of it – paired with active observation and subsequent reflection – turns it back into a constructed activity.

Coming back to the idea of the spectatorship in relation to art, a spectator may be considered passive if framed by each artwork and obeying the orders within it, as with O'Doherty's phantom, Impressionism's footman or Seurat's accomplice. But the moment a spectator steps out of the framework of the individual artwork and connects it to another through their own experience, as outlined by de Duve, they inadvertently build their own definition of art through their specific and accumulative engagement with art's overall landscape. It is through this that there seems to be a link to the idea of the *dérive*. While a spectator can passively follow the flow of art made available by artists and the infrastructures of the artworld, those who become conscious of their path through the events, exhibitions, institutions, project spaces, galleries – those who actively reflect on their experience and try to gain a personal understanding of what they engage with – revolutionize their activity from passive to active



being divided into huts and clear cut rooms with strange entrances. He was commenting a number of times on museums in different ways and the other work seemed 'closer' to reflecting on life or humanity I suppose. A lot of work with stencils and words, I wonder if I took photographs, now I hope I have as the image of the page is in my mind but not the words that held poignancy.

without much more effort than a shift of consciousness. We may even propose that it is nothing more than a choice.

and if it was in praise it was self-praise,  
or at least self-inclusive. I get the feeling  
the artist was not confused, but the work was  
confused. Why slow motion? Why curtains  
& projections? Why installation activated by  
performance, why I have long? If using P.  
Atkins narrative theory its multiple  
perspective narrative, revolving around a  
theme, not a character — the source is not  
the individual <sup>the individual</sup> <sub>important</sub>

Dear Stefano and Bob,

As promised, the Art-Run Summary. The Art-Run, as I mentioned, is what I call the activity when there is a lot of art to be seen, which then results in a whole day being reserved (or any other large chunk of time) to go see large quantities of art in one long run; as fast as possible, in quick succession. This kind of art watching is usually tied to Art Events – today being one such example (Amsterdam Art Weekend). But Art-Runs need not be tied to these organized conglomerations. Going to every museum in the city because it's the day before your museum card runs out, could also be defined as an Art-Run. In fact, I have never called these days Art-Runs until today, when I bumped into Sander, and I described what I was up to as 'running around looking at art'. Which by the time I'd bumped into you, had then morphed into Art-Run in my head. So lets run with it for a while.

Today my Art-Run took 7 hours, in which I went to 2 art institutions,<sup>22</sup> 6 commercial galleries,<sup>23</sup> 3 project spaces<sup>24</sup> and 1 art residency show.<sup>25</sup> You caught me outside Rijksakademie, in which I was planning to see 5 artists.<sup>26</sup> I missed 2, but accidentally saw 11 others instead.<sup>27</sup> Adding this to the rest of the work I saw today makes my total sum of artists-seen 38 artists. My definition of 'seeing' is being able to put the image of the work and the artist's name back together now that I'm back at home reflecting on it. So physically speaking I probably 'saw' a few more. For example, my map from Stedelijk tells me there was an installation of Thomas Eggerer's work in the show I visited this morning, but now for the life of me I cannot remember how it looked. I can remember entering the room –

- 22 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Prince Claus Fund
- 23 Ellen de Bruijne, Annet Gelink Gallery, Grimm, Stigter van Doesburg, Galerie Fons Welters, Ornis A. Gallery
- 24 Kunstverein, Art in House, Plat-
- 25 Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten
- 26 Tchelet Pearl Weisstub, Sander Breure & Witte Hulzen, Nora Turato, Femke Herregraven, Sam Keogh
- 27 Kubilay Mert Ural, Iqra Tanveer, Josse Pyl, Claudia Martinez Garay, Sonia Kacem, Ceel Mogami de Haas, Deniz Eroglu, Kate Cooper, Esteban Cabeza de Baca, Inez de Brauw, Isabelle Andriessen

repeated I remember the study of a lip and the shape of a head. The (almost) abstract sculptures I remember the colour of, and the presence of tiny, almost imperceptible dents - representing a woman? The subject matter seems almost unnecessary. I remember some in plexiglass cases but now I cannot remember what was inside.

the physical space, the location in the museum – but the art on the walls stays as blank in my memory as the white walls that hosted them. I will have to go back sometime soon to see them anew.

Out of the 7 hours I spent out today, I spent 2 of them walking. This means I spent 5 hours looking at art, which divided by 38 artists means I spent an average of looking at one artist's work for 7.8 minutes. Luckily for you, you requested that I keep an eye out for 'a painter in the stables' at Rijksakademie, which turned out to be many more than one. Out of these painters I remember 2: one being Kubilay Mert Ural, whose paintings were mostly blue, inhabited by characters who seemed to be sometimes representing politicians, sometimes cats, sometimes unidentified people. My favourite one of them was of two men – one white (headless), one black – on a surfboard riding a wave. This painting also turned out to be the picture used in the catalogue – which also turned out to be the first painting I saw from the corridor. It was this painting which drew my attention. I say it was my favourite painting of his work, but now I'm thinking that since it was the only painting that I had seen previously (via reproduction [I'd been skimming through the catalogue earlier]) I was probably a little biased to it – according to my theory of 'accumulative-recognition'. This is a very loose idea inadvertently growing from a seed planted by Michel Foucault's essay about the author, which I talk about in more detail in my thesis (which I can send to you if you wish). The basis of the idea is that which you have seen before – which you recognize – feels much less hostile than that which is completely new – therefore feeling familiar, friendly: likeable. What I am outlining pulls it a little away from Foucault's theory, but in any case, what I'm wondering right now is if it's relevant to my experience of Kubilay Mert Ural's surfer-work today.

