

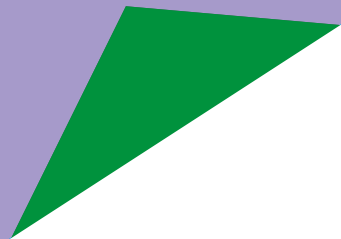
Leading up to an exhibition the artist engages in conversation with a previously unknown correspondent.

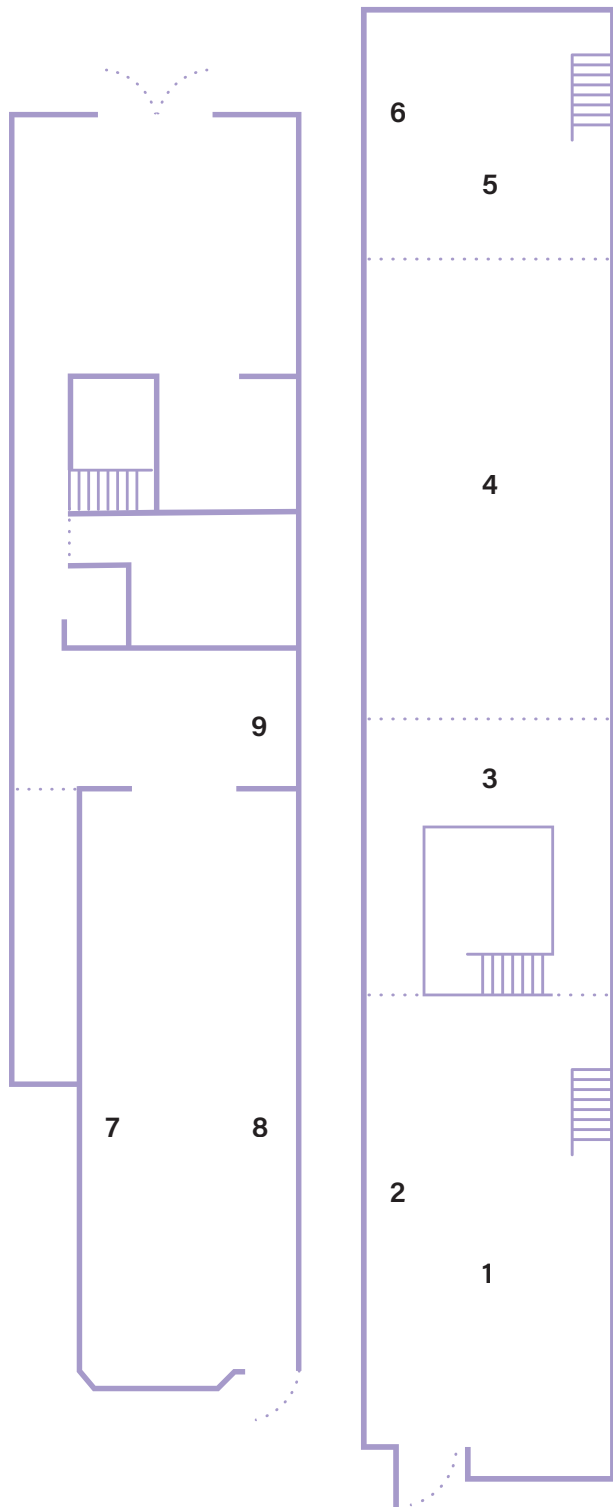
The conversation aims to get an insight on how the initial ideas for the project develop, to paint a picture of the otherwise untraceable choices in the artist's process, practice and the making of this exhibition.

**Mike Bourscheid**  
in conversation  
with  
**Jaring Dürst Britt**  
As part of the  
exhibition  
**A SPELL IN  
THE ALPHABET  
SOUP**

**1646.nl**

**1646**





1: ***A Spell in the Alphabet Soup***

Stained glass, plants and herbs, 2023

2: ***Them***

Oak, 2023

3: ***Agnès***

4K video, 47 min., 2023

4: ***Sunny Side Up and other sorrowful stories***

Three costumes, wiggled gloves, casted crayon fruit and eggs, broom with lipstick, sleeping mask with two upper wisdom teeth, wooden ceremonial table, two crystals from artist's collection, newspaper, ostrich feather, three latex noses, suitcase with western saddle, custom wooden door, 2021

5: ***Sunny Side Up and other sorrowful stories***

Bed, custom bedsheet, wiggled socks, hugging bag, cigarette, bench, peanut, 2021

6: ***R.***

4K video, 39 min., 2023

7: ***A Spell in the Alphabet Soup***

Pencil drawings, 2022

8: ***Y's jewellery and medication inventory***

Photograms, 2021

9: ***The wellbeing of things: a five kilometre race***

4K video, 9:30 min., 2017

# Mike Bourscheid in conversation with Jaring Dürst Britt As part of the exhibition **A SPELL IN THE ALPHABET SOUP**

For more information about this and other projects,  
check our website or scan the QR-code.



