

**SASKIA BOS**

a chit chat with Otto Berchem

**Saskia Bos:** I have a lot of good things to say about the show. I've had it with all of the criticism. I have good things to say about the show, and the CRAP SHOOTER. Which is, I think, maybe just as important.

**Otto Berchem:** But Saskia, the question is - did you know?

**SB:** No, I didn't know.

**OB:** When did you find out?

**SB:** I was in Germany. I came back on Thursday, but I had a meeting outside of Amsterdam. I was called before the meeting. It must have been about 4:00 pm. It was Gerrie van Noord who called me ...

**OB:** Who also didn't know...

**SB:** Who also was not informed. She was totally confused, she said "I have to tell you something. They've broken into Bloom Gallery ... this is impossible. The police are in-volved" etc. I had this meeting, and knew I couldn't do anything, then I went to De Appel and we discussed the whole thing with Cattelan. What I wanted to hear were the content arguments, the real artistic reasons why he did it. He spoke about what I would say is appropriation, and the need to make that appropriation in reality, and the need to bring some-thing into another space, from one space to another. I remember asking myself, over and over, why he had written a letter to ask if he could bring the show from one place to another, why didn't he involve them consciously, willingly, knowingly. He said "no, because I had to transgress this line. I had to do something without their consent". It was the surprise that he was interested in. It was a pretty calm meeting, because I wanted it to be calm. The excitement of it was already big enough with the others. So we really discussed, for hours, about "why did you leave the note "Don't worry. Everything is OK. You will see everything again soon", why didn't you leave another kind of note?"

Then I was shown the space, because I wanted to know what he would exhibit. First the curators wanted to show a photograph, but Cattelan wasn't interested in that, he wanted to show the ladder. The ladder he used to break into Bloom with. On Friday, the day after, I decided that - because I had to draw the line afterwards, as an institution, I had to say NO. This is a transgression that we don't condone. Although as a person, if I had been a critic, I could have thought about it in a different way. Maybe Cattelan should have codified his message better, if he had wanted it to be a 'tongue-in-cheek' piece.

**OB:** Did you have to protect the institution?

**SB:** I don't think I had to protect the institution, I had to BE the institution. I said "now I have to draw the line in retrospect" - because we hadn't discussed this in the curatorial course - like what would happen if we would do a robbery? They didn't discuss it with me, because they knew I would have said no. So they couldn't. So they didn't.

**OB:** Wouldn't the ladder have been more interesting than a room with a news clipping and a couple of hastily written statements taped to the wall?

**SB:** We can not say "we don't agree with this project", and at the same time give the artists a wink and say "nice little project". I would rather have an empty room. So it was a case of censoring the work, after the fact. If you were to compare this with the Fuchs project, or other projects, I was uninvolved,

but I was complete-ly aware. And I guided them through the process. With the Fuchs project, I saw it on the night before the opening, and ... I must say I was a little wary, weeks before, when the curators showed me the P.I.'s business card. I thought "isn't this a bit weird? Shouldn't this guy be more like James Bond, like invisible?"

OB: Have you been in touch with Fuchs about the project?

SB: No. I had said to him that I had some naughty curators around, and then I discussed that with him, like I always wondered if you should censor, but at the same time I said one shouldn't. In the end, this work of Geers is another form of portrait painting.

OB: Do you see the show as, I'll use this metaphor: leaving your kids home for the weekend with the fridge full, keys for the car, and money to go to the movies. Your trusting them.

SB: Which doesn't mean, with the show that they made, they were given carte blanche. They should discuss it with me, and I should see the point. If they would have said "I want to do a show of Jan Knap", I might have had problems with that, because the work has some really regressive imagery.

OB: Did you ever imagine things going to the point that they have?

SB: Normally I have responsibility for the artists, but in this case I wanted to take a step back, of course. They have invited them. Although all along I knew who they were inviting, what they had been doing. I knew about the brick piece. I helped facilitate the project of the evaluation of the building through the sponsor.

OB: One of the interesting things about the show, for me, is how Brinch and Jakobsen's work becomes more of an image, working on one level/border of tolerance, compared to Cattelan or Geers.

SB: Why is Brinch and Jakobsen, for example, in every newspaper? Because it's the most spectacular ...

OB: It's the most visual ...

SB: It's the most visual, and therefore I also criticize their project because I think it's overly narrative. One wonders if there's a conscious disinterest in metaphor. I think Kendel I Geers' brick through the window is the strongest of the 'broken works'. It relates to the street, it's a clear message, in one room, it's absolutely an icon for hate, or aggression towards an institution. It works that way for a lot of people. There's a clever argument by Haacke, when he's been attacked that he always does these things within institutions. About co-optation. "According to Haacke, co-optation occurs when the intentions with which our action is taken are reversed in practice, and one ends up serving the opposing interests. The problem is that in spite of these distortions, museums and galleries as the established channels of communication remain the most powerful tools for getting a message out."

OB: What works do you think were the strongest in the show?

SB: I think the Geers' brick through the window, the lowered doorways, and Halter/Gratwohl's soup, and the video toilet I think is pretty good. As works. Also, Jeroen Eisinga's room is pretty strong.