If they are images, not sculptures. then the title of him being a painter, sculptor reaches further than the material meaning. Is everyone catalogued an image maker? Everyone read or looked at on a screen, does this eclipse the material? If it lies in the viewer's experience, then the definition yes. So all art is digital and photographic - or at least partially. And written.

The other painter in the stables I remember is Esteban Cabeza de Baca, whose paintings were large and orange and gritty. It was this gritty texture that really got me thinking, because it wasn't the first painter of the day in which the surface seemed imbued with concrete or sand, drenched in colour via standard paints. The quality was very noticeable in real life, but when I looked at a reproduction for comparison it was, of course, completely lost. The other artist of the day whose work included this kind of texture was Tjebbe Beekman, at Stigter van Doesburg. While the gallery's press release does not mention it, these paintings felt to be painted at least partially in cement - or at least with some kind of extra textural substance added to the paint to give it more body. This kind of manipulation of the paint reminds me of some paintings I saw at Frieze Art Fair last month - whose paint was fat in added texture, aimed at amplifying the effect of the painter's brushstroke. I think this last sentence starts to point out what it is about these paintings that makes them uncomfortable to me - the word 'effect'. While the paintings at Frieze felt to be some kind of ode to paint as a material, the painter was only able to do so by adding other substances to manipulate the paint into a thick, stiff texture that would make it hold its 'painterly' form. There is something manipulative, insincere, about an ode to paint that needs something equivalent to steroids to produce it. Though the paintings of Esteban Cabeza de Baca felt no way near so explicitly textural as the Frieze paintings - and Tjebbe Beekman sat somewhere in between - the connection my eye made between these three painters made me more suspicious of Cabeza de Baca than I probably would have been without the experience of the other two's works.

There is of course so much more to say, but I think I'll stop here. There were artists whose work I'd seen previously which I enjoyed seeing once more; there

with metal sheets/bars holding it to  
 the wall in a room with other  
 (almost) all white paintings/works -  
 it seems to be a habit for museums  
 to do this, maybe right now, maybe  
 only T.M and Stedelijk AMS oh and  
 this installation of people leaving work  
 films/videos - I don't remember why  
 but it had been mentioned and then it

were new artists who I'd never seen, but whose ideas ran parallel with mine; there were other artists who I've already blanked out completely - not by choice, but by complete miss in connection. But it really seems futile to go through a point-by-point run through of everything I saw. Especially in this mode of viewing, in which comparison between works becomes far more prominent than specific qualities found in individual works. If anything, this is the quality of this kind of viewing. Had I not seen Tiebbe Beekman's paintings earlier today, I might have stood in front of the paintings of Esteban Cabeza de Baca, feeling equally as conflicted about it, but without having the reference - the visual vocabulary - to try understand, or contextualize, this conflict. The act of viewing then becomes not about discerning good art from bad, but about identifying its action upon ourselves and understanding why it makes us feel the way we do. And from there arriving at some kind of opinion of it; aware of the work's context, clearly aware of our own context - and how these build and affect our experience of viewing.

So that is what I learnt from my Art-Run today.  
 I hope it has been a somewhat enjoyable read,

From Dee

had very different practices that they never  
 interfered with and I found this obviously  
 striking because I've never forgotten  
 and when I saw this show this is  
 what I remembered from her and I  
 went 'Oh! This work is done by some  
 quite mature artist, I thought it P.C.  
 as in not an up-and-coming young  
 artist and it changed the flavour <sup>neither</sup> <sub>of</sub> <sup>the</sup> <sub>work</sub>

While visiting Freeze Art Fair in London this October (2017) I took a moment to reflect. It took the form of a kind of note taking I call 'skim writing'. Skim writing is the writing version of skim reading. It is an exercise of letting your mind sprint through thoughts as fast as possible, while the hand straggles behind, picking up as many words as it possibly can – the rest getting lost as if gone through a sieve. The effect is one of getting nuggets of information, which can later be expanded into a more comprehensive text.

So here's the note:

Collaborators and performers walk in wobbly lines conducted by square walls and changing floor textures – sometimes functional, sometimes aesthetic, and both achieving the opposite of what they desire. Each bench a mark on which a fallen press has passed out from back injuries, mind injuries so numb it forgot how to make chains that speak without being noticed to stay out – the pink and blue blending into the white of the glaring surface that screams just as a forgotten smudge in an ever-sterile environment. Thankfully, blending between the foul-functioning floor and the whispers escaping from a few live pieces, live with past knowledge, lit by past knowledge, previous encounters, conversations counted beyond the first, numb, unaccountable encounter is the hope and inspiration I hope will inspire us as a group, the mid-twenties, brunette faces, to not step up but keep stepping, slowly.

