

# THE WEL FARE STATE

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# INTRODUCTION

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## THE WELFARE STATE IS NOT A THING OF THE PAST

The welfare state gives form to the values of freedom, justice and love of one's neighbour in a secularised society. In this sense, the welfare state is not merely a social system or an institution, but just as much an ethics.

Herman Deleecq, 1992<sup>1</sup>

One of the delights of thinking about the welfare state, but also one of the difficulties, is that it is the object of so much intellectual and political passion, so much controversy and affection. It is in the nature of the welfare state that it concerns everyone, not least a public museum of contemporary art that would not exist without it. We who worked on this project agreed from the beginning that it should not become nostalgic. The welfare state, we concurred, should not be equated with a sentimental longing for the past when the future is something to look forward to.

'The Welfare State' exhibition at M HKA is therefore not set up to celebrate an idealised memory of post-War prosperity. Belgium's *verzorgingsstaat* or *État-providence* was, in its classical incarnation, a centralised 'caregiving' state, but when federalisation began in the early 1970s, it resonated with the politics of the time. France's *trente glorieuses* – 'thirty glorious' years following the Second World War – saw high economic growth and expansive state policy, but also brutal colonial wars and near-revolutionary social unrest. The record-breaking annual economic growth of Sweden's *rekordåren* in the late 1960s and early 70s could not be sustained once the oil crisis of 1973 made critical self-reflection necessary.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Herman Deleecq, *De Architectuur van de Welvaartsstaat*, Leuven and Amersfoort: Acco, 1992, p.14. Translation the author's.

<sup>2</sup> *Rekordåren 1966, 1967, 1968...* is a documentary film by Lena Ewert, Staffan Hedqvist, Ann-Charlotta Hult and Olle Jeppsson – a left-wing, proto-new age critique of the dehumanising management of constant growth. Highly contentious in its time, it was famously censored two days after its premiere in 1969, and subsequently aired a single time on television.

It is tempting, seventy years after the end of the Second World War, after Year Zero,<sup>3</sup> to lament the loss of that certainty with which every new generation was able to say ‘Most of our people have never had it so good’.<sup>4</sup> But let us not forget that the welfare state, as a system of thought and a monument to pragmatic progressive politics, is a work in progress, a field of innovation through trial and error. Let us, indeed, remember that want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness – the ‘five giant evils’<sup>5</sup> – have yet to be vanquished.

If, in this sense, the welfare state is a thing of the future, it remains very much of the moment, and not only in our part of Western Europe. Like many developed economies, Flanders and Belgium (and of course, also Brussels and Wallonia) are now struggling to adapt the agreements and institutions of the welfare state to the new normalcy of an economy growing by less than two per cent a year, among many game-changing facts and figures at home and abroad.

No, the welfare state is not a thing of the past. Nor is it in life-threatening danger; nor, necessarily, in decline. Yet it is not static and cannot afford to be. Just before I sat down to write this, I listened to a programme on Swedish Radio about ‘hof-ficing’: inviting strangers to use your home as a shared office, a new practice within the broader phenomenon known as the ‘social economy’ or ‘collaborative economy’.

Might this trend among networked individuals be relevant to our exhibition? Possibly. Indeed, probably. And not least because of how employment security and the tax base will be affected in the long term should more and more people choose to bypass the formalised economy. Such societal experiments may eventually tilt the precarious balance inside the complex system that the Danish sociologist Gøsta Esping-Andersen calls the ‘welfare regime’.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, this regime knows very well that it must be open to new ideas if it wants to stay in power.

The welfare state is not ‘owned’ by any single ideology or

country. The US is still waging its War on Poverty, announced by Lyndon B. Johnson half a century ago, alongside the more talked-about War on Drugs and War on Terror. China and Indonesia are introducing universal health insurance for their vast populations. The Soviet Union and the socialist bloc offered social services comparable to those at schools, universities and hospitals in the global West, on terms that were not entirely bad for the population; even today, Cuban health care has quite a reputation. Across Western Europe, all political movements on the respectable left-to-right spectrum co-authored the non-violent, consensual and incremental politics and the ‘mixed economy’ that allowed the continent to recover from the devastation of war and the loss of empire in the mid-twentieth century.

Growing up in Sweden in the 1970s – my own experience – meant being indoctrinated in the official truth that the technocratic, one-size-fits-all welfare state was unthinkable without the ever-victorious Social Democratic Workers’ Party. The Swedish ruling class at the time would have reacted with sincere perplexity had anyone suggested that the Catholics of continental Europe were also offering progressive and morally sound social policy. (No one ever did, of course.) So to me, the full title of Herman Deleeck’s now classic textbook on the Belgian welfare state is charmingly exotic and baroque:

*The Architecture of the Welfare State, or a Description of the Principles, the Facts and the Problems of This Society, Wherein the Connection Is Made between Welfare, Employment, Inflation, the Labour Force, Its Aging, Social Dialogue, Taxation, Government Social Expenditure, Social Policy, the Division of Income; Whereby Crisis and Critique Are Not Shunned, but Whereby It Is Also Posited That This Welfare State Is an Incomparably Advanced Form of Society Based on Freedom and Solidarity, the Spiritual Ideal of Europe.*<sup>7</sup>

Deleeck was a Flemish economist, jurist and top politician for the Christian People’s Party (which was rebranded in 2001,

<sup>3</sup> See Ian Buruma, *Year Zero: A History of 1945*, London: Atlantic Books, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> In the words of British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan, addressing a Tory rally in Bedford on 20 July 1957 to mark 25 years of service by Mr. Lennox-Boyd, the Colonial Secretary, as MP for Mid Bedfordshire.

<sup>5</sup> These were named by the economist William Beveridge in *Social Insurance and Allied Services*, a report he completed for the UK government in 1942. Usually referred to as the ‘Beveridge Report’, it is considered the founding document for the post-War welfare state in Britain.

<sup>6</sup> See Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990.

<sup>7</sup> Translation the authors.



and is now called CD&V, short for Christian Democrat and Flemish). He spotted a paradox within the post-War Western European welfare state, which he named the Matthew Effect, after Matthew 13:12: ‘For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.’ The welfare state was originally built on a morally motivated rejection of charity, as well as, at least implicitly, on a traditional patriarchal society rooted in familial networks. Certain benefits should, it declared, be offered to all citizens, regardless of their income or wealth; individuals in need should not be humiliated by having to ask for help, even from their own relatives.

Since the early-to-mid 1970s – the waning days of the post-War period of high economic growth and low social inequality (at least compared to now, if we are to believe Thomas Piketty’s calculations in his 2013 book, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*) – the European welfare state has, in fact, been in an almost constant condition of crisis and reinvention. It has been criticised, by all ideological camps, for being either lacking or exceeding in ambition or efficiency, for going too far or not far enough.

Deleek problematised some outcomes of the entitlements system from his perspective of ‘compassionate conservatism’. In a recent book,<sup>8</sup> two senior editors of the liberal, pro-globalisation weekly *The Economist* bring up – disapprovingly and no less than three times – the free bus passes that Sir Mick Jagger and Sir Elton John are entitled to as senior British citizens. The authors report on what they see as constructive approaches to making the welfare state more efficient, in places as different as Stockholm, Singapore and Sacramento, the state capital of California.

Meanwhile, left-leaning debaters and activists continue to argue against cuts in public spending and, crucially, the priorities they are based on as well as the vision of a future society they reflect. A recent example in this country is the Hart boven Hard, or ‘Heart over Hard’, movement, which came together in August 2014 to protest against budget cuts by the new Flemish



‘The Key to Happiness! Socialism’. Election poster for the Belgian Socialist Party, 1958  
 Courtesy of Amsab-Institute of Social History, Ghent

<sup>8</sup> John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *The Fourth Revolution: The Global Race to Reinvent the State*, New York: Penguin Press, 2014.



'For Women: The Right to Die but Not to Vote'  
Courtesy of KADOC-Documentation and Research Centre for Religion, Culture and Society, Leuven



'For a Happy Family, Vote Liberal'. Election poster for the National Federation of Liberal Women, 1958  
Courtesy of the Liberal Archives, Ghent





and Belgian governments. Together with its Walloon sister organisation, *Tout autre chose*, meaning ‘Something Entirely Different’, it organised a march in Brussels on 29 March that drew some 20,000 protesters.

## CAN THE WELFARE STATE BE AN EXHIBITION?

The relation between art and politics is not a passage from fiction to reality but a relation between two ways of producing fictions.

Jacques Rancière, 2010<sup>9</sup>

The welfare state has, generally speaking, become synonymous with the synthesis of a market economy and active government that characterises both ‘Western’ and ‘emergent’ societies today. The term itself can no longer be reserved only for countries such as Belgium or New Zealand, the US or Japan; it also describes how countries as different as Brazil, Turkey, South Korea and China treat their populations. Yet there is little agreement among the many who operate and observe public social policy – politicians, civil servants, trade union leaders, social scientists, journalists, the public at large – about how the welfare state could or should be defined in more precise terms. What is part of it and what is not?

For ‘The Welfare State’ exhibition, Ghislaine Peeters, Head of Production at M HKA, and I initiated a collaboration with the professors and doctoral students of the Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy at the University of Antwerp. Together with Professor Ive Marx, we have organised a series of seminars involving the centre’s researchers and the artists invited to participate in the exhibition. The first of these, which took

place at the university on 9 April 2015, featured Professor Marx and the artist Kajsa Dahlberg, who spoke on precarious labour and how it can be objectively observed and evaluated.

An interesting sub-theme emerged in this debate: should the work of an artist and the financial support that she receives from the state be seen as part of the welfare state? For both museum curators and artists the answer must be yes. Otherwise, why would we make this exhibition? We find it self-evident that the ambition to provide efficient and sophisticated public education, and ultimately universal access to knowledge and culture, is a key component of the welfare state.<sup>10</sup> Those who produce and mediate and appreciate culture and art do so as members of society. They – we – may be in opposition to society, or at least take a dissident position towards it. But this does not mean that cultural activities should be regarded as separate from a ‘useful’ mainstream economy. Our hosts, the professors and doctoral students, took a more cautious view. They pointed out that some researchers do not consider public subsidies for culture an integral part of the welfare state, but prefer a narrower definition of the term, focussing on social policy in a stricter sense: taxation, transfers, labour market regulations and other such tangible aspects of social engineering.

What makes this collaboration with the university so important, at least to us, is precisely this difference in perspective and method. Whereas we – the ‘we’ of the art world – maintain that we must always be at liberty to interpret any phenomenon or idea in any meaningful way, this subjective approach ceases to be productive in the realm of academic research. Creativity can be just as important in academia as in art, but a researcher who slips up on terminological consensus will soon be outmanoeuvred.

The next seminar, on 11 May at the University featuring the doctoral candidate Sarah Marchal and the artist Francisco Camacho Herrera, asked to what extent the welfare state can be seen as an emancipatory project. Interestingly, while this is a more speculative question than that of how precarious labour

might be represented, it was suggested by the university rather than the museum.

A question that this series of discursive enlargements of the exhibition will try to answer ahead is: Does the welfare state have a form? Our discussions at the Herman Deleeck Centre started with the idea that the welfare state is a closed system, designed to cater to those on the inside, and to keep others out; therefore it cannot be said to have an open form. But it is difficult for us within the museum to avoid raising follow-up questions: If the welfare state does have a form, can it be shown? Can the welfare state be an exhibition? And if it can, what kind of exhibition?

A museum of contemporary art must always respect some fundamental and specific freedoms that define art and, arguably, make it useful to society: the freedom of movement between disciplines and topics and means of expression; the freedom of conscience that allows art to challenge aesthetic, ethical and political prohibitions; and, perhaps most importantly, the freedom from the ban on self-contradiction that underpins Western philosophy and science.

An exhibition *called* ‘The Welfare State’ and built around the work of eight contemporary artists may disappoint viewers who believe they are going to see an exhibition *about* the welfare state with contributions by these eight artists. That is a risk we are running.

It would be presumptuous to claim that this exhibition has all the right answers to the many questions about the relationship between art and politics. Yet, its composition (based on the subjective interests of the participating artists) and its organisation (originating in the intention to restrain curatorial subjectivity and seek truly collaborative relations with various partners) betray the same crucial ambition: to create an event that speaks in different voices but also comes together as a song because it does not submit to a single master narrative.

The participating artists are well versed in various practices of political activism and its mediation throughout cultural life. But as I see it, they have chosen to apply their ideas and convictions in unpredictable ways, remaining committed to

<sup>10</sup> ‘In all human societies, health and education have an intrinsic value: the ability to enjoy years of good health, like the ability to acquire knowledge and culture, is one of the fundamental purposes of civilisation.’ Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (trans. Arthur Goldhammer), Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press, 2014, p.308. Emphasis the author’s.

constantly observing the outside world in all its imperfections and to interacting with fellow human beings. They have chosen to respond to and transform reality through aesthetic means.

The possibility to do this, and to do it well, is what the philosopher Jacques Rancière is defending with his notion of the ‘aesthetic regime’ as developed in his two relatively recent books, *The Emancipated Spectator*, from 2008, and *Aisthesis*, from 2011.<sup>11</sup> Rancière’s refutation of the ‘oppositions between the collective and the individual, the image and live reality, activity and passivity, being in charge of oneself and alienation’<sup>12</sup> is all the more convincing for resounding from within an intellectual practice that speaks clearly and passionately about emancipation. Moreover, Rancière sees emancipation as dependent on the distance between people that is ‘the normal condition of all communication’.<sup>13</sup>

The ‘politics of art’ thus appears in the interlacing of three logics: that of the forms of aesthetic experience, that of the work of fiction and that of meta-political strategies. This also implies a curious and contradictory weaving-together of the three forms of efficiency that I have tried to define: the representative logic that wants to produce effects through representations, the aesthetic logic that produces effects through the suspension of representative ends and the ethical logic that wants the forms of art and those of politics to identify directly with one another.<sup>14</sup>

Rancière’s take on art is certainly not apolitical, and he does not argue for a revival of the nineteenth-century slogan *l’art pour l’art*. His argument is, rather, that the contradiction between passive spectatorship and active or critical engagement is a construction that leads us astray. This has been a guiding light for our exhibition.

Esping-Andersen’s welfare regime and Rancière’s aesthetic regime may even have something in common. Are they not



‘More Free Time Means Greater Family Happiness’

Courtesy of KADOC–Documentation and Research Centre for Religion, Culture and Society, Leuven

11 J. Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art* (trans. Zakir Paul), London and New York: Verso, 2013.

12 J. Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, op. cit., p.13.

13 *Ibid.*, p.16.

14 *Ibid.*, p.73.





Class at the Desmet School, Kortrijk  
Courtesy of the Liberal Archives, Ghent





Camping at the Belgian Coast, 1950s  
 Courtesy of Amsab-Institute of Social History, Ghent © Rol (Roland Van der Sypt)

Cars in Tunnel of the Small Ring Road in Brussels, 1957  
 Courtesy of Amsab-Institute of Social History, Ghent © Keystone

more radical, in the long run, than other, more revolutionary alternatives, precisely because they are both based on respect for the distance – and difference – between people that makes dialogical communication possible? And is this fundamental possibility of communication not what unites such different social phenomena as the negotiation between organised interests (in the labour market, for instance) and confidence in highly subjective statements (in the arts)?

All eight artists in ‘The Welfare State’ have set up their own aesthetic regimes over the course of their careers, whether they span more than half a century, in the case of Stephen Willats, or just around one decade, as with the youngest participants, Francisco Camacho Herrera and Donna Kukama. It is all but impossible to characterise these regimes in just a few short sentences. The issue here is whether the title of this exhibition is justified by the practices and works it presents; in the inverse, it is whether the inclusion of these artists is justified for an exhibition with this title.

The term *cybernetics* is used much less often today than in the post-War decades, although this science of communications and automatic control systems in both machines and living things started to really dominate our lives only in the digital age. In the early 1970s, Stephen Willats’s interest in cybernetics shifted from the live interaction between his sculptural works and their viewers to his own live interaction with people living in various socio-economic conditions. The encounters were transformed into diagrammatic image-text compositions, combining photographs, quotes from conversations and graphic symbols. This exhibition includes a selection of his works from the last forty years that is as generous as the available space allows.

One of the things that makes Willats’s oeuvre truly remarkable is the quality of the relations he builds with people through his work. He does not instrumentalise them. Instead, he encourages all those participating in the work as protagonists or as viewers – sometimes one in the same – to take each other into account, to come to terms with one another. This is particularly true of *Meta Filter* (1973–75), a work that is both sculpture and event, both process and its documentation. It allows two participants to

sustain a dialogical negotiation in real time, through a computer encased in a rather large wooden console, and to simultaneously produce a record of it by filling out a 'Problem Book'. The hardware was advanced technology forty years ago; the experience it makes possible is still a cutting-edge enactment of social thought.

Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven says that her work has always been about the welfare state, not least in the sense of 'inner welfare'. As a *samenlevingsvorm* – the Dutch term denoting 'form of society' also connotes 'ways of living together' – the welfare state produces artificial ideas of comfort, at the same time as it offers useful guidelines for how to survive contemporary reality. In this sense, the welfare state determines and envelops Van Kerckhoven's visual universe, where contorted human (mostly female) figures move across distorted (mostly interior) spaces. The scientific community's quest for artificial intelligence, the as-yet-elusive ultimate goal of cybernetics, has provided her with inspiration and advanced working tools for more than thirty years. To this exhibition she contributes what might be called a 'freeform ensemble' of new and existing works, including paintings, digital prints and one of her mobile 'carrel' installations, doubling as a workspace and a surface for images. The presentation allows viewers to glean her non-linear and ultra-logical thinking, and to catch a brief glimpse of HeadNurse, a nurturing but also life-threatening presence that can be felt throughout her oeuvre.

Although best known for his wryly humorous and subtly obsessive films starring characters mostly played by his closest family and friends, Josef Dabernig is in essence a spatial artist. The films should really be seen in the architecture he designs for them, and this exhibition allows visitors to do so. Dabernig is inexorably drawn to the remains of the welfare regime established by 'real existing socialism'. It is as if he cannot get enough of the settings provided by train compartments, holiday resorts and sports bars in countries that continue to be, 25 years after the fall of the Iron Curtain, an exotic 'near-abroad' to the Viennese. Dabernig's eye is trained on the 'restorative' activities that citizens of the welfare state are encouraged to engage in. Two films are shown here: one about exercising, the other about holidaying.

Artūras Raila's two works in the exhibition deconstruct ideological speech simply by letting it flow, so that viewers do the analytical work themselves, almost without noticing. Some fifteen years ago, Raila visited Austria just before the election that brought the right-wing Austrian Freedom Party to power. He showed his video footage from the trip to the leadership of the outlawed right-wing National Democratic Party in north-west Lithuania and made another video with their comments, which are all the more ideological for being spontaneous and expressing the world view (and complexes) of 'simple people' in the periphery of the periphery. A few years ago, Raila visited Copenhagen and chanced upon the funeral of one of Denmark's wealthiest philanthropists, Mærsk Mc-Kinney Møller. His 'libretto' – a wall-text and series of animated films – based on his spiritual encounter with the deceased becomes an opera of authority and activism, deference and dissent. One of the characters says: 'You'd better pay your taxes.'

One reminder of the closed form of the welfare state is Europe's less than adequate response to the humanitarian disaster caused by the civil war in Syria. The 'others' must be kept out, at almost any cost. Róza El-Hassan proposes a solution to the housing problem caused by the large number of refugees within Syria and in neighbouring countries: build shelters using adobe bricks, the cheapest local material, based on the traditional beehive-shaped houses of northern Syria; the domed constructions do not need to be insulated in winter and they keep cool in summer. Erected in the exhibition as a sculptural installation (and as a large painting, because they will also be adorned with a representation of the starry sky), this structure and another model for a simple dwelling, the one-room adobe 'cube' common in the Egyptian countryside, additionally offer functional prototypes for emergency housing that can be mass-produced with support from the NGO sector.

If we had to list the most important contributions art can make to society at large, self-reflection would probably come out on top. Kajsa Dahlberg has wired self-reflection through her entire practice. The medium she chooses to work with – in the case of 'The Welfare State', documentary cinema – becomes



part of the mental and technical *substance* of her work, in the working process and the results it yields. Here, the chosen topic is labour, specifically precarious labour. Dahlberg's narrative incorporates not only the self-reflection of everyone who contributed to her project (including the factory workers who made her equipment, the delivery men on tight daily schedules and the self-employed translator of the subtitles) but also a history of labour specific to cinema, notably the importance of film footage to the development of Methods-Time Measurement, which regulates factory labour. Today the system is increasingly used in the service sector, sometimes even to measure the productivity of creative professionals.

The distance from labour to desire is not as long as we might think. Francisco Camacho Herrera's contribution to this exhibition is an unambiguously process-oriented work: a website owned and managed by users who wish to work together in real terms. While the tools for initiating and sustaining such collaboration are virtual (a venue for posting projects online and a system of colour codes reflecting the amount of working hours invested), the projected outcome is not. Camacho Herrera was inspired by the utopian communitarianism that Charles Fourier called for in the early nineteenth century. He intends *fulltopia.com* to articulate a collective desire to bypass the monetary economy and to facilitate the exchange of services for other services. Throughout the duration of the exhibition, the website will be tested by actual, already-existing communities, such as jobseekers and volunteer networks.

Donna Kukama uses performance to highlight tensions and movements in contemporary society. She performs in public spaces – streets and squares and shopping malls populated by real people – injecting strong doses of the imaginary into the transactions of the everyday; she creates the half-real. As an artist, Kukama is both pronouncedly visual and profoundly socio-political. She might, for example, appear in contexts where high art is largely unknown, to then incorporate references to the history of Western painting. Her unsettling repurposing of existing institutions – whether financial, real estate or civic – aims directly at the fundamentals of the prevailing order. She precariously



'The Future: Join the Belgian Socialist Party', 1957  
Courtesy of Amsab-Institute of Social History, Ghent



'In This Country You Can Be Yourself Again. The Renewal Works'  
Courtesy of the Liberal Archives, Ghent



'All to the Official School', 1958  
Courtesy of Amsab-Institute of Social History, Ghent © Marcel Stobbaerts



balances between the theatrical and the socially engaged, between the solidarity of the political activist and the non-alignment of the artist. Subversion can only ever happen on the inside of a system powerful enough to call for resistance.

## IS THE WELFARE STATE THE ANTITHESIS OF ART?

Art is the societal antithesis to society, not to be directly deduced from it.

Theodor W. Adorno, 1970<sup>15</sup>

The welfare state in its classical Western incarnation embodies the ideal that everyone is equal before the law and that the same rules apply to all. But the welfare state also developed out of the professionalised administrative apparatus set up in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the nation states of a rapidly industrialising Europe and in its colonial dependencies overseas. Modern rules-based bureaucracy replaced earlier personalised systems of governance inherited from the princely states of the Middle Ages. In the newly unified Germany of the 1870s, the 'Iron Chancellor', Otto von Bismarck, put in place the first modern welfare regime, complete with health insurance and public education, to counter the influence of the socialists among the growing working class.

The European welfare state was at least partly an anti-revolutionary project of the old establishment, and to this day it operates with regulations that must be applied to every individual in the same way. While it may protect rights and freedoms, the welfare state demands something in return: individuals must identify themselves as members of society first and foremost. That, incidentally, is a price that few artists are prepared to pay in full. Although many artists and intellectuals are ardent



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supporters of the welfare state in both theory and practice, and although they may be fascinated by rules as such, they are not generally known for their readiness to submit to rules formulated by others.

This has proven an interesting complication in organising this exhibition, ‘The Welfare State’, in a museum of contemporary art. It is not advisable to ask artists of this calibre to help illustrate the meaning of an exhibition’s title. Not that *illustration* is bad in and of itself: its origins lie in *illumination*, namely ‘casting light upon something’. It has, however, become embarrassingly associated with a practice of redundancy: of retelling something in images that has already been told in words (as too many book illustrations do) or vice versa (as is too often the case with press releases for art exhibitions).

Is the welfare state the antithesis of art? I find it pertinent to rephrase Adorno’s statement into this question, even if I am not prepared to answer yes. I have, however, included ‘non-art’ in the exhibition, as a way to elucidate what the welfare state means to a Belgian audience and to anchor the cumulative narrative of the exhibition in this country’s interestingly complex and contested political history. There is, of course, nothing new about using visual evidence of things happening in society in the hope of painting a true picture of social reality.

A visitor to the Paris Universal Exhibition in 1900 searched hard to find its most explosive exhibit. [...] In the open air, officialdom celebrated ‘The Triumph of Industry and Empire’, but tucked away on a side street were cramped rooms devoted to reckoning the human issues raised by this triumph. The fair’s organisers dubbed the side-space a *musée social*, a social museum, a Louvre of labour meant to show how capitalism gets its work done. The exhibitors described their rooms quite differently, naming the space *La Question sociale* – ‘The Social Question’. [...] The statements made in the Paris rooms came mostly in the form of documents and maps tacked up on the walls.<sup>16</sup>

The four so-called cultural archives in Flanders were created by and for different political movements, the ‘pillars’ of industrialised Belgian society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the Catholics (Christian Democrats), the Liberals and the Socialists (the Flemish National Movement was added somewhat later). These archives were all founded in the late 1970s and early 80s, during a time when cultural policy was being devolved from the central government to the linguistic communities. Before that, starting in the late 1960s, the Belgian political parties and trade unions had split along the linguistic divide, so that there were no longer any major socio-political organisations uniting Flemish-speakers and French-speakers.

KADOC–Documentation and Research Centre for Religion, Culture and Society is an institution under the Catholic University of Leuven; it was founded as the Catholic Documentation Centre in 1976. Amsab–Institute for Social History in Ghent was founded in 1980, as the Archive and Museum for the Socialist Workers’ Movement, but also traces its lineage back to a National Institute for Social History that existed in Brussels from 1937 to 1940. In recent years, Amsab has broadened its political scope to include, among other things, archives of the Green and LGBT movements. The Liberal Archives in Ghent were founded in 1982. ADVN–Archive and Research Centre in Antwerp, the newest and smallest of these archives, was founded in 1984 as the Archive and Documentation Centre on Flemish Nationalism.

We contacted all four archives, and after exploratory visits to each by Ghislaine Peeters and myself, they set up a joint working group consisting of Chris De Beule (Researcher at the Liberal Archives), Koen De Scheemaeker (Director of ADVN), Hendrik Ollivier (Head of the Collection at Amsab), Paule Verbruggen (Head of Mediation at Amsab) and Luc Vints (Head of Mediation and Communication at KADOC). These colleagues then presented us with a joint selection of visual and audiovisual materials (political posters, photographs, informational films) from their archives. We were very happy with this working method, since this exhibition wants to be dialogical rather than dialectic: it does not try to convince the entrenched, nor does it preach to the already converted.

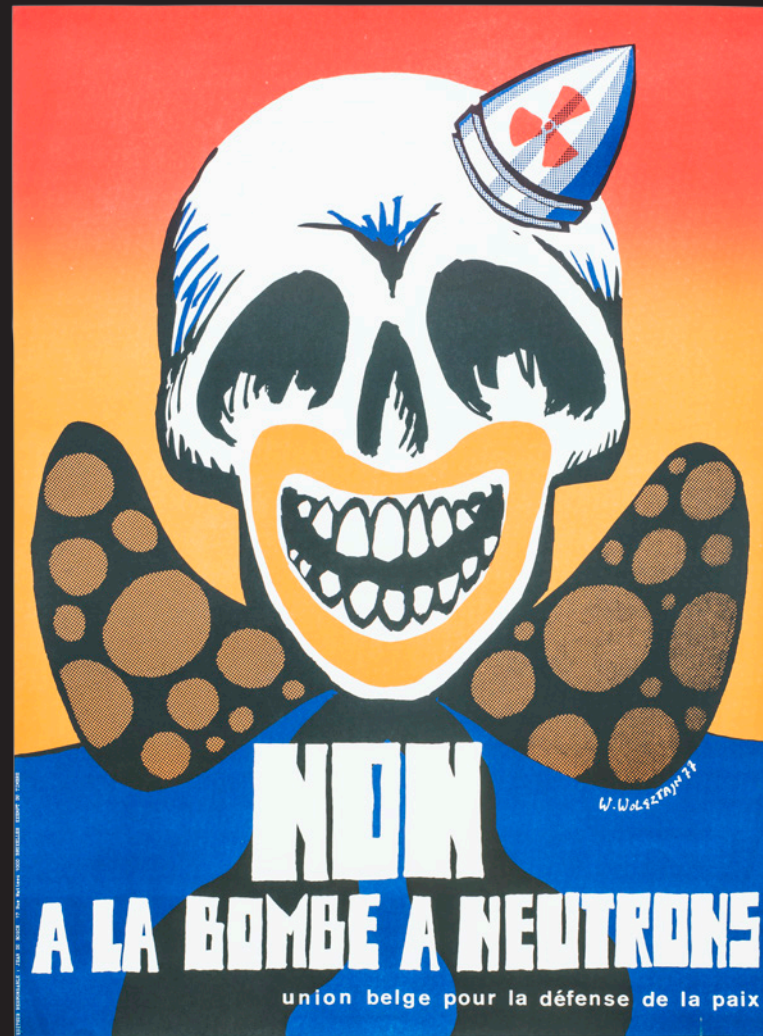
<sup>16</sup> Richard Sennett, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*, London: Penguin Books, 2013, p.35.

When we started preparation for our exhibition, we sent a letter to all prospective collaboration partners, as well as to the artists, in which we raised some concerns about the welfare state, choosing to problematise rather than to eulogise it. It should be made clear from the beginning, we thought, that we do not intend the project to be soft-lensed or nostalgic. The archives also received our letter and decided to use these statements as a starting point for their work:

*The welfare state is aligned with the centralised power vertical.* While many important social reforms of the twentieth century were motivated by egalitarian thought and progressive political determination (the creation of the National Health Service in the UK is just one example), they still presupposed, indeed grew out of, centralised bureaucracies. In the case of Belgium, most aspects of the still-visible post-War welfare state came into being while the country was centralised, before the devolution of power to the linguistic communities.

*The welfare state is entangled with militarism.* This is not just a case of the military's organisational and operational structures being carried over into civilian life, which happened across the world in the modern era; it also, more specifically, concerns the dynamic of the Cold War in Europe. Both sides, NATO (including the neutrals who self-identified as Western) and the Warsaw Pact, motivated their populations towards military spending and conscription by referring to the values of their respective takes on the welfare state, which need to be protected at any cost. To a somewhat lesser extent, this was also true in Yugoslavia, the only officially non-aligned country in Cold War Europe. Inversely, social spending was, in all countries, seen as something that boosted the population's loyalty to the ideological system underpinning it.

*The welfare state is steeped in colonialism.* The welfare state was created for 'us', the domestic population of the European colonial powers, and not for 'them', the adversaries or the colonised populations. For instance, in the formation of the EEC in the 1950s, one of the objectives (not often acknowledged nowadays) was to consolidate the countries of continental Western Europe so that they would have continued access to resources



'No to the Neutron Bomb', Belgian Union for the Defense of Peace, 1977  
 Courtesy of Amsab-Institute of Social History, Ghent © Willy Wolsztajn



MI Business

**Onze regering  
dankt de derde wereld  
voor z'n gulheid.**



Photo Credit: Mike Wells

**11.11.11. Omdat honger 'n onrecht is. Prk.002**

vrij van zegel, codex 198

'Our Government Thanks the Third World for Its Generosity. Because Hunger Is Unfair', 1989  
Courtesy of Amsab-Institute of Social History, Ghent © Mike Wells

**500.000  
WERKLOZEN,  
waarom dan  
gastarbeiders?**

**VLAAMS BLOK**

'500,000 Unemployed: Why Then Guest Workers?', 1988  
Courtesy of ADVN-Archive and Research Centre, Antwerp



'Holidays at Sea', 1989  
 Courtesy of Amsab-Institute of Social History, Ghent © Wim Schamp

from Africa in the face of not just the threat from the USSR but also competition from the US and the declining British Empire. The French and Belgian colonial empires were still quite intact in 1957, while the Italian and Dutch colonies were largely 'lost'; Germany had already relinquished its colonies after the First World War.

*The welfare state is used to promote isolationism.* The 'us-and-them' conflict may be a construction, but it is a powerful one that is still active and will shape the future of Europe. Just look at the ongoing refugee crisis on the Mediterranean Sea. The debate about introducing a living wage for all Swiss citizens, to name another example, goes hand in hand with a debate about introducing more restrictive rules on immigration. The welfare state has also been exploited for the 'provincialisation of Europe' in more intangible but nonetheless insidious ways, not least the nostalgia for an illusory egalitarian (and ethnically homogeneous) recent past that many parties of the 'new right' consciously promote.

*The welfare state has contributed to the depletion of the natural environment.* In the 1960s, neither the capitalist and 'mixed' economies of Western Europe nor the socialist command economies in the Soviet-dominated 'Second World' were environmentally friendly. Both systems treated nature as an inexhaustible resource to be exploited, necessarily, for economic growth – indeed, to sustain the social and political models they subscribed to. With the beginning of political environmentalism in the 1970s, a new question was raised: How much growth do we actually need? Today most certainly the issue of climate change should be a top priority for all political forces. But, for a largely post-industrial society, is the updated welfare state really more environmentally sustainable than the 'classical' version for which some among us are still nostalgic?

