

TERRA NOVA

DARIUS MYKŠIS IN CONVERSATION WITH FRANK KOOLEN

Anybody invited to realize a project in 1646 is asked to engage in conversation with a previously unknown correspondent.

This conversation takes place via e-mail and stretches through the whole period during which the artists develop their initial idea into final results. 1646 invites the correspondent at the other end of this contact to figure his/her way through this actual process.

In trying to picture what result the artists' work is going to, such exchange can become a reflection on the amount of otherwise untraceable choices of the moment which make up to the artists' practice.

This issue is part of the exhibition by Frank Koolen *Terra Nova*, December 17 2011 till January 22 2011 in 1646.

This artist
Frank Koolen

This correspondent
Darius Mykšis

Concept and design
Nico Feragnoli

1646.

Boekhorststraat 125, 2512 cn, The Hague
The Netherlands

<http://1646.nl> - info@1646.nl

16 NOVEMBER: Darius Mykšis [DM] to Frank Koolen [FK]

Hi Frank, sorry for the late response, I'm away for some time, but I can start and continue from my phone, I just need to apologize for some typos if they occur. I'll be quick and fast from now on.

The questions:

1. Do you use specific (if any) concept or technology for generating the content of your exhibition? Meaning the fact, that since not all artist practices are directly linked with artistic production, the existing void between the artist's mind and the exhibition space could be filled with some kind of automated process which, by using some algorithm, could extract artist's knowledge shaping it into the art exhibition form. For instance, our conversation could be such algorithm.

17 NOVEMBER: FK - DM

Dear Darius,

Great to hear from you!

Thanks a lot for your reply and first question.

Hereby my answer:

The only technology which really has an effect on my work and also this exhibition is the technology of the home-made. Seemingly an anti-technology but not meant as such. It's a technology of inventiveness. The only rule is to make something work, to stop something, to keep something open, to hold something together. It's a technology without much attention for appearances. It looks some way because it turned out that way. Of course I sometimes make use of professional machines to do things I cannot do. Still, even then, they just have to do basic homely things. They bend, cut, saw or drill. I want to be part of what is happening in my work, I guess.

I think the idea of the automated process or algorithm is very interesting however, because it could free you from all doubts and hassle you have while mentally and physically constructing a work or show. It would free you from your will. So you would be free of your freedom. Freedom which makes art so difficult in the first place. Good for your health, but I think I need doubt and hassle to come to new ideas and insights. I'm afraid Doubt and Hassle are my best friends. Creating an automated process would upset them badly.

Did I tell you my show is entitled Terra Nova?

Started with some vague idea about travelling, expeditions, discovery, but at one point in this associative mist, you crossed my mind. We only met shortly but, for some reason, I think you can travel parallel worlds. Can you tell me something about this? If not, just ask me another question.

Yours, Frank

18 NOVEMBER: DM - FK

I'd better switch to another question, otherwise I would need to tell about coffee which I like when it's bad. The questions will spin around my personality mostly, since we barely know each other as you have mentioned. When the answers will create something visible of you, I will know something more about myself too!

The second question will be the following:

2. Have you ever experienced your parents forcing you to become an artist?

FK - DM

You're completely right. This conversation is too young to sink into personal quicksand just yet (although I'm curious about this coffee...).

My second answer:

I think it's not impossible. My parents have always been complimenting me on my drawings although I know for sure they weren't that good. I always copied comic book figures on semi see-through paper (an absolute corrupt method) and presented them as my own. They must have known this but never mentioned it, on the contrary, they loved them. When telling stories about my childhood I'm always the one drawing peacefully in corners. Not true in my memory. I was always outside playing football or reading comics. Pure falsification of history. So yes, my parents could have easily constructed a well-planned web to trap me into their art fantasy. A very soft force nevertheless.

Looking forward to your next question.

20 NOVEMBER: DM - FK

3. Would you agree that with time, people eventually become artists? Assume that all

people have become immortal - sooner or later they all turn themselves into artists. And if you are a young artist, wouldn't it mean that you are older than your peers?

22 NOVEMBER: FK - DM

You can say the more time you're into art making, the better you know what you want. Still does this make your art better? Are you then a better artist?

Of course, you are more experienced. You made more decisions. Your work becomes more focused. More specific. More personal. You accept easier that the things you do are the things you do. Less questions, more peace. A generalisation, but true in many cases.

But does this make the work of for example the old Sigmar Polke better than the work of Polke the younger? Aren't the first direct, stupid, irresponsible actions of the young artist not the most interesting? Before everything is cosmetically polished, overly theorized and related to some? Before it becomes a job. So, to come back to you question: Yes, you're older, but if you mean wiser and a better artist, I don't know. Who is the oldest and wisest (dead?) Artist you know?

