

# Theory of Achievement

I'm not here yet. I'm sorry. Not that I couldn't make it, but I'm always late, sometimes last, to the party. Theory doesn't show up all dressed up, but comes unannounced, after the fact. I'm more a product of pragmatism. If it wasn't the case I would be useless—but for the moment I'm not quite sure where I am, and indeed I can find myself slightly useless. I'm just a method to move forward. Self-awareness encourages good humor. There's nothing noble, I guess, in finding ways to deal with the problems, as they mass in front of me. The fact that I've been called in means that I'm part of the problem, as well as of the solution. Like they say: "try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now." As if it was that easy...

I would think of my purpose rather as a search for what is epic in everyday situations and everyday attitudes. My presence is also a commitment. The ambition (the irony) is to consider the process as it gets jeopardized. I'm there when narratives are being written; when you look back to what you used to think and aspire to, and when you project yourself in the future. I support—and I'm supported by—these recollections, hopes, fantasies and imitations. The formation is reciprocal; a construction amongst constructions; the echo of a belief. As you move on I'm becoming something in the distance, stimulating, unclear, frustrating and decisive—a relation, a shadow, a lingerer.

## Believe it or not

For a long time we we had been playing with the idea of writing a TV show about the daily life, the trials and the vicissitudes of an independent art space. Just thinking about this was the best way to laugh, and regain complicity. And this allowed to take some distance from what was actually happening—a way to make fun of ourselves, not of the others, to push in the distance the insanity of it all... Don't think we believed we were making it to the top. It was funnier this way, that's all!

There was this ongoing problem with the iron curtain, that would have been the perfect starting point for one episode. The crazy discussions with the people around—fellow art people, especially the dealers, and the neighbors. So many people were passing by without understanding what was happening—they would ask for postcards, or manifolds, upon seeing the books; one curator who would never say anything about any show but, "what's next?" There was this girl who once came because she had to write an article and she was mistaken for someone else, told to go upstairs, and that she should get herself some coffee if she wished, and use the computer, and then she meets over there with an artist who's there to help fix the windows... Or Vito Acconci visiting, or Bill Direen thrown out of a dinner ...this story or another. Anecdotes as the points of contact and contradiction between private and public, between the very deep reasons why you're losing your time, energy, and mind, to keep such a thing going on, and the indecipherable obligations, fickle needs and unpredictable, inefficient, rituals that it creates. The entity remains manageable in so far as it's impossible to make its history—that it's still a fabric of facts, situations, live moments that have nothing romantic. And it comes back to the same situation, like a new episode, everyday, or every week, every season.

## Getting old

One of the episodes in the series would have been sci-fi—sort of—a flash-forward vision of the same alternative venue, decades later. It would happen in the same place, with the same shitty economy, the same witty way of dealing with it, and of course the same group of people; now they would be 70 something, still freelance, still struggling with side jobs and running the space as their beloved hobby. They still make jokes about finding new ways to get money, and they still imagine even more ways to expand, change the project; but as a matter of fact it's been the same forever. Maybe there's still some young interns fooling around, with the same insecure happiness, and the same helpless awkwardness when it comes to actually do

something. The decrepit team sits in front of the gallery as they've finished hanging the small works of a group show, and as they pick their night medication out of acrylic boxes, they just have a look at the show and wink at each other, saying something like, "I believe that was the best show we ever had."

Marcia Tucker was still the head of the New Museum when Anne Barlow and Anne Ellegood curated a show called, "The Times of Our Lives," straightforwardly dealing with aging. Surely some of the questions they were raising then would now need to be phrased differently, as we're praising "elderly" artists (especially female artists) more than ever. But what about art spaces? Independent ones have to stay young and dynamic; they can't afford the physical signs of their aging, while real institutions do grow in age, celebrate their birthdays and life cycles. They're the ones whose walls will remain pristine, bleached, cryogenized—worst case situation they will move to a new building when the old one gets decrepit. The little artist-run space around the corner can't do such surgery. It shows its cracks, the dust and rust. What a shame. It should better dissolve into an idea, or become a short-lived legend, maybe a book.