Which I later expanded into:

The inhabitants of Frieze Art Fair – the people walking through this temporary tent in Regent Park London – walk either aim-full or aimless, but in either case due to



considered still objects, but now as their role turns to illustration, and are shuffled in and out of exhibition rooms & installations, their quality is one of temporality, one of movement. And the museum stays still. The white walls, the space, the quiet, 23° ~~an~~ environment. The museum chills sending me out approximately 2-3 hours after arriving (as usual)

the labyrinthian plan of the booth-filled space, there is absolutely no direct way to get anywhere. Even the bookstore is reached by detouring through the bathroom. And even coffee is tucked behind unrecalled booths from where memory placed it. Between these booths are benches, marking places where people (i.e. I) can collapse at any point, pretending to watch art while really blanking out – which is not so difficult with all the white walls around. A blank state being easy to nurture through excessive white walls, white light and art: excessive ideas to dive into and surfaces moving in so many directions that joining them only makes you dizzy. One thousand bodies collaborating into a singular Pollock: each drawing blanks until revealing a network – either spatially, historically, socially, or through oeuvres.

Recognizing connections within oeuvres becomes most gratifying – the hand of the artist detected in colours, or literal brushstrokes, or conceptual brushstrokes. This brings to mind Foucault's theory of the author. In his essay *What is an Author?* Foucault postulates the idea of an author's name representing a category of writing, rather than acting as a proper noun (a word used to identify individual, physically existing people). The author's name, according to Foucault, no longer bares that function, and is now replaced with the role of bringing order to our conglomeration of reading instead. Foucault outlines how an author's name classifies works, building relations between them, and exploring how these works, and the author's name, change if these relations are severed (for example, if we discover that Shakespeare did or did not write a particular text).<sup>28</sup>

28 Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology* (New York: The New Press, 1998) trans. James D. Faubian, p.210

Bringing this theory into the context of Frieze, perhaps we can transpose Foucault's definition of the author as category to a notion of artist as category. For example,

something human, something universal,  
 then start drawing me into this man's  
 tale, this man's details, his sensus data.  
 Don't explain the work to me, let the  
 work hit me first or let an idea  
 hit me first! I can't remember 1000  
 biographies and should I care? perhaps.  
 Am I interested in what he does or what  
 he thinks? What he thinks, I think.

turning Michael Krebber into a category of art dispersed across the fair (and beyond) rather than using the words 'Michael Krebber' to describe a particular, physically existing person. I propose this because (sticking to the example of Michael Krebber), a fair few galleries at this fair represented Krebber, and therefore his work was scattered across various booths within the tent. After becoming aware of his work at various locations, my eye started tuning into Krebber-like works – finding Krebber paintings in far more galleries than in which he was actually present. Each time I approached a label and either affirmed my aesthetic deduction (yes! It is Krebber!), or corrected my aesthetic deduction (oh no, it's not), my cumulative experience of Krebber-esque work refined my category – my Krebber deductions becoming more and more precise – the attributes of Krebber becoming more and more specific with experience. While I cannot say with complete certainty how much more refined my Krebber category became during Frieze, what I can report is the jolt of satisfaction I was awarded through every accurately guessed Krebber work. Correctly recognizing Krebber-brushstrokes became a very satisfying, straightforwardly binary game in the sea of contemporary art Frieze offered.

Funnily enough, while Foucault was trying hard to *expel* the proper-noun in relation to literature, de Duve was doing his best to *claim* the proper-noun in relation to Art. De Duve postulates that assigning the name 'Art' to objects is an act comparable to that of naming a child – the word *Art* acting as a proper noun. But let's not get into that.

Back to numb minds and bodies passing out on conveniently placed benches between booths hosting Art. Back to bright-white booths with over-lit lights – blinding for humans – excellent for photographs – and removable surfaces made of paint and malleable materials.



that's okay. Oh, and no publication so  
 my work did not exist anymore either.  
 which is somewhat nice maybe or  
 is it an excuse? A bad one? Who  
 knows, what to do next? No one but  
 David and Ksenia surprised me. Oh, <sup>and</sup>  
 Ayesha and Lars is getting there I think.  
 Ida's sculpture should have been  
 more central. Pio's performance filtered <sup>through</sup>

These undulating pockets making a small percentage of the surface eyes cover when establishing the scene with panning shots (society of the spectacle indeed). The landscape reveals about 30% art, 70% fair – the objects of contemplation mere smudges in this clean, springy, new-carpet-smelling, tent (Amusing, how even the building is temporary for this temporary event). Semi-permanent, installed specifically, its façade of glamour is immediately broken the moment one sneaks into the backrooms to steal free coffee meant for gallery assistants. Suddenly, photographers working in the makeshift space yell at passers by to stop shaking the floor. Suddenly, pieces of grass come through the tiling; the windows reveal themselves as being made of plastic; the insulation does not exist. The tent becomes present. I am back stage. The seams are on show. The front (or inside, or outside, or whatever you would call the inside of the fair, which is really the façade of the temporary structure, no matter how 'inside' it physically is) remains an ever-sterile environment: trash does not exist; big (laborious) bags are left at the bag check. Only hand and tote bags are allowed. All tote bags, handed to press, handed to anybody needing to carry something, carry Frieze logos – Frieze London, Frieze Masters – on red, or complimentary green-esque bags. Oh, wait – green is for Sunday, another art fair, this weekend, this city. The green is off green. The red is bright red – London red – shining bright, claiming eyes. The bags shine bright over hundreds of undulating black and grey clothes. An occasional crisp white shirt breaks the surface as the crest of a wave cut fresh by gasps of wind. The streams of people, humming through the fair, become the ocean.