The first thing visitors to 'The Welfare State' see is a row of stands with some seventy posters commissioned by parties, trade unions and other organisations from the whole political spectrum in Belgium and Flanders, dating from the end of the Second World War until just a few years ago. The museum made its final selection from the materials offered to us by the four archives' joint working group. The topics, inspired by our

problematism of the welfare state, flow into each other, but if the visitors take the leftward route from the stand nearest to the entrance, they encounter them in this order: 'general political propaganda', 'optimism and the future', 'consumerism', 'labour and unemployment', 'women's rights', 'family policy', 'the environment', 'anti-militarism', 'solidarity with the developing world', 'immigration', 'education' and 'general social policies'. Should visitors choose to go in the opposite direction, 'general political propaganda' will be followed by 'general social policy', and so forth.

Amidst these stands are four vitrines displaying photographs selected to reflect themes such as 'education', 'housing', 'infrastructure and transport', 'holidays' and 'colonialism'. They too have been selected from the holdings of the four archives, and in addition there are photographs from the archive of the now-defunct airline Sabena (Société Anonyme Belge d'Exploitation de la Navigation Aérienne) that were kindly lent by the Royal Museum of the Armed Forces and Military History in Brussels. A programme of films, and excerpts from films, again lent to the exhibition by the four archives, are shown in a small adjacent room.

Just a few words about the picture from the Belgian Congo adorning the inside jacket of this volume. We are also using it in various other contexts to symbolise and promote this exhibition. It comes from the Liberal Archives in Ghent, which holds a collection of some 2500 photographs from the Belgian Congo, donated by the family of Henri Guillaume (1914–64). From 1957 until the independence of the Congo in 1960, Guillaume headed the department for film and photography of Inforcongo, the information service of the colonial government in Léopoldville.<sup>17</sup>

This photograph was taken by Joseph Makula, the only Congolese working for Inforcongo,<sup>18</sup> and according to the type-written tag on its verso it shows 'children being registered for the official school in the community of Matete in Léopoldville'. It was probably taken in 1958, and certainly before the riots on 4 January 1959, when protesters specially targeted the symbols (or simulacra) of the colonial welfare state in areas of the

capital reserved for the *évolués*, the Congolese urban elite whom the Belgians considered more 'evolved'. Administrative buildings, clinics and schools were ransacked; standard-issue desks were hurled out of windows; blackboards were defaced with obscene graffiti or, worse, with subversive slogans such as *Je suis indépendant*.

To this day, some people seem provoked by the suggestion that the fate of the Congo could – indeed should – be discussed within the same conceptual framework as the past, present and future of the European welfare state. But how could we have found a better image than this strikingly staged composition to reflect the complexities and interdependencies signalled by our exhibition title?

17. See <http://www.liberaalarchief.be/fotos-collectie-kongo.html#8> (last accessed on 17 April 2015).  
 18. 'A former soldier in the *Force Publique*, Makula had been assigned to the military newspaper *Sango ya Biso*. In contrast to his European colleagues who travelled extensively through the colony, much of Makula's work focussed on the *évolué* community of Léopoldville, showcasing interiors that demonstrated the achievements of the Congolese as peers of the Europeans. After independence and the departure of the Belgians at Inforcongo, Makula continued to work for the information service, training a whole generation of Congolese photographers, including a woman, Mpate Sulis. In semi-retirement, he operated Studio Mak in Lemba Commune in 1981–91.' Mwana Mboka, *Kinshasa Then and Now* [blog], available at <http://kosubaawate.blogspot.be/2014/07/leopoldville-1924-photo-zagourski-opens.html> (last accessed on 17 April 2015).





'A Congolese Family Home in the Community of Matete in Léopoldville', late 1950s  
Photograph by Joseph Makula for Inforcongo  
Courtesy of the Liberal Archives, Ghent (Donation Henri Guillaume)

# CAT TA LO GUE

**Stephen Willats**  
**Josef Dabernig**  
**Róza El-Hassan**  
**Francisco Camacho Herrera**

**Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven**  
**Artūras Raila**  
**Kajsa Dahlberg**  
**Donna Kukama**

# ***STEPHEN WILLATS***

England, born in 1943, lives in London  
[www.stephenwillats.com](http://www.stephenwillats.com)

*Meta Filter*

1973–75

Painted wood, Perspex, computer, slide projector,  
Problem Book, booking card

Wooden console, 160 × 180 × 180 cm

Collection of Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Paris;  
located at Musée d'Art Contemporain, Lyon

Constructed with the assistance of Derek Aulton,  
electronic engineer

*A State of Agreement*

1975

Photographic prints, gouache, ink, Letraset on card

4 panels, each 55 × 70 cm

Collection of the artist; courtesy of Victoria Miro Gallery,  
London

*The Reunion*

1976

Photographic prints, ink, Letraset on card

1 panel, 48.3 × 76.2 cm

Collection of Markus Schultz, Berlin

*I Don't Want to Be Like Anyone Else*

1977

Photographic prints, ink, text on card

6 panels, each 76 × 109 cm

Collection of the artist; courtesy of Victoria Miro Gallery,  
London

*Sorting Out Other People's Lives*

1978

Photographic prints, photographic dyes, gouache, ink,  
Letraset on card

4 panels, each 103 × 76 cm

Collection of the artist; courtesy of Victoria Miro Gallery,  
London

*Inside the Space We Have Been Given*

1979

Photographic prints, gouache, ink, Letraset on paper  
4 panels, each 123.2 × 76.4 cm

Collection of the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven

*Contained Reality and Hidden Pressure*

1979

Photographic prints, gouache, paint, Letraset on paper  
4 panels, each 148.5 × 99.5 cm

Collection of the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven

*Starting Afresh with a Blank Canvas*

2008

DVD, photographic prints, photographic dye, ink, acrylic  
on card

3 panels, each 155 × 78 cm

Collection of the artist; courtesy of Victoria Miro Gallery,  
London

*The Secret of Life in the City*

2008–09

DVD, response sheet, photographic prints, photographic  
dye, acrylic paint, ink, Letraset on card

3 panels, each 112 × 80 cm

Collection of the artist; courtesy of Victoria Miro Gallery,  
London

*Oxford Community Data Stream*

2013

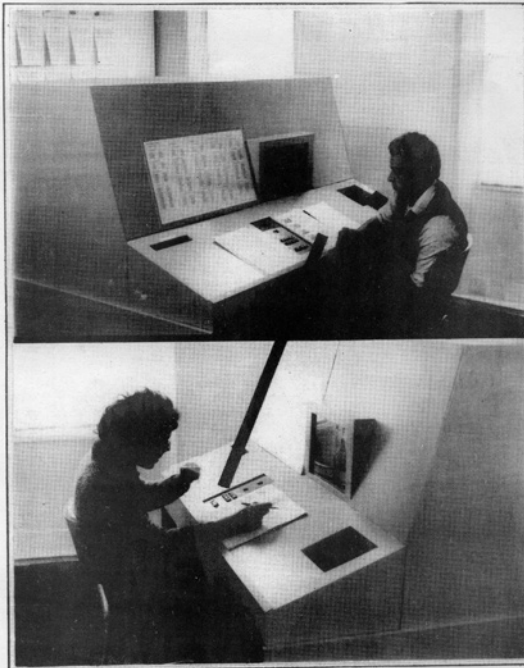
Installation with 400 colour prints and 18 channels of  
video

Dimensions variable

Commissioned by Modern Art Oxford

Collection of the artist; courtesy of Victoria Miro Gallery,  
London

## META FILTER



Meta Filter is a social model that is based on two people interacting with each other to reach a state of agreement. By giving two participants a series of perceptual problems about how they view other people's behaviour, the work establishes a common territory between participants.

Anybody can use Meta Filter during the course of the exhibition in one of two daily sessions. You can either choose to come with your own partner or be matched by us with someone you don't know. The average time of each session is two hours, so if you wish to operate Meta Filter telephone in advance to book a time.

Tues - Sat :- Session One 11am. Session Two 2-30pm. Sun:- Session Three 2pm.

Tues 27th March - Sun 8th April.

City Art Gallery, Civic Centre, Southampton.

Stephen Willats has been making work, and explaining it, since the beginning of the 1960s. The explaining matters, because Willats insists that art should undermine the authoritative hierarchical systems that modern reality – he prefers the more evocative term ‘new reality’ – imposes on the vast majority of people. Such subversion, he says, can be achieved by ‘an open system of explanation between all participants in a network’.<sup>1</sup> His interest in cybernetics, the new post-War science aiming at an integrated theory of control and communication, has always been emancipatory in nature. One image that recurs throughout his oeuvre is a diagram of the ‘homeostat’, an ultra-stable but therefore adaptive grid in which all parts are equally connected to each other.

Artists, Willats says, are under pressure to ‘maintain “exclusivity”, to separate practice from other practitioners, to declare sole authorship, exhibit a unique language’.<sup>2</sup> The process of explanation, the effort to make things explicit, can save artists from legislating to audiences by imposing their own language on them, from making fetishes for museums, from becoming stylists. These concerns, and many others, are articulated in books such as *Art and Social Function* (1976) and *Artwork as Social Model: A Manual of Questions and Propositions* (2012). Willats’s writing must be considered part of his art practice, as must the journal *Control*, which he has edited and published since 1965.

Underpinning his visual work is a speculative and future-oriented understanding of the model and the diagram. He uses descriptive models to show how things really occur, but attaches even more importance to what he calls ‘predictive’ and ‘prescriptive’ models (representations of how things will occur and how they could or should occur). The diagram, to Willats, is a speculative modelling tool that helps us realise the potential dynamism of any situation, even if it appears hopelessly predetermined or stagnant. It is no coincidence that he so often uses diagrammatic modes of representation in his works; based on collaborations with people in housing estates, they reveal the naked face of ‘new reality’, and indeed, the welfare state.

1. Stephen Willats, ‘Explain Yourself’, in Hans Ulrich Obrist (ed.), *Manifesto Marathon*, London and Cologne: Serpentine Gallery and Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2008.

2. *Ibid.*



I view the world we live in as a multi-channel experience in time, that our encountered fragments of reality are in themselves random variables, that we create the order we choose to see, and in this respect art practice itself becomes a social phenomenon. For me these concepts have remained a constant, as I wrote in the 1960s:

A work of art can itself constitute a societal state, a model of human relationships.

A work of art can consist of a process in time, a learning system through which the concepts of the social view forwarded in the work are accessed and internalised.

A work of art acknowledges the relativism inherent in perception and the transience of experience, there being no right or wrong, it taking the form of an open-ended process.

A work of art can operate as its own institution and as such is independent of specific art institutions.

A work of art can engage anyone meaningfully, being available to whoever wishes to enter its domain, only through embodying in its presentation the means by which people are able to acquire the necessary language and procedures to receive and internalise its meaning.

My work engages the audience in a new way of encountering art in society. I am not talking about a compliance, but something more active, a mutual understanding, an interaction between people – similar to the dynamic image of the homeostat where all the parts of the network are equal and equally linked.

Ultimately I am interested in the idea that reality is our own construction, that we build it and we create the reality we want in our life. There is not only one way of viewing reality. My work is an open work, based on agreement and open agreement.

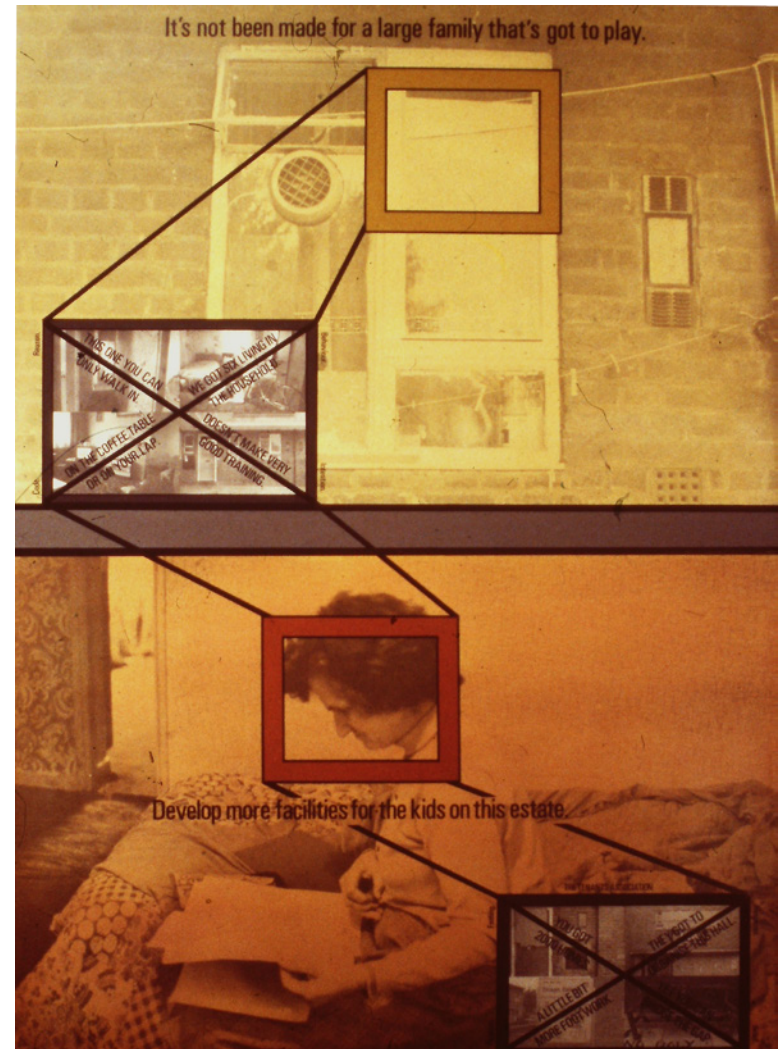
It is worth listing the options the artist seems to have in using a language that will maximise articulation and understanding on the part of the audience:

- A. The audience learns the artist's use of language, this being what the artist has traditionally relied on.
- B. The artist uses common codes or elements of language that are used in the same way by the audience.
- C. The language of the audience is used.
- D. The creation of a meta-language which the artist and all participating groups learn and use to describe their individual languages to each other.
- E. The construction of a meta filter which will encode a message transmitted in the language of one group of people and decode it into the language of the other.

In the mid-1960s, Willats entered the uncharted territory of the 'social project'. At first his ideas were playful. For *Man from the Twenty First Century* (1971), he planned to send an interviewer in a spacesuit into suburban Nottingham, and in *The Social Resource Project for Tennis Clubs* (1972), he invited club members to remodel the game to fit their social needs. With *The West London Social Resource Project* (1972) and *The Edinburgh Social Model Construction Project* (1973), however, he faced serious conceptual and methodological challenges. No one had ever tried to involve the general public in collective prescriptive social modelling, or attempted to create an artwork in the form of a social resource. Should the focus be on broad participation, radical ideas or concrete results? These are still relevant questions.

Willats continued to develop elements from these early projects: the workbook, the noticeboard, the use of computers, collaboration with public libraries and community centres. *Meta Filter* (1973-75) is an interactive learning system allowing two people, who may or may not know each other, to build an intangible model of society – a model society – through mutual agreement. Seated on opposite sides of a console that can be installed in any public venue, both operators encounter the same sequence of problems. These are formulated in the Problem Book and visualised in sixty slides of a group of eight people reflecting five kinds of group behaviour: 'reference', 'social provision', 'survival', 'projectional' and 'institutional'. The problems are organised into twelve areas of increasing complexity; in addition, each problem is accompanied by statements from two different reference groups who were consulted during the construction of the work.

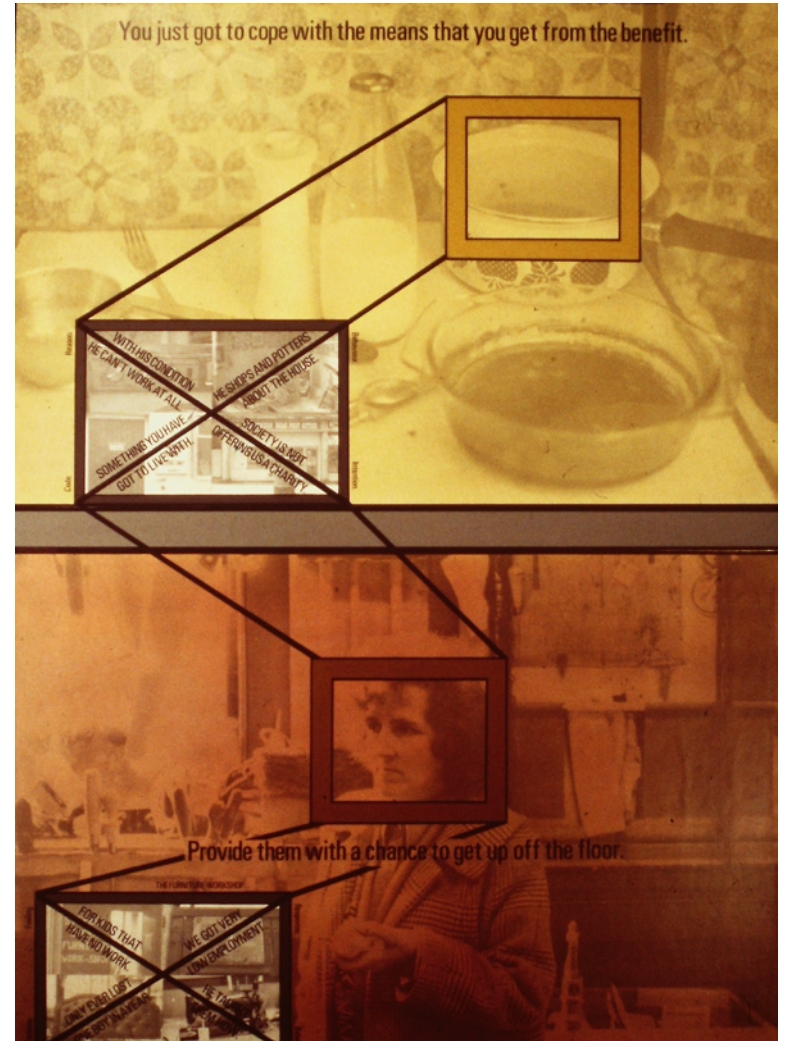
Both operators are given the same tool: a thesaurus of 976 numbered words describing how people perceive each other and referencing the five categories of behaviour. For each problem, they enter a number into the Problem Book and into the Meta Filter computer, which allows them to see each other's choices. There is no right or wrong, but when they reach agreement in one problem area the computer takes them to the next one. A carbon copy of the filled-out Problem Book is collected for display.



