

Abiotic Factors, Marion von Osten

Water on asphalt mirroring the sky, the prism in a drop of oil, a smuggled tree, a network of waterways, slimy drops crawling along a metal fence, an eco-machine pumps liquids. The urban landscape is equally biological, social, built and geophysical. Cities are ecosystems, not just in a metaphorical sense but actually inhabited by subnature, human and non-human animals, toxic components, machines, electricity, gas pipes and telephone cables, and informed by climate conditions, traffic organization, public and private zones, and social interactions. The nature-culture of contemporary urban societies is the point of departure for this year's international Master students exhibition at BAK, basis voor actuele kunst in Utrecht.

In opposition to an understanding of ecosystems projected solely on an idealized natural environment, the exhibition by the group of young artists from Mexico, China, Czech Republic, Greece, and the United States takes the urban environment as the site of mutual interactions between different living and non-living agents. An imported tree growing in a backyard created its own migratory existence in the Netherlands, micro-events in the streets of Utrecht become triggers for poetic narratives, the inner body of obsolete technology becomes the cartography for an unknown future and projections of/on plants reflect the abstracted scientific gaze. Social interactions are far from ideal, societal determination, competition, individualism; the neoliberal governance of the subject has also created darker sides in the unconscious. Are there ways to intervene in these conditions? What if a game is played beyond its binary conception? What if the unconscious is taken as the relevant source of being? Critical ecology in this sense includes a new spirit, situating the human animal in reciprocal relation to all diverse biotic and abiotic factors of today's nature/culture.

Curator: Marion von Osten

Participants: Chao Wang, Dinos Milonas, Elena Pietrini Sanchez, Haoran Kang, Susan Jenkins, Tereza Telúchová, and Zhengqing Li.

Opening: June 23 17.00 – 19.00
 Exhibition: June 24 – July 9, Wed – Sun 12.00 – 18.00
 BAK, basis voor actuele kunst. Lange Nieuwstraat 4, Utrecht
 More information: www.mahku.nl

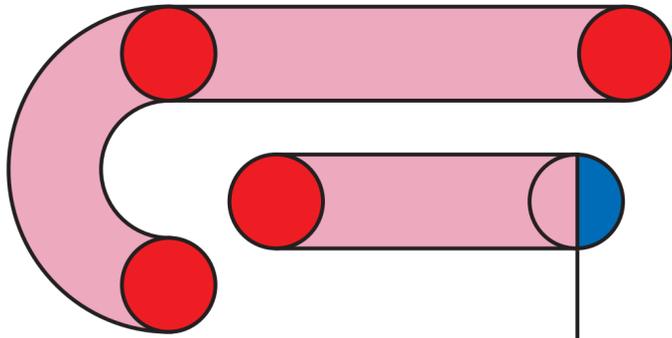
Symposium, Once We Were Artists

On Saturday 24 June 2017 BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht organizes the symposium "Once We Were Artists" to launch the publication *Marion von Osten, Once We Were Artists: A BAK Critical Reader in Artists' Practice*, edited by Maria Hlavajova and Tom Holert. The symposium takes place from 10.30 hrs till 18.00 hrs in the Tuinzaal of the Centraal Museum, Utrecht (Agnietenstraat 1).

Recognizing the rapidly changing predicaments of political, economic, cultural, and environmental conditions today, the symposium addresses the shifting nature of artistic practices that lay claim to the public sphere and political space. It discusses a collaborative, process-oriented ethos that revolves around issues of feminism, migration, education, and (post)coloniality as a resource for the contemporary. The symposium approaches these topics from two interrelated perspectives. One line of inquiry asks: *What do we have in common?* The contributors discuss the changing role of the artist as initiator, instigator, organizer, and collaborator in long-term aesthetic-political endeavors with other societal members, taking into consideration the conditions of precarity, class recomposition, global migration, and shared concerns and struggles. Secondly, the notion of *organizing difference* is examined through current instituting practices of artistic transversal spaces and micro-organizations that are different from artist-run spaces or art collectives and which create platforms of solidarity and of being together *otherwise* in and out the art world.

Contributors include E. C. Feiss (writer, Berkeley), Tom Holert (art historian, curator, and writer, Berlin), Sven Lütticken (writer and curator, Utrecht), Marion von Osten (cultural producer, Berlin), Maria Papadimitriou (artist, Athens), Farid Rakun (artist, writer, editor, and teacher, member of ruangrupa, Jakarta), and Joanna Warsza (curator, Berlin).