## 1646.nl

## Mike Bourscheid

Using various forms of art, Mike Bourscheid tells stories that often have a funny or absurdist twist. With the help of strange and clumsy costumes and props, Mike channels different personalities. With a constantly changing identity, the artist addresses aspects of masculinity, patriarchal power and arrogance while investigating the codes and behaviours of our society and tackling social conventions.

## Jaring Dürst Britt

Jaring Dürst Britt (1981) founded together with Alexander Mayhew in 2015 Dürst Britt & Mayhew. This internationally oriented The Hague based gallery represents artists from different national and artistic backgrounds while also facilitating one-off collaborations in their Frontspace. Dürst Britt formerly worked as artistic director of Nieuwe Vide in Haarlem and as business coordinator of Casco in Utrecht. He is currently a board member of the Dutch Gallery Association.

Jaring: This is a very informal interview we're going to do. I see a lot of glass houses... At first, entering the show, I see a lot of wooden puppets too and I see that the houses also have anthropomorphic forms. What comes first to my mind is, is there a juxtaposition between the glass objects and the wooden objects? Because wood has a different connotation than glass, strong and constructive, while glass is more fragile.

Mike: When I was working with it, the glass was quite strong too! It is very fragile but I was very impressed by how strong it actually is, it is very fragile and strong. I wanted to create wooden figures that are kind of protecting the town. They're like the guardians of the town. The houses are like a *cul-de-sac*. I grew up in a *cul-de-sac*.

Jaring: What is a *cul-de-sac*?

Mike: A *cul-de-sac* is a street in which you drive in and out, you come in, you visit the people and then drive out again. I think it's a french word.

Jaring: Yeah, it definitely sounds French! So a super ini-mini-town, I think the Dutch word would be *lintdorp*.

Mike: Ok! yeah, a classical suburban design.

Jaring: And is this a literal translation of the houses that you grew up around? Or is it more the format of a *cul-de-sac* that you used?

Mike: A little bit of both. It's not that the houses look like where I grew up... actually, in Luxembourg, where I grew up, people have their shutters down at 6pm to have more privacy and it's also the same with the houses here, because the eyes are sometimes closed, or opened. With glass you can make it transparent or opaque. But they are also characters, neighbours that were living next to me, or above me. I had a very mean neighbour where I lived.

Jaring: A mean neighbour?

Mike: Yes, a very mean neighbour

Jaring: Can you give me an example of his meanness?

Mike: Yeah! If I kicked a soccer ball over his fence he would come and stab it with a knife and that was it for my ball. So, stuff like that, pretty bad. His name was Mr. Heinz.

Jaring: Ah, Mr. Heinz!

Mike: It's a mix between neighbours that I know and the fact of having gossip around. Neighbours gossip so much and know more about your life than you know about yourself. But in the houses there is also the influence of horror movies. There's a Carrie in there, there are the twins, there are clowns, vampires, there's a blood house... Possession.

Jaring: Ah! So you're following a certain narrative film script, a horror movie with Mr. Heinz as a transformed persona.

**Mike:** Houses are always important in horror movies, they always have another meaning. There is something living in your house that maybe you can't grasp. Like in "Poltergeist", for example, there is a spirit in your house that you can't see but it is there. And I think that it is the same with the houses of your neighbours. Sometimes you think you know your neighbour but you don't, there is a spirit there that is unknown. And especially when the shutters are down.

**Jaring:** This also immediately creates tension in the narrative, which becomes the driving force of that story. Are those narrative structures something that appear often or that you use a lot in your work? Or do you use narrative in general, not necessarily filmic narratives/structures?

**Mike:** I think character building is the main thread in my work. If it's performance, or if it's photography, video, sculpture, whatever, it's always a character that comes to mind, or comes up or comes out, in whatever medium. Often, I am also playing the character myself in a performance or in a video, so it really depends on how I feel and what is needed for the work. I'm very interested in storytelling.

**Jaring:** You mentioned that you also wear some of your works, so that you can activate them. Is this because when we look at them they are sculptures, they are models of a house but they are also, let's say, hollowing sites? So eventually you could put them on your shoulders? Are they masks?