Thankfully, behind this shape-shifting façade, where the people are the landscape, the floor has an agenda, Art is a child and the artist a category, there are glimpse encounters of something recognizably human.

experience of the exhibition is eclipsing the  
 experience of the work. No concrete details  
 come back to mind, just colours and textures  
 and our movement through the exhibition room.  
 I filmed it secretly no problem. It was  
 dark to protect the ink. The last works seemed  
 out of place no longer the kind I had  
 gotten used to. (no more blue?) I remember  
 little figures, but why and how? It feels as  
 though I'm missing a detail

Between visiting booths and benches and bookstores,  
 the fair accommodates a conversation between a  
 gallerist and myself. He speaks passionately about the  
 artist he is representing. The artworks we are looking  
 at are by Maria Farrar – whose studio I visit the next  
 morning. A human, not a category; a peer, not a star;  
 a woman, not a female-artist. Suddenly we're back to  
 relatable doubts, to human twistings of structures to  
 build possibilities; to proposals and the will to make  
 things happen. We're backstage, and the grass is  
 growing through the temporary tiles, so to speak.

aesthetic artwork and conceptual artwork  
 and I very much enjoyed the colouring in  
 painting and the eagle museum sticks in  
 my head and the mussels, which I learnt  
 are some kind of icon for Belgium? or perhaps  
 even a specific part of Belgium where he is  
 from and there I enjoyed less for some  
 reason and I remember stencil esque  
 numbers and admin esque sheets of poetry

It's several months later, RijksAkademie OPEN and Amsterdam Art Weekend are long gone and Amsterdam is back to its usual rhythms. Exhibitions open and close at their own pace, new and old faces appear and reappear; old faces with new works can be seen. Which is exactly what happens to me at Galerie Fons Welters.

Galerie Fons Welters is a two-space gallery. The back is dedicated to Jennifer Tee, an artist I saw exhibited at CoBra Museum two years ago; the front is dedicated to Esteban Cabeza de Baca, which catches me completely off guard.

The bike ride there had been hurried and cold, my body not wanting to leave the apartment, my brain telling me all I had to do was bike, stay for fifteen minutes and go back home: a quick one-stop trip to see the opening and leave.

As I said, seeing the work of Cabeza de Baca caught me completely off guard. I peeled off my winter scarf and coat, entering the space in that horrible biking pace that contrasts so strongly with people standing, smoking and sipping wine. It's as if inertia hasn't quite yet steadied – energy still propelling limbs forwards into space faster than the other bodies in the crowd. And it was crowded. A small path was creatable by turning one's shoulders and gently plying other visitors away, but gaining a full view of a work? Only possible by practically hugging the wall; vision bent by obnoxious proximity. In any case, I recognized Cabeza de Baca's work at once, and, partly due to the lack of space, was soon up close studying its surface.

Upon recognizing the maker of the works, my mind began retracing its steps, refinding the words I had used

hiding behind corners, floor plans to spaces  
 in new york, a text I haven't read  
 yet, a fabric stretched just as the  
 one in that hotel in Queens town (NY)  
 last year (2016) the one that matched  
 the bedspread (did it?) the one I have  
 a photograph of. Quick, unexpected stop  
 making some of the difference? Spent  
 about 12 minutes there. or 13. ~~Cannot~~ sure

to describe my unease of the paintings several months earlier. I had described the texture, comparing it with two other, more textured works that at the time Cabeza de Baca's works reminded me of. I recalled how the connection to these works, which made me personally uneasy, had imbued a greater suspicion of Cabeza de Baca's work than perhaps would have been the case if they hadn't been on my mind. And now, standing in front of his works once more, I failed to see the connection. The sandy, gritty texture imprinted in my mind's eye was not present and sculptures, erased from my mind's memory stores, now reappeared. Doubt began creeping all over the opinions I formed (in that letter) some months earlier.

My head swims, swarms of people wash in and out of my vision, I pick up the press release, read it and leave. A slightly stronger orange hue is imprinted on my mind as I go home, the brightness and loudness and busyness of the gallery contrasting strongly with the cold, dark, early Amsterdam night. Within an hour of leaving, I'm opening my front door, greeting the works on my own walls and bringing water to a boil for a cup of tea.

