A Slowdown at the Museum

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with Helena Sidiropoulos
& Thomas Verstraeten,
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Kimpe, Simon Dybbroe
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A postscript to an unfinished sentence

'When nothing new is discovered and the old is no longer the familiar, the epilogue is what suggests itself'. Hans Belting's dictum diagnoses, in his masterful *Art History after Modernism*, the state of a discipline essentially preoccupied with its crises, anxieties and foundational paradoxes. As a motto for the current exhibition, it mutates into a comment on temporal disorientation, a sense of captivity between an impregnable past and a future that seems to arrive only as obstruction, as an 'end of...'. *A Slowdown at the Museum* concludes the scenario of a 'museum', its rise and fall, the always incomplete processes through which 'museum' and visitor make sense of each other and this sense is committed to a future history of art and of ourselves. Echoing some of the questions asked in the previous episodes, *Museum of Speech* and *Museum of Display*, this show gathers works that function as either epilogues or preambles, that materialize closure and opacity or presage transformations to come.

Throughout the series, a generic 'museum' was posited as the institutional regulation of our relationship to time, a tool to partition the temporalities that constitute identity and political belonging. Recent art has of course done much to disturb this model, to stage turbulent events between orderly, chronological exhibits. *A Slowdown at the Museum* is not an inventory of those, but a composite of traces and persistent sensations, of interruptions and moments of suspension. It probes practices for which institutional critique, in its formulation as a stage for the transfer of power – from the institution to the emancipated viewer, with the mediation of the radical artist –, is both an essential reference and an untenable premise; practices preoccupied with reversals and reconceptualization, whereby the tenets and strategies of critique are unraveled and diverted to poetic, imaginative uses.

The conventional script of institutional critique is relocated to the other side of what that script pictured as a 'barricade', perturbing the distinction between 'inside' and 'outside'. At odds with itself, the 'museum' goes on strike. In protest against precarious employment or an oppressive political regime, a slowdown multiplies by two the time it takes for a decision to reach its practical outcome. What effects would such a form of resistance-by-deceleration, occurring in a 'museum', have on our sense of historical position; which truths about art or ourselves would be withheld or remain unwritten? The hypothesis of a strike at the 'museum' is a narrative scaffold for works that operate at the borders of what can be shown and understood: the placelessness of these objects, their meditative, self-absorbed silence, the stories they do not tell fully, are pictured in fictional symmetry with the social dysfunction or political collapse of the very place where they could have been

catalogued, made to belong and turned into symbols of passing time. 'Place' and 'object' function as each other's distorted reflection.

Oscar Hugal

"*Cathedra* came into existence while I was preoccupied with Barnett Newman and Abstract Expressionism's notion of a picture being both physical and metaphysical. The physicality of canvas, frame and paint, in relation to a notion of the picture as a possible place of experience. A statement by Newman for his second solo show at Betty Parsons, acknowledged this: 'There is a tendency to look at large pictures from a distance. The large pictures in this exhibition are intended to be seen from a short distance'. With this in the back of my mind I started working on something that involved a wall text or title placard, 'devices' commonly accompanying and referring to – nearby – artworks. Wanting to produce a work that oscillates between its own presence and its subject matter, I superimposed one on top of the other."

One of Oscar Hugal's concerns is distance and the modes of imprecision it can generate or accommodate. The distance that is indicated – and somehow embodied – in *Cathedra* is the route between Extra City and the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, separating us from the close inspection of a Barnett Newman painting, of the same title, held there. The wry equation in the work pits against each other the closeness of sensorial engagement and the quasi-mystical absorption solicited by Abstract Expressionist painting ("We are reasserting man's natural desire for the exalted... We are freeing ourselves from the impediments of memory, nostalgia, legend, myth... Instead of making *cathedrals* out of Christ, man, or 'life', we are making it out of ourselves, out of our own feelings. The image we produce is the self-evident one of revelation, real and concrete, that can be understood by anyone who will look at it without the nostalgic glasses of history", wrote Newman in a 1948 text titled *The Sublime Is Now*), the cultural gap separating us from that defunct mindset and the topographic remove between the two places of experience, that of the work and that of its 'model'. Hugal's fine print, as blue as the blue expanse of Newman's painting, compresses an entire array of gestures and positions that articulate, in their disparity and discontinuities, a vexed relation to tradition. At another level, Hugal pairs the preeminent tool of today's knowledge transmission, Google, and the difficulty of an initiation into the terms, procedures and rewards of abstract art – the instantaneity of a Google search and the radiant immediacy sought by Abstract Expressionism. Via Google, one could either obtain a low-resolution reproduction of a Newman painting, or traffic directions as to how to go and see one. These regimes of

experience overlap in the work, which offers abstracted directions and pure calculations: a set of movements to be performed in order to reach the painting, the choreography linking an abstract body, an abstract road and an ambiguous, pulsating destination – a painting that belongs to another place in time.