12 DECEMBER: DM - FK

4. I think with coffee you can say there is good coffee and bad coffee. You hear people say this a lot : "that's really good coffee, he makes a great cup of coffee" or " this coffee is mud water, it's bloody awful". Or "hey, are you trying to kill me with this coffee or what?" Whatever the quality it is still both coffee, right? Good or bad.

Now with art I don't know, some things are at a given time more art than others based on their market value, within that specific system they are then considered through their value as commodities to be good art. It is good inside a context, for a purpose but a limited way of appreciation - it tends to spill over ultimately though into general appreciation.

Besides this art as a good investment, as a commodity within a canon etc., I suppose what I want to ask you really is this: Is there such a thing as bad art (and good art)?

Or is it then, perhaps, no longer art but just an attempt to formulate something that will be recognized as art - or that will say by itself I am art. And can we sidestep any socio-economical framework to get to the heart of it anyway?

In my mind there is Art and not Art (or everything is art if you zoom in or out). Saying something is bad art doesn't feel right - the only thing to say that would make sense then would be that it's just Bad and not Bad art.

I am sorry it is maybe getting to loose to expect a tight response. I will go make myself a cup of coffee now. (an old trick with writing to end with the beginning to make it seem coherent).

13 DECEMBER: FK - DM

Thanks for your question, great to hear from you again.

Was afraid you got lost somewhere...

I think you're absolutely right stating bad art doesn't exist. When hit by a stray bullet you cannot blame the bullet. You cannot blame the gun. You cannot blame the one who made the gun nor the bullet.

The only one to blame is the one who shot it. Even if he was hired or pressed to do it, even then he's the only one responsible for you getting hit.

Bad art doesn't exist, bad artists do. I pity bad artists because they can't see that what they're doing reflects them as bad artists. I feel a deep contempt for people (when sane and adult) who can't place themselves above themselves to grasp an objective view on what they do and what they are. Bad artists can't do this otherwise they would do something different.

Something else.

I know you're not really into answering questions, but I wanted to try it one last time because I thought this was applicable.

The exhibition is now getting more focused and for some reason this idea of time travelling has become even more apparent.

As somebody told me you're known in Vilnius for 'probably making a dog disappear during an opening'.

Can you tell me: Where is this dog now?

14 DECEMBER: DM - FK

5. Art exists of its own time to begin with, but in retrospect, in hindsight, to say the least most art has very short legs and looks old and out of breath quickly. It was only relevant for a short time because everyone was too excited to play along with it thinking they were part of the game themselves, a reflection of themselves as open minded, cultured, relevant people who somehow "got it".

Do you believe in the Universal - is there such a thing as expressing the Universal? Can it be gotten at?

FK - DM

Thanks for your quick reply!

I do think something like the Universal exists. There's no formula to get to it except for trying things out. If lucky there will be a few moments you can look it in its one eyed face. The universal is the absolute. It's the moment everything is clear. Which ranking you have on the ATP tennis list if everybody would be on it (even if you have never played tennis), when was the moment you were closest to death, who you would be with if not kissed your girlfriend that night, how the earth would have looked like if the dinosaurs weren't extinguished, a man shouting on another planet, the moment most cars were stolen in the southern hemisphere (at the same time!). In this case it's the same as in you last question. It's not only found in art but in everything. Art is just a very interesting place to look for it.

15 DECEMBER: DM - FK

Yes hello Frank.

My last question is not one direct question. I might be mumbling a bit.

I have been travelling so much on dirt road buses my mind is shaking.

Do you think artists are all too happy to join the big capitalist career machine these days, and their artist aspirations have become petty and bourgeois?

Is art still about questioning systems, has this questioning or critique merely transformed into a careerist platform where artist and curators seek each other out in a feigned attempt to be for something other than themselves?

Does everybody just want a way IN, is that all the (art)world has come to mean?

And, would you go on making art if no one would be interested in your work - what sacrifice would you make if you have to choose between say, figuratively, bread and paint?

Do you think it is equally possible to do something real and radical as a businessman for instance?

I sometimes wish to change or expand my practice but I admit to be also complacent. Having an idea just to be an artist, playing that part, is pretty constrictive, no?

Good luck with your exhibition.

16 DECEMBER: FK - DM

Dear Darius,

Thanks for your honest and open questions.

I really admire the way you are willing to question the mere fundament of what you are and what you're doing.

Still, choosing between bread and paint I would choose bread.

Art is not worth dying for. Art is a way of showing you're alive.

It's a symbol for the choice finding out what is living about anyway.

What is associating, what is choosing, what is creating, what is this moment where everything is redefined next to or entangled with everyday life.

It is constrictive, cause it partly is played by it's own rules, but it's the most free world of all possible choices.

It's corrupt, it's used, it's bad, it's horrible but compared to other possibilities, it's a next level.

Many thanks for your input and all best,

Frank

Title of the works in Terra Nova:

Frontspace middle - The Raft

Middle space right - The Cave

Middle space left - The Tunnel

Backspace - Portal Room

All made specially for this installation
