

The Value of Our Love

Artistic Practice and its Economic Reality. Round Table Debate.

[Art Brussels](#) / Sa 20.04.2013 / 12:30 – 17:00 Moderation: Andrea Phillips

With contributions by:

Lenio Kaklea (FR), performer, dancer, choreographer, Paris / Dilettant (SE), initiators of The Public Office – an open space for work and knowledge exchange, Stockholm / Bik van der Pol (NL), artists and initiators of School of Missing Studies, Rotterdam / Agency (BE), artist Brussels, Jan Boelen (BE), product designer and artistic director Z33, Hasselt / Igor Byttebier (BE), economist and founder Dadelen.be, Gent / Guy Gypens (BE), director Kaaithheater, Brussels / Nikita Kadan (UA), artist & activist, Kiev / Sally De Kunst (CH/BE), curator and director of the Belluard Festival, Fribourg / Stijn Maes (BE), O.C.A.M. workplace for visual artists, Mechelen / Anna Manubens (ES), curator & art manager, currently working for Auguste Orts, Brussels / Sari Depreeuw (BE), attorney and specialised in copyright and media law, Brussel / Josine De Roover (BE), co-ordinator NICC and De Voorkamer, Antwerp & Lier / Jack Segbars (NL), artist and critic, Rotterdam / Alain Servais (BE), art collector, Brussels / Kris Vleeschouwer (BE), artist and collaborator of Arteconomy, Antwerp / Tom Viaene (BE), journalist and critic for Rekto:Verso / Matteo Lucchetti & Judith Wielander (IT/BE), curators of the research project Visible, Brussels.



The Value of Our Love was an initiative of Jubilee, invited by Katerina Gregos, Artistic Director of Art Brussels and developed in collaboration with Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, editor of the Manifesta Journal and free lance curator, and Andrea Phillips, Director of the Doctoral Research Programmes of Goldsmiths University, London.

Resume and Transcription by Katleen Vermeir / Jubilee, 2013

Introduction

Throughout history artists have taken on the role of seismographs and critical observers of the (cultural) crisis, but also as the creators of models of survival and escape. Ever since the beginning of modern art, experimental artistic practices and innovative strategies developed – all shaping the institutional critique of their own time.

However, the 'space of negotiable resistance' as one could describe the working space in which artists maneuver, has become increasingly narrow – not least because of the economic powers that underlie its current structure. The powerful art market thrives on a model of growth and profit, which puts pressure on the sustainable relationships between the artists, dealers, curators and other actors in the field. By capitalizing on (emerging) artistic expression, the current system corners artistic autonomy instead of stimulating it. And by extension, cultural critique, one of the cornerstones of a democratic society, is threatened to become a commodity and pawn within this system.

The assumed mutuality between the artist and the dealer, based on a shared love of cultural production, masks a set of questions about the value of art: how is it created and how is it shared? If artistic practice is caught in a catch 22 with the market on which it operates, can we think of alternative tactics or counter moves within the system? Where do conflicts emerge when trying to put this into practice? Should this relation come to an end or are there ways to build new forms of alliances between all parties involved?

The debate opened the floor to a wide selection of artists and other experts in the field who spoke about the impact of the current economic system on the modes of artistic production. Possible trajectories for change towards a new economy, also for the arts were debated.

Resume and transcribed excerpts

Performance Lenio Kaklea,
a performance about cash, debt and living without credit.

Katrien Reist, Jubilee
introduces Jubilee & Round Table & Guests

Andrea Phillips, moderator.

We start this debate with the question: What is the value of our love? What is this when we talk about Love? Love is the thing that keeps the wheels of the art world circulating. Love is the thing that we exchange. Love is the thing that happens between me and the object on the museum or gallery wall. Love is the thing I am talked about when I walk into a gallery to buy art,

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love is the thing that we teach as educators to art students and art historians about the priceless value that is embedded in the conceptualisation, the making and the doing of art. This sounds lovely, but it has a problem. When we talk about love, we talk about value, you don't want to talk about price. When we talk about value it is beautifully rethorically posed, to be not about price. You don't talk about the price of a painting, you talk about cultural values, political values, artistic values etc...but we never talk about money. Today we want to talk about money.

Today we want to move from a critique of the art market towards alternative structures. We know art and our love is capitalized and we want to discuss different ways of operating. It is important that we do this talk in an art fair, it is both a militant stage and a place for knowledge exchange. Important to know is that it all comes from the voice of artists, and how they try to survive and make their work.

