

WHAT ENTERS

KEES VAN GELDER IN CONVERSATION WITH OLGA BALEMA

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 Olga Balema *What Enters*, June 14 2013 till July 13 2013 in 1646.

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KvG - OB

What I remember of your studio presentation one year ago is the life size staples you put in the space as if they were naked actors not to know exactly what to do with the following:

hanging screens and digital prints as background shapes

text blocks piled on top of each other

drop cloths, monitor screens and rolled up engraved carpets.

If I would be a staple - without factually stapling something for the time being - I would be wondering as well about what to do in a space with e.g. a "background shape" on a canvas that usually hangs on a wall being a mere image - on the foreground, so to say.

MAY 28: OB - KvG

The "staples" :) were doing what staples do, functioning through exerting a feeling of pressure. The five monitors in the installation each displayed a version of an animation which spelled out "Squeeze Through", the animation was made by shaping a clip of the finals scene of "Twilight IV: Breaking Dawn", which shows the protagonist Bella turn from a human into a vampire.



What struck me about the transformation scene was that Bella blew up and expanded, she entered a completely finite state in which there was no more room for change. Somehow this makes me think of objects and the way they have agency while being still. I wanted to make this animation because I was interested in working with a video clip in a similar way that I would work with a piece of steel. The animation and the structures created a movement of expansion and contraction.

The pieces of neoprene hanging and laying on the floor were printed with images from shampoo commercials. The commercials depicted an action rendered through digital effects that was the same as the transformation scene, a dead hair ingesting in protein and coming

alive. Neoprene is also very absorbent.

There was feeling coming out of the immaterial coldness of digital effect of transformation, one that was very material, one that become very involved in the materiality of the human body, pushing it through to the other side of the alien.

(The "Backgrounds" and the small monitor sculptures were part of a different body of work, the staples didn't have to deal with them)

13 JUN: KvG - OB

It took quite some time for coming back to you. My sincere apologies!

Your interest in objects being in a state of change comparable to changing into a vampire is striking when I think about my first experience seeing your works in an installation. I felt at once being in an hospital. There organic processes of curing or perhaps genetic engineering come into mind. It creates a strange sometimes uncanny atmosphere...

14 JUN: KvG - OB

The printed shapes on canvas are free standing, they float on an empty plane, so to say. The whiteness could quite well function as a background, but the individual shapes themselves seem to be meant as background if I read the title well enough. Interesting that an outspoken form, a shape, is used in the second place in some kind of a hierarchy where something else is on the foreground, apparently in the first place.

The images depicted in the 'Background shapes' are printed on canvas. I guess, such a canvas may be used as a background e.g. in one of your installations, but then the canvas itself is turned into a position of a decor. In that case another title would be more appropriate. If the depicted shape is used as background, then it must be a plan to make such a shape e.g. in one of your installations. So still work to do... or not.

These works (uniquely printed, if I am right) are ordinary prints on canvas, although following the code of a seriously made authorized artefact (referring to painting). I must say, a bequestioning strange title I have here steering paradoxal readings.

21 JUN: OB - KvG

I think the idea of curing is interesting in relationship to that particular body of work. But curing through may be malevolent or unsavoury methods.

The uncanny bit of the healing process, ranging from over-prescription of medication to attachment therapy. Healing practices today can often be ethically ambiguous and its difficult to know how exactly to deal with our bodies. Not that I am somebody that distrusts modern medicine, but I do think that it provides for a certain anxiety.

When I see the bit in a shampoo commercial of the hair follicle is being infused with abstract formations of "proteins", I feel as though it provides a general visualization, an imagination of how ones body is fixed, that it

heals in smooth gel-like swoosh. It makes me imagine the body as plastic, magical.

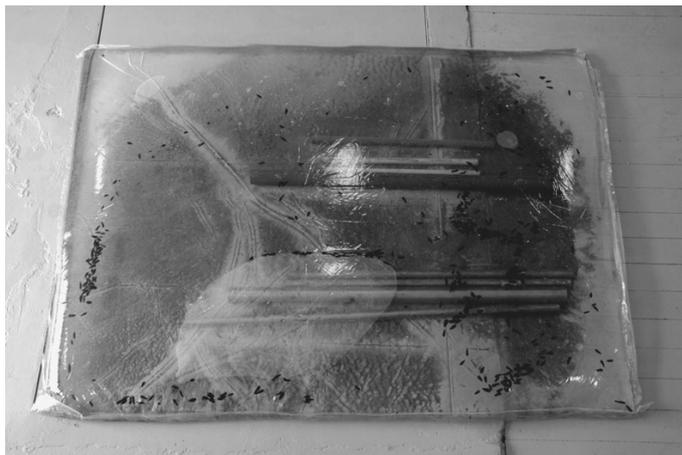
The scene that I picked from "Twilight IV" for the "Squeeze Through" animation functions in a similar way to a shampoo commercials, it also uses pseudo scientific imaging to show the transformation from human to vampire. For me its interesting to see these very similar depiction methods being used for different purposes, standardizing the depiction of bodily functions through digital effects.