**Mike:** No no, they're not masks. At the end of the build up, there will be boxes inside of them and plants will grow inside the houses, so they are a little bit of a greenhouse. At the moment I am working with Joost Niewenburg and we will make schnapps with the plants.

**Jaring:** What plants are used for the schnapps?

**Mike:** I will definitely plant oregano, and I will see for the rest. We are in conversation, but we will probably go for something like aquavits style, but with some herbs that are planted here. So it's a mix of different herbs that will be part of the schnapps.

**Jaring:** Which house will contain the oregano used for the schnapps?

**Mike:** The oregano will be in the Bloodhouse.

**Jaring:** Do you give the sculptures names, because of their anthropomorphic shapes?

**Mike:** Some do have a name, yeah... I mean, one is called Carrie as a reference to the film. But I think that's the only one so far.

**Jaring:** And is that the title of the piece or is that more of a nickname?

**Mike:** Just a nickname, yes, but often I use names for my works. A previous work I did is called "Frantz H.B."; and the video that I will be showing in the other room is called "Agnès". There are different references in the names. I like to give names to my sculptures because then they become characters.

**Jaring:** Can you tell something about how you make these works? Do you first make the design and then you look for the glass and then you assemble it? Do you assemble them yourself?

**Mike:** Yeah, I cut them, I weld them, I solder them together, I do all the process. And it depends, for some I did the drawings in advance, but then later I would go to the glass store and the colour that I wanted wouldn't be available, so I would have to find another one and it would match more, so the material would guide me. The material could influence the drawing and sometimes it could be the other way around. My partner showed me how to work with glass. We were in a residency and she taught me how to cut it properly and then I was hooked.

Each type of glass has a way of behaving, so you get to know it. And when you know it a little more, then you are able to predict when it's going to break and you start to form a relationship with the material. That is what I love about craftsmanship. Even with the wood sculptures too! You get to know the material when you work with it.

**Jaring:** When it comes to wood, is there a favourite sort of wood to use?

**Mike:** Yeah, I like oak, but also because I was living in Canada for so long. I really love everything that is Douglas Fir or any type of softwood. I love 2 by 4s. But oak... I grew up Catholic and all the benches and all the things you kneel on, all that is usually oak. It's an easy wood to work with but if you put it on the lathe it's super hard because it has long fibres. It's a very tricky wood to work with but it's beautiful and so strong... But it chips easily, so it's similar to glass, actually.

**Jaring:** It sounds like you very much enjoy discovering the limits and the possibility of glass and wood. Is there any material that you've come across and thought "this is not going to work"?

**Mike:** I'm not a good welder... Steel is such a beautiful material but I have not worked with it as much. You need so much equipment and you need a floor that does not burn because of the sparks.

**Jaring:** Is it also a bit too macho?

**Mike:** No, I think metal also can be very soft and warm. It can be both.

**Jaring:** And how about the welding that has to be done for the glass sculptures?

**Mike:** Ah, this is different.

**Jaring:** Is it something that's like "yeah, I can overcome this"?

**Mike:** Yes. In the past, I had a job doing copper roofing and there we had to solder together the roof plates and bend them. Things I learned there were very handy. It's similar to working with metal because those plates are three dimensional objects and you have to find the right spot to solder them together

**Jaring:** And it's funny that the technique that you have learned on roofs comes back in the houses here!

**Mike:** Yeah!

**Jaring:** And I've also been told that you made these houses at your mother's place, so back in Luxembourg, I assume?

**Mike:** Yeah, I made one of these in Berlin during the residency in which Vanessa showed me how to work with glass. She has all the materials, like the grinder and the cutting tools... After that I got hooked, did all the drawings, and we went to the glass store in Cologne and bought all the glass there, and then I arrived in Luxembourg and got Covid.

**Jaring:** Really!

**Mike:** Yeah, and I was stuck at home and Vanessa was in a residency in Canada. I was just there and I could fully be engulfed for a month and a half finishing the drawings and cutting everything in my old bedroom.

**Jaring:** It's curious which turns things can take, you made this installation representing the neighbourhood of your youth, and you ended up making it in your old room!

**Mike:** Yes, absolutely... And my bedroom is now an office. Spaces are switching around in the house, but it's nice and inspiring.

**Jaring:** And what is the relationship between the glass house sculptures and the wooden dolls that you are going to show in the first space of 1646?