Stephen Willats, *Sorting Out Other People's Lives*, 1978 (Panel One) © Stephen Willats



Stephen Willats, *Sorting Out Other People's Lives*, 1978 (Panel Two) © Stephen Willats



Stephen Willats, *Sorting Out Other People's Lives*, 1978 (Panel Three) © Stephen Willats





What references are actually embodied into a work is a result of an interactive process established between myself and the participant. This procedure is as follows:

After having initially suggested the idea of participation, I arrange a subsequent meeting where the concerns of my work in general, and of the particular work being developed, are fully outlined. If someone agrees to participate another appointment is fixed for a tape-recorded conversation, which will be eventually transcribed. This initial discussion is very simple and descriptive, there being no set procedure, the conversation just ranging over what spontaneously comes up within the area defined for co-operation.

Next a general photographic documentation is made of the participant's environment, where particular attention is paid to objects within it that exert on them a psychological pressure.

Having studied the transcription of the discussion a set of more formulated questions is put together, and a second discussion is entered into. In this second discussion the participant is asked very particular questions that involve them in considering how they would change their situation. It is unlikely that the participant would be able to engage in the making of the second, more difficult, tape if they had not made the first. Other photographic documentation and taped discussions are made as necessary, until there is a coherent body of references that can be encoded into the work.

Subsequent meetings are arranged between myself and the participant, so that they can approve and alter what has been considered for the work.

The principle agent for generating interaction between the audience and the work is through the presentation of 'problem situations' that reflect some conflict between object and person. By phrasing a 'problem situation' into a question there is a direct relationship with the audience, for in responding they are drawn into an encoded reality composed of photographic prints and texts.

By leaving an associative gap between photograph and text the viewer is left to make their own connection: the activity of doing this increasing the meaning of the established link. Instead of just passively receiving an already authoritative formal message from a reality separate and remote, the audience interact labour-intensely with the artwork.

A two-way process is established by the audience, where they construct connections between their own situation and the depicted participant's, the latter acting as a basis for engaging in re-orderings.

## 'I Don't Want To Be Like Anyone Else'

The work 'I Don't Want To Be Like Anyone Else' centres on six ways in which an individual is viewed within society under the predominant consciousness. The areas studied are as follows; Panel One, the individual as a statistic; Panel Two, the individual as a partner or mate; Panel Three, the individual as a consumer; Panel Four, the individual as a worker; Panel Five, the individual as a political activist; Panel Six, the individual as a cultural consciousness. These ways of viewing are looked at in terms of the pressure they exert on the individual to conform to stereotyped or expected patterns of behaviour. A woman was chosen to be the 'symbolic individual' in the work, since women have traditionally occupied a passive position in our social fabric, perhaps resulting in the most complete forms of alienation from cultural projections. The 'symbolic individual' is presented as an inhabitant of a 'symbolic world' the fabric of which is located within the contextual reality of the estate, and surrounded by the institutions of society. The individual within the enclosed reality of the estate (the symbolic world) is immersed in an environment of potential problems and conflicts.

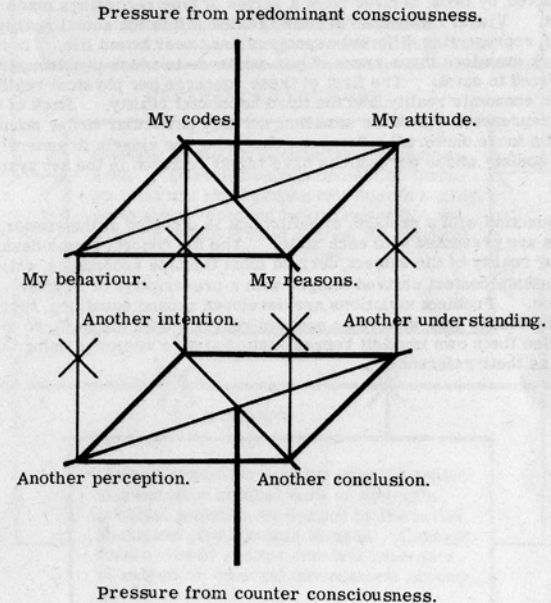
The work places its viewer in the position of provider of possible solutions. Each of the six panels presents the 'symbolic individual' within a particular setting of conflict accompanied by a problem situation presented by a question directed at the viewer. The work does not legislate to the viewer its own authoritatively presented line, but focuses attention on a cognitively interactive situation. Thus, the self construction of a response by the viewer is stimulated by using the problem presented by the question as a basic implicit generator of interaction, in association with a framework of attitudes and visual cues which act as a territory of references. These references are held within a 'concept frame' which acts as a parameter to each of the six states. This consists of four axioms used to hold contextual imagery and references from the symbolic individual's world. There are two sets of 'concept frames', one associated with the predominant consciousness, the other with a counter consciousness, the axioms for each are as follows:- 'Predominating consciousness': my codes; my reasons; my attitude; my behaviour. 'Counter consciousness': another intention; another conclusion; another understanding; another perception.

The 'concept frame' representing the predominant consciousness is descriptive, showing the images of an institutional reality which surround life on the estate in conjunction with texts of negative attitudes attributed to the 'symbolic individual'. Counter consciousness is prescriptive and is represented by positive attitudes and a negative imagery that show society's alienation from itself. Both 'concept frames' are set up within the work in opposition to each other to provide concentrated areas of cues, to be studied and used as tools by the viewer as part of the process of constructing their own model. The retention of the four axioms' subject areas throughout enable the viewer to contrast the different references generated by the work's various areas of attention and to use them as a heuristic. Thus, the viewing of the work feeds forward from each area of attention, the references being transferable from state to state.

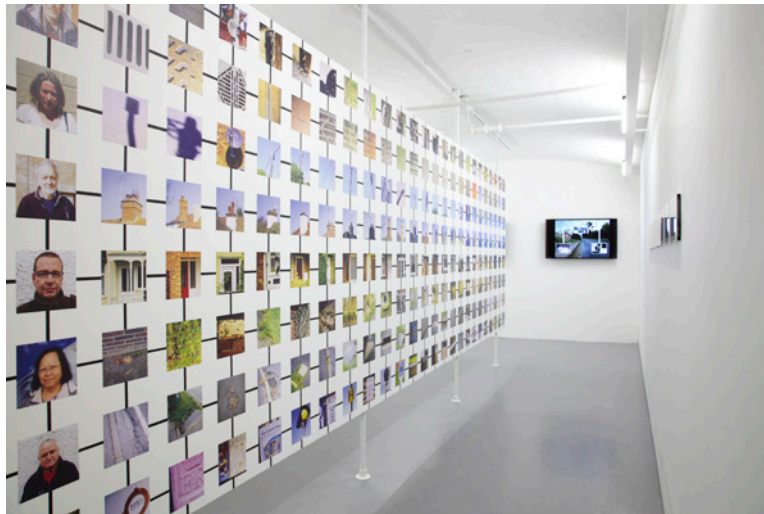
The work is conceived as context dependent and is referenced to a particular setting, the Avondale Estate at Hayes, West London. The estate, enclosed and isolated from the surrounding neighbourhood, is used to provide an actuality and consistency to the loading of references and attitudes in the work. The institutional imagery of the 'predominant concept frame' has been drawn from the nearby shopping centre of Hayes, while the 'counter concept frame' uses waste land adjacent to the estate. The estate was built in the 1960's, the surrounding

post war development of Hayes has been chosen as a symbol of the context in which most people in our society have to live their lives. On the other hand, the adjacent area of waste land, though surrounded by the institutional structures of society, lies unused and quite outside the boundaries of socially acceptable norms and conventions. Not only does the area's condition represent the physical effects of modern society's waste output, or alienation from natural environment, but it is also used by local inhabitants for activities which could not be engaged in or fulfilled within their social rules for everyday life. It therefore functions as a territory of counter imagery.

### OPPOSITIONAL STATE OF CONCEPT FRAMES.







Stephen Willats, *Oxford Community Data Stream*, 2013  
Installation views from Modern Art Oxford © Stuart Whipps

From 2006 to 2007, Willats worked in Milton Keynes, one of the ‘new towns’ founded in England in the 1960s, and got to know a woman who had decided to rebuild her life there. *Starting Afresh with a Blank Canvas* (2008) portrays her as a character as not unlike Kit Stone in East London thirty years earlier, observed through the pressures of her daily life, the objects she identifies with and her community work on the estate.

*Oxford Community Data Stream* (2013), a multichannel installation that embodies Willats’s commitment to art as a transformative practice, was commissioned by Modern Art Oxford. The project provided the framework for a collaborative process aimed at creating a different kind of ‘new reality’. Here, there is no longer the authoritative determinism of the post-War ‘mixed economy’; instead, an act of interactive speculative modelling performed by people from two very different communities in the Oxford area.

The work is the result of Willats’s two-year collaboration with inhabitants of Blackbird Leys, a housing estate built for those evacuated when an old working class district was demolished, and the more genteel Kennington, which grew out of an old farming estate. Willats provided all participants with disposable cameras and film cameras. He then asked them to take the same walk in their surroundings, shooting different things from different conceptual angles.

The editing took place in workshops where participants met each other, Willats and the people working on the project at Modern Art Oxford. Sixteen films by individual participants are included, eight from each community, along with photographs and stills that the authors extracted from their films. These form the ‘data stream’, shown as a gridded composition (visually reminiscent of the ‘homeostat’) on the central screen of the installation.

The core speculative result is two films, both titled *Community Data Stream Oxford*. They allow viewers to reconstruct how one image from each community was combined into a new image, of something that does not exist outside their collaboration, by two people who had never met before. The films were originally exhibited concurrently at Modern Art Oxford and community centres in Kennington and Blackbird Leys.

**ANNE-MIE  
VAN  
KERCKHOVEN**

Belgium, born in 1951, lives in Antwerp  
[www.amvk.be](http://www.amvk.be)

*Atman/Wombman*

1988

Silk-screen paint and plastic foil on trovical with iron-hinged joints

370 × 244 × 0.3 cm

Collection of the artist; courtesy of Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp

*Unic*

1995

Marker, acrylic and silk-screen paint on PVC

165 × 100 cm

Collection of the artist; courtesy of Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp

*Prada*

2000

Digital print on PVC

2 panels, each 70 × 138 cm

Collection of the artist; courtesy of Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp

*Ward, disturbed. Ward, quiet*

2013–15

Digital print and mixed techniques on Plexiglas, mounted on wooden frame

124.5 × 300 cm

Collection of the artist; courtesy of Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp

*Coromandel, disturbed 1*

2013–15

Meranti multiplex, digital print and casein paint

223 × 240 × 62 cm

Collection of the artist; courtesy of Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp

*Coromandel, disturbed 2*

2015

Meranti multiplex, casein paint and mixed techniques

202 × 240 × 60 cm

Collection of the artist; courtesy of Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp

*Carrefour*

2015

Marker, acrylic and silk-screen paint on PVC

165 × 100 cm

Collection of the artist; courtesy of Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp



Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven, *Atman/Wombman*, 1988

Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven (AMVK) is an artist of 'singular' sensibility and complexity. She trained in graphic design and has called her works 'refined posters'. They are constellations of manipulated imagery and text, and she uses the materials and tools of commercial graphics, such as Plexiglass, computers and professional-grade printers. Yet from the beginning, in the mid-1970s, AMVK has transcended such material conditions both visually and mentally. Read as a prose poem, the titles of her solo exhibitions illustrate her ultra-logical and ultra-lateral thinking:

'We Are Watches So I Never Come Too Late' (1978); 'Future: Logics = Art: Science, Art Something' (1979); 'Logic: Future = Recombinant DNA: Serendipity' (1980); 'Basic, Art Something' (1980); 'The Green Moments Make It All so Acceptable' (1980); 'Comfort Above All!' (1981); 'Stress = (Provisions + Politics) × (Youth + Poison)' (1981); 'Exposit' (1981); 'Stress' (1981); 'Industrial Types' (1982); 'Evil, the Moral and Sentimental' (1982); 'Whores and Prophets' (1983); '39 Steps of Hitchcock Versus 19 Enochian Keys' (1983); 'The Four Extremities' (1983); 'Brains with Horns' (1984); 'Mental Force' (1984); 'Transport' (1985); 'Man in the Animal: A Question of Hormones' (1986); 'The Golden Age No. 2 + 3' (1987); 'Hard on the Tongue 6 × 6 × 6' (1987); 'Parallel Worlds' (1988); 'The O-Option and the Number 8' (1988); 'Divide and Rule' (1989); 'Divine 3nity/Sex/Art History 1900-45' (1989); 'Shangri-Lah' (1990); 'The Fifth Force' (1990); 'Border Areas' (1990); 'With, Amongst Others, a Hard Body' (1991); 'A Flower of Sorrows Was Her Mouth' (1991); 'The Negro/Digestive Process' (1992); 'Belgian Spleen' (1993); 'Paradogma' (1993); 'The Madrigal' (1994); 'Moral Re-Armament' (1996); 'Eclipse' (1997); 'HeadNurse' (1998); 'Nursing Care, in Melancholy Stupor' (1999); 'Prober 5' (2000); 'The Peacock' (2001); 'In Dreams' (2003); 'Deeper' (2003); 'Anti-Sade' (2003); 'How Reliable Is the Brain?' (2004); 'Elasticity at Home!' (2006); 'Explodes from Within' (2007); 'On the Ego' (2007); 'Nothing More Natural' (2008); 'On Mars the Rising Sun is Blue' (2009); 'Insights and Vistas' (2011); 'In a Saturnian World' (2011); 'Mistress of the Horizon' (2012); 'Love and Insight in Trendy Places' (2012); '3 Carrels (Degenerate Customised Solutions)' (2014); 'Serving Compressed Energy with Vacuum' (2015).



Since many of these exhibition titles were not originally in English, the list distorts reality for the sake of readability.

AMVK is truly interdisciplinary. She works in Belgium's three official languages (Dutch, French, German) and in English. She has collaborated with the computer linguist Luc Steels since the mid-1970s, and was artist in residence in the 80s at the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory that he runs for Free University Brussels. In 1981, AMVK founded the noise band Club Moral with her husband Danny Devos. It was revived in 2001. Under the same title, the pair organised numerous events in Antwerp until 1993, and have published the magazine *Force Mental* since 1982.

Such formative collaborations aside, self-organisation and self-analysis are fundamental to AMVK's work. Her creative commitment to artificial intelligence cannot be disentangled from her social thought and political engagement, nor from her endeavours to understand and articulate the self. Her participation in 'The Welfare State' is conceived as a small solo exhibition within the larger group exhibition, themed around her self-reflective immersion in the welfare state as an external (social) and internal (mental) reality, and in art as a simultaneously analytic and therapeutic activity.

These dualities, which may or may not be in opposition, are embodied by HeadNurse. A figure of thought as well as an alter ego, she recurs throughout AMVK's more recent work and references both hierarchical social institutions and the need to cure our inner demons and heal the world. She is an explicit presence in the textual elements of the work *Ward, disturbed. Ward, quiet* (2013-15), which also features some digitally modified samples from AMVK's collection of pre-sexual revolution erotic photographs.

Although HeadNurse was articulated as a character only in the mid-1990s, she seems to already inhabit *Atman/Wombman*, from 1988. The title for this deliberately challenging aesthetic object couples the Sanskrit word *ātman* ('self') with wombman, an abusive misogynistic term but also, more interestingly, a self that transcends the genders and sexes. The themes of distortion, disfiguration and disturbance, always activated in AMVK's manipulations of found images, are amplified in the two-panel work *Prada* (2000).

