PETER P. HOPKINS: NOTES ON IN SITU a global sculpture project in response to the Covid-19 pandemic

In 1986 the Belgium curator Jan Hoet (1936-2014) created a radical art exhibition in Ghent entitled Chambres D’Amis, or “Guest Rooms”. His intriguing concept involved inviting 58 artists (including Lawrence Weiner, Sol Lewitt, Bruce Nauman, Marisa Merz, Joseph Kosuth, and Jannis Kounellis) to produce site specific art works for separate residences around that city. All the spaces were private homes ranging from large and well-to-do hosts to much more modest apartments of everyday workers. To engage each space the chosen artists had to respond to the found environment rather than carry in a pre-made work. The artists’ self-imposed task is to transform these spaces —within the limits imposed by the owners or occupiers— into something which can be called “art”.

Hoet achieved a brilliant two-fold disarticulation of the traditional art object/ground relationship. First, in the way that the “pre-organized spaces” of a lived in environment required the artist to sublimate their own practices and desires to that of owner’s needs; but secondly- and most important- it required a new way for the viewer to engage the usual sterilized ritual of art encountered in a museum, or art gallery. In Chambres D’Amis Hoet had instantly disrupted both the art object and the viewer at once. The process of “seeing” the exhibition now forced each person to walk dozens of kilometers through city streets and alleys, breaking the usual seamless experience of an art show into fragments now impeded by weather, time, and direction. This fracturing of the curatorial whole into “shards of experiences” meant that the art event could only be (partially) recovered by the viewer long after the exhibition was over. During the 3 months, June 21 to September 21, of Chambres D’Amis more than 120,000 paid visitors saw the event. Several critics wrote of the event as a jumble of unrelated experiences that never cohered into a clear curatorial statement, but those writers missed that this “confusion” was built into the project by Hoet. His goal was not to replicate the traditional safe experience of a museum stroll, but rather aligned his thinking based on a Situationist derive; where the art objects and the environment merge into a strange new understanding of the urban landscape. His idea of the role of the curator was not to present an artificially constructed whole, but rather forcing each viewer to take some responsibility for creating their own exhibition. The drifting between art locations, the mapping, and the confusion required to find each one was not an unfortunate byproduct of Chambres D’Amis, it was an essential part of it. Chambres D’Amis artist Lawrence Weiner’s bold graphic text in three languages summed this up perfectly: MY HOUSE IS YOUR HOUSE / YOUR HOUSE IS MY HOUSE / IF YOU SHIT ON THE FLOOR IT GETS ON YOUR FEET.

In Situ is an homage to Jan Hoet’s 1986 event. We have simply re-purposed the central concept of art located in non-art sanctioned private spaces to help form a response to the global pandemic gripping the world. What is now different is the possibility of scaling this to allow artists from around the world to participate via the internet without leaving their own residences. In some sense Hoet’s exhibition was a digital art show decades before such a thing was possible. The ways that he broke a unified thing into parts, transmitted the “data” over space, and then allowed it to be recombined at a different location by each user is a property intrinsic to the digital universe. His limitations on locations proximate to Ghent no longer apply to this project; nor do the issues of artistic diversity based on geographic distribution, race, age, or gender. The ways in which artists have responded to the virus and the ensuing quarantine is our focus. With In Situ we can get a glimpse of what a creative art act- especially those constructed during a sheltering in place- can look like. Our goal is to highlight these responses into a shared document that will allow future generations to understand that while the pandemic restricted movement, it did not restrict creativity.

Peter P. Hopkins, Executive Curator, In Situ
NATASHA ALEXANDER: IN SITU CURATORIAL STATEMENT

‘In Situ’ provides an opportunity to be a part of a record of artistic resilience throughout the pandemic and of the ways this universal experience has been reflected in practice.