Registration for the symposium is required. Tickets include lunch and are €8 or €6 for students. More information: www.bakonline.org



Chao Wang

"Chasing rainbows", "The sea I made", and "Looking down to observe the sky." These are episodes in my artwork that sound like childish jokes. And yes, I want to learn something from children. In a world focused on utilitarianism, we grown-ups tend to lose the poetic imagination of micro-events in our daily life – while kids are sometimes more poetic and more sensitive to art than adults. In the book "The Little Prince," I find what I am missing. My work deals with imagination, association, emotion and inspiration. If you ask me what the artistic goal of my work is, I would say that art is not for anything. Art is the ultimate goal. It saves our souls and makes us live happily. As John Cage said, "we are not moving towards some kind of goal. We are at the goal. And it is changing with us. If art has any purpose, it is to open our eyes to that fact."

Dinos Milonas

My masks are a visualization of the identities and the positions that society forces us, as individuals, to take. Moreover they are also a visualization of "democratic societies." Some are more abstract than others and some are more structured than others. We are locked in a box from which we have to break free mentally. This box has many names in the West such as 'freedom' or 'democracy.' Even though the system may have had the greatest intentions at its starting point, it has failed in most situations in which it was practiced. No matter how good the system may be, in the end it all comes down to the question of who the individuals are that really rule.

Elena Pietrini Sanchez

Where did grandpa go?: This installation is a Memento Mori of my grandfather, who died while watching his favorite movie, *The Cliff of the Souls* (El Peñón de las Ánimas, 1942). The same film is projected over and over again –until the DVD is worn down–, over the PCB (printed circuit board) that belonged to the same TV that witnessed his last breath. The piece resembles a map by which his mind may have traveled, like our minds may inside other devices, through electrically conductive tracks made of copper. Stay in contact: The PCB acts like the brain and the heart of our most intimate device: the smartphone. In the way we have daily physical contact with it, the smartphone works as an extension of our body. Through some voice notes, text messages and the actual devices that enabled my husband and I to stay in contact during our long distance relationship, this installation questions how what is "personal" becomes "public" inside a politically fabricated reality. Live Honey Gold: Video below 0°C. Honey can change its viscosity depending on temperature, without completely solidifying. It is also a conductor of electricity, the so called spark of life.

Haoran Kang

There is a Chinese philosophy book, "Sun Tzu Bingfa," translated in the West as "The Art of War". This Eastern philosophy is my starting point for understanding Western art. The book says: if you want to win the war, you must find "Right timing, right place, and right people." This idea has its own logic based on positive moral sentiments behind it. The author, Sun Tzu, does not discuss how to win in war, on the contrary, he is anti-war and believes it is better to win the heart of the people than to capture the city. This idea is my starting point for reflection on human society: What is war? Do we need war? How do we face war? The game, as a simplified model of war, is a reinterpretation of the system of war and a rethinking of war. I have re-created three games based on traditional games from the East and the West – Chinese chess, Fencing, and Table football. What happens when the players' relationship moves from binary opposition to a more complex tripartite interaction? How does human nature deal with that? Over the past century, war has pushed the concept of humanity to the background. Yet modern civilization has moved on to a new era of humanism, science and technology. But what about art? I reflect on how to move art forward. What is art? What is an artist? What is the artist's responsibility?

Susan Jenkins

Mind and Place: The sequoia grows fast. For every meter it grows in a year, it sheds countless branches. Its home is normally a forest, but here on a tiny island it rains tawny extremities on the deck, grass and garden. We endure six months of raking and sweeping. The tree marks the time lived in the house. The tree drops memories and we sweep them up, gather them up—long, short, lush, scraggly—and move them out of the way. We use our bodies nonchalantly to collect and disperse these small mirrors, these fragments of change—embedding the place in ourselves with every sweep. We are connected to place by our actions. Yet my sense of place arises from my mind – a process of these minute experiences and reactions to my senses becoming relationships, story, history. But place is continually transforming – it is as solid as the wind. Only the mind holds it, or lets it go. Nonetheless, these connections seem necessary. They weave around me as a cocoon, but there is always a thread to unwind into light.

Tereza Telúchová

—: In my work, I will be departing from the point of view of our public and private spaces and the social interactions and impressions that these spaces provoke. What are the places that we encounter in our every day lives and what kind of stimulating qualities do they provide? The venture I face is to create a space that would become a stimulating environment based on conceptions of nature and culture, triggering associations and evoking a charged atmosphere. The work is not a final product but will gradually take its form during its public view, filled with performative and discursive elements.

Zhengqing Li

Life is a short journey, but it's long enough to drown in tons of dreams. When you were a child, were you fascinated by your dreams? Do you still try to find the meaning after you had a sweet, creepy or erotic dream? My project is about my understanding of dreams. After a day of absorbing information, do your experiences keep running through your mind? Does your dream return to a scene that you saw before over and over again? Does that scene change a little bit each time? Does the end meet the beginning? Have you ever tried to make sense of a dream about a past experience? Have you been inspired by a new understanding of the experience because of the dream? My works invite people to rethink and reinterpret the signals from their mind, especially from their dreams.