### The abstract isn't sexually stimulating

In 1970 I chose graphic design to study because on the one hand it was the art direction with the strongest emphasis on drawing, on the other hand to learn the most techniques possible of making images in function of their technical reproductibility. From in the beginning all these techniques functioned as languages to me, with interchangeable laws and patterns. I always liked to force things into a certain unity while fusing opposites and the so-called incompatible. At the source of this urge is a deep love for all that exists, this combined with a constant feeling of disgust fed by my evergrowing sense of incomprehension, disbelief and revolt.

From 1975 on I started to exhibit my drawings. These drawings were made in cycles, as a result of too much experience with the world. This experience transformed itself into images in my subconscious. Kind of seismographic reproductions of an accumulation of inner life. The outcome was at random, very irregular. When you show your work people expect you to talk about your work, yo explain it. Being unwilling to focus on the content, trying to protect the naturalness of it, I focused on what made me make them, what purpose they fulfill: in function of what need i made them, in response of what triggers. Triggers like images, words, circumstances and situations.

At those times I was reading De Sade and Wittgenstein at the same time, in combination with science magazines. The explication of my work became a second version of the work. And my own brain became the object of my art.

The impulses that made me do things became my big points of interest. Influence, determination, fate, the social, the moral, everything what makes people do what they do was what I became inspired by. In opposite to my inner images I began to use images out of massmedia, collecting every magazine I could afford, using the "superficial" of all this information to search under its surface for structures, divisions, systems. These images inspired me for paintings I made mostly on waist polystyrene, plastic and plexiglas. When after a while a certain system started to show up in the accumulation of works, I finished the whole in a well-structured installation, exhibition.

Each installation functioned as a survival mechanism. Each cycle spreaded itself in time, up to 2 years, or more. For these installations spectators received a manual, so I didn't need to explain anymore. At the same time I began to record the shows on tape, these videos became works on themselves, again.

In 1981 I became artist in residence at the laboratory of Artificial Intelligence at the Free University in Brussels, this until 1986.

In function of unidentified but very strong affinities I constantly collect information. I collect images, words, people...and I put them in my computer to use now or later. In particular do I have a big collection of images of nude women, the reproduction of the female body is one of these triggers that lead me for years.

1995



*HeadNurse* came about in a time when I wanted to know why I was fascinated and inspired by artificial intelligence and naked women. It was a commission for an undercover art project in Bruges, in the Gezellekwartier.

Guido Gezelle (1830–99) was a famous and honoured Belgian priest-poet, about whom I also remembered a hatred of women and the fact that he fiercely collected words. Since I have a big collection of reproductions of nude women stored in my computer, I took 96 words from fields attached to the investigations in artificial intelligence and started combining words and women.

For 96 days in a row, I sent one black-and-white distorted woman-image from my computer in Antwerp to the fax machine in the Bruges house, and called them reports. This was the beginning of the ongoing sex and technology project *HeadNurse/Moral Rearmament*.

## EROTICISED CONCEPTS

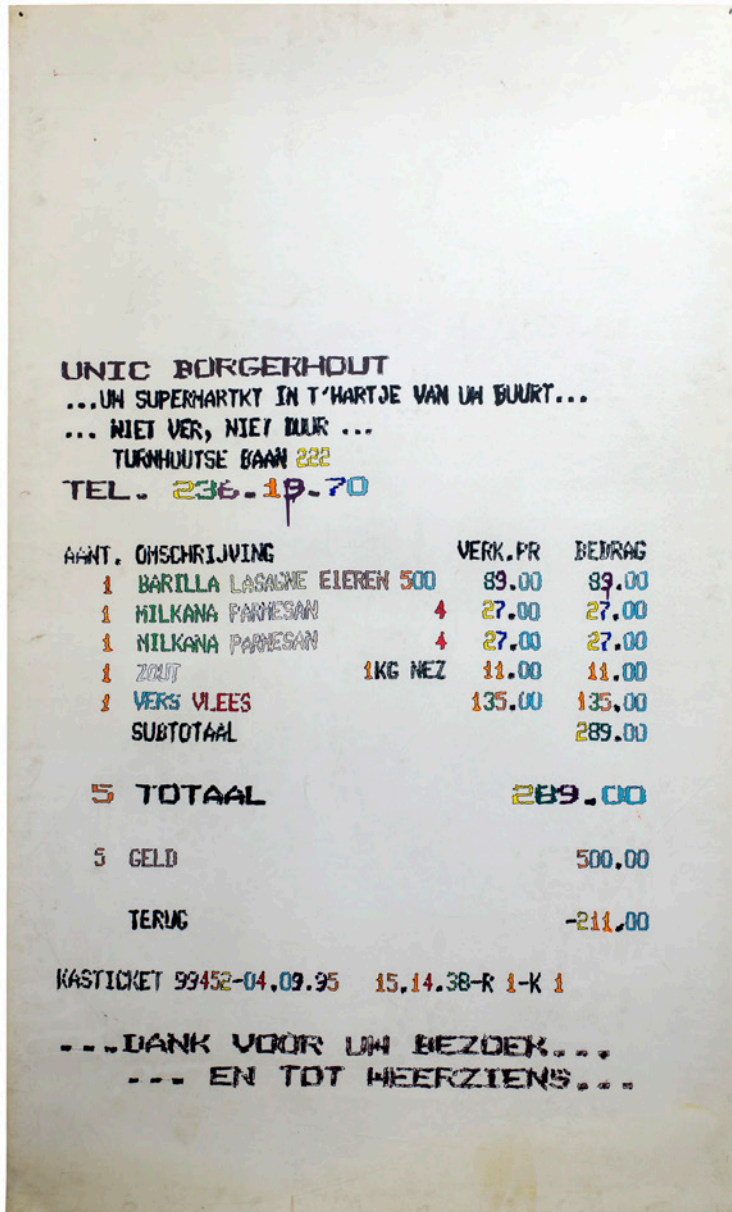
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|---------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 01. abstract concepts     | 30. common sense        | 64. fundamental         |
| 02. logical reasoning     | 31. structure           | 65. representation      |
| 03. analysing             | 32. visual images       | 66. formal logic        |
| 04. process               | 33. world knowledge     | 67. human memory        |
| 05. telescope             | 34. translation system  | 68. meta-knowledge      |
| 06. instrument            | 35. text                | 69. introspection       |
| 07. expertise             | 36. acquiring knowledge | 70. important insights  |
| 08. simulation            | 37. biology             | 71. concrete theories   |
| 09. industry states       | 38. synthesise          | 72. limitations         |
| 10. impulse programme     | 39. forest              | 73. foundation          |
| 11. toy                   | 40. limits              | 74. uncertain facts     |
| 12. biological components | 41. consistent          | 75. strategies          |
| 13. parallelism           | 42. deduction           | 76. dissolve            |
| 14. irrelevant            | 43. classic             | 77. big steps           |
| 15. brain, internal       | 44. idealisations       | 78. new concepts        |
| 16. complex systems       | 45. not absolute        | 79. material            |
| 17. thermo-dynamical      | 46. accurate            | 80. scarce              |
| 18. non-equilibrium       | 47. generalisation      | 81. available           |
| 19. waves of activation   | 48. observations        | 82. economic importance |
| 20. connectionistic       | 49. imperfect           | 83. some sectors        |
| 21. networks              | 50. ungrounded          | 84. negative evolution  |
| 22. knowledge             | 51. reasoning           | 85. professions         |
| 23. head                  | 52. body                | 86. improve             |
| 24. domain                | 53. measurements        | 87. autonomous          |
| 25. rules of thumb        | 54. marginalia          | 88. sharpening          |
| 26. ticking in            | 55. problematic         | 89. direction           |
| 27. ten thousands         | 56. opponent            | 90. wakefulness         |
| 28. learning situations   | 57. limited time        | 91. restriction         |
| 29. absurdity             | 58. search areas        | 92. application         |
|                           | 59. incomplete          | 93. construction        |
|                           | 60. mistakes            | 94. new species         |
|                           | 61. partial information | 95. support             |
|                           | 62. count               | 96. fascinating         |
|                           | 63. order of size       |                         |

The union of sex and technology usually happens indoors, where members of contemporary society spend most of their time. AMVK collects pictures of naked women, but also of interiors. Many represent the bric-a-brac she relishes as a true connoisseur of the Belgian mind, while some are refined visual creations.

The exotic-sounding word *Coromandel* appears in the titles for two recent works. It refers to the coast of southeast India and also, by association, to the carved and lacquered Ming Dynasty screens that were much exported to Europe beginning in the seventeenth century, through Madras or Pondicherry. (They were later collected by people like Coco Chanel.) A carrel is another kind of room divider, a sheltered desk on wheels typically found in research libraries. AMVK keeps carrels in her studio to collect and consult specialist literature. Recently, she started extending them with images or mirrors.

For *Coromandel, disturbed 1* (2013-15) AMVK fused two images in her data bank: 'Coromandel' (based on a *Vogue* photograph of a Parisian interior) and 'New Red Panty Brunette' (based on the 'scandal page' in an American 'gentleman's magazine' from the 1950s). The piece is a follow-up to AMVK's first carrel, built to hold her study materials on the mystic Marguerite Porete, who was burnt at the stake as a heretic in Paris in 1310. Porete's subversive take on official ideology is reflected in the title of her famous book: *The Mirror of the Simple Souls Who Are Annihilated and Remain Only in Will and Desire of Love*. AMVK has similar concerns about mortality, morality and authority. She thinks, in fact, that she might be a reincarnation of Porete. The first carrel was originally shown with a quotation from Porete's book as its subtitle: *The Soul Is Stunned When She Thinks of the Gifts of the Goodness of God*.

Although they are made twenty years apart, *Unic* (1995) and *Carrefour* (2015) form a diptych of sorts. On 4 September 1995, AMVK bought some basic produce from her local supermarket, blew up the receipt and turned it into a painting. Now she repeats the same act, making visible the changed state of welfare: a new chain, a new currency, a new ratio of nature to mortality (the food) and to freedom (its price).





Installation view of Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven's exhibition '3 Carrels (Degenerate Customised Solutions)' at Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp © Peter Cox

**JOSEF  
DABERNIG**

**Austria, born in 1956, lives in Vienna  
[www.dabernig.net](http://www.dabernig.net)**



*Hotel Roccalba*

2008

35mm on SD Video, b/w, 10'

**Direction, script, editing and production:** Josef Dabernig**Camera:** Christian Giesser**Sound design:** Michael Palm**Cast:** Annemarie Dabernig, Anni Dabernig, Josef Dabernig senior, Josef Dabernig, Wolfgang Dabernig, Karin Franz, Maria Franz, Isabella Hollauf, Hedwig Saxenhuber, Georg Schöllhammer, Ingeburg Wurzer, Otto Zitko**Funding:** if innovative film Austria, ORF-Film and Television Agreement

Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Andreas Huber, Vienna, and Wilfried Lentz, Rotterdam

*excursus on fitness*

2010

Digi Beta on SD Video, b/w, 12'

**Direction, script and editing concept:** Josef Dabernig**Camera:** Christian Giesser**Avid editor:** Daniel Hamersky**Cast:** Anna Dabernig, Josef Dabernig, Wolfgang Dabernig, Isabella Hollauf, Ingeburg Wurzer, Otto Zitko**Production:** Josef Dabernig and MAK Vienna

Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Andreas Huber, Vienna, and Wilfried Lentz, Rotterdam

*Film, Foto, Objekt, Text, Bau.* Film, photography, object, text, and then a good German word that is hard to translate but means at least three things: 'construction' (the act and its result), 'architecture' and 'urbanism'. This is Josef Dabernig's own categorisation of his various kinds of works. They are distinct but interconnected.

Dabernig trained as a sculptor and says that he spent most of his time as a student measuring things. Painstakingly copying out long texts in miniature handwriting was also part of his early practice. These were different ways of achieving 'structure' – another possible of *Bau*, and of overriding importance in his work. When Dabernig began to make short films in the mid-1990s, they were just as imposed and articulated as his objects, and just as meticulously planned out, second by second. The photographs are intimately connected with the films, and so, in their conception and execution, are the objects. They can be flat grids of standard-issue aluminium profiles, or more room-like wooden constructions, to be inserted into existing interiors or exterior built spaces.

In the architecture Dabernig designs for exhibition purposes, all constitutive aspects come together as *Bau* 'properly speaking'. For 'Individual Systems', featuring fifteen artists and curated by the late Igor Zabel for the Venice Biennale in 2003, Dabernig designed an architecture that, in Zabel's words, was 'an escalating rhythmical sequence of full and empty spaces'.<sup>1</sup> For the first (and so far only) Brussels Biennial in 2008, Dabernig was commissioned to realise a new architectural work for the exhibition 'Once Is Nothing'. It 'repeated' Zabel's exhibition but without the physical works that Dabernig's walls, with their staggered perspectival effects, hosted in Venice.

His design for two large interconnected screening rooms in 'The Welfare State' is, in a certain sense, also a repetition. They are modelled on the twelve screening rooms built for his majestic survey *Rock the Void* at mumok in Vienna in 2014. The title must have been a bit ironic, since the various modes of display – including aluminium grids leaning against white walls – filled three levels of the museum.

1. Igor Zabel, 'Individual Systems', in Urška Jurman and Polonca Lovšin (ed.), *Ready 2 Change*, Ljubljana: Maska and Zavod P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E., 2005; also available at [www.igorzabel.org/zabel\\_ready-2change\\_eng.pdf](http://www.igorzabel.org/zabel_ready-2change_eng.pdf) (last accessed on 30 April 2015).

In my short films I try to achieve a symbiosis of elements from narrative cinema and the traditions of experimental film. Simple narrative threads cross over into strictly conceived spatial settings and elaborately plotted editing. The relationship between image and sound is, as a rule, conceptually loaded with anachronisms and genre clashes. The constituent parts are linked in such a way that they can still be separated analytically but make no sense in isolation from each other. Composing with them is what defines as film.

[...]

In terms of image composition, the takes are, as a rule, quite fixed. With very few exceptions, the camera moves only horizontally. This lends something profane to the iconography and content. The came-rawork and editing are carried out in such a way that viewers will recognise themselves in the fiction. That sometimes makes a conceptual reception of my miniatures more difficult, but it opens them up to the traditions of narrative cinema. Each of my films contains one moment that triggers or motivates it on the level of content. The material closest to me is my own traumas; I don't have to invent anything. The second, at least as important level, is that of form. There I try to set up continuities and at the same time undo them. So the individual films, but also all my films taken together, become images of movements or figures that could be read as sculptural volumes.

[...]

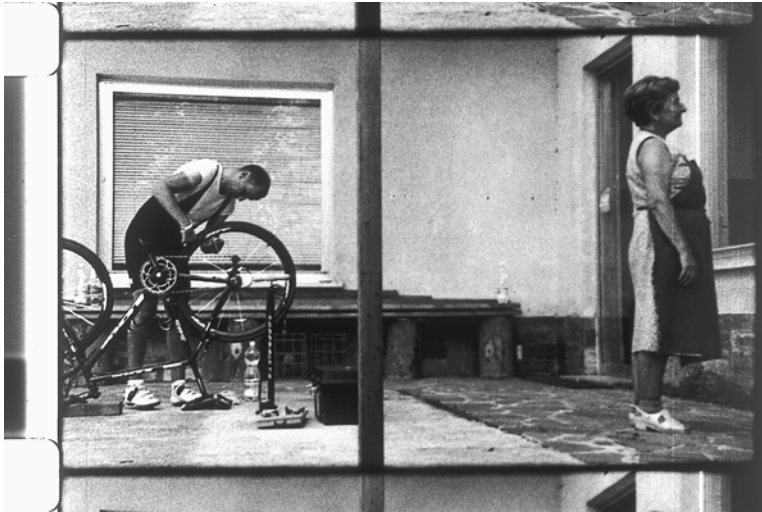
The framing of a plot that is there without being shown is important for constituting the plot as farce. It becomes manifest through architectonic signifiers that document a place in transformation where ambiguous content helps construct the evacuation of a pseudo-fiction. If an artistic statement begins with the ambition to explain (or show) everything, it leaves no free space for the viewer. Such a statement risks becoming an authoritarian gesture. My understanding of film plays with the deliberate creation of free or empty spaces, and from time to time also with traps challenging the viewer's autonomy.

[...]

My task as an author is not to question the dramaturgical empty space once I have decided on it, but rather to bring together all the dramaturgical details (also those that help define the meaning of the emptiness) as a whole. That includes leaving things out, and all the components of the framing that construct the film's empty centre.

[...]

Hence, in image composition and editing, many decisions need to be made, about both form and content, to achieve the necessary precision and density, and the same is true of sound composition and editing.



Josef Dabernig, *Hotel Roccalba*, 2008. Stills from Super16 footage © Bildrecht Wien

Dabernig's films have been shown in festivals around the world, and in numerous group exhibitions on the global circuit, such as *Manifesta 3* in Ljubljana (2000), the 49th and 50th editions of the Venice Biennale (2001 and 2003), the Ninth Gwangju Biennale (2012) and *Manifesta 10* in St Petersburg (2014).

