

# EN DAT OOK

## KIANOOSH MOTALLEBI IN CONVERSATION WITH BRAM DE JONGHE

MAY 3, Kianoosh Motallebi [KM] to Bram de Jonghe [BdJ]:

Hey Bram!

Good to be in touch. Let's kick this off. Nico said it is not necessary and 'preferable' I am not familiar with your practice. I can see where he wants to go with that. An open mind never hurts. Unfortunately I am not a complete novice when it comes to your work. I've seen it on two separate occasions, once at Stroom and once at PAKT and the experience certainly did not leave me empty. Oh and I also saw you on TV once...

That said, I appreciate Nico's sentiments and will try and not refer back to what I already know of your work. I will also not google you.

So let's start with a classic: How are things going?

MAY 10, KM - BdJ:

Hi Bram

For the sake of freshness I still have not done any googling, nothing to prime these emails with. I did however have a brief encounter with Klaas Kloosterboer in Antwerp who mentioned you. I did not realise you were colleagues at the KABK. He is in a two person show with Frank Koolen. I was surprised to see Koolen's 'sculpted' objects, I only knew him as a ready-made style artist. The combo with Klaas' process orientated paintings exploring doubt and modes of art making made sense. Did you go to KABK? Talking shows: I am on my way back from the Stedelijk, Seth Price. It was my first successful visit after two failed attempts. I wanted to see the Jordan Wolfson show; I went to see specific pieces (like many) but *Coloured Sculpture* was being fixed during my first visit, then I just got dates wrong and missed *Female Figure*. Some say it's better I don't see those pieces, ever.

In any case, today's Stedelijk visit was accompanied by a sense of accomplishment/relief. That, together with finally using my Museum Year Card this year, might have tinted my vision pink and fuzzy but I thought the show was great, and the more time passes by, the more I like it. Have you been yet?

BdJ - KM

Dear Kianoosh, I'm sorry for my late response! I'm in the middle of the start of the intervention. Like for the preparation of a canvas, I intended to start with the adaptation of the space at 1646. In the weekend I will be a little further than now. I will send you a mail then.

MAY 11, KM - BdJ:

No worries ... good luck!!!

Sent from my iPhone

# 1646.

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MAY 14, BdJ - KM:

Dear Kianoosh,

Thank you for the email. As you might now, Femmy gave birth to Emma, our daughter is already six months now. Although we became parents we both have had busy times, both Femmy and I had solo exhibitions but that went perfect. So I haven't seen Seth Price or any exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum this year! ahi ahi ahi

But I know the work. Nice guys, Klaas Kloosterboer and Frank Koolen. Indeed Klaas is my colleague in Sculpture at the KABK although we don't teach together on the same day but in the same department. I met Frank during the green light (assessments) last year and we could find each other very well, he has sent us a book with his work and, indeed, I also know his more 'ready-made' kind of works. About the exhibition, I had some technical problems with the installation of a funicular or cable-way to transport a burning candle through the walls of the high space of 1646. Friday I finished it and it worked perfect yet it was raining inside ... The day after the whole roof was leaking water. I thought it was rain but it seems that I drilled through a water pipe in the ceiling?!!! So ... big problems... The whole gallery was wet and I was all alone because the crew of 1646 was in Venice. So in one hand a bucket, in my other a telephone trying to reach somebody for help. Everything is under control now but the space has to dry now and the ceiling has to be painted, the walls too ...

I started installing two walls with white heat-shrink plastic film and the idea is to cover the whole floor with the same white plastic, attached to the wall (approx. 60cm) high with metal-folded braces. The reason why I wanted the floor covered was that the front space has a wooden floor and the back space a concrete floor. Also the entrance space is a transit space with lots of disturbing elements, like the staircase. The works I will install today are tar works I made for this show. Two big lumps of tar melted onto an iron brace with folded corners. I became so intrigued by tar that it had to be part of this exhibition. So the shrink-plastic shrinks when exposed to heat (opposite to normal materials), tar stays liquid and fluid, ever-changing sculptures and folded and bent pieces of metal. The movement of light and light source, real-time and narrated time transmuted into viewing, the denting of metal studs, expansion joints, white shrink-wrap plastic, a spray booth, tar sculptures that use the space like a shoe, the release. These auto-referential building blocks will again be the vehicle for daily concerns.