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A few days later I'm back, minutes before a meeting and armed with a friend, going for a quick spin through the gallery space. Four minutes max. It's completely empty. Not even a gallery attendant in sight and I swing through the works with long, jaunty strides. My companion reminds me that yes, there were sculptures at the Rijksakademie installation and, sidling up close to a painting's surface, we note the absurdity of the texture. Not sandy, as I remembered, but eaten away, as if a splatter of paint had been applied, painted over and later removed, leaving a trace of its existence through negative space. I'm perplexed and encouraged to study

relatable to the occupants filmed in  
 the video - the store half found, half  
 installed, the video half-found, half  
 constructed? Playing with the line  
 between art + life in a very typical  
 or quiet way? just accepting it as a  
 state rather than drawing attention to it  
 as a statement? Using it as a quality,  
 (a style?) rather than as an action or  
 form.

the surface, drawn in further and further till my nose  
 and the canvas almost touch. Eyes suddenly rendered  
 useless, or satisfied with my observation, I spin on my  
 heel and continue my dance throughout the room -  
 ebbing further and closer to the edges of the works,  
 conducting long shots and pans across the room. And  
 then four minutes are up and I leave the building.

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My next encounter with the work is via documentation.  
 I reread the Galerie Fons Welters press release. I reread  
 the text from RijksAkademie OPEN. I look at the  
 images uploaded on Cabeza de Baca's website. His  
 paintings, now the size of a screen and hung one *below*  
 the other, feel even brighter due to the light of the  
 screen shining through their colourful surfaces. And  
 here, in the privacy of my home, I have time to observe.  
 I see small figurative details in corners I never noticed  
 and, aided by my empirical knowledge of the peeled off  
 layers, I see half submerged scenes starting to appear.  
 The images available span across a couple of years and  
 different approaches to his method and subject matter  
 can be seen. What is revealed more predominantly in  
 one image helps decode the next. Rather than flounder-  
 ing through expanses of textures, I feel as though I am  
 getting an overview. The images are smaller, more  
 mediated, more distant, but I am under the impression  
 that I am seeing more details.

I read articles, learn once again about his origins from  
 San Ysiro, a town on the US/Mexican border. I learn of  
 his intent to expropriate 'the formal language' of  
 American and European painting. I learn that the  
 erased splashes are indeed created through a masking  
 fluid which immediately projects me back to a classical  
 landscape painted by my tutor, Yulia Zapisetskaya,  
 a Russian painter from St. Petersburg. Her painting,

museum, and to just look at the art. I  
 became so absorbed I forgot I lied to  
 the cashier lady that I was writing  
 an article on the show (and the  
 museum). Its not often I get lost in a  
 show, as in time lost, and unbored.  
 Balloon room, marker pen series, car boot  
 +ridology, broccoli <sup>books</sup> wall, toilet paper  
 tower, cacti line. And all dryly named <sup>in</sup>

a realistic ink wash of a winter day, also made use of  
 masking fluid carefully applied to reserve blank paper  
 to represent snow in its final composition. Now,  
 confronted with splashed masking fluid haphazardly  
 excavating vast expanses of canvas, I see Cabeza de  
 Baca's statement of expropriation come to life: using  
 the tools of these cultures' visual language to give a  
 voice to his. His work physically starts a conversation  
 between cultures, between histories, by speaking his  
 story in another's material language.

The imagery feels violent, the application fierce, or  
 perhaps naïve, or perhaps both. Material thrown, not  
 applied. And yet the description of Cabeza de Baca is  
 that he is a calm, slow-spoken person.

The deeper my engagement with his work goes, the  
 more my image of his practice fills with paradoxes –  
 through my own memory and through multiple views of  
 his works on different platforms. I see sculptures I had  
 forgotten about seeing; see stronger colours than I  
 recalled. But I also re-see the softer abstraction that first  
 imbued my mind. And I realise: I had not imagined his  
 work into another form. Rather, I had reduced his  
 whole practice to a singular surface – a rough, light  
 orange square occupying a fragment of one painting  
 with an addled texture which had sprung me onto a  
 road of comparison perhaps completely astray of what  
 he himself had laid bare – the quick, surface-covering  
 mode of the Art-Run making my eyes sweep out any  
 nuanced reading of the work. I feel slightly ashamed,  
 and excited to go re-see his work this Saturday.



praise, but not in critique. No stand point, just pointing at everything - mainly eating / food patterns and a tiny bit of artist practice / routine, what was the source material? found interviews on the internet? Interviews of the performers? Interviews with certain celebrities? The strangest part was when the cast celebrated at the end, as if stepping out of a character they could not step out of - self-celebrators.

I'm confused.

While Marcel Duchamp outlined making art as the act of choosing, he also stated that for a work of art to exist it required 4 conditions: '1) an object, 2) an author, 3) a public, and 4) an institutional place ready to record this object, to attribute an author to it, and to communicate it to the public.'<sup>29</sup> This is not necessarily the confusing part.