Already in his first film, *Wisla* (1996), set in a rather empty 1950s football stadium in Cracow, Dabernig's cinematic reality presented itself fully formed. The various elements (cinematography, score, the plot or lack of it, buildings, objects, people) are mismatched with such precision that the result comes across as 'deadpan' (although no one would use that word in Mitteleuropa). The artist appears as an actor, as do, oftentimes, his family and closest friends. His personal aesthetic interests (in this first film, football; in others, Italian opera and cars, Polish trains or Czech hotel interiors) are integrated into a visual and conceptual grid that is not fundamentally different from that of his spatial work.

The two films selected for this exhibition can credibly be described as themed around the 'care of the self' that the welfare regime allows – indeed requires – its subjects to perform, in this case leisurely inactivity and physical exercise. Dabernig's own production notes provide the key to his intentions: '*Hotel Roccalba* [2008] holds the level of meaning construction in suspense. It remains unclear what unites or separates the twelve persons in this film. Their simple activity or non-activity delegates questions about more profound meaning to the audience.'<sup>1</sup> 'I understand *excursus on fitness* as a sculptural construction in the extended sense. The expectations we might have about the motif gradually dissolve into a scenario of representational and emotional deficiencies, defined through ambivalences. [...] If my films since 1996 have developed out of a sculptural consciousness, then *excursus on fitness* is an attempt to reverse this – namely, to think sculpture through film.'<sup>2</sup>

*excursus on fitness* has been shown in Belgium before, at Extra City in Antwerp in 2011 and in the 'Countour' biennial in Mechelen in 2013, for which it was projected on a screen installed high within the Gothic church of Onze-Lieve-Vrouw-over-de-Dijle.

1. Reproduced in *Josef Dabernig* (exh. cat.), Vienna and Cologne: mumok and Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2014, pp.83–84. Translation by Anders Kreuger.  
2. *Ibid.*, pp.50–51.







Josef Dabernig, *excursus on fitness*, 2010. Video still © Bildrecht Wien

# **ARTŪRAS RAILA**

Lithuania, born in 1962, lives in Vilnius  
[www.raila.lt](http://www.raila.lt)

*Under the Flag*

2000/2015

Two-channel digital video, colour, sound, 20'

Collection of the artist

*Libretto for Mærsk Mc-Kinney Møller*

2015

Script translated from Lithuanian into English (by Anders Kreuger) and from English into Dutch (by Jeroen Struys), shown as wall-text; 8 animated films: digital video, b/w, silent, each ca 10 seconds, looped

Collection of the artist

Artūras Raila's participation in 'The Welfare State' and the production of *Libretto for Mærsk Mc-Kinney Møller* is supported by the Lithuanian Cultural Council, Vilnius.

Since he gave up making sculpture in the mid-1990s, Artūras Raila has made thought-provoking and subversive works in many different formats, including video, photography, text pieces and performance events staged inside and outside of art institutions. Raila's cunningly non-academic approach to institutional critique and discourse analysis allows him to efficiently reveal the undercurrents of contemporary society, in Lithuania and elsewhere. His works often demonstrate or simulate how 'simple people' look at their world, their society and their history. This simultaneously softens and sharpens their criticality.

A 'folk history' of what happened in Lithuania during the Second World War, *Forever Lacking and Never Quite Enough* (2001–03) juxtaposes archival newsreel footage and the accomplished amateur poetry of Raila's elderly neighbour who, like many of his generation, spent long years in forced Siberian exile. *Roll Over Museum* (2004) mixes up two communities of connoisseurs bound not to take notice of each other: expert car tuners and the professional audience for contemporary art. For *Power of the Earth* (2005–12), Raila mapped a neo-pagan 'geo-energy' grid onto several European cities and regions, including Vilnius and Berlin, with the help of two latter-day geomancers, working with or without divining rods.

Raila has exhibited widely both at home and abroad, including notable solo presentations at CAC Vilnius in 1999, 2004 and 2008 and at Frankfurter Kunstverein in 2006. He participated in Manifesta 3 in 2000 and the Second Berlin Biennale in 2001. At the Vilnius Art Academy, he is Professor in the Department of Photography and Media Art.

In the late 1990s, Raila started a collaboration of sorts with an aspiring politician from Šiauliai, Lithuania's fourth-largest city, who had become notorious for his anti-Semitic statements and was therefore unable to register any of the parties he kept trying to establish. Bemused by how Mindaugas Murza performed the role of the expressionless leader, Raila organised a parade in Vilnius for him, with drummers and pom-pom girls marching on the roof of the CAC (*We or Nobody (Cancelled)*, 1998).

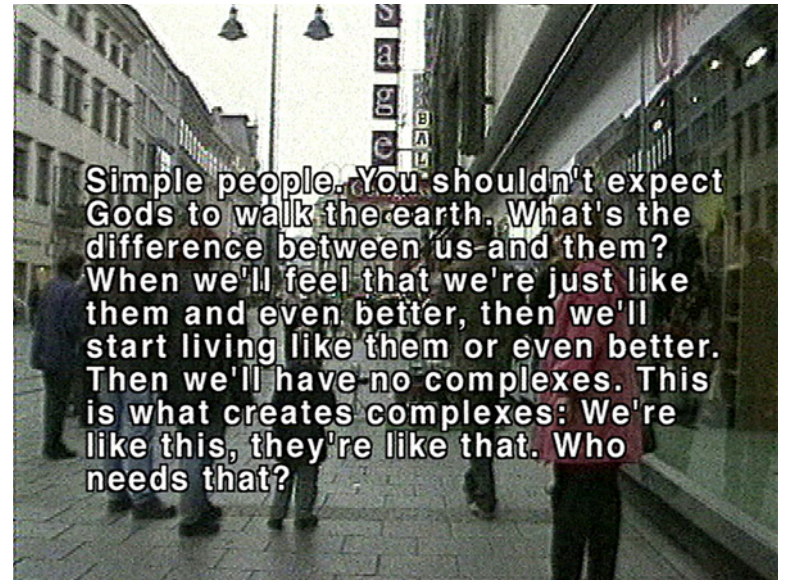
In 2000, Raila showed video footage of everyday scenes in Austria to Murza and his closest followers as they sat under



the flag of the now-defunct Lithuanian National Democratic Party. The flag was an adaptation of the ‘double cross’ used by Jogaila (Jagiello in Polish), the Lithuanian prince who became the first ruler of the Polish-Lithuanian union when it was set up in the late fourteenth century. The ‘open mike’ strategy that Raila used for *Under the Flag*, whereby Murza’s cohort spoke freely before the camera, achieved a few things. It exposed these self-styled neo-Nazis’ *Weltanschauung* as a deeply rooted, everyday Soviet mentality, and it made the Lithuanian authorities’ determination to demonise Murza as a threat to national security look like ‘showing some action’ rather than addressing a fundamental problem of political culture in the country. But above all, and with lasting relevance, the work allows us to see the workings of illiberal populism up close. How sharp can the teeth of the provincial precariat possibly be? The EU made half-hearted attempts fifteen years ago to boycott Austria after Jörg Haider’s party joined its federal government. In 2015, much nastier beasts in France, Greece, Hungary and other countries are being fed by the Kremlin as it seeks to exploit Europe’s internal divisions.

In connection with ‘The Welfare State’, a Dutch-language reenactment of the transcript from *Under the Flag* is performed by Antwerp-based actors. *Eenvoudige mensen*, ‘simple people’, is a translation of the Lithuanian *Paprasti žmonės*, the title of a similar reenactment in Vilnius in 2009.

Mærsk Mc-Kinney Møller (1913–2012) was Denmark’s wealthiest person. The shipping magnate spent the equivalent of 310 million euros on building the new opera house in Copenhagen, and donated it to the Danish people. When the architecture was mildly criticised, he is reputed to have said: ‘It is a gift, not a gift voucher.’ Raila was in Copenhagen at the time of Mc-Kinney Møller’s funeral, and snapped a photograph of the people on either side of the security cordon. He has written a synopsis for a libretto that he may or may not turn into an opera about his encounter with the spirit of the deceased philanthropist. For now, he exhibits it as a wall-text and eight short animated films that incorporate his drawings of the script’s ten scenes.



Artūras Raila, *Under the Flag*, 2000. Video stills

## Scene Two

(On the first level there are four activists: three men and one woman. One of them is pushing a white bicycle. On the second level the choir disperses to the left and to the right. These two groups are in conflict and change their location according to where on the stage the activist girl happens to be.)

ACTIVISTS: Just think about this one, more generous than all the others! We don't want to be victims of your generosity. You'd better pay your taxes! Look at all these somebodies who have come together here, behind the gates. They are responsible for the death of our beautiful planet.

FIRST ACTIVIST: They are the one per cent, and there is no end to their greed. Murder, deception and envy have brought them financial security. The whole planet is one province and we shall all die.

SECOND ACTIVIST: They kept the possibility of a complete life to themselves, and hypocritically offered the proletarians alcohol. It is impossible to stay sober and sane under such oppression. The fight for power is a rat race where only the most ruthless survive. But the important thing is to 'share, be together and collaborate' (as Alcoholics Anonymous say), so we'd be just fine without the government.

THIRD ACTIVIST: Legalise pot! It is medicine and gives us hope to forget this hateful reality, where money is the only thing that counts. Money is evil; it enslaves everyone. We shouldn't have to work to live.

CHOIR (on the right): Those so-called activists or neo-hippies are parasites in our society, financed by enemy countries.

CHOIR (on the left): But they are necessary in a balanced society and we tolerate them...

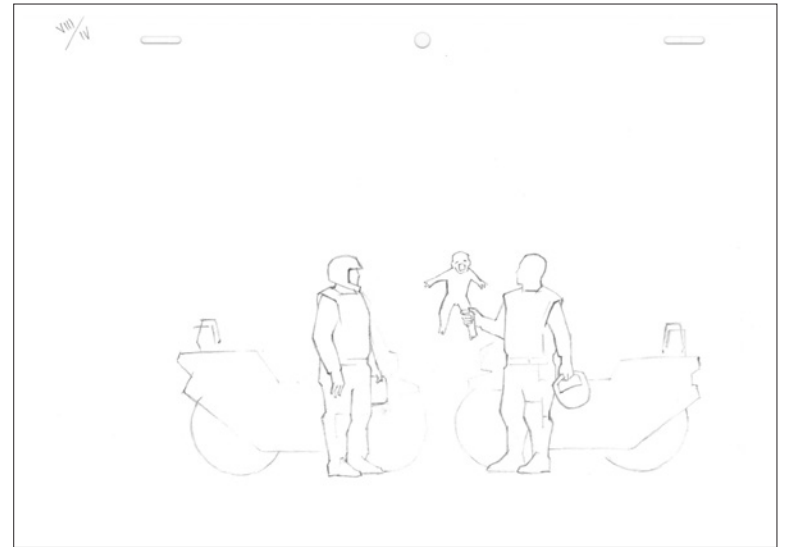
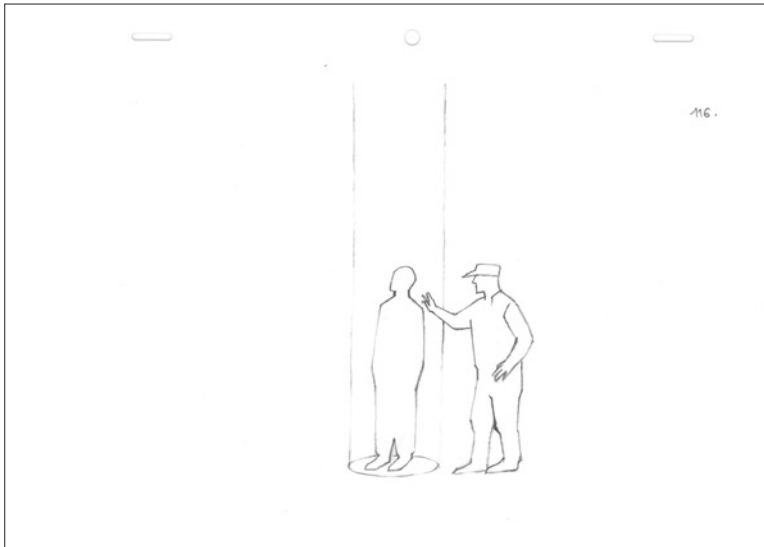
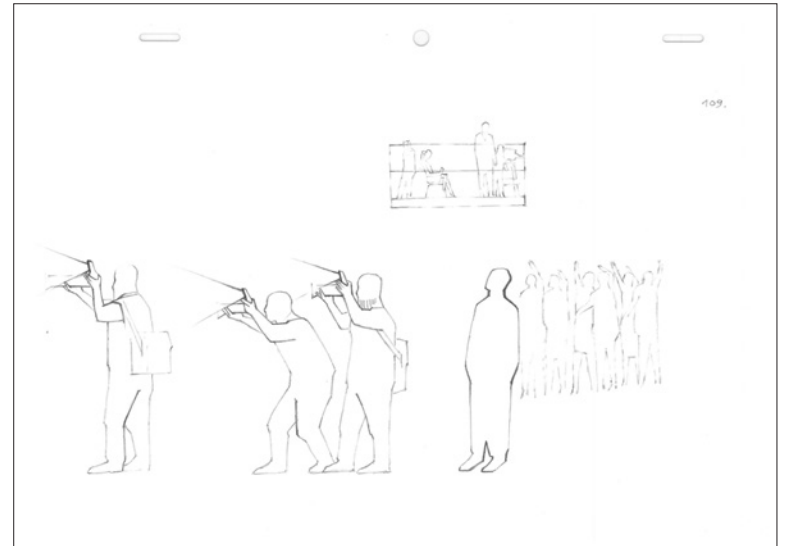
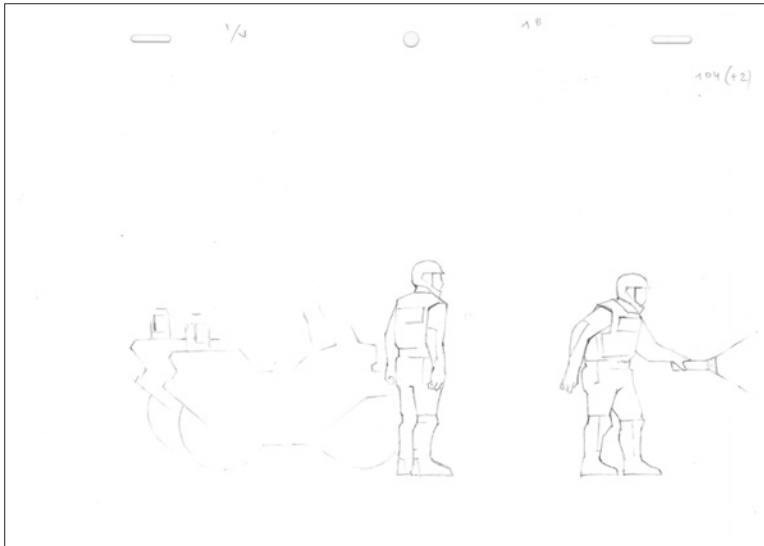
CHOIR (on the right): ... As the losers they are. Trash is usually not white.

CHOIR (on the left): Let them sing what they want; no one is listening anyway.

CHOIR (on the right): Not until we're on television...

(The three photographers leave the choir and come to the foreground, bringing Cutout [the 'cultural tourist', a portable life-size image of a human figure printed on cardboard] with them. They photograph the approaching activist girl, using their flashes.)

ACTIVIST GIRL: We have invested in our image and our lifestyle. So if you paparazzi photograph us, then pay!







# **RÓZA EL HASSAN**

**Hungary/Syria, born in 1966, lives in Budapest**  
**[www.roza-el-hassan.hu](http://www.roza-el-hassan.hu)**  
**[www.nocorruption.hu](http://www.nocorruption.hu)**  
**[syrianvoicesmediationandart.wordpress.com](http://syrianvoicesmediationandart.wordpress.com)**



*Breeze 9 (Natural Air Conditioning and Adobe Houses)*  
2015

Prototypes for temporary housing (one beehive-shaped,  
one cubical) made from sundried adobe bricks

Dimensions variable

The production of *Breeze 9 (Natural Air Conditioning and Adobe Houses)* is supported by the Flemish Community and the European Union's Culture Programme, through M HKA.

Róza El-Hassan's body of work, since the early 1990s, has spanned drawing, painting, collage, sculpture, installation, photography, performance, text pieces, exhibition curating and political activism. Although it is hard to single out any of these as particularly significant, it is impossible to imagine her practice without the many drawings. Working on paper seems to be her default method for approaching a new or difficult topic, for thinking in images. We would also have insufficient understanding of El-Hassan's oeuvre if we passed over her sculptures. She has a way of making wood and stone look both discarded and refined, both personalised and socially engaged.