IRWIN

NSK Passport Holders by the Slovenian group Irwin casts an intriguing look at the links and gaps between 'art' and 'life'. In 1992, Irwin created the Neue Slowenische Kunst *State in Time* as an infinite political entity without physical boundaries, 'ever-inspired by the moment of grace of its becoming', 'manifesting itself in time yet at the same time transcending time', and 'mastering all its probabilities'. The initiative was a response to nationalist furor in Yugoslavia, an attempt to imagine alternatives to dire political circumstances and rethink social cohesion. "At the time of its formation", the artists write, "the *NSK State* in Time was defined as an abstract organism, a Suprematist body, installed in a real socio-political space as a sculpture, consisting of the body heat, the movement of spirit, and the work of its members." The project developed by setting up temporary embassies and consulates, an *NSK Folk Art Museum*, peacekeeping regiments, post offices, and issuing passports for the citizens of the state; it grew at a steady pace within a relatively well-defined class of politically minded art lovers.

 Starting in 2004, and accelerating in the following years, this pattern changed dramatically as the NSK passport website was flooded by thousands of citizenship applications from Nigeria and neighboring countries. Applicants were attempting to acquire *NSK State* passports in the belief that they would grant them the ability to travel to Europe, move to Slovenia or to the country of NSK. Instead of rejecting this as a parasitical outgrowth of the original project, Irwin continued to issue the passports, while engaging with the prospective citizens and advising them on the goals and uses of the *State in Time*. However, to a significant extent, the project had been re-scripted and taken over by other actors, hijacked or hacked by motivations very different from the ones on which it had been premised. To quote Irwin again, "How did a symbolical object that had been sold in the (art) market of the First World for fifteen years and is recognized – regardless of its ambiguity or precisely because of its ambiguity – as an art object, become a functional document in the Third World? In short, how did the word become flesh?"

If the *State in Time* had initially been confined to the spectrum of political aspirations and projections of the art world, seeking to recuperate from the avant-garde a totalizing rhetoric and a transformative ambition, those aspirations were ultimately exposed to

their unforeseen consequences, spilling over into directly political forms in uncontrollable and ambivalent ways. If the project had initially been formulated in reaction to the ferocious nationalism in Yugoslavia in the 1990s, this turn of events situated it between two wars: one opposing actual armies, the other – diffuse but no less brutal – occurring across the North-South divide; an economic conflict, unfolding at a time when Europe is once again reconsidering border policies against a background of resurgent populism. With *NSK Passport Holders*, a political art project met with an unexpected outcome, which could be only partly assimilated in its own logic and translated in artistic terms. How can the work still be exhibited, how can the conventions and scales with which exhibitions operate make sense of the amplitude and complexity reached here, other than invite a deeply empathic understanding of the world? Hinged between a representational 'inside' – interviews or artifacts produced by citizens, and hence belonging in the *NSK Museum of Folk Art*, a strategy which decisively binds statecraft with museology and makes 'every citizen' an artist – and an uncontainable 'outside' – the beliefs and hopes of the 15,000 citizens of the NSK *State – Passport Holders* supersedes the capacity of the exhibition to make full sense of its objects. In it, 'art' and the 'museum' are posed an uncomfortable question.

"The Black Square, at first rolled up like a funeral shroud for rapid transportation, is opened by innumerable hands with a twisting, clockwise motion. Spread out in the heart of Red Square, it functions as Malevich first designed it to: inscrutable, radiating, possessing an indefinable power. Hundreds of people, gathering at its perimeter, define the Suprematist archetype. They look like a swarm of ants around a giant sugar cube." Film director Michael Benson's account of the performance *Black Square in Red Square* by Irwin conveys the collective frisson produced by this temporary monument installed in the heart of Russian political power. A 22-metre square of black cloth, unfurled in Moscow's Red Square, triggers the confusion of police officers and the participation – enthusiastic or reticent – of passers-by. If, employing every identifying instrument provided by ideological apparatuses, Irwin strive to be "more total than totalitarianism" (Boris Groys), here they collapse two absolutisms. Malevich's *Square* is exalted, 'misread' and deviously actualized, its revolutionary potential is emphasized together with its failure to create a viable conduit between art and politics: between dual promises and failures, the performance re-organizes the debris of the cultural and political past. The total gesture and hyperbolic use of the image recurs in Irwin's *Processions*, where a painting by the group is carried as emblem of faith by two different Christian denominations. The painting, and the political sacrament it stands for, both recedes into a time before the Great Schism between East and West and pushes that moment into the future, performing what Irwin define

as the retro-avantgarde function, and using the anachronism for its prophetic potential.