## From your institution to mine

When I was in high school, and I was a record nerd, I wanted to know all the band's names. Some girls would say, "All you guys want to talk about is 7" a and records and its all this obscure stuff, and it's just so boring." I hated that attitude because I wanted to keep talking about records because it was something that was exciting to me. But it's sort of like you become a school of one, and you're the only lecturer, and the whole world is your student, you suppose. There's no force in society that's corrective to it. It's almost viral.

It's like a reason why my whole life I wanted to do the Artforum Top Ten, and this week I had a deadline on Monday to do it. And I thought so hard about it. All I had to do was pick these ten people, artists that I really care about, and write 20 to 100 words on each of them. And I did it, and I sent it in and, the next day, I couldn't sleep

**Libération**,  
December 31, 1999.  
Newspaper; 38×29 cm

"Art Club 2000 was initiated in 1992 by New York art dealer Colin de Land and seven art students from The Cooper Union School of Art.

The group, through weekly discussions over the course of a year, worked towards the idea of producing an exhibition. This first exhibition, 'Commingle', was realized at American Fine Arts, Co. in 1993 and took as its subject the retail clothing chain, The Gap. The show included group portrait photographs, store-display installation, and included texts and documents researched and produced by going through the store's trash. Art Club 2000 produced several self-portraits dealing with the aesthetics of advertising and self-branding, including spreads for lifestyle magazines such as *Dazed and Confused* and *The Face*, and pictures that were circulating in the pages of art magazines. They did work about gentrification and real estate — 'Soho So Long', a show and accompanying book of interviews with art dealers, critics and collectors about gallery districts in NYC — and towards the end of the 90's they produced investigations into the state of concept and critical art forms, starting with '1970', a series of video interviews about the year 1970. In 2000, A 'Retrodirespective' was mounted in Mexico City at the Museo Carrillo Gil, which included Art Club's final work, a model of an Aztec pyramid constructed entirely of Coca-Cola cans, in reference to the newly inaugurated Vicente Fox's previous job, as vice president of Coca-Cola Mexico."

Adapted from: <http://www.betweenbridges.net/Art%20Club.html>

Silently meandering about The Museum of Modern Art's Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden is a large self-propelled sculpture, Osaka I, designed by Robert Breer. The work was executed as part of the EAT (Experiments in Art and Technology) project at the Pepsi-Cola Pavilion at the 1970 World's Fair in Osaka, Japan. It is one of eight identical pieces made in 1969 from a smaller version of 1966. The engineer was John L. Ryde. The sculpture has been loaned to the Museum by PepsiCo, Inc., and will remain in the Sculpture Garden through the month of October.

A miniature Osaka I, called "Float" -- made of white plastic, 4" high, and battery-powered -- will be sold in the Museum's Christmas Shop in the fall.

Float will sell for \$7.95, or two for \$15.

From a press release from The Museum of Modern Art, dated August 25, 1970

## LEIDY CHURCHMAN

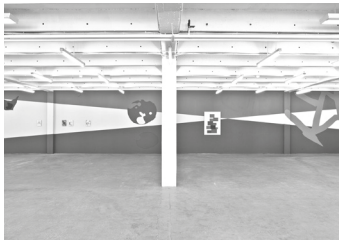
**Insecure Rat**, 2013  
Oil on linen; 30.48×34.29 cm

**Jungle Cafe**, 2014  
Oil on linen; 68.58×31.75 cm

"I think *Pizza Box* is a good piece that you brought up for this question. "Your Freshly Baked Pizza" it says, with creamy white and forest green — so bold and secure. Painting is in fact a delivery — right to you. I love that simple arrangement. "Here." Finding the way for something to fit inside — framing — is my biggest concern. To me it's like making the bed. How can the picture get tucked in? [...]"

