

Bik Van der Pol, “accumulate, collect, show” (2011 – 2013)

[accumulate, collect, show] is a full size live-scoreboard, that was on display at the FriezeArt Fair in 2011 as part of the Frieze Special Projects. It is an open framework with modular text-elements that can be changed and replaced, and that performs as a generator of constant activity.

It is animated live by assistants who constantly change the text to spell out a number of abstract idioms, quotes and maxims, presenting a narrative to visitors of the fair. Emphasizing on the temporary visibility of a continuous flow of language -as a form of capital so much part of any economy – the work reflects on the value of ‘buzz’ and the ‘unfolding’ of language, as a perhaps futile fluidity that connects action and change.

The work makes reverence to Cedric Price's Aviary designed for the London Zoo. This structure, as the architect envisioned, would be ‘handled’ by its inhabitants. Flexible and impermanent, just like the Frieze art fair with its temporary tent structure for the art community gathering annually, the aviary was designed for a community of birds.

The temporal and provisional aspect is important, but also the visual aspect is. The colors of the boards are inspired by Mondrian's last and unfinished painting Victory Boogie Woogie; a work that reflects the rhythm of jazz and frantic and ongoing city movements. This living billboard is a sketch board, a test site; continuously changing, sometimes to the point, sometimes off the point, and always entertaining.

Bik Van der Pol is a duo of Dutch artists based in Rotterdam who have worked collectively across art and architecture since 1995. Recent solo shows and projects include: The ENEL Award, MACRO, Rome; ‘Learning from Vancouver’, The Western Front, Vancouver (both 2010); and ‘It isn’t what it used to be and will never be again’, Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow (2009). Recent curatorial projects include: ‘Too late, too little, (and how) to fail gracefully’, Kunstfort Asperen, Acqouy (2011); and ‘Plug In’, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (2009). Recent group shows include ‘We Are Grammar’, Pratt Institute, New York; ‘CLAP’, Hessel Museum of Art, CCS Bard College, New York (both 2011); ‘Portscapes’, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam (2010); and ‘For Reasons of State’, The Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Program, New York (2008).

Interview MutualArt

MutualArt had the pleasure of interviewing one of the artists presenting at this year’s Special Projects: Dutch artist duo Bik Van der Pol. Comprised of compatriots Jos and Liesbeth, the Rotterdam-based collaborators have worked together since 1995, creating a multitude of pieces that often fuse installation work and architecture. For this year’s Frieze, they will be making a ‘scoreboard’ of sorts, creating a narrative animated by live participants who will continuously reform text to spell out a variety of abstract messages to the audience. “The texts will be sometimes humorous, sometimes very well known, sometimes total non-sense, and sometimes deep and thoroughly wise,” the duo said cryptically. Check out our interview with this unique pair of collaborators, ahead of Thursday’s Frieze opening:

MutualArt: How did this project come about? What is the idea or the inspiration behind it?

Bik Van der Pol: We wanted to make something that is continuously changing and flexible and that is somehow reflecting the art fair itself as a flexible format, as well as reflecting on the economic, intellectual and passionate activities going on there. We were also thinking a lot of the aviary of Cedric Price. The temporary tent structure of the Fair in Regents Park is a little like the aviary he built in the nearby zoo: flexible and impermanent. Just like the Frieze art fair designed the tent structure for the art community that is gathering annually, the aviary was designed for a community of birds. Price's idea was that when the community was established, it would be possible for them to remove the netting, which was just temporarily, only needed just as long as the birds would start to feel at home. An extra skin around the Fair would however be problematic.

Then we saw an image of a live score-board, the one they use at cricket matches, and decided to use this as a starting point, since it is a temporary construction accommodating continuous change, is performative, and would be able to be a platform for reflection, and function as some sort of advert, some sort of billboard. The temporal provisional aspect is important, but also the visual aspect is. Thinking about time and movement, Mondrian's last painting Victory Boogie Woogie came in mind as a work that reflects the rhythm of jazz and frantic city movements, and we decided to incorporate this in our living billboard. Would [Mondrian] have lived longer, he might have ended up with a score-board, we imagined, taking also in consideration his studio environment and his definite affinities with architecture and urban life. We see this living billboard as a sketch board, a test site; continuously changing, sometimes to the point, sometimes off the point, and always entertaining.

The Artist's most recent work: As Above, So Below, by Bik Van der Pol, (2011) for Living As Form, organized by Creative Time; September 24-October 16, 2011, displayed in New York City (Essex and Delancey Streets)

MA: How is this similar or different to your other site installation and performance works?

BVP: We think this one is just bigger than many of our other works. We have reflected on advertising and billboards before, for example in our work Absolut Stockholm, where we took the Absolut billboard ad, furnished by IKEA, into the museum space as a 'vehicle' to open up the discussion on the importance of public space for the development of democratic space. Or the floating dock we built in a lake and recreational area, for the Lyon Biennale. This work hinted towards Paris '68 and the Lumiere brothers, who, as one of the early inventors of film, were also the first ones to not only record daily life, but also tourism on celluloid. Often we create discussion pieces, as we like to call them - discursive platforms that open up spaces (physical spaces, spaces of knowledge), and invite the audience to enter that space and engage with what it is offering, be it sleeping with a film, reading and buying books, doing walks in far-out urban developments, performing for a film, diving in the water, or hanging out in a kitchen...[Right now] we are working towards a big long-term project in one of the biggest mining cities in the world, in Canada, where we will develop a project dealing with the blackened (due to pollution) rocks, the impact of human activities on nature, and the impact of nature itself on life. We are also

developing a project in the Netherlands in the Bijlmer, a 70-s newt-town and part of Amsterdam, on the issue of 'revolution'.

MA: You've used people in some of your other works as well. What's it like using a "live" medium?

BVP: We feel we never 'use' people in our work. We mildly lure people into our work, which hopefully engages them to relate to the content, at some point in time. We always inform them, thoroughly. We give them something; they take something. That to us is more a reciprocity or exchange than a use, unless the economy of exchange is: using people - which also sometimes seems to be the case in daily life. We have worked with other live medium as well: birds, butterflies. The only way you can do that is doing it very precisely and very caringly. So in those cases we have worked with entomologists, bird-specialists and breeders, and people who informed the audience; and we make sure that the environment we build for them is generous, exactly the right climate, and that they are taken care of very well. However, despite all precautions, you do sometimes meet a lot of aggression, because people sometimes think you will abuse the birds or butterflies. (*See video, below) [And] there are always challenges and limits; space-wise, budget-wise, or in other ways. The public is an issue, perhaps more particular here than in other cases, though when you have been invited to think through a site-specific or site-sensitive project, or when you work on a project that is reflecting on urban developments, public is always a factor.

MA: After watching and participating in your piece, what message do you want fairgoers to walk away with?

BVP: We hope the audience will see the work, that they will think about time, about labour, about pace, about human activities, including those at the fair and including their own activities. And we hope they will smile, not only once in awhile, but often! (*Check out the video from Bik Vand der Pol's 'Butterfly Pavilion' - "Are you really sure that a floor can't also be a ceiling?" at the Macro Museum in Rome).