

Preface for AIR#0, a publication to capture the first four years of Artists in residence at the Amsterdam School of the Arts, Amsterdam 2007.

The research group Art Practice and Development made the explicit choice to implement its AIR (Artist in Residence) programme in a variety of forms, thereby offering each faculty the opportunity to define its own relationship with the autonomous guest artist – or ensemble, or office.

This publication sets out to offer an insight into the diverse collaborations with the first four AIRs, to reveal what they have yielded for the artists, and to explore the benefits for educational practices and our vision of the prospects for artistic research at the Amsterdam School of the Arts (AHK). Attention is also given to the matter of whether contemplating similar initiatives can hone the ability to make choices: should we use our AIR programme to position ourselves within a particular area of development, or are we perhaps employing a strategy so susceptible to influence by trends that it tends to be applied rather pragmatically? ‘What matters? What would make a difference?’¹

Let's suppose the Academy is a place for artists... **Notes on AIR, the Amsterdam School of the Arts' artist in residence programme**

By Marijke Hoogenboom

1.

The initiation of a new artist in residence programme was fundamental to the research group Art Practice and Development at the Amsterdam School of the Arts when it was established at the end of 2003. The AIR programme enables each of the four creative faculties (the Netherlands Film and Television Academy, the Amsterdam Conservatory, the Academy of Architecture and the Theatre School) to annually invite an artist to become attached as Guest Professor.

A strong notion existed as to *why* the AHK wished to involve artists from the diverse disciplines directly in art education and research, but the *form* this involvement was to take was undefined. What was clear, in any case, was that it should respond to the dynamic of art practice itself.

The research group can now look back on the first generation of AIRs (Peter Delpout, Joël Bons, Luc Deleu and Emio Greco|PC) and specific experiences can be placed in a broader context: the tradition and long-term development of artist in residence programmes on the one hand, and on the other the explosive growth in the number of opportunities for artists to work outside their usual environment or to become attached to academies and universities as researchers.

2.

Artist in residence programmes are a growth market in both national and international art practice. The Dutch-based network Trans Artists, which advises artists on residency programmes worldwide, presently has more than 700 options on its books: from Germany to India, from visual arts to interactive media and from the seclusion of an island to the pandemonium of a metropolis. Cultural exchange should perhaps be viewed as a vital strategy for survival in our globalising society, and the increasing number of artist in

¹ Paul Carter, *Material Thinking*, Melbourne 2004.

residence programmes is a positive consequence of the advancing internationalisation of the art circuit. Nonetheless, there are reasons to keep a critical eye on this 'contemporary phenomenon'.²

If proof were needed that the motives behind the various artist in residence programmes are widely diverse, then the pool of Dutch initiatives alone – entirely financed by the government – provides it: there are residencies that serve no other purpose than the personal development or inspiration of the artist himself (in addition to the many ateliers it manages abroad, the BKVB Fund recently created just such a position in Drenthe, in the Netherlands); there are artists' initiatives and art centres that work primarily on a per-project basis (often characterised by a lack of transparency regarding the available facilities); and a growing number of institutions and enterprises expect an artist in residence to contribute to the organisation's culture. The AHK is, perhaps, an example of these last mentioned, as are the *Yo! Opera Festival* and the *IDFA*, which also include their guests' names in their external communications. And more recently, innovative programmes have been initiated that require resident artists to address issues relating to their own citizenship: the Stedelijk Museum supports *BijlmerAIR* in the Bijlmer district of Amsterdam; *Beyond*, the art event in the new suburb of Leidsche Rijn, included a residency; and *SKOR* takes care of the *Fifth Season* artist in residence programme at the Willem Arntzhoeve psychiatric clinic.

This wave of programmes is contributing to a contemporary movement whereby individual artists are wresting themselves free of self-imposed studio-bound isolation and becoming increasingly nomadic and flexible.³ But this also places artists in a vulnerable position and – as evidenced by the variety of approaches to the application of artists – all too easily allows them to become instrumentalised, unless they make clear choices about the reasons for, and nature of, their involvement.

The career of an artist as artist in residence is not a new phenomenon. Once the status of the artist had surpassed that of the craftsman, a foreign sojourn or a placement outside the established work environment became an indispensable component of artistic development; the name of one of the most prestigious Dutch art prizes, the *Prix de Rome*, refers to the seventeenth-century tradition of artists being invited by the Académie de France to stay in the sheltered setting of the Villa Medici. Here they were systematically encouraged to break free from national limitations and were all but compelled to ally themselves with ancient culture. Although crucial aspects of this exclusive scholarship have been superseded (the prestige of the oldest academy, the allure of Italian influences, and the concept of a single artistic centre) the original intent of the institution has persisted in many variations: it appears that even then, such generosity was not unconditional.

