

# OBVIOUSLY

## FRANK KOOLEN IN CONVERSATION WITH BONNO VAN DOORN

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 Bonno van Doorn *Obviously*, March 8 2013 till April 13 2013 in 1646.

This artist  
Bonno van Doorn

This correspondent  
Frank Koolen

Concept and design  
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# 1646.

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MARCH 2: Frank Koolen [FK] - Bonno van Doorn [BvD]  
Hello Bonno,

Good that we will start this correspondence.  
To start it off immediately: Will we do this in English or Dutch?  
And shall I pretend I don't know you?

MARCH 3: BvD - FK  
Hi Frank,

Such tough questions right at the start.

We are two primal Dutch boys, no? Let's just do this in Dutch. You started it this way anyway.

Maybe 1646 can translate. They will check this correspondence on spelling mistakes anyway, so that's one less thing to worry about.

I don't care if you pretend you don't know me, but I'm not sure people will believe it. In Prague they still think I made you up. Anyway it is a good opportunity to get to know each other a little better, or to start over again.

I'm curious!

FK - BvD

I quite like the idea of corresponding with your own fictions.  
Fiction broadens the truth.

Perhaps still better not to emphasize it right away.

Before you know it nobody takes anything serious anymore. And then the fat really is in the fire! (I'm curious how they will translate this saying into English...)

Yes, let's make an attempt to get to know each other better.

For a while now there is this quote wandering in my computer. I don't really like quotes, but sometimes you find one that is worth saving. Strangely I had to think of it immediately when I read the title and the description of your exhibition.

The quote is from Sherlock Holmes, coincidentally a fictitious character, and reads as follows:

'The world is full of obvious things, which nobody by any chance ever observes'

Do you see yourself as an investigator who exposes obvious but unnoticed things?

Or is this too much suggesting a mission and therefore too much a certain morality?

You have to start somewhere...

MARCH 4: BvD - FK  
Hi Frank,

People who make fictions are a dying breed. They make reality more

interesting then it really is.

It was not they only time that I was not taken too seriously.

I also like the idea of a quote wandering through your computer. I think it's a fine quote by Sherlock and I have to think immediately of a quote from Manuel Klappe (you know him. He's also a kind of Sherlock, but then with a cigar) that he wrote in a text about my work:

'Hiccups are common and annoying. Surprising yourself is a hard thing to do'.

I totally don't see myself as an investigator who wants to expose the unnoticed, but more as a adventurer or an explorer who dives into something without knowing the end result. Or rather a un-explorer of things. I love to dissect things until they are no longer what they are or what they are meant for. In doing this I like to surprise myself by what I'm doing and what I can bring about. This way I am reacting to what I am doing. Sometimes it's quite a contrition and quite annoying, but sometimes it's a revelation and a pleasant surprise.

What is that? Is one of the most asked questions about my work. And most of the time I don't even know myself what it is, and I actually don't want to know. It's not so much about what it is, but about what it could possibly be.

I try to avoid the obvious in my work as much as possible. I really hate it (that would be a nice one in English) when art is based on facts. Then the work is just what it is and nothing more than that; probably only less than that. I would much rather stir up people's imagination and stimulate them to look at things in a different light, to make them see by themselves, think by themselves.

Maybe I like to unlearn them what they have been taught. We unlearn a lot of things as we get older.

Everything is being so thought through and analysed to death these days that nothing remains to fantasize about.

It's a cliché, but I think the journey is more important than the destination. I don't really have destination and therefore also no mission. And don't ask me about moralities.

FK - BvD

I think the analogy to an explorer is very interesting. I also feel familiar to that.

The tragedy of the explorer is that after each discovery he immediately moves on to the next. Being an explorer isn't always so great. Nothing funnier than reading an honest journal of explorers of new land. They got scabies, were bitten by all kinds of creatures, servants died by the dozen and miscommunication caused unnecessary misery.

I once saw you at work when you were preparing for the 'Present Forever' exhibition in the Bijlmer in Amsterdam. You were working on your work Newfoundland. Even though I saw all kinds of terrific things and could not imagine any less result than a great installation, you were absolutely dissatisfied. I think it's a beautiful paradoxical situation when it's about the possibilities and beauty of the journey, but that sometimes this journey can also be absolutely unpleasant.

You seem to look for a surprising lightness but to get there you sometimes take dark roads. You don't spare

yourself.

Is this necessary to create an interesting result for yourself, or was this just an coincidental moment I caught you in?

BvD - FK

Yes, everytime I have to reinvent the wheel.

When I have found something and I try to repeat it, it will fail by definition.

It will end up being a mere rehash of a previous discovery.

The dissatisfaction and struggle everytime seem to be an inevitable part of a new journey. Personally of course you go through different phases. Sometimes you have to go through the hell to get to the heaven, with roads leading you through the high and the low. They are part of the whole. So it's mostly the things that I encounter by chance on my journey that I show. A little bit of scurvy might be part of it sometimes, but it won't stop us. Of course this is a contradiction, but the end justifies the means. The end is mainly to be engaged and working and not so much a destination.

