

## **Married by Powers**

**a selection from the collection Frac Nord-Pas de Calais in TENT.**

**October 17 - November 17 2002**

Bouvard and Pécuchet, the two maniac collectors from one of Flaubert's books, derived from a few stones from the Celtic past not only all of Western culture but the 'meaning' of that culture as well. Those menhirs lead them to construct the phallic wing of their museum: "... in former times, towers, pyramids, candles, milestones and even trees had a phallic significance, and for Bouvard and Pécuchet everything became phallic. They collected swing-poles of carriages, chair-legs, cellar bolts, pharmacists' pestles. When people came to see them they would ask: What do you think that looks like?" then confide the mystery, and if there were objections, they shrugged their shoulders pityingly."(1)

Somehow, the phenomenon of collecting, the basis of a museum, is that "the set of objects the museum displays is sustained only by the fiction that they somehow constitute a coherent representation of the universe. [...] Should the fiction disappear, there is nothing left of the museum but a 'bric-a-brac', a heap of meaningless and valueless fragments of objects which are incapable of substituting themselves either metonymically for the original object or metaphorically for their representations". (2)

Though not convinced of any universal vision whatsoever, we are interested in the possible significance of collections and archives, and in how, time and again, different meanings can be derived from them. Culture as such means little, for today's cultural resistance is tomorrow's art object or commercial product. Of more importance are the conditions of cultural production, how culture is produced. In this case: the way a collection can be activated and revitalised, as a tool or even a weapon, to view, comment and rethink culture. Because this is how points of view and positions can be adjusted, changed, developed and sharpened. A collection with accompanying storage, the depot hardly ever leaves the cellars of the museum where it is concealed, and if it does, usually in small parts. Married by Powers enlightens some aspects of 'the collection': transport, storage, presentation, documentation, mediation, public, and personal interpretation and makes an attempt to render transparency to this extensive collection by bringing it into action as material, as a literal think tank.

On the invitation of FRAC Nord-Pas de Calais and TENT, we made a choice from the FRAC collection. This choice, around 150 works of 73 different artists is not a cross-section: most pieces (art objects, but also design) were made in the 60s-, 70s and 90s. Some of the works - or other works by the same artists - have been shown in Rotterdam before, in spaces such as Venster, Westersingel, Witte de With and Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. In this sense, Married By Powers revitalises a few links with Rotterdam.

During the process of defining our choices, we chose to be led by a few criteria: if a work generated recognition and discussion between us, if it 'spoke' and appealed to us, if we were eager to see a specific work that we had seen before, again, and last but not least, if we really wanted to use this opportunity to create the possibility to finally see works in real, works that we only knew from images or stories of others.

In principle unlimited, we were only restricted on practical grounds: 'unavailable' when temporary on loan for an exhibition elsewhere, and 'impossible' when a piece is too big, too heavy and too complicated to transport and to install in this situation.

Married by Powers is closely connected to our art practice. Our projects engage with functionality, usability and site sensitivity, concerned with interaction at an institutional and intimate, local level, aiming to improve situations, add what is missing, highlight what is in the dark and to open rather than close. Our working method is based on co-operation and we use this as a platform for various kinds of communicative activities. Exploring and activating such platforms runs like a thread through our work. With, for example, The Bookshop Piece (1996, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen), a fully functioning copy of the ICA bookshop in London, we reintroduced the discourse on art into the very same arena where art is shown. And with the group Nomads & Residents, we create, in collaboration with others, a platform for informal presentations and discussions by artists, critics, curators, architects, using existing spaces in cities such as New York, Los Angeles and Rotterdam.

Through research and archived information (from (art) history, journalism, media, magazines and internet) we create a frame of reference composed of images, events, media coverage and texts. Circulation of knowledge and reuse of existing and left-over spaces, forms and situations are thus important tools in our work. Not by adding yet another new idea to the cycle of production and consumption, but by revising and reactivating an existing situation. This reusing does not stem from nostalgic desire, but is sparked by the understanding that things lie concealed in the folds of recent history which have to be actively exposed in order for us to be able to move on.

A collection only comes alive when taken into operation, when the objects are being shown and allowed to function as 'working papers' at large. *Married By Powers* deals with the significance of an international art collection such as this FRAC collection. What does it mean, a collection, how do its individual pieces determine our vision on art, what do they mean for contemporary perception in a changing world and in what ways can a collection be valued and activated, beyond the usual practice of exhibitions and associated publications. And, not the least: what do these objects mean to the present generation of young artists, designers, architects? We invited nine young colleagues to choose in their turn, as our partners, from the 150 pieces and to state their reasons for their choice(s). They are all active in the broader field of the arts and come besides from The Netherlands from different parts of the world. They are today's and tomorrow's cultural producers.

Their choice is presented during three days, in SHED, the space next to GYM (which is the space where the depot is installed). Their motivations are recorded on video and on show, thus forming an ever-increasing shadow collection, while the exhibited choices change all the time. Sometimes pieces will return, sometimes in a different context and certainly with a different motivation. GYM houses the collection of 150 pieces, all packed in protective cases and material: the depot as image. The content of the cases is indicated by the list of names of the artists, titles and descriptions of the work. In some cases this list will evoke memories of the pieces, for many of the works may be part of some sort of collective memory.

Three pieces are, as our personal parameters for *Married by Powers*, shown during the whole period: *How Does It Feel* (1995), a work of Tony Oursler addresses directly to the viewer, in this way exploring and questioning the relation between public and private, intimate space. With *Speech Bubbles* (1997) by Philippe Parreno, the energy of a discourse floats - so to speak - in the air. *Untitled, 1994 (Recreational Lounge)* a project by Rirkrit Tiravanija creates a place in the exhibition, actively inviting to play, hang out, think and read.

*Married by Powers* came into being thanks to the dedication and attention of all who contributed: the partners Lisa Klapstock, Natasa Petresin, Basak Senova, Mai Abu Eldahab, Franceso Bernardelli, Nikola Dietrich, Edit Molnar, Marc Bijl, Maher Al Sabbagh, Paulina Olowaska, Jill Magid, Nanine Linning, Martijn Boelhouwers, André van der Eijk, Carla Cruz, Nina Hoëchtel, Tina Sejbjerg, Claudia van Dijk, Reynaldo Chirino; collecting information, Ad Benard, student KCW; video work, Roebie Starink, student AV, Willem de Kooning Academie; design invitation Peter Westenberg; the people of Frac Nord-Pas de Calais in Dunkerque and TENT. in Rotterdam, transporter LeClerq and AFAA, Association Française d'Action Artistique.

Bik Van der Pol, september 2002

(1) Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1993.

(2) Eugenio Donato, "The Museum's Furnace: Notes toward a contextual reading of Bouvard and Pecuchet", in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. J. V. Harari, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979.