

BONANZA, a diorama of the near

an exhibition by artist Bram Van Breda
curated by Carolyn F. Strauss
Gastatelier Leo XIII 25-27 October 2019

"The values that belong to daydreaming mark humanity in its depths."
- Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

Corridors. Closets. Sleeping room. Toilet. Kitchen. Attic.
Incessant drip of a faulty showerhead. A white space.

Dust. Detritus. Glass. Plaster. Wood. Wool. Glitter. Loam.
The reek of urine and a slight whiff of sour milk.
A glorious flying carpet.

Desire. Dreams. Fantasy. Anxiety. Pleasure. Violence.
Monuments rising and falling. States of undress.

Stijlkamer. Wunderkammer. Trash and treasure.

A diorama of the near.

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BONANZA, a diorama of the near is the result of artist Bram Van Breda's 4-month residency at Gastatelier Leo XIII, realized together with curator Carolyn F. Strauss and lovingly supported by a diverse host of local collaborators.

Exploring the space, we encounter fabrication-fabulations of matter, memory, and aspiration. Symbols of prosperity and privilege intermingle with human refuse and excretion, encrusted pipes excavated from beneath the city streets, and the shimmering remnants of a summer carnival. Collectively, they form a portrait of the artist and his stay in the city of Tilburg: a marker of his physical presence, a map of his movements, a captain's log of daydreams, disturbance, and delight.

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In the title of the exhibition, the artist evokes what is 'near.' Directing our gaze to the spatial and social offerings of the residency, to histories and peculiarities of the local urban environment, but also to the less visible and not always consensual forces and flows that define our contemporary humanness. Here is a study not only of that which is physically close by, but also a tracing of the faint outlines of other bodies, spaces and times still doggedly entangled in the present. Hopes and hierarchies intertwined with legacies of colonialism and class struggle, persistent myths of 'progress' tied up in the pathology of human hubris and capitalist accumulation, conceptions of the natural world that deny our current state of ecological crisis.

Within all of these, Van Breda attempts to locate himself – his anatomy, his personal history, and his creative practice – interrogating his own accountability to the physical, social and political histories of the place, and his role in the culture at large. How is the artist affected by what is 'near' and how, if at all, are those surroundings affected (altered, amplified) by his presence? Is his art merely an instrument in service to existing material and social webs? Or might it be an agent of dismantling those structures from within?

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As a prologue to the residency period, on the 1st of May 2019 (Labor Day) the artist collected a bottle of his urine in a show of solidarity with the original low-wage laborers of Tilburg, the *kruikenzeikers*. This first gesture set Van Breda on a path of probing the rhythms and intimate functionings of his body as part of a larger dialogue with 'otherness' – training his attention on unknown territories of his own existence as well as on a range of human/non-human/tangible/invisible actors, so as to render them (in the words of political theorist Jane Bennett) "more audible, more detectable, more sensible."

Van Breda also took to carefully scrutinizing the residency space itself, investigating and activating its horizontal and vertical spatial registers not only over the normal course of his daily routines, but also through deliberate processes of exertion: climbing ladders and scaffolding, crawling in the attic, and chasing plays of light and shadow across the walls. A quest inspired, in part, by Gaston Bachelard's 'poetics of space,' which posits the house – or, in Van Breda's case, the guest atelier – as a site that simultaneously localizes memory and shelters the imagination. The residency as a protected space for reflection and reverie.

Meanwhile, the artist's fascination extended into the world beyond the confines of Leo XIII-straat. Historical images, clippings from daily newspapers, rumors and fairy tales, curiosities hauled in from the city streets... these (and more) fueled the artist's creative impulses to assemblage and experimentation. Just as the daily collection of urine rendered Van Breda's body a sieve, filtering and recycling the environment during his stay, the body of the guest atelier became a dynamic receptacle for gathering and sifting through mountains of matter and information: with Van Breda building up and tearing down installations multiple times over the course of the residency period.

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What is now on view in the guest atelier is the end result of that rigorous cycle of ideas and matter entering and transforming within the space and through the practice of the artist. Fully digested and having found their proper place and relationship within the whole. A carefully-tended garden of impressions, identities, materialities, and temporalities that both critiques the world we know and cries out for the one we wish we had.

A space in-between. A space to dream. A time machine.

Bonanza!

Carolyn F. Strauss_25 October 2019