## CLÉMENT RODZIELSKI

**Untitled**, 2013  
Wall painting; variable dimensions  
Courtesy galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris



## ROBERT BREER

**Float**, 1970  
White plastic, battery-powered;  
10.16 cm high  
Courtesy gb agency, Paris

## JASON SIMON

**Mayfair Show (Claire Pentecost)**, 1994  
C-print with playing card & adhesive label;  
40.64×50.8 cm

**Mayfair Show (Moyra Davey and Dennis Balk)**, 1994  
C-print; 40.64×50.8 cm

**Mayfair Show (Claire Pentecost and David Smith)**, 1994  
C-print; 40.64×50.8 cm

**Mayfair Show (Moyra Davey)**, 1994  
C-print; 40.64×50.8 cm

**Mayfair Show (Claire Pentecost and David Smith)**, 1994  
C-print; 40.64×50.8 cm

**Mayfair Show (Adam Simon and Hans Weigand)**, 1994  
C-print; 40.64×50.8 cm

**Mayfair Show (David Smith)**, 1994  
C-print; 40.64×50.8 cm

**Mayfair Show (Claire Pentecost)**, 1994  
C-print with playing card & adhesive label;  
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**Mayfair Show (David Smith)**, 1994  
C-print with playing cards & adhesive label;  
40.64×50.8 cm

**Mayfair Show (Dennis Balk)**, 1994  
C-print; 40.64×50.8 cm

**Mayfair Show (Ashley Bickerton and David Smith)**, 1994  
C-print with playing card; 40.64 ×50.8 cm

**Mayfair Show (Ashley Bickerton)**, 1994  
C-print with playing card;  
40.64×50.8 cm

Courtesy Callicoon Fine Arts, New York

"I curated a show at The Mayfair Club, a private poker club in a basement near Madison Park, and then exhibited these 'installation photographs' at American Fine Arts. It was about making a connection between artists and gamblers, or art making and gambling. All of the works were selected for their articulation of what I saw as the shared concerns for repetition, play, suspending time, questioning the fates, playing to lose, the study and interpretation of signs, and creating value. The photos were printed oddly, off center and some with the Mayfair's own playing cards mounted. The artists were Ashley Bickerton, Moyra Davey, Claire Pentecost, David Smith, Hans Weigand, Adam Simon, Denis Balk. Colin showed those installation shots at AFA in a show called 'The Mayfair show', my first solo show in NYC, but I also included portraits of poker players made by a compulsive gambler and club member named Melissa Hayden. The club was very old and had moved locations a few times, and for most of its history it was a bridge club. It turned to poker through a legal loophole by only admitting members (I was one) and not permitting cash on the table (you bought your chips at the reception). It was eventually raided by the police, but not so much for the poker as for the sports betting also going on there. It had its share of whales."

Email correspondence with the artist, June 2015

## RICHARD HAWKINS

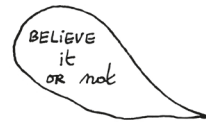
**Back in the Game**, 2014. Acrylic and pencil on canvas; 40.5×51 cm • **An Ugly Child makes a Lurid Discovery**, 2014. Acrylic, collage and pencil on canvas; 40.5×51 cm • **We're Big Fans of your Work**, 2014. Acrylic, collage and pencil on canvas; 40.5×51 cm • Trouble in Paradise, 2014. Acrylic, collage and pencil on canvas; 40.5×51 cm • **Still III: An Illuminating Manuscript, page 01**, 1984. Polaroid and ink on paper; 60.8×45.5 cm • **Still III: An Illuminating Manuscript, page 05**, 1984. Polaroid and ink on paper; 60.8×45.5 cm • **Still III: An Illuminating Manuscript, page 07**, 1984. Polaroid and ink on paper; 60.8×45.5 cm • **Still III: An Illuminating Manuscript, page 08**, 1984. Acrylic, collage and ink on paper; 60.8×45.5 cm • **Still III: An Illuminating Manuscript, page 12**, 1984. Polaroid and ink on paper; 60.8×45.5 cm • **Still III: An Illuminating Manuscript, page 13**, 1984. Acrylic, pencil and ink on paper; 60.8×45.5 cm • **Still III: An Illuminating Manuscript, page 15**, 1984. Polaroid, acrylic, collage and ink on paper; 60.8×45.5 cm • **Still III: An Illuminating Manuscript, page 18**, 1984. Acrylic, collage and ink on paper; 60.8×45.5 cm • **Still III: An Illuminating Manuscript, plate 01**, 1984. Acrylic, ink and pencil on paper; 60.8×45.5 cm • **Still III: An Illuminating Manuscript, plate 02**, 1984. Acrylic and ink on paper; 60.8×45.5 cm