Former Dutch State Secretary for Education, Culture and Science Rick van der Ploeg set up an artist in residence programme for his ministry, as a component of a hospitable cultural policy.⁴ Those involved were in fundamental disagreement as early as the interim evaluation in 2001: should the primary criteria for successful residency be 'the wishes and ambitions of the artist rather than possible benefits for our country'?⁵ Or should the programme distance itself from the idea of classical *Xenia* and require that 'in their turn, these prominent foreign cultural figures give something back in the form of their reflections on the state of the arts in the Netherlands, and in this way enter into a critical dialogue with the Dutch arts and culture sector'?⁶ The DAAD programme in Germany, by contrast, has for 40 years been recognised

² Domeniek Ruyters, 'Commentator of tourist? De artist-in-residence als hedendaags verschijnsel' (Commentator or tourist? The artist in residence as contemporary phenomenon), *Metropolis M*, 3/2005.

³ Janneke Wesseling, 'Het atelier is overal' (The studio is everywhere), *NRC Handelsblad*, 19 May 2006.

⁴ For a recent critical analysis of Dutch international cultural policy and for an understanding of the necessity for a more explicit participation in the international cultural arena, see *All That Dutch*, Amsterdam, 2006.

⁵ Letter from the culture council, W. Zorgdrager, 19 December 2001.

⁶ Letter from the then State Secretary for Culture Rick van der Ploeg to the chair of the House of Representatives, 5 May 2002.

as a 'forum for an artistic dialogue that goes beyond cultural-regional and, more specifically, political borders'.⁷ This organisation evidently has fewer qualms regarding the productive combination of residencies and international cultural politics, and is willing to invest on a large scale to obviate the threat of cultural isolation. The generous gesture made by DAAD to effect this 'international representation of contemporary art in Berlin'⁸ illustrates that sanctuary and autonomy need not conflict with an appeal for public accessibility and social engagement.

Nowadays, as in the past, an artist in residence programme reflects the changing cultural position of the artist, and thus, implicitly, the expectations that we as hosts or members of society or audience have of him. Is the artist a commentator or tourist, pioneer or missionary, consultant or ambassador? No matter for what reason or with how much sensitivity an artist in residence is placed, the institutional host must reflect upon the extent to which he is interested in the specific expertise of the practising artist and whether he values that particular artist's way of seeing: 'I show you what I see and how I, somebody, though apparently me, see it. And so too now, in Rome, which is as imaginary as any city, because one sees alone.'⁹

3.

Other models, however, also impact on the research group that aspires to invite artists as researchers into an academy. An international debate has blossomed over the last ten years about 'whether a phenomenon such as research in the arts exists – an endeavour in which the production of art is itself a fundamental part of the research process, and whereby art is partly the result of research'.¹⁰ Encouraged by the reform of universities in the United Kingdom and Scandinavia at the beginning of the 1990s, artists there have for some time been able to attain an academic degree – masters or doctorate – through their work, and practice-based research is now widely accepted in art courses. Furthermore, despite the continuing division between Science Education (WO) and Higher Professional Education (HBO) in the Netherlands, the nature of artistic research is also being debated here. Grudgingly, the educational establishment is granting space to the artist-researcher by introducing research departments, increasing the level of cooperation between HBO and WO, incorporating the research task of the HBO system in legislation, and so on.

Abroad, artists are already appointed to universities and academies as Research Fellows or Research Associates. This tradition, rooted in the Anglo-Saxon model of scientific research, is interpreted particularly broadly in relation to artists. A salient example is the interdisciplinary ResCen (Centre for Research into Creation in the Performing Arts) attached to Middlesex University in North London, where, over a number of years, artists can develop and practice methods based on research drawn from their own proposals. 'ResCen exists to further the understanding of how artists research and develop new processes and forms, by working with professional artists and others.'¹¹ Within the normative framework of this university, creative knowledge – that rather fashionable term for the tacit and sensory cognition embodied in art – is not placed in opposition to scientific or intellectual knowledge, but has apparently been emancipated and can consequently facilitate the production of an *other*, equally valuable, form of knowledge.

These institutional changes, and the public debate about them, would be unthinkable if reflection and research had not already become inseparably bound up in contemporary art

⁷ 'Forum des künstlerischen Dialoges, der die kulturellen und allemal die politischen Grenzen überschreitet', press release, Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, March 2001.

⁸ Ibid., 'Internationale Repräsentanz der zeitgenössischen Kunst in Berlin'.

⁹ 'Ich zeige Dir das, was ich sehe und wie ich, irgendwer, eben ich, das sehe. Und jetzt, in Rom, das ebenso imaginär ist wie jede Stadt, denn man sieht einzeln.' German writer Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, during his stay in the Villa Massimo in Rome, 1972–1973.

¹⁰ Henk Borgdorff, 'Het debat over onderzoek in de kunsten' (The debate on research in the arts), *Theater Topics*, 2/2006.