Fernando Sánchez Castillo

Architecture for the Horse is a performative exploration of the repressive architecture of Universidad Autonoma, built in 1969 near Madrid. The choice of emplacement for the campus was dictated by its relative isolation and its vicinity to one of the largest army barracks in the city. The architectural design of the University, explicit especially in the spatial coordinates of the Philosophy Department – where, as the experience of May '68 indicated to General Franco's advisors, most episodes of disobedience originate – follows as its main guideline the accessibility of the edifice to mounted police. Architecture pursues the reinforcement of discipline as structural principle: the grid of buildings, any of which can be easily sealed-off, is crisscrossed by a series of corridors, keeping the number and size of reunion places to a minimum. If not specifically designed for horses, as the title of the video suggests, the space of the University was to be inhabited by lesser humans, paralyzed by circumstances that reduce their capacity to react.

The deserted building is effortlessly traversed by a former policeman on a white horse. The ease with which the horse climbs stairways and the moves by which it occupies a perimeter and could thus stall the assault of rebellious students register as an ironic choreography, that would be elegant and entertaining if it could be detached from its original purpose and political 'libretto'. With ballet moves, an uncanny centaur polices an edifice built for neither humans nor animals, but somehow for its own emptiness and uneventfulness. The video works like the afterword to an unconsummated story, the representation of an event that never happened. Sanchez Castillo compares the dictatorial fantasy of a controllable mass of inept bodies and minds to the fiction of revolt. When political agitation reached the Universidad Autonoma, students used marbles (from Chinese Checkers games) to turn floors into slippery surfaces and to thwart crowd control maneuvers. As the artist notes, those students form the country's current political elite, presiding over an incompletely acknowledged past.

Shahryar Nashat

"Nashat's original inspiration for the video *Plaque* was the freeform conceptual legacy of Canadian musician and composer Glenn Gould, (...) notorious for his eccentricities and his rejection of the concert hall in favor of the control and editing possibilities of the recording studio. It was Gould's media consciousness and

the way that he constructed his work and artistic image that drew Nashat's attention in particular. A series of sixty-four stills taken from a 1969 televised concert are accompanied by an excerpt of Gould playing Bach's *Toccata in C minor*. Nashat's choppy stop-action animation works like a visual deconstruction of the performance, isolating Gould's mannerisms and postures like moments in a dance. Absurdly, the soundstage for Gould's concert featured a number of vertical faux marble panels – shorthand signifiers of bourgeois grandeur. The droll twist of Nashat's work is that these fake elements inspired the very real concrete slab his video employs. As the toccata unfolds, the concrete sets. The intertwined audio sources are punctuated by visual hard-cuts; we're left with sublime Bach ringing in our ears and the slab flying out toward us. In previous works, Nashat has similarly brought together unlikely, if not oppositional components. Nashat has emphasized the artificiality of his work through precise cinematic framing and composition, meticulously dubbed soundtracks... In a number of works, palpable tension has pervaded, along with an extra layer of unspoken 'knowing' manifested as homoeroticism (which acts not so much to infuse the works with either identity or desire as to further complicate, even destabilize, the scenes). In *Plaque* the camera lingers inexplicably on the arms and faces of handsome laborers. (...) it seems video works are as much about how they are put together as what you finally see or hear. This wordless *Plaque* suggests meaning is a sculptural construction site..." (Dominic Eichler)

If indeed the video portrays its own aesthetic making, or is its own interpretive making-of, the delicacy with which the two components – concert and slab – are barely affixed semantically to each other, then it also breaches a discussion of virtuosity: Nashat's own, that of Glenn Gould – who, as Paolo Virno argues, painstakingly dismantled the aura of performance and brought his virtuosity as close to labor as possible, and that of the workers. The monolith, signifier of a kind of depleted constructive élan, was made to the artist's specifications for no purpose other than to document its production. The slab is demonstrated, it is performed in virtuosic activity, one that finds its fulfillment and purpose in itself, and in the presence of others that it casts as witnesses. Nashat's improbable pairing of densities, weights, furtive glances and incongruous frames, by which two 'atmospheres' fuse or bleed into each other, Gould's renouncing the production of records and the slab's purposelessness – this conglomerate of potentialities recalls one of Virno's pronouncements: "where there is an end product, an autonomous product, there is labor, no longer virtuosity, nor, *for that reason*, politics."

Nico Dockx with Thomas Verstraeten and Helena Sidiropoulos

Nico Dockx's contribution to the exhibition revolves around a peculiar protagonist and a particular understanding of editing, of drawing larger concentric circles around the central element. This central element is the result of an extended performance carried out by the artist since 1998: a cobweb ball, a spherical 'body' that encapsulates countless gestures of destruction and accumulation, an endless process whose purpose is troublingly withheld. The ball is poised between the various existences a *thing* can have, the meanings that can be attached to it, the temporalities it can be said to have traversed and represent. It is the understated refusal of the categories that cut through the indeterminacy of experience, and separate the objects worth preserving, assembling and reanimating, from a terrifyingly large and inert rest. Neither work nor ready-made, the spider web ball maintains a halfway position in whatever antinomic coupling we might use to 'solve' it. The ball is simple and dizzyingly complex, frail but not easily destroyed, it can be touched – an experience which blends familiarity and faint horror – and repositioned, but is always out of place. The past it incorporates is a past not worth remembering, yet that time is brought forward as disquieting plenitude. It is the provisional result of endless contingencies and emptied connectivity: it is perhaps the humble version of an impossible object, the alkahest in homely disguise, weaving and dissolving correlations, threading together a persistent paradox.