OB: In a way, Eisinga is removed from the show as a whole, he's the dark horse, the unknown in the dark room. He's the most autonomous part of the show... What were some of the reactions to CRAP SHOOT that you have gotten?

SB: I never would have thought that our 77 year old book keeper would break into tears (when he saw the smashed ticket booth). It was such a beautiful and emotional reaction. He said: "how could you do this ?" He was crying, he said "maybe it has to do with my age ...". I was very moved by this, because it was a beautiful reaction against all cynicism, or pseudo Philistine reactions, to use your

words, people standing up for the 'so - called silent majority', like this critic did. This was an authentic reaction by an old man who sees a lot of shit around in the world and thinks "why is this necessary"?

OB: Let me pick up on a point that was made by a critic: are you a monster maker?

SB: Do you remember that? He said "you're creating little monsters here". I said "I'm not interested in making clones", if I would be interested, then they would make different shows. They would make my shows. Which I can do. It's not the goal of my curatorial training. They do what they think is necessary. that's what I mean by guidance That they present their way of seeing the contemporary situation assessing what artists of their generation are thinking today. I can do that, through my eyes. I want them to do it through their eyes.

OB: You mentioned some of your goals, why did you initiate the course?

SB: It wasn't something I had invented. I was an advisor to a course in Grenoble, in Le Magasin. As a student of Art History myself, I always missed the relation - and felt the gap - between theory and practice. I remember that, which might still be the case, at an institute of Art History, people always make work about artists that have already died because they cannot talk back to you. When I saw what was happening at Le Magasin, I thought "this is something that's really needed. It's a very bright idea." I applied in '91 to the Ministry to do such a course. I also think that it helps any institution that does it. If you were to talk to Nick Serota, at the Tate, why he does it together with the Royal College, he would give you the same answer as me. He'd say "it also challenges the curators that you have in your own institution". It makes everyone very much alive. This is good. This is a dialogue.

OB: How were you challenged by the curators of CRAP SHOOT? How do their positions about the role of the curator differ from yours?

SB: I think whatever generation you are working with, the curator should step back behind the artist. And let the artists be, and decide, and shine. Even if it's not so coherent. This is almost a theme show. I'm always a little bit wary of the 'theme show' because the individuality of the artists is always a little bit damaged by too much coherence in the show. He gets to be part of a group that maybe he doesn't want to be part of. On the contrary, the public, they're always very happy because they can understand why you did the show. I think also the critics, in the newspapers, they love coherent shows. It's like a show of landscape painting. We can criticize the show and say "how many sunsets can you have?" ... How many broken windows belong ?

OB: Shouldn't we talk about the comparison between the 60s and 70s?

SB: Some newspaper critics seem to canonize the art of the 60s and 70s. Why? Because it's already in the art history books ... even though they don't understand it. They haven't witnessed, and they haven't experienced that. If you read what they write about now, I am skeptical about how they would have reacted then. I think in contrast to the courageous curators, because they are courageous, and the artists too, that the critics are the chickens because they lean on a history that they haven't lived.

OB: What about these attitudes that "it's been done before, and done better" ...

SB: I'm not of that opinion. It has not been done before. We can talk about a spiraling history, which comes back into the same areas, but this has not been done before. I would have wanted to have been at a lecture that Wim Beeren gave to the curators after the show opened. He came up with his magazine, made in 1969 about the Op Losse Schroeven exhibition. I'm amazed that those people said that this (CRAP SHOOT) was just like the 60s and the 70s. First: they (the curators) were not born yet. Also Wim Beeren laughed, he said "when were you born?" One said "68", the other said "71". His show was in '69. Can you imagine how he felt? He is 67 years old. He comes out of that 'from this, came this' which is modernism. I think that there is a spiraling cycle in history anyhow. Which is not a new story, that you come back into the same attitudes maybe every 30 years. Why not? It's happened before. 30 years back is the 60s with Fluxus, and another 30 years earlier you have Da Da.

## MO PROBABLY DIDN'T KNOW

Saskia Bos continues her chit chat

While everyone has been getting bent out of shape about Maurizio Cattelan's robbery of Bloom Gallery, and how "it's all been done before", they haven't once mentioned the first Art robbery. Time to do some homework, Saskia Bos tells all about the work by Ulay.

**Saskia Bos:** Ulay did this for two reasons. There was a painting by Spitzweg, who was Hitler's favorite painter. Spitzweg was the bourgeois painter, more than Bidermeyer. The subject matter was 'the poor poet'. It showed the unfortunate condition of the artist.

Ulay thought that it was incredibly hypocritical that Hitler was so in love with this painting. Even though this is '74, not '34, he robbed it. Why did he rob it? Because he wanted to transgress, and to perform.

He was already into performance by then. He recorded the whole thing. He then brought the painting into the home of a Turkish person. That whole Turkish story, which now is so contemporary because of all the fires and events in Ger-many, had yet to happen. He already saw the tension between Turkish people work-ing there, and that they were going to be the Jews of the late 20th century, in Germany.

Now, that robbery, you can say, is very content based. But it makes it maybe a little more interesting. Maybe he didn't have to rob it, he could have put a reproduction of that painting in the home. But he wanted public attention, and through a robbery you get public attention. Now if you compare that to Cattelan, doesn't it end with public attention full stop?

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