**Mike:** The wooden sculptures are all inspired by "Hampelmann" dolls that I used to love as a kid, where you would pull the string and they would move. But here they're not really functional, they don't really do that. They are stuck on the wall, trapped on the wall. I wanted to have them as the guardians of the houses, but when you look closely, they could also have the potential of destroying them, because they're all

kind of like clubs, kind of like spanking pedals, you know? Because of the holes in it. And you could take them all apart and use them as pedals. So there's the friendliness, the guarding and the clumsiness of a *Hampelmann*, but then there's also the threat coming from their nature, being spanking pedals.

**Jaring:** Is it with a reason that you use the eyes to hang the pieces partly to the wall?

**Mike:** Yeah, it was a very conscious decision because they are guarding the place and they see everything, but they are also trapped by that, attached to the wall. If they weren't attached to the wall they would be collapsing and falling to the ground, the eyes pretty much keep them together.

**Jaring:** I also like that for one of them you worked a bit more with colours on the socks, it makes it very informal, as if they could still come off the wall and walk away

**Mike:** Totally! I even thought of making two of them naked, and one of them keeping the socks on.

**Jaring:** And did it take you long to come up with the way the installation presents itself in this first room? With the green carpet and the cul-de-sac village, with a grey brick path that reminds me of The Wizard of Oz.

**Mike:** Well, I got inspired by a pizza place that I would always go to as a kid, where in the basement they had a room for kids with a play area with a slide. In this room you would often have carpets with streets on them and I got inspired by that for this floor. This room feels like this basement playground with toys lying around.

**Jaring:** Let's move to the second room. The first thing that I notice here is this fence. So it's almost like we entered a house and now we are in the garden of this house

**Mike:** Yeah exactly, that was my intention, we're actually in between two houses.

**Jaring:** I also see costumes, so it's like this transitional space where you can also transform yourself into.. a typewriter?

**Mike:** Yes, that's a Ouija board. All these costumes are part of a film that will be shown on a TV in this room. It's 47 minutes long. I wear all the costumes in it and all the props are here. The Ouija board will be a way to connect to a person. There are also these gloves that are like puppets that talk. They are part of this character that wears them and does not talk. The socks are actually characters, they have hair and they talk and try to resolve a mystery. In the film you can see what the mystery is about

**Jaring:** Yes, I don't want to know yet what the mystery is about. But what I notice while having this conversation with you is that you are also wearing socks that are matching the colour scheme of the room! Is this pure coincidence?

**Mike:** Oh! Yes, that is pure coincidence, maybe subconsciously I got inspired by the room.

**Jaring:** Sockconsciously maybe.

**Mike:** Yes exactly.

**Jaring:** I also see the door that will lead the visitors to the second video space, it looks like a chocolate bar. Is there a reference here?

**Mike:** I found this door in the suburb of Berlin. The door is also in the film as a prop, it is very heavy. I found it on *Craigslist*, it was handmade by a person that I picked it up from and I had to unscrew it from the house. The house was left without a door, it was the son who was renovating his grandad's house. The granddad actually came to the exhibition in which the door was shown! He was very proud of his door, because he made each part and lathed each square on it himself. I love that! But I still wanted to give it a fresh colour, so I chose this chocolate brown. It's also a reference to my partner's granny, called Jean Brown. She has the same colour on her house, so we call it Granny Brown.

**Jaring:** So there's a lot of interplay between this universe that you're creating and, let's say, your personal universe from your youth till growing up later on. And is Mr. Heinz also referenced in this part of the show?

**Mike:** In this part no, but this part is actually a reference to my mother. It is called "Agnès", which is the middle name of my mother. It is an homage to all the single parents that raised their kids alone, that's why I made this work, being raised by a single parent.

**Jaring:** Did that stimulate you in some way?

**Mike:** Yes, definitely, it inspired a respect for women in general and the strength it takes to do that. Actually, there's a nice reference in the costumes. My mum would always make my costumes for the carnival and, years later, when I went to the fabric store, I found the exact fabric she would use back then. My mum worked in a fabric store and they had this brand there, and when I

**saw it in the shop recently it had to be part of the show, so I decided to make an adult version of my childhood costume.**

Jaring: An eternal carnival... And it's also funny to have the name Agnès for fashion and design, it reminds me of the name of the famous designer Agnès B. And your name is Bourscheid, right? So she was also Agnès B.!

**Mike: Well... because she's divorced, she's not actually Agnès B. anymore, she was.**

Jaring: But that also shows the fluctuation of things in life!

**Mike: Yeah! I'm married and we decided not to take each other's names. That changes too! Often one of the partners has to take the name of the other and thank god that's not the case anymore. These things have changed, so that's good.**

Jaring: Long live the playful approaches concerning that. Thank you!