Videos accompany the object: Nico Dockx's own making-of footage, Helena Sidiropoulos's tighter focus on the same performative action, and Thomas Verstraeten's further 'edit' of the piece, a recording of other actors – people visited by the artist at their homes – adding layers of cobweb to the ball and opening the spinning and weaving process to a collective ritual. These are the first two episodes in a long sequence of 'edits' envisioned by Dockx, during which either object or footage will go through the hands or computers of more and more artists, to be manipulated, processed, permuted, set according to other time codes, translated or erased, expanding the space of exchange within which the cobweb ball can hold on to its soft secret.

A separate film by Nico Dockx shows the flight of a bird inside a Buckminster Fuller dome, one of three Buckies that sit atop a now-decommissioned National Security Agency facility in Berlin, where they sheltered the obsolete machines and confusing messages of the Cold War. Roughly similar to the diaphanous architecture of the spider web, the dome is for Dockx the site of a return and a recalibration, of the attempted recuperation – into art history, its categories and modes of interpretation – of an object that has been adrift for decades in the geopolitical world.

Mike Cooter

"The videos and installations of Mike Cooter bring together any number of apparent and false correlations; his meticulously researched works often beginning by exploiting some found connection. Within Cooter's practice, in which each incidental detail is potentially significant, the given world is conceived as a film ripe for analysis. Drawing on a Conceptualist predilection for following rules and reducing the artist's subjective decision-making, Cooter sets out and follows strict premises in the material production of his work. (...) The question of transferred and displaced identity is also present in Cooter's letters to the American legal scholar Robert Bork. The latter was nominated to the US Supreme Court by President Reagan, but was rejected as a result of uproar in the liberal media over his right-wing views. The viciousness of the attack on Bork's politics reached such a level that his name has since become a verb: 'to bork' someone being a usage that found its way into the Oxford English Dictionary in 2002. Cooter noticed a statue of the Maltese Falcon, from the 1941 film of the same name, in a television interview with Bork, and used this connection to begin a correspondence with the political lawyer, deftly mirroring this man – whose name became a symbol – with the fictional prop that has now become a real objet d'art." (Melissa Gronlund) The letters in *Original Intent* alternate, according to the same critic, "between hyperbolic formalities and naïve liberty-taking": "With that in mind, I would very much like to ask you the following: What do you believe is the purpose of art?"

The installation sets a stage for imminent revelation, but what it posits as its own enigmatic object is destructured at the same time as it is acquired. It is lost and retrieved via the same conceptual maneuvers, which recall, for instance, the strategies of an artist like Hans Haacke. The installation deploys a toolbox of research and direct inquiry, casts the actors playing its slightly exaggerated characters – the over-zealous artist and the cunning politician –, arranges in sequence the props that can heighten attention or curiosity, or can suggest in their linearity that a denouement awaits. It then allows these meticulously articulated elements to lose momentum, to get tangled in other connections and references and silences. It sets out from an allegorical pretext, the Maltese Falcon, and concludes as an allegory of clarification. It is ostensibly geared to obtain one final answer and finds instead an entanglement, an unfamiliar maze. We will never know if the last letter was not sent or not made public, if the purpose of art – and its affiliation to the political world that Bork's reply could have intimated – was not formulated or is not disclosed.

Lonnie van Brummelen and Siebren de Haan

The artists' film is a reconstruction of the *Gigantomachia* from its reproductions in art history books, through which the bibliography of the sculpture institutes a spectral, boundless double for the frieze, engaged from – and diffracting into – an immense number of perspectives and sources. The *Gigantomachia* depicts the war between gods and giants, "but it is also the receptacle of another tale – that of imperialism, cultural looting and the re-appropriation of national treasures, cultural heritage and the spoils of war. Currently housed in the Pergamonmuseum on Museum Island in Berlin, this monument was removed at end of the 19th century from its site of origin nearby Bergama, Turkey. Here Celts battled in pre-Roman times against the Pergamon Kingdom. To celebrate their victory, the Pergamese erected the monument to the fatherland on a mountaintop overlooking the site of the battle.

In a letter requesting permission for film recording, the artists state: 'We want to unravel the modern concept of universal culture and trace how this concept relates to the current sweeping forces of globalization. Today, it has become customary that people and objects are relocated, removed from their cultural, historical and political contexts, and distributed over the globe. ...We want to produce a film work which reflects upon this contemporary condition of displacement from a historical perspective.' The Foundation for Prussian Possession of Culture, the current owner of the physical monument and also of the less concrete copyright, did not want to collaborate with an art project addressing the fact that the monument originates from somewhere else. This might 'stir the debate about repatriation', the formal letter of rejection stated: '... the project does not fit with our intentions from several points of view and would rather create debates which we would like to avoid.' The artists were not allowed to film in the museum, nor make use of the image archive of the Foundation. Yet numerous images of the *Gigantomachia* circulate in academic books and guides that have been published throughout the years. The reproductions have varying qualities, from the coarsely-grained quality of a museum guide dating from Germany's Great Depression in the 1930s, to large, crisp, full-color pictures in bulky coffee-table books printed in China or Vietnam. From high contrast, drawing-like heliographs dating back to 1925 – before the panels of the frieze were even reconstructed –, to the grayish print standard from the GDR period."