Reception aesthetics outlines the interaction between a spectator and an artwork as an aesthetic object, automatically outlining the spectator in that 'object' as the author (the human co-author to be precise). A public, the audience, is not hard to find when the artist, the author, 'is also the first spectator to the work' (see n. 14). But if this text is outlining a practice of spectatorship resulting in an oeuvre of aesthetic objects, synonymous to artworks, then how to locate an institute that will attribute the author to the object and to communicate it to the public? A now-dead definition of institute is 'purpose', which gives an angle that could neatly tie the conditions of (now-dead) Duchamp into the legitimation needed, which would then subsequently apply the institution of art history to become the true legitimiser. But it feels a bit cheap. Another word game in a game already so metaphysical and reliant on words. And isn't that definition of 'institute' already deemed dead?<sup>30</sup> And is it really the most intelligent solution to use the words of our 'ancestors' to certify our definitions? Art's expansive use of the word 'spectator' has already allowed me to use it in anyway deemed necessary and on this basis I've called a relationship an object; a book cover an artwork; reading an act of looking. I've paired the poetics of language with the tone of critical theory. Is it really necessary to jump through one more linguistic loophole

29 de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*, p.391

30 The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology ed. T. F. Hoad (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) p.238

though also probably not as exciting as if I would have seen it two - four years earlier. The earlier paintings excited me very much and so did the drawings, was it because I already knew them fairly well? And so full of energy and carelessness/recklessness, so big just for studio space - edges unpainted for cuts and corners

on an if-this-is-that-then-that-must-be-this basis? I am merely playing a language-based game of isomorphism.

If the industrial revolution brought into art a new division of labour then perhaps the context of this text is asking for a reconsideration of relationships and roles. This text was initially written under the title 'spectator as artist' and structured around anything referring to the word 'spectator' – looking for the loopholes in the term that these resources might hold. This led me to run a reading group around *The Society of the Spectacle*, not because I had anything to share, but rather that I did not want to tackle the book alone. Another detail that activated this research was my terrible memory which, while not necessarily relevant to this text, spurred on the activation of my spectatorship: in the hope to remember better, I started taking notes of every single exhibition, book and film I watched, read or saw since May 2017. This led to a fair magnitude of memory cards that are an absolute incoherent mess of subjective reflections, with no research structure applied.

And here we are, back at the *dérive* and the psychogeographical reports of the Situationist International. If Thierry de Duve picked an anchor point from which he centred a web of research and ideas, Brian O'Doherty employed an ever-expanding frame to centre his path and Michel Foucault used the author as a form of category to arrange his thoughts, then I have been drifting through the 'constant currents, fixed points and vortexes' of art, allowing them to 'strongly discourage entry or exit from certain zones'.<sup>51</sup> And as I have been drifting through, I have been creating an imaginary collection of art while, as said by de Duve, 'acknowledging the helter-skelter order in which they entered [...]'. "Is this legitimate?" you would ask yourself. "Am I not supposed to come up with a model,

31 Guy Debord, "Theory of the Derive" in *International Situationiste* #2:1958, trans. Ken Knabb, p.1



cm). They were low enough to when scanning for them from the bike, to start picking up on other things with accidental attention: patches of gravel, access lids to (assumed) electrical/water lines). The tour stimulated talk on trash, Paris, architecture, NL's importation of trash! (the most expensive building in ans), oil reservoirs for stabilizing markets, ash vs. asphalt, iPhone image vs. video.

something that could stand for art at large and be objectively valid, or at least historically relevant?"<sup>32</sup>

I would indeed. And then I remember the proposition I offered earlier that it was the action of reflection that these reports generated that offers them lasting importance, rather than the content generated within the reports themselves. And a small weight lifts off my shoulders. Suddenly, my mind is projected to a film by William Kentridge I saw yesterday in which, through his use of sketched stop-motion, ultra sounds morph into star-maps morph into car windows and rear-view mirrors. The poetry of his transitions quickens my imagination; my mind begins projecting mental imagery between myself and the work. My eyes still physically observe the film and yet a lens of thickening images starts to interfere. My attention disperses. Absorbed into the authenticating body of the work, my mind relaxes, spinning present and past resources into ideas. My questions of 'why' are pushed out by questions of 'how' which project my mind into entire new spheres. William Kentridge's intention disappears. The film ends, the room goes blank. I thank the William Kentridge film and I leave.

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## Exhibitions

- Art Fair, *ARCO* (Madrid, 2018)
- Art Fair, *Art Rotterdam* (Rotterdam, 2018)
- Art Fair, *Frieze* (London, 2017)
- Art Fair, *Frieze Masters* (London, 2017)
- Art Fair, *Sunday* (London, 2017)
- Art Fair, *Supersimetrica* (Madrid, 2018)
- Art Fair, *TEFAF* (Maastricht, 2018)
- Marten Baas, “Hide & Seek” at *Groninger Museum* (Groningen, 2017)
- Anna Banana, at *Kunstverein* (Amsterdam, 2018)
- Tjebbe Beekman, “Wait, Hold That Thought!” at *Stigter van Doesburg* (Amsterdam, 2017)
- Otto Berchem, “Dive for Dreams” at *Ellen de Bruijne Projects* (Amsterdam, 2017)
- David Bestué, “Rosi Amor” at *Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia* (Madrid, 2018)
- Ross Birrel, “A Beautiful Thing” at *Ellen de Bruijne Projects* (Amsterdam, 2017)
- Juliette Blightman, “Loved an Image”, at *Galerie Fons Welters* (Amsterdam, 2017)
- Marcel Broodthaers, “Un Jardin d’Hiver at *Hauser & Wirth* (London, 2017)
- Marcel Broodthaers, “Eine Retrospektive” at *K21* (Düsseldorf, 2017)
- Stanley Brouwn, “This Way Brouwn” at *Eenwerk* (Amsterdam, 2018)
- Carlos Bunga, “Intuición” at *Galeria Elba Benítez* (Madrid, 2018)
- Esteban Cabeza de Baca, “Unlearn”, at *Galerie Fons Welters*, (Amsterdam, 2017)
- Anne-Lise Coste, “La conquete de l’espace, la chute des feuilles, les neiges éternelles, l’avancée des deserts, la puce électronique.”, at *Ellen de Bruijne Projects* (Amsterdam, 2017)
- Martin Creed, “say CHEESE!” at *Museum Voorlinden* (Wassenaar, 2017)