I hope we can start from here

The text in the attachment is a first draft from when I was still working on my solo exhibition in Belgium. It is in Dutch so I don't know if you can understand it. It might help to understand the context of working.

[attached]

*Eerste aanzet*

*UNTITLED EXHIBITION; VERTELTJID (TIJD OM VOOR TE LEZEN)  
/ VERTELDE TIJD TIJDSVERLOOP IN TEKST) VERTRAGING OF  
UITBREIDING (DU. DEHNUNG, ENG. STRETCH) 1646*

*In this show I want to follow an aesthetic trajectory that releases the tension the formal and practical.*

*During the installation of the exhibition I will engage in an accumulative series actions by subjecting myself to conditions in the form of practical interventions. These conditions will provide me with both peace of mind and will redefine the way I present the work to an audience. I hope the counteractions of the setting will invite an alternative viewing or experience.*

*I want to introduce a series of obstacles in the space. Obstacles are mental and physical constructions. They can for instance block the view or serve as a platform for darkness. White walls made of shrink plastic sheeting will direct the gaze and shift the spatiality of the exhibition space at Netwerk, Aalst. I want the work to confront the viewer with their own spectatorship and the different meanings the work can attain in different contexts, within different spheres of convention. The aim of the show is to experience the everyday in a new, reflexive and distanced way. Rather than negating the art-nonart divide the works in the show re-interpreting it. To me, this divide can no longer be objectively defined as a border between a self-referential art work and its surroundings.*

*The aesthetic quality of the object is not bound by predetermined characteristics; it is a product of experience that is initiated through confrontation with the object. When thinking of blurring borders it is not possible to separate the aesthetic from the non-aesthetic without distancing oneself from aesthetic thinking. It is about the shift. Through a series of practical structures (walls, crawl spaces, halls ) the exhibition will be a point of collection for stretching the capacity to experience.*

[attached]

MAY 15, KM - BdJ:

Wow, this all sounds like a renovation gone wrong. It must have been a hell of a weekend. Stay away from them pipes!!!

I'm doing this in English because I thought 1646 is doing these conversations in English. I'll carry on in English for now but if you want we can switch to Dutch, I am pretty native in that so no problem.

You speak of disturbing elements in the space and after reading about the leak at 1646 I cannot help but relate the materials you are using to D.I.Y. or renovation. Tar and plastic sheeting are utilitarian materials, usually used to cover up, fix or preserve something. Do these materials serve to distract from or in some way cover up the disturbing elements of the space you wrote about like the discontinuity of the flooring materials? Is there an idealised version of the space you are looking for? I am curious what you mean with disturbing elements and what level of control you want to exert on the existing architecture and when you let it go.

You mention in the attached PDF you are interested in the potential to experience 'the everyday' in a new way. Is it even possible to experience the everyday in any shape or form in an art space? Regardless of what is in

an exhibition, one (at least I do) enters it with a level of expectation which, in turn, kind of 'turns off' or dims experiences linked to the everyday or ordinary. As you install this, are you strategising in ways that counter this initial expectation, like with obstacles or moving elements in the space such as the candle which, not only changes, but diminishes as it traverses the space? I am really interested in the different temporalities in the space (verteltijd: tijd om voor te lezen / vertelde tijd: tijdsverloop in tekst). Like the candle slowly dying in its micro life cycle, the apparatus which - I am guessing - can move endlessly, the slow pace of time the tar objects imply and the sealing quality of the shrink wrap which is more about a freeze or pause in time. What is your thinking with regards to this mesh of time-frames? How does it relate to the sensory experience of space for you and how do your obstacles intervene in this mesh?

On a side note I was fixing a roof, so I get your fascination with tar, it's a pervasive and ancient material that sticks to everything and everything sticks to it.

MAY 16, BdJ - KM:

Plastic and tar are indeed utilitarian materials, I like to use them for that reason yet they offer great sculptural qualities, since they are always in movement. They don't need to distract or cover up the disturbing elements but replace and provoke. I like the fact that I can use very simple materials that can create a beautiful tension. In a way the material is known to the public but, then, the way in which it is used differs a lot from its use in daily life. I indeed wanted to shift the 'transit front space' into being part of the space itself. I don't know if that will work but that is the reason I want to have the floor covered. So that the gaze is connecting the two spaces more than seeing them as two parts of one gallery. I want to adapt the architecture in a way that there is no friction on my work and therefore it becomes part of the work. What do you mean with 'idealized space'? For instance, a disturbing element at 1646 is the staircase (to the studios upstairs). This functional 'object', let's say, makes you want to use the wall on the left side. I don't like the architecture to become predominant. Also in the back space the skylights and the lower space at the end are dominant in all exhibitions at 1646. They become conditions to play with.