As Tessa Giblin, curator of Projects Arts Center Dublin, commissioner of *Monument to Another Man's Fatherland*, suggests in the conclusion of her text, the visual differences between the various reproductions that the film momentarily reconciles, indicate the fault lines and disputed grounds in a prehistory of globalization.

Between the inaccessible, fraught monument of more struggles than one, and its multiplying documents, all functioning as expressions of the technological age that produced them and of a seemingly stable relation to the original, a network of dependencies is sketched. Its purpose is to forget the original dislocation, to paper over aspirations of historical justice, to create a surfeit of second-hand visibility, which places the original and its trauma beyond reach. What the two artists set up through their work is a ghostly, counter-institutional equivalent of a foundation for displaced heritage and historical barriers.

Simon Dybbroe Møller

Each of Simon Dybbroe Møller's four works in the exhibition function as an obstacle: both a threshold to an 'inside' where meaning is supposedly constituted or consolidated, and a screen that allows a glimpse into that process. Yet these acts of separation are elaborated in such ways, and so much potentiality is grafted unto them, that the assumption that there might be something the works do not divulge dwindles in the urgency with which we are addressed – vividly engaged and subtly mystified. These protocols of obstruction invite us to imagine their functioning in an improbable flooded museum, or across the rectangular contours of a Modernist, closed gallery, to look again at entry and exit points into and out of the institutional experience of art.

Of the two works that directly refer to the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, and through its bias, to a Modernist mantra of parallel lines and transparent space, the video *Thick Air* is filmed in sharp zoom and circular movement through the windows of the closed gallery. For critic Brian O'Connell, the film attempts an impossible flow across and around a square volume as if it were round, while the space of encounter and separation thickens into a kind of viscosity – perhaps into a spatial equivalent of nostalgia, a state where the evidence and presence of loss become indistinguishable, a presence felt and undone in the continuity of nostalgic rehearsal. This incapacity to settle in favor of one version of the past recurs in Møller's *Curtain for Neue Nationalgalerie (No More Moore)*, an ample screen printed with an amorphous mass of blue scrawls, like the accreting work of a perpetually dissatisfied graffiti artist. In its original setting, the work blocked the view towards the sculpture garden, seemingly in protest against the ubiquity of Henry Moore sculptures. In this new context, the work has the effect of summoning the absence of Henry Moore, of invoking him as not here, and of a loss of practical purpose whereby the gestural blue expanse registers as spatial cut and estrangement.

The Norman Mailer Paradox III forces a connection between discreet objects: inflatable canoes and a bench from the waiting rooms of Malpensa airport. As in other instances of the same series of works, they are tied together on the basis of the theoretical ability of the weighty element to counterbalance the floating one. The arithmetic precision linking anchor and buoy prepares the work for a flood that will not wash it away with the other flotsam and jetsam of our age. If later found and misinterpreted for a time capsule, for something whose desire to resist was motivated by an address to the future, it would testify to a historical moment of indecision as to what deserves to be salvaged. Finally, Møller's celestograph emulates a technical process conceived by August Strindberg for the direct impression of the night sky onto photographic plates, an indirect comment on how value is allotted in cultural history. In an interview with Thorsten Sadowsky, the artist speaks about his interest in the half-truth, balanced between rationality and mysticism. The observation connects one seldom quoted *Sentence on Conceptual Art* by Sol LeWitt's ("We are mystics rather than rationalists") with the critical consensus that August Strindberg's whole oeuvre is pervaded by mysticism.

In Møller's intriguing view, this too could register as an arithmetic operation: the mysticism generally ascribed to Strindberg *is* the mysticism subtracted from predominant readings of Conceptual Art, a fallacy which makes both episodes susceptible to misreading, to taking the earnestness of canonical accounts slightly too seriously. The aura of serially or mathematically determined processes, the fixation on form and process in Minimal and Conceptual art can also be said to produce somewhat 'alien' entities, not fundamentally unlike Strindberg's insistence of the role of chance and automatism in securing an artistic conduit into the unknown. In the series *Now there is nothing between me and them, Frankfurt am Main Skyline after Sundown*, Møller returns to Strindberg's conviction that he had invented a more truthful technique for photographing heavenly bodies, dispensing with photographic apparatus, and seeking a resemblance by contact between darkness and sensitive surface. Strindberg undermined the entire logic of the photographic medium by leaving out an essential intermediary step: the focusing of light. The procedure is not replicated here within a mystical disposition or in the wish to debunk the possibility of one, but in a study of technical imperfection and the chemical faults that allowed Strindberg's photographs to continue to develop, so that they *do* resemble impenetrable night skies.