¹¹ ResCen, research aims, www.mdx.ac.uk/rescen

practice. Institutions and artists alike increasingly describe their activities as research, or, as the curator and culture theorist Sarat Maharaj puts it, 'Most of us feel we've been doing artistic research for years, without quite calling it that.'¹²

Influenced by contemporary trends among artists – or in the art market – artist in residence programmes all over the world have shifted focus from production and presentation to research and development. As a consequence Dutch post-academic institutes such as the Jan van Eyck Academie and the Rijksacademie van Beeldende Kunsten (National Academy for the Visual Arts) now label their activities 'research' and their residential participants 'researchers'. However, the art critic Domeniek Ruyters warns that artist in residence programmes with this focus unwittingly contribute to the 'increasing invisibility of art'¹³ because their policies serve the process rather than any material result.

Ultimately, the central issue for the research group Art Practice and Development is not the hotly debated subject of the academisation of art education and research, and the word *development* was chosen for a specific reason: to describe the research activities of artists and to place them in the context of tangible practices. The AHK's AIR programme must also reflect upon whether criteria can be formulated to distinguish *art practice* from *art practice as research*, and discover to what extent its residents contribute to the artistic agendas of the faculties.

4.

This publication traces the four remarkably divergent paths taken by filmmaker Peter Delpout, architect Luc Deleu, composer-artistic director Joël Bons and dance company Emio Greco|PC during their year in the AIR programme. The expectation was that they would not isolate themselves entirely from the academic institution concerned to operate exclusively according to their own conditions and ideas. But on the other hand our AIR programme has no blueprint and so each faculty entered into discussion and made its own arrangements with its resident artist. Luc Deleu made use of an existing educational format at the Academy of Architecture. Emio Greco|PC and Joël Bons developed entirely new projects at the Theatre School and the Amsterdam Conservatory respectively, and Peter Delpout operated outside the direct educational framework of the Netherlands Film and Television Academy, becoming an interlocutor for management, directors of studies, and tutors. Their approach also varied with regard to content: from a clearly defined assignment to cast a critical eye on certain aspects of one Academy's curriculum, to an artistic exchange with an authentic practice considered especially enriching by the faculty concerned, and to novel investigative queries closely connected with recent production and the AIR's own interest in education and knowledge transfer.

The AIRs we were fortunate enough to welcome during the 2004–2005 academic year knew only too well that they were not being offered a retreat that lent itself to seclusion. There was a host that fully appreciated each person's unique knowledge, vision, inspiration and enterprising nature on their own terms, and it looks back with joy and respect on the contributions they were willing to make to the educational practice of each faculty.

What next?

Crucial questions remain unanswered, of course, and after the first four AIRs (and the five since) nothing is solved and the identity of the programme is still very much under development. What kinds of places do the faculties offer? What is the difference between a visit and a residency? Does the AHK even have a view on the role of artists in education? What does the artist want from the art school, and what does he bring to it? What artistic issues within contemporary practice are relevant? What risks is one willing to take? And,

¹² Sarat Maharaj, 'Unfinishable sketch of "An unknown object in 4D": scenes of artistic research', *Artistic Research*, published by A. Balkema and H. Slager, Amsterdam/New York 2004.

¹³ Domeniek Ruyters, 'Commentator or tourist, the artist in residence as contemporary phenomenon', *Metropolis M*, 3/2005.

most particularly, how do we acknowledge the 'otherness' of the resident artist and avoid any chance that the guest must adapt to the host's excessive hospitality, and thereby become assimilated into a dominant institutional culture?¹⁴

Finally, I wonder if those artists engaged in the setting up of residencies can provide solutions to this complex puzzle. The British choreographer Wayne McGregor, for example, has taken the initiative of creating a 'place of rest' for close colleagues. Every year, he invites about fifteen people to stay for a few weeks on the grounds of his immense villa on the Kenyan coast. Perhaps because of his worldwide success and extraordinarily busy schedule, he refuses to contrive any goal or mission for others. He simply offers his guests a sabbatical: 'Visual artists, neurologists, architects, anthropologists, fashion designers: they don't have to do anything. If they want to work on an idea, that's fine. But it's not a requirement. No pressure to produce. Just go.'¹⁵

Are we then to return to the most altruistic form of an artist in residence programme? The challenge for the research group Art Practice and Development remains to actively seek out that field of tension between autonomy and engagement and thereby place the current relevance of our own intentions under continual scrutiny – here and now, and together with the artists we will welcome in the future.

¹⁴ The hazard of the guest being 'rendered harmless' by excessive hospitality is the central theme of Jaques Derrida's essay 'Over gastvrijheid' (On hospitality), Amsterdam 1998.

¹⁵ Annette Embrechts, 'Dansen vanuit je hoofd' (Dancing from your mind), *De Volkskrant*, 27 April 2006.