Diego Delas, "The Sky and Golden Siesta Sun" at *F2 Galeria* (Madrid, 2018)

Rineke Dijkstra, "An Ode" at *Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 2017)

Jan Dubuffet, "The Deep End", at *Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 2017)

Marcel Dzama, "It's Time" at *Galeria Helga de Alvear* (Madrid, 2018)

Ibrahim El-Salahi, "Three Crossings", at *Prins Claus Fund Gallery* (Amsterdam, 2017)

Jeronimo Elespe at *Maisterravalbuena* (Madrid, 2018)

Olafur Eliasson, "A view of things to come" at *Galeria Elvira González* (Madrid, 2018)

Ed van der Elsken, "Camera in Love" at *Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 2017)

Alexandre Estrela, "Knife in the Water" at *Travesía Cuatro* (Madrid, 2018)

Esther Ferrer, "All Variations are Valid, Including this One" at *Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía* (Madrid, 2018)

Günther Förg at *Galeria Heinrich Ehrhardt* (Madrid, 2018)

Fortuny at *Museo Del Prado* (Madrid, 2018)

Pauline Curnier Jardin, at *Ellen de Bruijne Projects*, (Amsterdam, 2017)

Johan Jensen, "Brick wall, brick wall in the mall, who's the prettiest of them all", at *Galerie Juliette Jongma*, (Amsterdam, 2017)

Sandra Gamarra, "Indian Red" at *Galeria Juanna de Aizpuru* (Madrid, 2018)

Giacometti, *Tate Modern* (London, 2017)

Graduation Show, *Artez* (Arnhem, 2017)

Graduation Show, *AKI ArtEZ* (Enschede, 2017)

Graduation Show, *Artez* (Zwolle, 2017)

Graduation Show, *Gerrit Rietveld Academie* (Amsterdam, 2017)

Graduation Show, *KaBK* (The Hague, 2017)

Graduation Show, *MaFAD* (Maastricht, 2017)

Graduation Show, *MaHKU* (Utrecht, 2017)

Graduation Show, *Minerva* (Groningen, 2017)

Graduation Show, *Piet Zwaart* (Rotterdam, 2017)

Graduation Show, *Sandberg Institute* (Amsterdam, 2017)

Graduation Show, Willem de Kooning (Rotterdam, 2017)

Group Show, "On the Nature of Things" at *Annet Gelink Gallery* (Amsterdam, 2017)

Group Show, "Beating around the bush Episode #5" at *Bonnefanten Museum* (Maastricht)

Group Show, "Making Money For My Friends" at *Bonnefanten Museum* (Maastricht, 2018)

Group Show, *Documenta 14* (Kassel, 2017)

Group Show, "Bearable Lightness of Being", at *Grimm Gallery*, (Amsterdam, 2017)

Group Show, "Elias and the Fine Arts Department" at *Gerrit Rietveld Academie* (Amsterdam, 2017)

Group Show, "The Merry-go-round", at *Galerie Juliette Jongma*, (Amsterdam, 2018)

Group Show, "Open Day" at *Gerrit Rietveld Academie* (Amsterdam 2018)

Group Show, "Community Board" at *Grimm Gallery*, (Amsterdam, 2017)

Group Show, "Open Studios" at *Jan Van Eyck Academie*, (Maastricht, 2018)

Group Show, "Open Day" at *Kunstakademie Düsseldorf* (Düsseldorf, 2018)

Group Show, "Thank you, gracias" at *Noguerasblanchard* (Madrid, 2018)

Group Show, "Bild Des Tages" at *Plat-*, (Amsterdam, 2017)

Group Show, at *The Photographer's Gallery* (London, 2017)

Group Show, "RijksAkademie OPEN", at *RijksAkademie* (Amsterdam, 2017)

Group Show, "Sketched and Staged" at *Room 2.07* (Amsterdam, 2017)