Javier Téllez

Javier Téllez collaborates with psychiatric patients who, in *Dürer's Rhinoceros* as in most of his films, assume the position they are

usually barred from, that of speaking subjects. The artist sees mental illness as a "question of language, but also a question placed unto language itself, since we build language on the basis of its exclusion: madness in itself represents a rupture in our lingua franca, a language against the grain, which by nature has potential for subversion and transgression." Interviewed by Ana Teixeira Pinto, the artist describes the rhinoceros as an imago intrinsically linked to Portuguese history, connoting both lost imperial greatness and – via the connection to Dürer and to an entire segment of national literature – the Saturnian, melancholic side of the collective psyche.

The work was filmed at the panopticon of the Miguel Bombarda Hospital in Lisbon, built in 1896 and in accordance with the original plans of Jeremy Bentham, as a prison for the criminally insane. In a series of workshops conducted by the artist, patients of the day clinic at the hospital conceived the fragmentary narrative of the film, imagining themselves as inhabitants of the former asylum and acting out fictional scenarios within their assigned cells. This reconstruction of the everyday life at the mental institution is complemented by voice-overs quoting texts like Bentham's letter presenting the Panopticon, Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, and Kafka's *The Burrow*. From various perspectives, the texts are concerned with the architectural and spatial models that institute an abstract 'eye' as discerning master of the world, or that relegate sight to the realm of shadows, figments and servitude.

An engraving by Albrecht Dürer lends symbolic cogency to the project. A rhinoceros had been brought to Portugal in the 16th century as an emblem of colonial power and was sent as a gift to Pope Leo X, only to die in a shipwreck on its way to Italy. It is certain that Dürer never saw a rhino, but produced his stunning engraving based on verbal descriptions of the exotic apparition. In Téllez's film, the stuffed animal is both prop and leitmotif: it is pulled counter-clockwise around the circular architecture of the panopticon, but its perfect visibility to the now-vacant point of surveillance and its 'invisibility' to Albrecht Dürer presses, as pendant, a question about the 'visibility' of the mental patient: did Jeremy Bentham ever *see* a mental patient, and were the inmates of the panopticon held within the domain of sight or that of supervision? How is the separation between normalcy and pathology operated and put into effect? Two forms of invisibility are superimposed in the metaphor of an disembodied eye, one that patrols the borders across which definitions of sanity and its antonyms are organized.

Biographies

Lonnie van Brummelen and Siebren de Haan

Lonnie van Brummelen (°1969, the Netherlands) and Siebren de Haan (°1966, the Netherlands) live and work in Amsterdam. The artist duo works with and around the topic of today's European border policies and the disruption brought along by this. With the media of film installations and essays they transpose individual strategies for skirting around such obstructions and barricades, as well as exploring the position and meaning of art within such disrupted contexts. Within their practice the two artists move between the domains of politics, culture and the aesthetic space of the artwork. Lonnie van Brummelen and Siebren de Haan have shown their works in, among others, *The Embed and the Shadow of the Horse* (Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam), *Monument to Another Man's Fatherland* (Project Arts Centre, Dublin), *Translocalmotion* (The 7th Shanghai Biennale, Shanghai) and *Monument of Sugar* (Palais de Tokyo, Paris). Valiz published the monograph *Redrawing the Boundaries* in 2009.

Mike Cooter

Mike Cooter (°1978, United Kingdom) works and lives in London. Cooter's videos and installations bring together any number of apparent and false correlations, his meticulously researched works often beginning by exploiting some found connection. Within the artist's practice, in which each incidental detail is potentially significant, the given world is conceived as a film ripe for analysis. Drawing on a conceptualist predilection for following rules and reducing the artist's subjective decision making, Cooter sets out and follows strict premises in the material production of his work.

Among others, Cooter's work was on show at: *Lapidarium* (zingerpresents, Amsterdam), *The Snail* (Serpentine Gallery, London), *Shadow Offset* (The Company, Los Angeles), *A Strangers Window* (Nottingham Art Gallery, Nottingham), *Nought to Sixty* (ICA, London), *I cannot live without* (The Showroom, London), *Marzbau* (Poliflor, Berlin), *The Nature of Things* (Art Rotterdam, Rotterdam) and *Film Program* (Frieze Art Fair, London).

Nico Dockx

Nico Dockx (°1974, Belgium) lives and works in Antwerp. The artist works out of a fundamental preoccupation with archives and structural processes such as data, memories, information, distribution and management. Often the outcome of collaboration with other artists, his installations, publications, soundscapes, texts and videos investigate the relationship between perception and remembrance, allowing multiple interpretations to emerge. Nico Dockx was awarded with a DAAD grant in 2005 and showed in Utopia Station (50th Venice Biennial/ Haus der Künst, Munich), Monopolis (Witte de With, Rotterdam), Through Time & Today (Musée des Beaux Arts de Nantes), 'dayby-day & another day' (Le Centre d'Art de l'Île de Vassivière) and CRYPTICCRYS- TALCLOUD (CCA, Kitakyushu).