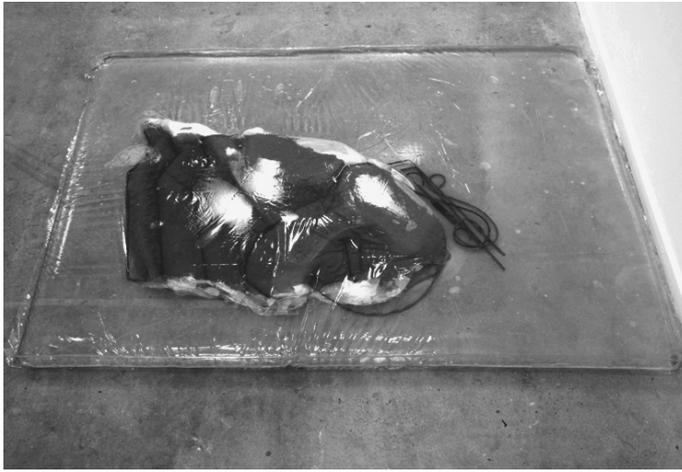
In the new body of work I made for 1646 I think we would talk more about degeneration. There is material submerged in water and it elicits a strong bodily feeling. This show is very different from the work that I have been making recently, but still touches on the topic of the visualization or perception of the body as alien somehow.

The sculptures are very low tech, they consist of a soft PVC outer shell, water, steel, concrete, chilli peppers, a tram rail, and a garden ornament.

They are also quite introverted, because they mostly refer to themselves, the entry point for the viewer lies mostly in their materiality and their presence in the space. They function a bit like voids, drawing in the space around them.

Attached are a few pictures:





I remember an article from 1975 in an academic weekly Dutch newspaper *Intermediair* about Rhesus monkeys that were literally cut off from sight by a brain surgery. They became blind and yet they could be trained to react on and 'see' dark and light objects in their environment.

I remember the image from the late nineties of a mouse bearing a human like ear (the 'ear' was actually an ear-shaped organic structure grown by seeding cow tissue cells).

Nowadays neuroscientists install on-off neuron switches in the brains of mice with the goal to isolate and knock out information of specific memories. "We know from studies in both animals and humans that memories are not formed in isolation but are built up over years incorporating previously learned information", American neuroscientist Mark Mayford says. "This study suggests that one way the brain performs this feat is to use the activity pattern of nerve cells from old memories and merge this with the activity produced during a new learning session."

It is likely that these personal experiences of remembrance may have triggered of what I wrote earlier to you about the atmosphere when stepping into your installation and work. This is me, apparently....

Olga, you once stated not so long time ago that individual imagination works as a critical authority and that an art object may be looked at from vagueness as a starting point in the relationship between that object and the viewer. This brings me to the position you are in being someone collecting visuals, apparently- made of objects trouvés or hand made objects - waiting for perceptual phenomena (from whom?). In this sense the collection of water conserved objects you show in 1646 at this moment is perhaps closer to your previously made works as an attitude, if it comes to how it is presented as objects for the sake of conceivable interpretations on the viewers side. If the above is me, how do you see the images you collect, handmade or not, on your side?

25 JUN: OB - KvG

Thank you for sharing those three moments with me, it's interesting how one can relate to certain things through very specific events in their lives.

As for the objects that are part of the sculptures: I was trying to pick objects that were common place with little serious emotive value to me and probably to most other people. Therefore I chose mostly building materials, decorative garden items I found in a discount shop, and I bent some steel to look like ornamental gates or handrails. I was trying to collect objects that were very generic and unspecific, ones that were perhaps specifically unable to trigger memories or association as you accounted to me in your previous email. Or that they would trigger so many memories and associations that none would be able to stand out.

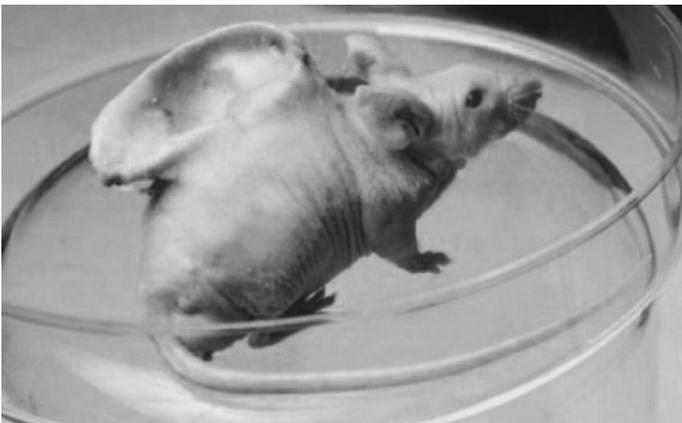
I just wanted to use these materials to create a feeling of severe physicality and they don't have meaning outside of that. I was mostly thinking in mass, weight, volume,



22 JUN: KvG - OB

Aaaagh...., Olga, curing through malevolent and insensitive methods in order to come to achieve a healing process....?! If I may position myself - as a viewer of your work from a certain distance - in a light speedy personal three-moment historiography, i.e. a choice out of my soft hard disc (of my brains):

When I was a child of about 10 years old I quite often went with my father to one of the five hospitals in the Dutch district Zeeuws Vlaanderen he was working in as the only internist. I am used to men and nurses in white dresses keeping white mice in a laboratory injecting them for the benefit of the patient's health; amidst chloroform, the attractive smell of ether mixed with the dominating musty smell of mice.



The Vacanti mouse, 1997

those kinds of “sculptural” concerns. But also interiors becoming exteriors becoming interiors...

Of course, I realized, when you encase anything in water, it becomes very sentimental. I must admit that the idea of decadence was stuck in my head as well while making these, not that decadence is sentimental.

I also just saw the very sad images of small live turtles being encased in water and sold as key chains, those are disturbing.

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