Listening to a reading of a letter by Hollis Frampton from 1973, In this letter to Museum of Modern Art film curator Donald Richie, Hollis Frampton addresses Richie's offer of a complete retrospective "all for love and honor and no money is included at all." While flattered "in principle," Frampton eloquently identifies the absurdity of an economic phenomenon wherein everyone from film manufacturers and lab technicians to film projectionists and security guards derives income, but the artist does not: "it seems that, while all these others are to be paid for their part in a show that could not have taken place without me, nonetheless, I, the artist, am not to be paid."

Ronny Heiremans, Jubilee

Has nothing changed since 1973? Would you write a letter like this when MOMA would ask you today?

Andrea Phillips, moderator

Tate does not pay, many biennales do not pay, Documenta does not pay the artists. The rationale is that they expect a dealer to make money from your work. Nobody mentions however research time, paying the rent etc...

Presentation by Nikita Kadan, Artist and activist (Kiev).

In Post Soviet times, big capital wants representation through art, but they don't want any discussion. I am part of an art group. We were inspired by the art workers coalition in the west. We were the first to demand a fee in a non profit institution, for example the Pinchuk institution, he is the famous rich collector. We acted against the privatization of the national museum, the director was deciding to present artists from her private gallery which she was still running at the same time. What is the task of a public institution? We want to give more light to our situation.

Presentation by Jack Segbars, artist, writer,

We started Platform Beeldende Kunst after the budget cuts in The Netherlands. We tried to organize, get everyone together, but the big museums stepped out and there started a fight between artists and institutions. We try to find arguments against an anti-artist sentiment where artists are seen as subsidy consumers.

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Josine De Roovere, coordinator NICC

We are defending the interests of artists. We do this on policy level, federal level, the level of the artist statute: an unemployment regulation. We talk to the Flemish community, also on the question of the artist fee. Institutions should pay artists, it is not a law, some of their expenses should go to artistic expenses. In reality it is often not done.

Sari Depreeuw, attorney at Brussels bar

Authors under the Belgian law are well protected if they go for contracts. The law does not impose a fee. The level of the fee is the choice of contractors, it could be 0.

Presentation by Kris Vleeschouwers, artist, collaborator in Art Economy

Art economy brings artists and companies together. I saw big opportunities in it for artists.

The companies give a team, hour time, sometimes a budget to pay for some production, sometimes a fee for the artist, but this is often still the city who want to stimulate this collaborations.

Andrea Phillips, moderator

Does it remind you of what is called public/private financing? Neoliberal governments that try to stimulate artists to find other ways of funding. Or do you see it as something like the Artist Placement group, something ambivalent, a political strategy. Do you see it as a possible alternative strategy or as a means of survival, because the artist is paid?

Kris Vleeschouwers, artist, collaborator in Art Economy

For me it is about the need for technical, IT information I can find in a company. I also see of course the strategy behind it. Do we want to be in this or not? Can we use this to our advantage? My role was to take care of the autonomy of artists and look to it the company could not co-opt the artistic process.

Guy Gypens, director Kaaithheater

More and more in performance but especially in visual arts do we see an increasing level of abstraction in the market. There is a disjunction in production, distribution, consumption. The problem is not about whether it is in production or presentation, but in the disjunction. How much do we want to connect these functions in the market as artists. Are we willing to rejoin these functions, and go for the total ecology of the production?

Presentation by Anders Jacobsen, one of the initiators of *Dilettant* and *The Public Office* – an open space for work and knowledge exchange, Stockholm
With *Dilettant* we started 6 years ago a so called 'employment cooperative', it means we organize the economies of 27 artists at the moment. The artists can use the cooperative to make contracts, make funding applications, instead of everyone starting its own company, its own non-profit. The artists need to invoice, or a legal body to apply for funding. It makes no sense to do it on your own and it eats time. 10% of everything the members earn goes to cover

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costs for administration, bookkeeping. There is some solidarity, transparency that apply here. The big chunks of money from big grants cover costs for others that do not bring in a lot. There are yearly meetings when you vote on the member fee, you know how the money circulates in the organization. The member fee is 10% of everything that the members make, it is an internal solidarity system. Good size of this cooperative is a balancing act, it can not become too big so it becomes an exploitative system, where members buy a service from, but still needs to sustain itself. We want to share methods or toolkits, make open source software for cooperatively managed economies. We want to take the employers' responsibility very serious. It is day to day practical work, and driven by ideology.