Oscar Hugal

Oscar Hugal (°1986, Belgium) lives and works in Antwerp. The artist has recently developed a focus on more and less apparent confrontations between the immanent infrastructure in which a work exists and the content of the work itself. Although most works are of almost theoretical nature and not necessarily site specific, they provoke a meditation on the material context shaping an exhibition, possibly even invoking a mental process of (dis)placing both individual works and other works shown.

Hugal was the laureate of the Mayor Camille Huysmans Grant 2010 and showed his work in the accompanying show at the Extra City Project Room, Antwerp. Other exhibitions include: *Error #16: INTO THE LIGHT* (Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp), *Luxor* (OktoberBar, Düsseldorf), *lines and crossings* (Medea/bb15, Linz), *SP W/T,P&E: A Festival on Photography* (Antwerp) and *La Connaissance* (NoGallery, Antwerp).

IRWIN

The Slovenian artist collective IRWIN was founded in 1983 during the confluence of the anarchic punk movement in Ljubljana, the Soviet bloc collapse and the imminent fall of the Berlin Wall. Working in photography, film, and performance IRWIN created its own nation-state, called NSK, in 1992, named after another Slovenian art collective, Neue Slowenische Kunst (New Slovenian Art), which it had co-founded in '84. With its own flag, embassies and 'citizens', though without physical borders, NSK pushed the boundaries of the concept and structures of statehood. The work is concerned largely with the idea of building one's own artistic position out of one's particular circumstances; stating that, by being particular, art can become truly universal. IRWIN works as a group, a collective, or even an organization, shifting the emphasis away from the individual personality of the artist, which is a relevant part of their productions. IRWIN is interested in the complexity of the image. For them, an image is never neutral, nor does it ever appear in a neutral space. The art collective was founded by Dusan Mandic, Miran Mohar, Andrej Savski, Roman Uranjek and Borut Vogelnik and their most important activities have included the planning of NSK embassies and consulates in Moscow, Ghent and Florence. IRWIN has shown its work in *Eye on Europe* (Museum of Modern Art, New York), *Manifesta 3* (Ljubljana), *Aspects/Positions: 50 years of Art in Central Europe*, 1949-1999 (Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna & Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona) and *Manifesta 1* (Rotterdam). IRWIN received the Slovenian Jakopic Award in 2004.

Kris Kimpe

Kris Kimpe (°1963, Belgium) lives and works in Antwerp. He is an architect who works mainly in the field of contemporary art. His practice involves designing exhibitions, public art and artist studios. Since 1999 he is the international assistant of Dan Graham. He has worked with/ for artists like Nico Dockx, Philip Metten, Willem Oorebeek and Luc Tuymans. Recent exhibition designs include the national pavilion of the United Arab Emirates at the *53th Venice Biennale*, *Animism* (M HKA & Extra City, Antwerpen) and *Ana Torfs: Album/Tracks A* (K21, Dusseldorf). Since 2006, he publishes the architecture fanzine *UP* together with Koenraad Dedobbeleer.

Simon Dybbroe Møller

Simon Dybbroe Møller (°1975, Denmark) works and lives in Berlin. The artist's working method offers an alternative to thinking about art history as a daunting public library with strict rules for readers. For Møller, it's a place to browse –, more like a peculiar second-hand bookshop in which the filing and cataloguing have gone a bit awry here and there. It is in these odd corners, where mysticism can be found rubbing shoulders with volumes on conceptual art, pop music and concrete poetry, that he can produce his work. Exhibitions of Dybbroe Møller's work include: *Based in Berlin* (Nationalgalerie im Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin), Umma Projects (University of Michigan Museum of Art & Ann Arbor Andersen's Contemporary, Copenhagen), *Fast Flickering Black Bugs on a Cool White Background* (Galerie Kamm, Berlin), *Double Take* (Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen), *Yesterday will be better* (Argauer Kunsthaus, Aarau), *Like Origami Gone Wrong* (Kunstmuseum Thun) *Martian Museum of Terrestrial Art* (Barbican Gallery, London). Sternberg Press published the monograph *Kompendium* in 2009, in conjunction with Kunstverein Hannover and Frankfurter Kunstverein.