"Dear 23 year old me, Lighten the fuck up, sweetcheeks. I'd like to say things get better — but they don't really. At least not for a long long while. If you can keep from throwing yourself off a bridge between now and then though there will someday be this amazing invention called anti-depressants. I suggest you take as many as your little heart desires. But otherwise, if you stick it out you can look forward to meeting amazing friends you'll love and cherish much more than family, mountains of books to dig into, pervy old men to teach you how to be just like them, loose boys to chase all over the globe... And besides that much much much more porn, gallons and gallons more poppers and some incredible drug trips you'll be far from happy if you miss out on. So just ease up and enjoy it if you can. Much love little buddy, Take care — You at 53. PS: You do realize you just turned yourself into pretty much of a half-decent writer though. Don't you? PPS: Oh, and painting. Have yourself a field day — who the fuck cares?"

CARSTEN HÖLLER,  
PHILLIPPE PARRENO,  
RIRKRIT TIRAVANIJA

LIAM GILLICK, DOUGLAS  
GORDON, CARSTEN  
HÖLLER, PIERRE HUYGHE,  
PHILIPPE PARRENO,  
RIRKRIT TIRAVANIJA

"Two videos about proximity and the politics of discourse as material. The films are a reflection of the collaboration, discourse and tensions developed in the 1990s. *Vicinato* is a film divided into several chapters. It is based on a conversation between friends, between artists. As time goes on, the actors become older, and the directors film a different movie. The scenario is based on a conversation that took place between Carsten Höller, Philippe Parreno and Rirkrit Tiravanija. The conversation, which was recorded, was later modified so that each actor would say the same number of words. The conversations are not assigned so that each actor represents one artist; rather



## LILY VAN DER STOKKER

**Believe it or not (sketch for wallpainting)**, 1993  
Marker and color pencil on paper; 26.5×35.5 cm

**Mistake (design for wallpainting with carpet)**, 2010  
Color pencil and pen on paper;  
21×29.5 cm

**No progress (design for wallpainting in donut-shape)**, 2011  
Color pencil on paper;  
30×42 cm

**Useless movement (design for wallpainting with carpet)**, 2011–14  
Color pencil on paper;  
29.6×41.8 cm

**No improvement no progress (design for wallpainting and furniture)**, 2009–14  
Color pencil on paper;  
30×42 cm

Courtesy  
Air de Paris, Paris



## WILLEM OOREBEEK &amp; KRIS KIMPE

1 What distinguishes this show from other Oorebeek shows is its architecture. Usually he builds very little, if anything. Judging from the evidence, Oorebeek's walls force a perspective and make a point about the materiality of all images, establishing the connection between an image and the mechanistic and financial ingredients of its face.

From a press release from Yale Union, dated May 2015

**Vicinato**, 1995  
16 mm film transferred to DVD; black & white, sound; 12:00  
Courtesy Air de Paris, Paris

**Vicinato II**, 2000  
35mm film transferred to DVD; color, sound; 11:21  
Courtesy Air de Paris, Paris

they are arranged along a temporal sequence. The shooting was made on 16mm black and white film, based on the style of Antonioni's films from the 1960s. The location was a roof in Milan. Few years after *Vicinato*, the conversation continues: *Vicinato II* is filmed in color, and features Josh Cole, Grant Gillespie, Karl Pittonand and Tim Webster. The scenario is based on a conversation between Liam Gillick, Douglas Gordon, Carsten Höller, Pierre Huyghe, Philippe Parreno and Rirkrit Tiravanija, recorded between 1998 and 1999. The location has a view on Monte Carlo."

Adapted from <http://www.ecoledumagasin.com/session23/en/vicinato/>

all night the next day because I was so repulsed by my own writing. Not because of the substance of my writing. It took me forever to write, and it was the most difficult thing. I realized it was something I didn't want to do, and I shouldn't have submitted it. It has something to do with me, right now, being unable to use 100 words or less to praise a piece of culture because I constantly read 100 word or less descriptions of art.