In 2011 we also launched Public Office. With politicians, etc...we discussed the idea of publicly available workspace, rent-free and open to everyone. We focus on the suburbs of Stockholm, there are no opportunities there. We want to use abandoned food stores in suburbs as open workspaces and we try to collaborate with Stockholm libraries and embed public offices in the existing structure. It is a model for shared infrastructure, for long term, 10-15 year projects. We want to build solidarity on a longer term.

Guy Gypens, director Kaaitheater

The precarious situation is the lack of a backbone, the thin relation between co-producers, presenters, there is no responsibility anymore when something unexpected happens. We wonder how to do it without being the producer of the work and control everything. The safety-net of a big institution is still important. If something happens we help to look for a solution. We try to make a tighter link between partners, make network stronger. In art 'network' is a buzzword, but how strong are they? It is better to help make better networks for artists.

Sally De Kunst, curator and director of the Belluard Festival, Fribourg

We try to work bottom up, facilitate artists, there is not one model. Sometimes people are stuck in a cooperative model, like Rote Fabrik in Zurich, the artists had studios there for 30 years, and they think they have a right to it, but you have to constantly reinvent yourself, especially since everything around us is changing...

Jan Boelen, product designer and artistic director Z33, Hasselt

Everyone speaks about presentation and production, but research is never mentioned, and afterwards the distribution. This should be part of the cycle in an institute, and together with other institutions we should create a network, than it can become sustainable.

Andrea Phillips, moderator

The visual art sector imposed its model on the performance art sector. As a consequence their economic structure became less stable.

Guy Gijpens, director Kaaitheater

I had a surrealistic discussion: the director of MuHKA said to me: You should stay away from performance art...you pay the artists and you fuck up the

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market...

Josien De Roovere, coordinator NICC

A new Kunsten decret proposal: institutions should follow new criteria, called the Kunst Canon. It stipulates the responsibility of institutions towards individual artists. For example to pay artists fees.

Igor Byttebier, economist and founder Dadelen.be

I do creativity innovation consulting in the social environment, and look for where paradigm shifts are possible. I focus for example on alternative currencies, but the discussion about it with artists is new to me. I try to find innovative tools in complex situations. Creating a new currency could be an element in it, but important is that we need to think differently as well. I wonder what is the value of art and the contribution of the artist in society? What could it be in a new society emerging here? For example we had the old guilds, should we bring them back with new rules?

Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, editor of the Manifesta Journal and free lance curator

Research was done by Electra, The Showroom, Chisenhale in London about embedded art practices, engaged with the community. There immediate affective value was clear, but on the art market they became only visible many years later, it was a deferred value.

Presentation by Bik van der Pol, artists and initiators of School of Missing Studies, Rotterdam

[The School of Missing Studies](#)(SMS) has, as a project, functioned as a nomadic, collaborative platform for experimental study and research of the public environment (public space, public time, public good) marked by, or currently undergoing, abrupt transition. In 2013, SMS will also operate as a one-time only, two-year Master's program at the Sandberg Instituut in Amsterdam. Both art project and Master course, SMS proposes to find common and uncommon grounds for research and practice, from where acute political, social, educational and urban challenges can be articulated and further debated.

Presentation by Matteo Lucchetti & Judith Wielander, curators of the research project Visible.

We come from Italy. There is no law or contracts or no welfare including artists. It is an archaic way. The system of the Mecenat is the only way. We started a collaboration with a company and the Pistoletto Foundation. We give an award to artists working in the social sphere. It is a constant research to create a network between practices that are similar. There is no chance to have public funding, that's why we started the dialogue with a private company. We proposed them a research, not a classical art project. There are no products in this project.

Presentation by Anna Manubens, curator & art manager, working for Auguste Orts, Brussels

I joined Auguste Orts, an artist run platform for production and development.

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The establishment of the platform was practically driven. We work with many different kinds of artists to learn different ways of doing.

Artistic presentation by Kobe Matthys, Agency

Assembly (The Value of Our Love), Agency calls forth Thing 001909 (Money).

The basic unit of Agency, the institution Founded in 1992 and run by Belgian artist Kobe Matthys, is the case involving the fate of a cultural object or act whose classification has been challenged in court. *Thing 0001909 (Money Man)* concerns a court case in 1993 in Columbia between the artist J.S.G. Boggs and Eljay Bowron, director of the U.S. Secret Service around the so called "Boggs Bills", the handdrawn facsimiles of dollar notes by Boggs.