Shahryar Nashat

Shahryar Nashat (°1975, Iran/Switzerland) works and lives in Berlin. In his photographic, sculptural and film works the artist is concerned with questions relating to forms of presentation immanent in art, as well as themes of deconstruction and reconstruction. The language of his videos and installations often lies beneath what is revealed although the surface appearances of his productions show an inescapable presence. Nashat's work has been shown in various solo and group exhibitions: *Line Up* (Kunstverein Nürnberg & Albrecht Dürer Gesellschaft, Nürnberg), *Frieze Project*s (Frieze Art Fair, London), *Silberkruppe: Old Ideas* (Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel), *Remains to be Seen* (Neue Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen), *2 1/2* (deSingel, Antwerp), *H-Box* (Orange County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, New Museum, New York, Centre Pompidou, Paris, & Tate Modern, London), *Shadows Collide with People* (Swiss Pavilion, 51st Venice Biennial) and *Adam and Eve* (De Appel, Amsterdam). Sternberg Press published the monograph

Downscaled and Overthrown in 2010, in conjunction with Neue Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen, Kunstverein Nürnberg and Albrecht Dürer Gesellschaft.

Helena Sidiropoulos

Helena Sidiropoulos (°1979, Belgium) Lives and works in Antwerps. She collaborates with Nico Dockx on a recurring basis, often contributing with writings to projects such as *Merz World*: Yona Friedman & Thomas Saraceno (Cabaret Voltaire, Zurich), Thomas Mayfried. Ephemera. Graphic Design etc. (Haus der Künst, Munich) and Prix de la Jeune Peinture Belge 2009 (Bozar, Brussels).

Fernando Sánchez Castillo

Fernando Sánchez Castillo (°1970, Spain) lives and works in Madrid. In his videos and sculptures the artist researches the course of history for interruptions and the absurd. His careful analyses begin with leftovers from the past, which have often been symbolically retained to this day in the form of monuments or statues. Monument, document, public space and tradition become tools for disinterring our most recent past.

Sánchez Castillo was a resident at the Rijksacademie Amsterdam in 2005, is represented by Galeria Juana de Aizpuru, Madrid, and his work is shown regularly worldwide in solo and group exhibitions: *El Ángel Exterminador* (Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels), *Borders* (Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam)*, Grandeur* (Sonsbeek 2008, Arnhem), *Fernando Sánchez Castillo: Ieder Het Zijne* (Stedelijk Museum, Schiedam), *Mercury in Retrograde* (De Appel, Amsterdam), *São Paulo Biennale 2004* (Ciccila Matarazzo Pavilion), *Bad Boys* (50th Venice Biennale), *The Real Royal Trip* (P.S.1 MoMA, New York) and *Abracadabra* (Tate Modern, London).

Javier Téllez

Javier Téllez (°1969, Venezuela) works and lives in New York. The artist's video installations combine documentary with fictionalized narratives to question definitions of normality and pathology. Collaborating with institutionalized patients living with mental illness to rewrite classic stories or invent their own, he creates what he calls a cinematic passport to allow those outside to be inside by renegotiating socio-cultural barriers. This approach to using art as a voice for the marginalized positions itself within the tradition of art therapy, though Téllez attempts to 'cure' viewers of false assumptions, rather than the patients of their disorders. Javier Téllez's work is shown regularly worldwide in solo and group exhibitions such as *Daydream Believer!!* (Yebisu International Festival for Art & Alternative Visions, Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo), *Too late, too little, and (how to) fail gracefully* (Kunstfort Asperen, Asperen), *O Rinoceronte de Dürer* (Galerie Arratia Beer, Berlin), Vasco Araújo/Javier Téllez – *Larger than Life* (Mu-

seo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo & Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon), *For the Use of Those Who See* (KW Institute of Contemporary Art, Berlin), *Der Brief über die Blinden zum Gebrauch für die Sehenden* (Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich), *Utopia Station* (50th Venice Biennale), *Plateau of Humankind* (49th Venice Biennale) and *Greater New York: New Art in New York Now* (P.S.1, MoMA, New York).

Christophe Van Gerrewey

Christophe Van Gerrewey (°1982, Belgium) lives and works in Ghent. The writer studied both architecture and literature and published fiction and non-fiction in magazines such as DWB, De Witte Raaf, OASE, NRC Handelsblad and De Architect. In 2008 Van Gerrewey was awarded with the Prize for Young Dutch Art Criticism in both categories, essay and review (by De Appel, Amsterdam, Witte de With, Rotterdam & BKVB Foundation). Recent publications of Van Gerrewey are *Modern Times* (2007), *Ruskin. Een reisverhaal bij het werk van Office Kersten Geers David Van Severen* (2007) and *Reality without Restraint. Bathtime in Villa dall'Ava* (2005). Van Gerrewey is also a researcher and lecturer at the University of Ghent in the Department of Architecture.

Thomas Verstraeten

Thomas Verstraeten (°1986, Belgium) lives and works in Antwerp. The artist develops performances and installations rooted in public space, in which he either evokes or dismantles behaviour patterns of himself and the people and places subject to his directing eye. Verstraeten showed his work in *Le chant des possibles* (Hotel Charleroi & B.P.S. 22, Charleroi), *Mayor Camille Huysmans Grant 2010* (Extra City Project Room, Antwerp), *What Remains* (Monty ABN, Antwerp) and *Project Perform* (Flemish Arts Centre de Brakke Grond, Amsterdam) and is a member of the theatre collective FC Bergman.