Group Show, "Zhongguo 2185" at *Sadie Coles*,

- (London, 2017)
- Group Show, *Skulptur Projekte Münster* (Münster, 2017)
- Group Show, “Jump into the Future”, at *Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 2018)
- Group Show, “Lockers v2” at *Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 2017)
- Group Show, “Uncut”, at *Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 2017)
- Group Show, “The Making of Modern Art” at *Van Abbe Museum* (Eindhoven, 2017)
- Group Show, “The Way Beyond Art” at *Van Abbe Museum* (Eindhoven, 2017)
- Group Show, *Venice Biennale* (Venice, 2017)
- Philip Guston, “Laughter in the Dark, Drawings from 1971 & 1975” at *Hauser & Wirth* (London, 2017)
- Wade Guyton, “Das New Yorker, Abridged” at *Serpentine Galleries* (London, 2017)
- Duncan Hannah, “Paintings from Collages” at *Ornis A. Gallery* (Amsterdam, 2018)
- Carmen Herrera, “Lines of Sight” at K20 (Düsseldorf, 2018)
- Gregor Hildebrandt, “Mit den Wünschen die Ziet” at *Casado Santapau* (Madrid, 2018)
- Damien Hirst, “Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable” at *Pallazo Grassi* (Venice, 2017)
- David Hockney, at *Tate Britain* (London, 2017)
- Hokusai, “Beyond the Great Wave” at *The British Museum* (London, 2017)
- Adam Jeppesen, “Out of Camp” at *FOAM* (Amsterdam, 2017)
- William Kentridge, “Enough and More Than Enough” at *Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia* (Madrid, 2018)
- Kunsthalle for Music at *Witte de With* (Rotterdam, 2018)
- Edward Krasinski, at *Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 2017)
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- Yayoi Kusama, “The Obliteration Room” at *Auckland Art Gallery* (Auckland, 2018)
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- Mathijs Maris, at *Rijksmuseum* (Amsterdam, 2017)
- Annette Messenger, “Avec et Sans Raisons” at *Marion Goodman Gallery* (London, 2017)
- Jay Miriam, “Fantasies in a Waking State” at *Ornis A. Gallery* (Amsterdam, 2018)
- Vincente Mollestad, “Green Infernos” at *Ellen de Bruijne Projects*, (Amsterdam, 2017)
- Bridget Mullen, “Forgettable Sunsets” at *Annet Gelink Gallery* (Amsterdam, 2018)
- Saskia Noor van Imhoff, “#+28.001” at *Galerie Fons Welters* (Amsterdam, 2017)
- Damián Ortega, “Play Time” at *White Cube* (London, 2017)
- Gordan Parks, “I am You...” at *FOAM* (Amsterdam, 2017)
- Permanent Collection, at *Auckland Art Gallery* (Auckland, 2018)
- Permanent Collection, at *Bonnefanten Museum* (Maastricht, 2017)
- Permanent Collection, at *Centre Pompidou* (Paris, 2017)
- Permanent Collection, at *Groninger Museum* (Groningen, 2017)
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- Raymond Pettibon, “A Pen of All Work” at *Bonnefanten Museum* (Maastricht, 2017)
- Pablo Picasso, “Minatours and Matadors” at *Gagosian*, (London, 2017)
- Pablo Picasso, “Olga Picasso” at *Museo Picasso* (Paris, 2017)
- Sarah Pichlkostner, “Kuy “I wanna know what will happen tomorrow?” Kay, was still walking”, at *Annet Gelink Gallery* (Amsterdam, 2018)
- Seth Price, “Social Synthetic” at *Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 2017)
- Robin de Puy, “Randy” at *Bonnefanten Museum* (Maastricht, 2018)
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- Daniel Richter, “Music for Orgies” at *Grimm Gallery*, (Amsterdam, 2017)
- Ella Rietma. Snoep, “Ode to the Four Seasons” at *Annet Gelink Gallery* (Amsterdam, 2017)
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- Betty Ringma and Marc H. Miller, “Amsterdam Polaroids, at *Stigter van Doesburg* (Amsterdam, 2018)
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- Doris Salcedo, “Palimpsesto” at *Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia* (Madrid, 2018)
- Jasper Spicero, “Living Waterway” at *New Gallery* (Paris, 2017)
- Jennifer Tee, “Let It Come Down” at *Galerie Fons Welters*, (Amsterdam, 2018)
- Evelyn Taocheng Wang, “Four Season of Women Tragedy” at *Galerie Fons Welters*, (Amsterdam, 2017)
- Wolfgang Tillmans, “2017” at *Tate Modern* (London, 2017)
- Nora Turato, “Opening Night”, at *Galerie Juliette Jongma*, (Amsterdam, 2017)
- Daniel van Straalen, “(Slow Heavy Metal Music Playing)”, at *Stigter van Doesburg* (Amsterdam, 2017)
- Alain Urrutia, “Mise en Abyme” at *Plat-*, (Amsterdam, 2018)
- Juan Uslé, “De Desvelos” at *Galeria Moises Perez de Albeniz* (Madrid, 2018)
- José Val del Omar at *Max Estrella* (Madrid, 2018)
- Willem Weissmann, “Flashback cont’d”, at *Grimm Gallery*, (Amsterdam, 2017)
- Rachel Whiteread, at *Tate Britain* (London, 2017)
- Jordan Wolfson, “Riverboat Song” at *Sadie Coles*, (London, 2017)
- Jordan Wolfson, “Manic/Love/Truth/Love at *Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 2017)
- Cerith Wyn Evans, at *White Cube* (London, 2017)
- Xu Zhen, “XUZHEN Supermarket” at *Sadie Coles*, (London, 2017)

## Colophon

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