'Is it even possible to experience the everyday in any shape or form in an art space?'

I agree on the fact that the exhibition space creates expectations and therefore does the opposite of showing the everyday. I think when you show, let's say; some dried seaweed with shells, everybody recognizes them immediately but, because of the created expectation and the fact that the visitor knows that he/she looks at art it creates a narrative and refreshing point of view on what we might know in daily life.

The temporalities are indeed important, the tar stays fluid and the shrink-wrap is also changing under the influence of temperature but, more importantly. They are opposite in *mental movement*. The tar is getting more fluid when exposed to heat and the shrink-wrap is getting more tight and steady. The tar works are titled *Onvoltooid*

*Verteerde Tijd* a word-play that suggests time, as you mentioned. There is an experiment with tar which is called *The Pitch-Drop Experiment*. One of the longest experiments in time. [A mass of tar - Ed.] approximately drops every 8-9-10 years average. And I started working with tar because of that experiment. The idea of a hourglass in sculpture. Every 10 years the sculpture needs to be hung upside-down. I like the idea of having gravity as a time-indicator instead of an atomic clock. The biggest tar sculpture I made for 1646 because it also sucks in all dust, fingerprints and particles of human behaviour in the exhibition. I like to see them as expansion-joints that are intended to take away all negative thoughts or gazes. A bit like an 'arbre magique' you put in your car to remove the smell out of your car/space. Or salt bags that come with electronic equipment to keep everything dry. The candle that moves through space is [always - Ed.] on the brink of dying because of its movement (speed) and might leave some smoke traces on the ceiling (so it is kind of funny that the water leak was in the ceiling ☺). I liked the idea of being in a cave looking for traces of ancient times.

I'm going back to 1646 now.. To be continued

MAY 17, KM - BdJ:

Oh, 'idealised' might be a strange way of putting it. I meant whether you were going for a particular kind of space, rid of certain aspects. But I totally understand now. It is interesting to think of expectation when dealing with such long spans of time, the time it takes for tar to drip. It raises questions about when, not the work, but the 'viewership' is finished (10 years in this case? )

It is also interesting because you phrased your work at the space as an intervention, which in an of itself always points to more things happening on a broader time scale, happening outside the scope of the show. Are you addressing this outside directly in the show, or does it just occur when you leave the space? I ask this because the interventions you make are very sensitive to the experience inside the space, it makes me wonder about how you deal with the entrance and exit.

The previous email was really illuminating. You describe your material choices by delving into the material qualities, shrinking instead of expanding, viscosity. To me this relates to the process of abstraction, taking apart the whole, and putting its parts together again based on a set of qualities. Does abstraction play a part in this show? I am actually thinking about it from a painting point of view (I guess I am still stuck on the canvas metaphor you used in the first email... ).

Just realised I can't make the opening. Will have to come later, I am lucky some things change slowly in this show....

JUN 2, KM - BdJ:

I already told you but the show was awesome. What are your thoughts on it now that some time has passed, or are still recovering..?

JUN 3, BdJ - KM:

Dear Kianoosh,

Thank you for the email and I was happy that you came to the exhibition. I know that you are a busy man.

It feels a bit like returning from a holiday to a distant country. You know exactly how your house is looking like, you know every sound, the smell but it leaves you kind of empty on the couch as if your brain is still in that foreign country. The sharpness of the moment; or lets say the unconscious decision-making is suddenly taken over by the rational of the everyday world of being conscious and reflective. Yesterday I was trying to work in my studio but the only thing I could do was repair an old power-tool. In the end I took my bike and went to 1646 to have a look. I want to continue with the tar sculptures but not necessarily with the tar as material. It is so hard to work with it and it is so unpleasant to think that it is so bad for my health when heating it even though I'm cautious (wearing a mask...) The indefinable shape is something I'm interested in, so I was thinking of isolating the shape and volume out of the tar sculptures by making moulds of them. I'm very happy that I have a moment without exhibitions now to work again in the studio, that feels always good.

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