El-Hassan has exhibited widely in Hungary and internationally, with solo exhibitions at, among other institutions, the Drawing Center in New York in 2003 and Műcsarnók in Budapest in 2006. In addition to representing Hungary at the Venice Biennale in 1997, she also participated in the Biennale in 1993, as well as in the São Paulo Biennial in 1998 and the Sharjah Biennial in 2005. Her installation *Lichtmahl* (1996) is in the M HKA collection.

Two earlier projects may help contextualise El-Hassan's contribution to this exhibition. One is a constellation of different works around the theme of 'overpopulation'. It began in 1999 as a T-shirt with the print 'I Am Overpopulation' and a performance titled *R. Thinking/Dreaming about Overpopulation*, which had El-Hassan sitting on the floor, fully covered in black cloth and squeezing an orange balloon. It continued with a billboard, in 2000, for the Vienna Secession, made in collaboration with the Serbian artist Milica Tomić. It bore the legend 'Milica Tomić and Róza El-Hassan Driving in the Porsche and Thinking about Overpopulation' and showed the pair in the front seat of a fancy sports car. Crucially, the third passenger was the right-wing Austrian politician Jörg Haider. From 2001 to 2002, El-Hassan organised the *Blood Donating Performance* series as a response to the suspicion Arabic people faced after 9/11. The poster image shows El-Hassan donating blood on a berth bearing the image of Yasser Arafat performing very the same act. In 2003, she left a wooden sculpture to interact with the public at Budapest's Moscov Square, many of whom are day labourers from Transylvania. They



looked after the little crouching figure, and even put clothes on it. Since 2009, El-Hassan has collaborated with Roma craftspeople in rural Hungary who have mastered the traditional techniques of wickerwork, casting herself in the role of a high-end-accessories designer of, for example, laptop bags. The project is being developed under the name *No Corruption Social Brand*.

Clearly, El-Hassan engages with the repressed 'other' that the art world often prefers not to notice. *Breeze* is another open-ended project, begun in 2012, and rooted in El-Hassan's strong commitment to Syria and its people, which is both personal and professional. She always argues for non-violent resistance through art, as an ideal form of 'the political' that is worth holding on to even in the very worst of circumstances (and the ongoing civil war in Syria certainly qualifies as such). Together with Syrian colleagues, El-Hassan has been running the blog *Syrian Voices: Mediation and Art*.

For this exhibition, she creates two structures from adobe bricks, as an installation that also becomes an image of the starry sky. Based on the traditional architecture of northern Syria, El-Hassan's beehive-shaped house and cubical house are sculptural forms, functioning within the economy and aesthetic of the contemporary art institution. At the same time, they are prototypes for emergency housing, which could be used to shelter those displaced by the war in Syria or in the eventual reconstruction of the country. Both the artist and the museum hope to get the NGO sector interested in continuing the project, yet in this form it remains a work by Róza El-Hassan.

The starting point for her extensive research into adobe architecture involved how it eases the circulation of air and water. The beehive-shaped dome is a natural air-conditioning machine. The building material, in this case commissioned from Roma craftspeople in Hungary, is environmentally sustainable. The simple mud brick can bridge the immediate interests of the poor and of refugees with the longer-term concerns of the global upper middle class. It shows that violent confrontation in the future is neither unavoidable nor necessary, despite what many believe or fear.



When I was a child and looked up at the top of the dome inside one of these houses, it seemed nearly endless, as if the upper part, with its round opening towards the sky, was no longer real. In these domes there was a sense of warm hospitality. They were nearly empty and always very clean. Colourful mattresses, piled up during the day, were almost the only furniture. In the evenings I would lie close to my aunts; in the winter there was also a small stove that smelled of petrol.

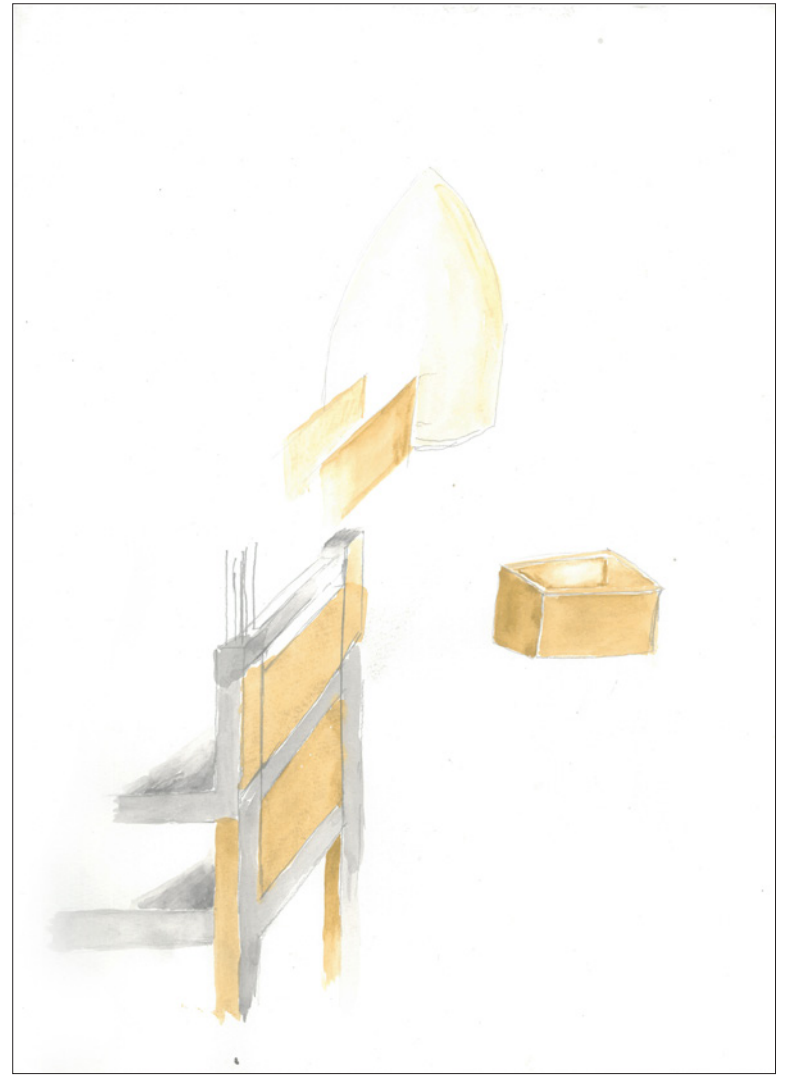
When I came back to the village in the 1980s, angular houses had suddenly become fashionable. They were a kind of status symbol, representing modernity, and these cube houses were built in the same dispersed way as the beehives. Roads were not very common, and there was so much space on top of that huge clay hill at the edge of the desert.

The cube houses were as clean and empty, almost without furniture inside, as the beehives. Three new elements appeared: one strict neon light on the wall, a TV set usually placed on top of other furniture, and a refrigerator. The emptiness was touching. These were farmers' families, who had built their empty two-bedroom cubes underneath the vast Syrian sky, on empty land without trees. At night I could see them from far away, almost motionless, sitting down together so calmly, on mats, under the strict minimal line of their neon lights.

Trying to handle the situation of the catastrophe, we Syrian artists are looking for new solutions for the moment of a new beginning. How will we rebuild the country? I dare not write: How will we heal it?

Millions of houses are damaged. I try to find my way around old and new building techniques, and I discover incredible things about my grandmother's old beehive house. The temperature indoors was usually twenty degrees lower than outdoors. No concrete or steel was needed to build it, no fired bricks, no hard lava rocks. Steel is a problem in Syria, since it is an imported product, and wood is also scarce in the drier areas. The adobe bricks of the beehive houses are completely sustainable; they just crumble back into the earth if they are discarded. The round shape is a perfect form, the high dome a cooling system that traps warm air at the top and keeps cool air in the lower parts, where people sleep. This could not be better, even if calculated by the best computers. The form of the house has remained the same for three or even ten thousand years.

At this moment I do not know what will happen in Syria, how its people will have the strength to rebuild the country. I try to think in the smallest scale; a beehive dome made of mud and the one-room or two-room cube, with a framed photograph of a relative and a mattress as the only belongings – our Syrian modernity, our pride. Anything more complex is beyond my imagination at this point.





# ***KAJSA DAHLBERG***

Sweden, born in 1973, lives in Berlin  
[www.kjsadahlberg.com](http://www.kjsadahlberg.com)

*Reach, Grasp, Move, Position, Apply Force*  
2014–15

Digital video, colour, sound, 16:9, 45'

Collection of the artist

**Post-production:** Simon Möller

**Research Assistants:** Frank Janssen, Helena Olsson,  
Sophia Ayda Schultz

**Participants, in order of appearance:** Ingo Singe, sociologist, University of Jena, previously a package deliverer; Knut Kille, Executive Director of Deutsche MTM Vereinigung eV; Kevin Slaten of China Labor Watch, a non-profit organisation promoting workers' rights in China; Li Qiang, activist, China Labor Watch; workers employed in the special economic zone at Kobierzyce, Poland; Harry Wattenbach, employee at Amazon's warehouse in Leipzig; Tove Holm, Free Workers' Union (FAU), Berlin; Carole Cadwalladr, undercover employee at Amazon's warehouse in Swansea, Wales; Mac McClelland, journalist, former employee at an Amazon warehouse in the US; Spencer Soper, journalist, quoting employees (Mark Zweifel, Stephen Dallal, anonymous, Myrna Willis) at Amazon's warehouse in Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania; Luk Louven Janssen, reading from the novel *Momo* (1973) by Michael Ende; Pierangelo Maset, Professor, University of Lüneburg; Geoffrey Crothall of China Labour Bulletin, an NGO defending workers' rights in Hong Kong; Claudine Biswas, voice-over artist and actress, Berlin; Vanessa Abel, freelance translator, Berlin; Martin Sejka, freelance online editor, Berlin; Jana Costas, economist, and Blagoy Blagoev, PhD candidate, Free University of Berlin; Janine, virtual assistant at fiverr.com; a waiter choosing to be anonymous, Berlin; testimony from the archive of the Swedish

Anarcho-syndicalist Youth Federation; online post by worker employed at a Foxconn factory in China; Johnny Hellqvist, FAU, Berlin; testimony by Sony employee, Tagajo, Japan

**Participants in the Super8 film:** Marit Östberg, Line Skywalker Karlström, Pietro Mele, Sophia Ayda Schultz, Kajsa Dahlberg, Billie

**Archive materials used:** *Zwischen 8 Uhr und 8:26 Uhr*, 16mm film, colour, 1950; *Wie man Kosten senkt*, 16mm film, b/w, year of production unknown; *System vorbestimmter Zeiten*, 16mm film, b/w, year of production unknown; *Arbeitsplatz und Stoppuhr*, 16mm film, b/w, 1968; *The Easier Way*, General Motors Corporation, 1946; YouTube clip of three-shell-game scam in London; YouTube clip of the Gilbreths' time and motion study in bricklaying; aikido excerpt from the film *Soleil Rouge* (Red Sun, 1971); YouTube clip of Emily Fox's world-record video; excerpt from *Momo*; labournet.tv; Marilyn Berlin Snell's interview with Jamaica Kincaid for the magazine *Mother Jones* (September/October 1997); description of the seventeen basic movements by Frank Bunker Gilbreth, inventor of MTM

The artist would like to thank Dieter Prenzel, Line Skywalker Karlström, Marit Östberg, Pietro Mele, Annika Rut Persson, Laura Guy, Ilaria Donà, Jermaine Loo, Sofie Tornhill, Habibi and the following people at Fiverr: Adelina, allykat, Janine, bethofffreshair, chrisleevella, Martyna, Yuki, balladanna, María, Paloma, Angeliq, alisonrae, lawrenceiscool, Yanitsa, devonmahdi, pjimprov, shiangchee and Vivien.

Kajsa Dahlberg's participation in 'The Welfare State' is supported by IASPIS, Stockholm.



Kajsa Dahlberg, *Reach, Grasp, Move, Position, Apply Force*, 2014–15. Video stills

Kajsa Dahlberg gives plastic form to concerns usually associated with – and quite often confined to – the context of political and social activism. Her work revolves around representation and self-representation, reflection and self-reflection. This is true in an art-specific sense, when she includes the production process behind a performance, installation or film in its eventual presentation, and also in a more general societal sense, when she creates a visually and spatially convincing environment for written and spoken words that go straight to the core of contested issues.

Investing much time and effort into research and collaboration, Dahlberg nevertheless exhibits frequently. She had a solo exhibition at Neue Berliner Kunstverein in 2014, presenting a first version of the film shown here, then titled *Strawberries* (in reference to the low wages earned by those who pick our all-year-round strawberries, Dahlberg quoted Jamaica Kincaid's dry statement 'We enjoy things far too much'). She also participated in 'Based in Berlin', a citywide exhibition of artists from many countries in 2011. Internationally, Dahlberg has exhibited at the First Athens Biennial (2007), Manifesta 8 (Murcia, Spain, 2010) and the Eighth Mercosul Biennial (Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2011). She teaches at the Valand Academy at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden.

Dahlberg privileges a female and feminist point of view, notably in works such as *Female Fist* (2006), which explores the possibilities for queer feminist pornography, and *Femø Women's Camp 2008: Film and Agreement* (2010), which insists on the carefully negotiated 'policy document' as a crucial component of do-it-yourself democracy. Two earlier installations prefigure the self-reflexive mode of the new film remarkably. *A Room of One's Own* is built around Dahlberg's re-edition of Virginia Woolf's influential essay from 1929, in which all the pages are scanned from copies belonging to different public libraries, showing the notes made by readers. The work exists in two versions, in Swedish (2006) and in German (2011). *No Unease Can Be Noticed, All Are Happy and Friendly (Postcards from Jerusalem, 26 March 1910 – 24 January 1999)* (2010) showcases a collection of postcards sent by Swedish visitors to Jerusalem. Their messages



to those back home convey the stability of the Swedish mindset, and the habit of not getting too deeply involved in other people's troubles, rather than the traumatic regime changes in the Holy Land during that 89-year span.

The final title of Dahlberg's new film, *Reach, Grasp, Move, Position, Apply Force*, lists four of the nine basic motions of Methods-Time Measurement. (To be precise, 'apply force' is a variation of 'apply pressure', as told to Dahlberg by Bert Carl, an MTM expert in charge of training programmes in Sweden.) This managerial discipline was developed in the late 1940s by researchers in the US, who used 16mm film cameras to record the motions of factory workers and thereby devise the Time-Measurement Unit (TMU), the equivalent of 0.036 seconds – ever since a global standard for the study and regulation of manual work. Cinema had already been used in the early twentieth century to create a list of the basic motions of labour, called *therbligs*, an anagram that traces them back to the Gilbreths, Frank and Lillian, the psychologists who identified them.

Dahlberg has followed in their footsteps, using film and video to examine how time is used to regulate and exploit labourers today, and *Reach, Grasp, Move, Position, Apply Force* even includes some of the Gilbreths' old footage of bricklayers building a wall. But what makes her new work truly self-reflective is that it focuses on the goods and services she used in making it, and on the precarious conditions imposed on those employed by the industries that deliver the fruits of our globalised civilisation. Examples and testimonies range from the factories in China where her digital equipment was made, to the conditions for employees at Amazon's warehouses and for the UPS delivery men who brought her the books she ordered, to the freelance translators and voice artists she employed to subtitle and narrate the film.

But as always with Dahlberg, the topic and the statements she makes about it are never quite the full story. She writes: 'The film reveals its own working conditions. But it is also about the relation to time in film and hence about the negotiation between the audience and the film itself.'



The motion model is also of use in that it enables one to teach the path of the motion. It makes it tangible. It makes the learner realise the problem of transportation involved. This has the byproduct of impressing the user with the value of motions. It is extremely difficult to demonstrate to the average person the reality and value, and especially the money value, of an intangible thing. The motion model makes this value apparent and impressive. It makes tangible the fact that time is money, and that an unnecessary motion is money lost forever.

Frank Bunker Gilbreth and Lillian Moller Gilbreth, *Applied Motion Study: A Collection of Papers on the Efficient Method to Industrial Preparedness*. New York: Sturgis & Walton, 1917, p.125.

If the building of a bridge does not enrich the consciousness of those working on it, then don't build the bridge, and let the citizens continue to swim across the river or use a ferry. The bridge must not be pitchforked or foisted upon the social landscape by a *deus ex machina*, but, on the contrary, must be the product of the citizens' brains and muscles. And there is no doubt architects and engineers, foreigners for the most part, will probably be needed, but the local party leaders must see to it that the techniques seep into the desert of the citizen's brain so that the bridge in its entirety and in every detail can be integrated, redesigned and reappropriated. The citizen must appropriate the bridge. Then, and only then, is everything possible.

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963, transl. Richard Philcox). New York: Grove Press, 2004, p.141.