You could say that my paintings and object are a metaphor for scurvy and scabies. Is that what you are trying to say? I like the idea anyway, but I really hate metaphores like I hate scabies.

When I was working for Present Forever I was breaking new ground and was absorbed in the proces. My self confidence wasn't too big at the time.

At moments like that I find it very difficult to receive judgments by others about my work, because it can still develop in every possible way. If someone gives a comment on my work in such a stage or looks at it in a certain way then I feel like the work is tainted and the magic is lost.

It's strange, but now during the build up at 1646 things are going quite well, but I remain sceptical and I'm afraid something will happen that will upset everything, but maybe that is needed. I am actually looking for some sort of tension or contrition what makes the work out of place sometimes.

I have been looking for a photo for an hour now. I know that I have kept it somewhere safe so that it wouldn't be damaged. It's driving me insane!

MARCH 6: FK - BvD

Sorry it took a while.

This way we will never fill this A4! We could consider a photo though.

Did you find your safely hidden photo in the mean time? And the build up still going well?

Hope so.

You have used the word 'contrition' now a few times. I think it's a beautiful word, but I think it means 'remorse' or 'deep regret' or 'moral dilemma'.

Making work from remorse or deep regret or a moral dilemma seems difficult if not impossible.

With a moral dilemma you start to drink or to run or swim at night, but making art is of no use then.

Did you intend it like 'friction'?

That it can look and even be uncomfortable?  
Scurvy and scabies don't exactly have a reputation for their aesthetics.  
Not that I don't think your work is not aesthetic.  
Aesthetics appears in many guises.

Maybe you can tell me something about how you set out to work this time in 1646?  
Did you think ahead or did you make several individual elements that you improvisationally put together on the spot?

MARCH 6: Bvd - FK

It's ok. I just missed you there for a moment.

I have considered a photo. I was thinking of Plato's cave.

The photo has vanished into thin air. But I'm sure it will appear at some point. That's what my mother used to say. Funny how a photo seems to become of utmost importance at such a moment.

Maybe I meant unpleasant, but I can agree with the meaning of 'contrition' you found online.

In the meantime I have drank the whole fridge of 1646. I'm making long days and I feel like a caveman. That's also how I look by the way.

It is hard to decipher the way I go about when I start working. I work a lot with chance and I am very impulsive. Soetimes, when at least a screw is to be found in the wall, then the screw determines where the painting will be. And when I have to make some space I put an object in front of that painting and all of the sudden that looks really good, so I leave it like that.

The space of 1646 is new to me. I had never been there before. It's a very nice light space and I wanted to deal with it like a blanc canvas.

At home I have very provisionally created a maquette of the space made out of cardboard and tape and put things in there that I had found in my house. From that starting point I continued working with already existing work and I started new things in a cold wet shed in Amsterdam Noord.

All these ingredients I have brought to Den Haag and started to work with them in the space of 1646. Now I am running from pillar to post in this space like a crazy caveman. It's fantastic to be so cut off from the outside world. It is becoming increasingly difficult to make decisions because the canvas is starting to get full with things and some decisions could turn out wrong.  
And before you know it you have a smeared brown book.

Isn't everything of no use in the end?

By the way I think often about a remark of yours. You once told me that so many people bike with their mouth open and that it looks so stupid. It really does look idiotic, but I caught myself doing it too! And you know why? To breath!

I gonna get myself another beer from the fridge of 1646 and blacken the rest of the walls.  
Cheers man!

FK - Bvd

Bonno, you old caveman!

Not that long ago I was in this prehistoric cave in France.

The cave is called Pech Merle and possesses a lot of wall drawings, some of them are 25000 years old. Between attacks of claustrophobia I saw bears, bison, horses and woolly mammoths everywhere.

The painters then painted with some sort of sticks but also blew pigment from their mouth onto the rocks. They blew red or black powder this way as well onto their hand and pushed these against the rock walls. On several places you can still see the profiles of their hands. An authentic signature.

I'm sure they did it for us.

Just like I am convinced that you are working there for us. For me and others.

You are doing it for yourself, but you do it for the people.

You will probably deny it, but I think you are a generous person.

Your work is generous.

No false pretences, no cosmetics.

If it is really honest I don't know, but I don't think that's really important. Honesty and art don't go together.

Honesty is too similar to naïveté and I don't believe in the naive artist.

Intuition is something else of course.

My first instinct is to lie anyway. Especially about silly things.

Then you've outsmarted reality!

Tell me honestly... have you once hid a few chunky pieces of expensive pata negra sausage behind my paintings in that show in W139?

It is once of my best incident-stories about exhibitions and something in me tells me you are responsible for it....

And about the open mouth...

I actually can't recall that I ever said that.

Women on advertisement posters usually also have their mouth open....

