jeanine hofland
contemporary art

Custodians of Culture

Curated by Steven van Grinsven



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"Ladies and Gentlemen, Change, for lack of a better word is good. Change is right, Change works. Change clarifies, cuts through and captures the essence of evolutionary spirit. Change; in all of its forms, change for life, for love, for knowledge, has marked the upward surge of mankind."

Re-insert the word greed for change here and you have one of the most legendary and infamous speeches in American cinematic history. By rephrasing the words of Wall Street's Gordon Gekko[2] one is able to clarify one of the fundamental foundations for the production of art namely progress. The exhibition examines through two interrelating 'works' the various strands of production, distribution and consumption of artworks and the destabilising effect libertine morals have on the autonomy of the object.

Custodians of Culture borrows both its title[3] and exhibition layout from a 2007 keynote lecture by MacArthur[4] winning critic Dave Hickey, the show in its application seeks to attest to its ongoing relevance today by interrogating the mores behind exhibitions produced past and present and the moral code of exhibition design.

The show follows Hickey's assertions about capitalist driven exhibition models used in the 80's and 90's that deployed (mock) socio-political installation work to masquerade the true intentions of the gallery. Galleries where Hernando's installation work made up out of confetti and dog turds is considered a loss leader and lure for the secondary market Don Judd in the back.

This show replaces Hernando's work with a nicely watered down 'fluxus folly' which today seems to surface in many a dubious gallery space. The Donald Judd for the show is replaced by a 1895 piece by Georges Henrik Breitner and in no way is no less of a secondary market stand-in for the Judd in Hickeys talk, although here it serves as a gentle optimistic nudge and engages directly with the folly erected, as to acknowledge the other's presence. Both constructed in the spirit of their time whilst shedding light on their fundamental difference. Bound not together in pessimism but in glimpses of hope of for a bright tomorrow, where contemporary galleries and their artists are beacons of light in a stripped bare cultural landscape.

Should we be willing slaves to tactics and ploy Hickey asks of his audience? The answer has not changed since then. It demands however for new generations to stand up with straight backs, showing and producing works they like, work they are willing to stake their reputations on. Showing disregard for the sometimes-antiquated tastes of the critical mass, liberated from that what has gone before but with awareness of its impact. Who are these pioneers? Who are in it for art more than money? Who are not always right but can never be wrong? This show is for them, for the custodians of culture who stand fast to their principles wherever the road takes them, who don't mind selling but hate selling out.

Steven van Grinsven, 2013

Steven van Grinsven (Tilburg, 1976) is a curator, cultural theorist and writer. 'Custodians of Culture' is his first curatorial project for an Amsterdam gallery since hanging up his boots as a gallerist. His brainchild, the experimental gallery ZINGERpresents, was a regular fixture on the international fair roster and sought to tear at the conventions of the gallery model. In many ways Custodians of Culture follows this inquest. 'Pink Mist' a new curatorial project is set for spring 2014, as is 'Macaroni', a new Amsterdam based platform for ideas, exhibitions and exchange. When not working Steven likes to cook, read, swear, socialise with friends and Liverpool football club.

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[1] Julius Erving aka Dr. J vs. Larry 'the hick from french lick' Bird, November 9, 1984 Boston Celtics - Philadelphia 76'ers, 130-119, Boston Garden. Both small forwards were fined $7500 for their misconduct. Photographic credits unknown.

[2] Gordon Gekko is the character played by Michael Douglas in Oliver Stone's film Wall Street, 1987, 20th Century Fox.

[3] Dave Hickey's keynote lecture Custodians of Culture, schoolyard art: playing fair without the referee was hosted by the Frieze Foundation at Frieze Art Fair, London, 2007.

[4] Often referred to as the Genius grant. The MacArthur is awarded to US residents of outstanding merit and promise for continued and enhanced creative work. The award is not for past accomplishments but an investment in a persons' originality, insight and potential, according to the foundations website. Hickey was awarded the 500k stipent in 2001.