The record reviews and the restaurant reviews in my newspaper cover the same amount of ground—sometimes they're of art and sometimes they're of pizza. I don't believe anything I read in that form. My own voice sounds so phony just because of the form, and I couldn't find a way just to get this icky feeling out of me. I guess it has to do with blogs, the icky feeling I get from whatever the length of a blog message, and the icky feeling I get from team-making and undeserved praise. I just don't want to be involved in it. It's something that I have to find a way to do because I want to continue to be able to praise people, but the whole existence of the top 10 list culture has made it impossible to the point where I have to turn down pristine writing assignments like, "A page in *The Believer*: Do whatever you want." I can't do those things right now because I can't stand it. I can't stand the consensus. You know what I'm saying? It's like a cliché that's really just coercive. It's empty. It's just a signal. That's what I feel like top ten lists are. They're not what they say they are. Its function has been completely superceded by meaning in the case of these top ten lists.\*

\* David Berman

### **We're big fans of your work**

What you love (what you hate as well) leaves no doubt upon what you are: somebody ready to answer questions, except for one: who are you?

It's a matter of discoveries, affections, preferences, distinctions. And above all (before experience), love. Even if it seems silly to say, we loved the art that we were working with—more than the artists themselves—and it had something "more," something different, beyond the ordinary. It had nothing to do with the other shows in town, in terms of subject matter as well as of aesthetics, of positioning, words, or even politics. There was something of contrarian way of thinking there, that had something unbelievably exciting and exhilarating. The qualities of the works

were always reconsidered, relocated in this particular forcefield, global/local. A "multiscalar" exercise in judgment, so as to say.

We had to look for the art, the artists, to find out and know more, not get fooled by the authority factor, get into the circumstances, the scenes, the rhetorics. It's been more often something done from the distance, without that much traveling; collecting second-hand information, with the excitement of trying to guess more out of it. Passion wasn't the way to express this love. There was something more laid back—more distanced—humility? But also: the feeling that the most interesting thing should be the works in the room. Though, at the same time, the most interesting thing was the talking, the jokes, the chit-chat, whatever way they would address what was in the show. Taking ourselves too seriously, giving ourselves a mission, had to be avoided at any cost. We weren't doing something that important. We weren't trying to stand for artists—stand by their sides, or course ...but not even all the time I guess... Working with them, and for them, as a matter of fact.

What we were into was always too far, out of reach, difficult to get, hard to tell, and at the same time, very close, simple to deal with—it didn't need sophistication, it could happen by chance, it could be there with no extravagancy. Things could be decided easily. It wasn't even a question of insisting on the choice: just that we knew there were more possibilities; and that it wasn't that complicated to provoke them—to realize some of them. Looking for these "other" issues, other stakes, was like an adventure in unknown lands: places where you could trust certain signs and names, and distinguish in between them, so that after a while, you could go further. And there were many people to meet over there, who knew the same problems, and could share other stories. This was a promise—but this was another time, maybe... Maybe we've lost the path, or we have to go back now.

### **Permanent vacation**

Organizing projects wasn't always the best way to meet and get to know an artist, or a writer or a curator—pretty often, this would let to disappointments and misunderstandings, indeed. Maybe that's also why everybody wants to highlight the conversations, rather than the work itself. There's many hidden rules in collaborations, although that's what makes them worth it. Pragmatics, once more. (We don't

speak much about love.) Group discussions are based upon doubt, blurriness, indecision. It's embarrassing when it becomes embarrassing. When work needs a definition—when the method needs defining you'd better throw it away; but where do you start from, then, again? What are you looking for?

There's this story according to which filmmaker Eric Rohmer was so stingy he would think about his movies in relation to his personal holidays—checking locations on the road to the beach, or something like this. The show is made on the way to the gorges—eating huckleberries, salmonberries, buying a new swimsuit. Soon we'll be swimming in the river, getting our heads under the cascades in the woods on the side of the mountain. The high-speed water falling down the mountain will explode your mind. It's not who wins the game, it's how it is played.

### **Escapism**

Falling very down is no problem for us,  
because we are falling masters of the dark  
We don't have problems with landscape,  
because we have a car to escape  
We don't have problems with transport,  
because we fly into the distance  
It's not our problem, that some people have  
very much money  
We're happy since years we don't need  
problems\*\*

\*\* Martin Kippenberger & Albert Oehlen

Theory of Achievement

August 1–September 6, 2015

Curated by castillo/corrales

Design by Kris Kimpe and Willem Oorebeek

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