I think that's strange but not stupid.

Apparently in America new recruits are usually attracted in those large shopping malls. They are specifically on the look out for people who are breathing through their mouth.

By the way across the street from 1646 is a sexshop with the best name ever: COCONuts for sex.

Did you see it?

If I ever start a sexshop I will call it Plato's cave.

Good luck over there, and remember that the biggest enemy of the caveman was the bear!

Enjoy your beer.

Bvd - FK

You are a storyteller, not a liar.

I have just finished the blackening of the space, and left my handprint here and there. And I do have to think of those handprints in the caves, but then the ones in Spain. According to internet the oldest ones are in Europe, about 40.000 years old. I have to paint the exhibition

space white again after the show.

Of course I noticed the COCONuts for SEX. They are also in other parts of the world. Which ones I don't remember, but it's not important. Apparently it's a franchise. I am very curious what takes place in there, but then again I'm not. Secretly I would very much like to go inside, but I don't dare to. Maybe we can go together one time and hold each others hand?

Suddenly Plato's Cave sounds really raunchy, but good. Next to COCOSnoot a place is for rent. Maybe this is the ultimate chance to work together one time?

I remember your show at W139 very well. It was the first time I met you, and it was love at first sight. At least for me.

I thought it was a terrific exhibition, with a fantastic opening and great after party. I still see you dancing on the roof of that car, but what happened after that I have no recollection. So, I can't really answer your question if I put the sausage behind your paintings. I would have liked to have done it.

But it will probably remain a mystery forever. 'The mystery of the sausage behind the paintings'. Nice title for a book.

I just walked back to the black space. It strongly reminds me of a sexshop, or 'even better', a darkroom. Not that I have ever been in one, but your mind plays tricks on you sometimes.

I actually have no idea whatfor I am doing all this. As I said before for me it is mostly important to be just working and to physically move around the space when I'm making something. Sometimes it is preceded by a small idea, but I don't think that very significant for the outside world.

I find this 'idea-art' these days hard to digest. The moving around and 'just doing something' has a very primitive quality to me. Something primordial. I really think it is in our nature to just fool around with things. In what other way would man have ever been able to make the first fire? Of course you can wonder about the use of all these inventions these days, but should we wonder? Besides that I often get the question: 'what is that?' people also ask me often: 'but what do you mean with it?'

I find that such an annoying question. I just can't answer it. Honestly I can't. People also tell me this frequently, that I'm such an honest person, but just as often I hear that people are afraid of me. I think I'm just very direct and I show it. I guess I am like this in my work as well. But then my work is just a part of me.

I'll have one more, and then I will get into my fold-up bed.

By the way, I am very much looking forward to the opening this friday. A group of the W are coming, and so are the Kafana Boys. Are you coming too? I would really like it!  
Bvd - FK

By the way, do you know what I like about caves?  
When you enter a cave it is suddenly so dark that you don't see anything anymore. You have to stare into the dark and all of the sudden you start to see.

MARCH 7: FK- Bvd

This is turning increasingly into a declaration of love.

Werner Herzog and Klaus Kinski went about it in a different way.

The were sworn enemies, but secretly they loved each other.

To be sworn friends, but secretly hating each other is possibly even more interesting.

I do understand that people are sometimes a bit afraid of you.

I wanted to write just now:

'that's because it sometimes appears as if you have nothing to lose.'

But I take it back.

You have, like all of us, everything and nothing to lose. You also have everything and nothing to gain.

With our work we try to gain everything despite the risk to lose it all.

We are in the pitch dark cave but in our minds we are in an open green field full of grazing bison and a steel blue sky.

I am not interested what is the real truth.

I started with a quote swinging around and I will end with a quote (by Fernando Pessoa):

'I am nothing/ I will never be anything /  
I couldn't want to be something /  
Apart from that, I have in me all the dreams in the world.'

No idea what I want to say with this.

Lots of luck my boy. Friday I am most certainly there. Let's herewith agree to make a show together someday.  
Titel: COCONuts for things.

Bvd - FK

Frank dear,

Myself, I don't have any problem declaring my love to you, but I know it makes you feel slightly uncomfortable.

Men in general seen to prefer just patting each other on the shoulder, rather than giving each other a nice cuddle.

By making art I give myself to the others, by letting loose what occupies me.

I actually show myself more and more in my work, but it seems to lead to an increasingly bemusing result.

Love is something abstract as well. So my work is some kind of declaration of love too.

I like it, that you're mentioning Herzog and Kinsky. 'Fitzcarraldo' is a beautiful movie, but maybe the documentary 'Burden of Dreams', about the making of the movie, is even more beautiful. At any cost, the boat had to be pulled over the hill.

Yes, lets put our COCONuts together and make them seem like things!

Let me finish with:

“ASA NISI MASA”

From 8 1/5 by Fellini. No idea what it means, but that's what makes it beautiful.

See you at the opening!  
X!B!

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