**FRANCISCO  
CAMACHO  
HERRERA**

Colombia, born in 1979, lives in Amsterdam  
[www.fulltopia.com](http://www.fulltopia.com)

*fulltopia.com*

2015

Website and virtual community under continuous development

*fulltopia.com* was initiated in relation to a research and teaching residency at the Banff Centre in Canada in 2014. The project is realised with support from the Mondriaan Fund, Amsterdam, and by the Flemish Community and the European Union's Culture Programme through M HKA.

Francisco Camacho Herrera wishes to thank Andres Ochoa, Mihael Mladenov and Imre Szeman (development), Philip Marnef and Pieter Boels (design) and the Banff Centre.

To articulate their world view, some artists find it necessary to seek routes other than the visual: not renouncing images altogether, they instead find ways to not get stuck in them. Artists who have this impulse may in fact be fundamentally visual personalities, whose thinking tends to be image-based rather than conceptual in the strict sense. We notice, not least in this exhibition, how the visual always finds its way back into their work: as renderings of ideas in two or three dimensions; as compositions of movements in time; as didactic panels and diagrams; or finally, as depictions of moderately visual things such as cash receipts from a supermarket or the allocation of public housing.

Francisco Camacho Herrera is one of these non-visual-but-visual artists. His contribution to the Taipei Biennial 2012 was a short video of himself performing a swimming style of his own invention: a spiralling forward movement that requires considerably more energy than any established style. Change for change's sake? The image of change? No. In Camacho Herrera's vision, art should outgrow self-contained practices of image-making (including artists' self-promotion through art); it should help us to see how we coexist with each other as a society. But this is still a 'bigger picture' – inherently visual.

Crucially, he insists on asking *how* things might change. *Group Marriage* (2009) challenged the monogamous norm implicit in Western forms of civil union. The project, produced by the Foundation for Art and Public Domain and the Spinoza Foundation, both in Amsterdam, discussed the possibility of marriage to more than one person at the same time. It purposely circumvented religion, predominant morals and the legal difficulties of assimilating citizens who live with more than one partner.

Launched in Sierre, Switzerland, in 2014, *Future Shop* will, later in 2015, continue there and in Tilburg, the Netherlands. Reviving the classical format of the 'community project', this series of events takes the somewhat perfunctory format of the social initiative and turns it truly solidary and convivial. Represented by the ad hoc community that always forms around Camacho Herrera no matter where he appears, it is a personalised offer to the general public. Activities proposed



by community members – language courses for immigrants, dance classes, communal lunches or dinners – are offered either free of charge or made highly affordable. Local politicians are supporting *Future Shop* because it gives participants an outlet for their sociability in environments too frequently marked by isolation and alienation. Still a work in progress, the ambitious aim of this project is to visibly address the larger problems of social agency and change in the ‘tired’ welfare state.

No discussion of social realities can dodge the issue of the economic system that envelops and determines them – a mature and thoroughly monetised globalised capitalism. This exhibition offers itself as a launch pad for *fulltopia.com*, Camacho Herrera’s nascent experiment in community-building. The website targets a virtual community of unlimited size, rather than the necessarily limited number of people we can invite to lunch or dinner. It aims to be a tool for identifying and localising desires in society. When fully functioning, it will help users not just to understand each other’s needs and behavioural patterns, but also to offer their time, knowledge and skills to each other, in very real terms, beyond just the symbolic, and to bypass money as an instrument of exchange.

A functioning version of *fulltopia.com* will be ready for the opening of ‘The Welfare State’, and its development and adaptation to one or several communities of users will continue well beyond the exhibition. Camacho Herrera, who takes inspiration from the utopian writings of Charles Fourier in the early nineteenth century, intends that this interactive website gnaw at the roots of capitalism. His hope is that its users will experience an increased sense of social agency as they realise that a self-owned communitarian tool can achieve the very things that a commercially operated information system is set up to prevent. For this reason, all exchange within the system needs to be horizontal, spontaneous, self-generated and self-regulated. If *fulltopia.com* were to obey the laws of market exchange, or follow the templates of educational or even activist organisations, it could not foster any real social improvement.

The screenshot displays the Fulltopia web application. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the site name 'FULLTOPIA', a search bar, and icons for messages and user profile. Below the navigation, there are tabs for 'Home', 'Communities', and 'Messages', along with buttons for '+ New Call' and '+ Start a Community'. The main content area is split into two columns. The left column shows a map of a city area with several location pins. The right column features a 'Welcome, Philip' message and a list of activity notifications. Below this, there are sections for 'Most recent', 'In my community', and 'Archive'. Each section contains a list of posts, each with a user profile, a title, a location, a description, and a call-to-action bar with statistics like 'people joined', 'days remaining', and 'comments'.

Social art practice has to respond to a situation of societal turmoil, in which the economy is controlling the cultural behaviour of communities. For at least 20 years artists have used the space offered by art, and by discussions on art, to integrate a social problematic into the construction of art speech. There are two kinds of social art practice: one representing and making visual the problematic of communities within the discursive framework of the art world, the other actively engaging communities and offering spaces for producing change. It is the latter that I am interested in.

[...]

One of my interests is rethinking the definition of art practices that are now primarily considered 'performative' and may leave behind a sense of manipulation when artists approach communities. In fact, performance-based socially engaged work sometimes risks becoming a new form of art commodity. I believe it cannot generate real social change, because it is not constructed by the community but imposed on it. An art practice that critiques 'wrong' social structures may, at the same time, be recreating the problems it aims to resolve. It is important to make problems visible, but it is not the role of social art practice to superficially denounce various phenomena in society. On the contrary, art should offer an uncompromised space and work towards permanent social change.

[...]

I believe that art practice can encourage social activation, help create communities through participation and engagement and change relatively fixed social states into dynamic and generative ones. Art practice can help generate new intimate economies and social gestures, thereby inspiring a redefinition of culture and changing the way it is used in our daily life.

[...]

*How* this might happen is the question I address in my work as an artist. My practice is based on three concepts, which I call 'communitarianism' (a living and sustainable sense of social cohesion on the micro-level), 'concertation' (the process of encouraging and achieving such cohesion through art practice) and 'concentration' (the acknowledgment that issues of form are of central and crucial importance to the success of any socially engaged art practice). In my work I am inspired by the idea that concentration, if properly and self-reflectively performed by a collective, may help it achieve 'concertation', which in turn is one step towards a 'communitarian' outlook and approach to shaping a future society. None of these three terms relieve the individual of either responsibility or agency. On the contrary, I believe that they foster a sense of personal involvement parallel to, and beyond, the mechanisms of global capitalism.

[...]

I work with, for and through communities and individuals, through engagement and activation. I choose to concentrate on small, even isolated communities that are, as it were, outside the mainstream. Together with such smaller groups I can achieve the openness of mind and the autonomy necessary for addressing overall systemic issues.

***DONNA  
KUKAMA***

**South Africa, born in 1981, lives in Johannesburg**

*The Monument of Apologies*

2015

Multimedia installation based on performance in Matonge, Brussels, on 7 May 2015: digital video colour, sound, 15', camerawork and editing by Mario De Munck; postcards for free distribution, 14.8 × 10.5 cm, photograph by Christine Clinckx  
 Courtesy of the artist

*What we caught we threw away, what we didn't catch we kept*

2015

Performance during the opening of 'The Welfare State' involving photographs by Joseph Makula from the Liberal Archives in Ghent  
 Courtesy of the artist

The production of *The Monument of Apologies* and *What we caught we threw away, what we didn't catch we kept* is supported by the Flemish Community and the European Union's Culture Programme, through M HKA. Donna Kukama is hosted in Antwerp for three months by AIR Antwerpen.

Bringing an established situation out of balance by occupying it as a *Fremdkörper* or 'foreign body' and unmaking the rules that determine it but are not supposed to be acknowledged as rules – this is Donna Kukama's deliberately undisciplined (and anti-disciplinary) method for performance art in public spaces.

Last summer's group exhibition at M HKA, 'Don't You Know Who I Am? Art After Identity Politics', featured two of her works based on such performances. *Not Yet (and nobody knows why not)* (2008), which is now part of the M HKA collection, shows Kukama in an open field in Nairobi, putting on red lipstick as participants are leaving a gathering that commemorated Kenya's Mau Mau uprising against the British in the 1950s. *The Swing (After After Fragonard)* (2009) documents a performance in Johannesburg: wearing a white dress with banknotes loosely pinned to it and sitting on a swing suspended from a highway flyover, Kukama let the notes fall onto the street below, where people scrambled for them.

Other previous works more directly prefigure her participation in 'The Welfare State'. For *The Red Suitcase* (2006), Kukama sold personal belongings from a red roller bag at a negotiated price that was always higher than the buyer's initial offer. *The Red Briefcase* (2007–ongoing) is series of photographs of Kukama covering her face with a briefcase that also reappears in her new work *The Monument of Apologies*. For *Treason 2 (We stand by our leaders)* (2007), Kukama walked in public spaces wearing a large sign with the slogan 'We stand by our leaders', borrowed from the protesters at the 'Treason Trial' of leaders of the South African liberation movements in 1956. The work connected this apartheid-era event with the 52nd conference of the African National Congress half a century later. *Black Money Market* (2010) was a makeshift stand in Basel selling a hundred coins from various African countries at a negotiated price and with a 'certificate of authenticity' – breaking all the rules of currency exchange. *The Museum of Non-Permanence* (2014–ongoing) was initiated for the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, South Africa. Kukama describes the performance-based piece as 'a Museum Body that produces public monuments throughout South Africa and owns a travelling private collection of some of the country's monuments'.



Kukama's work thematises both memory and money, narrative and negotiation, but does so in non-linear, non-hierarchical ways: sometimes using powerful visual cues (not least her own strikingly groomed and styled person), sometimes compressing the visual into coded symbols (coins and bags signifying circulation, written slogans declaring solidarity with struggles of the past).

In 'The Welfare State', she presents two new works, both relating to Belgium's African present and past. *The Monument of Apologies* (2015) takes place in the Matonge area of Brussels, a focal point for the country's large Congolese expatriate community. In the video, we see Kukama manoeuvring a roller bag (this time it is black) through its streets. Only she is moving forward; everyone else – everything else – is moving backward. In the postcard, we see her covering her face with a black scarf. It is as if Kukama is appropriating the very European notion of black as the colour of mournful commemoration.

*What we caught we threw away, what we didn't catch we kept* (2015) is a one-time performance, during the opening of 'The Welfare State'. A looped, continuous narrative, without beginning or end, it is based on selected photographs by Joseph Makula from the Liberal Archives in Ghent – a recurrent feature of this whole exhibition. Seated behind a standard-issue desk from Belgium's colonial era, Kukama tells individual visitors a story that includes fragments of history, literature and personal memory. She writes: 'Activated by my presence and that of public, the historical documents become slightly porous, allowing for self-insertion within the collective cultural and historical memories, putting to the test that which is perceived to be "true".'

Kukama's work has been shown in numerous group exhibitions all over the world, notably the Twelfth Lyon Biennale (2013) and the third iteration of the Triennial at the New Museum in New York (2015). She is a member of the Johannesburg-based Center for Historical Reenactments, together with Kemang Wa Lehulere and Gabi Ngcobo. The collective's work has had wide international exposure, for instance in the Eighth Berlin Biennale (2014). Kukama is also Lecturer at the Wits School of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.



*The Monument of Apologies* continues a series of 'public monuments' that I produce with the aim to flatten, reverse or challenge the way in which historical narratives tend to exist according to very strict timelines, often frozen in public structures that remain unchanged despite the changes around them. The monument confronts, head-on, the seeming lack of personal ownership for things that took place 'while we were not there'. It points at and challenges how time is mostly understood in a linear way. It also highlights how our ability to measure and assume geographical distances tends to erase personal ownership of certain histories. It questions why, still today, what goes on in faraway lands as well as what took place in the past is so often observed at a distance.

Two weeks ago, about a month after I arrived in Belgium, certain areas in South Africa experienced a spur of 'xenophobic' attacks on fellow Black Africans and Pakistanis and other immigrants of colour. About a week later, the term 'xenophobia' was being questioned and debated, mostly on social media, and I saw Facebook statuses increasingly referring to the violent madness as 'Afrophobia'. It had become clear that the attacks were not really xenophobic, since no Europeans or White Africans had fallen victim to the violence. In March 2014, at least 210 Congolese refugees returning home from Uganda drowned when an overcrowded boat sank on Lake Albert, on the border between the two countries. For a period of two years and until very recently, I rented a cottage in a Johannesburg neighbourhood that was mostly inhabited by Congolese nationals. In 1885, King Leopold II claimed, as his personal possession, the land that is the present-day Democratic republic of the Congo. On 17 January 1961, Patrice Lumumba, the first prime minister of independent Congo, was assassinated. This month, in May 2015, in the Matonge area of Brussels, these and more stories converge as *The Monument of Apologies*, a monument for an imagined welfare state.

The concept of a welfare state perceptibly places importance on 'nationals' before 'foreigners', and often does so apologetically. Since the status of citizenship acts as a qualifier for most of the beneficiaries of any welfare state, what is left for non-citizens might be summarised in one sentence: 'Sorry, we can't help.' When looking at the history between Belgium and the Congo, a much deeper public apology is called for, one that should attempt to go beyond 'reparations'. During apartheid, South African exiles forming part of the liberation movements depended largely on the aid and support of countries across Africa and other parts of the world. Ironically, it is a sense of 'citizenship' that drives the entitlement to welfare benefits and employment, one of the triggers of the recent Afrophobic attacks. The symbolic fall of Cecil John Rhodes's statue at the University of Cape Town should not be without the manifestation of another monument, one that publically apologises for our misinterpretation of the underlying implications of an adopted and unquestioned welfare system.



'Convalescents at the Clinic of the Lovanium University in Léopoldville', late 1950s  
Photograph by Joseph Makula for Inforcongo  
Courtesy of the Liberal Archives, Ghent (Donation Henri Guillaume)



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We thank AIR Antwerpen for hosting Donna Kukama and Contemporary Art Heritage Flanders (CAHF) for co-organising the forum ‘(Re)enacting the Welfare State’ in Cinema Zuid on 30 May. CAHF is a collaborative knowledge platform initiated by and built around the collections of four leading contemporary art museums in Flanders: MHKA and Middelheimmuseum in Antwerp, Mu.ZEE in Ostend and S.M.A.K. in Ghent.

We thank the Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy Research at the University of Antwerp for co-organising a series of seminars on core political aspects of the welfare state in collaboration with artists in this exhibition, VAI-Flemish Architecture Institute for co-organising a seminar on the welfare state as reflected in late modernist architecture and the Flemish-Dutch House deBuren for co-organising a seminar on contemporary income and social security policy.

We thank the archives and museums that have kindly lent their material and works to this exhibition: ADVN-Archive and Research Centre, Antwerp; Amsab-Institute of Social History, Ghent; Royal Museum of the Armed Forces and of Military

History, Brussels; KADOC-Documentation and Research Centre for Religion, Culture and Society, Leuven; Liberal Archives, Ghent; Musée d’Art Contemporain, Lyon; and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven.

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## COLOPHON

*The Welfare State*

29 May – 27 September 2015

muhka-welfarestate.org

**Artists:** Francisco Camacho Herrera, Josef Dabernig, Kajsa Dahlberg, Róza El-Hassan, Donna Kukama, Artūras Raila, Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven, Stephen Willats

**Material from:** ADVN–Archive and Research Centre, Antwerp; Amsab–Institute for Social History, Ghent; Brussels Air Museum, Brussels; KADOC–Documentation and Research Centre for Religion, Culture and Society, Leuven; the Liberal Archives, Ghent

**Curator:** Anders Kreuger

**Production:** Ghislaine Peeters, Georges Uittenhout, Ilaria Goglia

**M HKA Ensembles:** Evi Bert, Olivier Van D’huynslager

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**Guided tours:** For 'The Welfare State', M HKA offers a city walk focusing on 'traces' or 'monuments' of the Belgian welfare state in the area around the museum. Visitors can book a guide or download instructions and maps as a free app. Guided tours, in Dutch, of the exhibition are also available on Sundays at 2–3pm and on Thursday at 7.30–8.30. These are free with the admission ticket, and no reservation is needed.

**More information:** For information about guided tours, please visit [www.muhka.be/welcomes](http://www.muhka.be/welcomes). For information about the exhibition, please visit [ensembles.org](http://ensembles.org) and [muhka-welfarestate.org](http://muhka-welfarestate.org), or scan the QR codes on the work labels. Let us know what you think about the exhibition on our Facebook page ([m hka](https://www.facebook.com/mhka)) or twitter account ([@m\\_hka](https://twitter.com/m_hka)).

**Reservations:** Please call +32 (0) 3 2609990, Monday–Friday, 9am–noon and 1–5pm, or email to [reservatie@muha.be](mailto:reservatie@muha.be).

**Opening hours:** Tuesday–Sunday 11am–6pm; Thursday also 6–9pm

## M HKA

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