The beginnings of The Social Distance Art Project (TSDAP) were founded in the representation of UK students whose studios were inaccessible for months on end, or, in the case of 2020 graduates, permanently, at a much earlier date than expected. At a time in which so many of us were divided by physical distance and isolated from our usual creative settings, we, with the assistance of our submitees, have created a digital community of emerging artists to collaborate, promote and discuss works.

While TSDAP began student specific with a distinct aim, it is clear that this digital community is now needed more than ever and must adapt and continue as we attempt to make our way in the industry at this particularly uncertain time. To do this, we require actionable art events to expand as an exhibitor community. We must begin to take responsibility for our own curatorial; we cannot wait aimlessly for opportunities to arise – we must make these for ourselves. The possibilities of virtual collaboration and of shared global exhibition models have proved endless and grant autonomy to us, the artists, to exhibit in any way we please.

‘In Situ’ provides an opportunity to be a part of a record of artistic resilience throughout the pandemic and of the ways this universal experience has been reflected in practice. It is not simply a catalogue of art made in quarantine, but the process of an art making that was tailored to the circumstances of our confinement. By using the home and its surroundings, or wherever their place of shelter during enforced quarantine, artists have responded in innovative ways to produce documents that will define the ways in which we remember these unprecedented times. As opposed to an artist’s catalogue, we focus rather on the work itself and its relation to this surreal period in time. TSDAP strongly believes that this documentation of such an unexpected cultural moment, and of the ways that each of us have individually survived it, is vital for future artists everywhere.

Looking past digital exhibition frameworks as mere circumstantial necessity, as they have been for the majority of 2020, these formats have the potential to offer opportunities for our artists to collaborate and to work outside of our as yet niche demographic. On this particular project, TSDAP works with SHIM Art Network and Daniel Devlin of Susak Press, presenting our following with the ability to be involved in a global project, and to have their work presented side by side with that of already established artists.
**DANIEL DEVLIN: BEYOND SUSAK**

Susak Expo 2006 began as an idea to extend platforms by exchanges of contexts and languages through dialogues between people and locations. It’s an idea on the move, an idea in translation. — Jo Melvin, 2006

I did consider replacing Susak expo 2020 with a series of live zoom meetings as many other events have done but the idea depressed me and the next expo will happen when hopefully things will be back to a new normal where people can meet up again in the same way we used to and as a consequence Susak expo will be better than it ever was.

Susak expo can’t be replaced but other things can be done in the meantime. In a Zoom conversation (or was it Skype?) with Peter Hopkins (a New York City artist and gallerist; and a frequent collaborator/host of a few of my odder art “moments”) we spoke of our shared desire to see this unique moment of history not go unnoticed. Peter is also the co-founder of the SHIM Art Network, a global art resource sharing platform, and had been at work on an art idea that would try to allow us to combine our own separate- but not dissimilar- views on how artists might be able to record their own reactions to the quarantine. In Situ then became our shared project. The premise was simple. I would develop an interactive hyperlinked e-catalog that would allow every artist who wished to share with others a record of what, or how they had responded to this lock-down. This would align quite nicely with the strange aesthetics of the Susak Expo and with Hopkins’ own concept of networked artists who share risk and receive benefits like his democratised use of Artsy for all SHIM members. The Expo had always been pushing artists to think about their art without the traditional art object as the focus. The goal on the island was always to treat that idyllic space as a retreat from the tyranny of feeling that often obliges artists to make market-ready things as a precondition to their own artistic identity. In Situ had been premised on the hope that artists would not see this as a chance to show off images of things they had made while sheltering that they might otherwise would have made in a studio, but rather embrace the very definition of the term in situ as a way to record some stranger idea or practice they might have undertaken during this time that was intrinsically inseparable from where they were living or staying.

The concept of In Situ also could then establish that artists had indeed used this time to find ways to become even more creative now that were temporarily freed from the restraints of “object making”. This catalog would show the slight gestures , the capturing of small or seemingly unimportant thoughts, and even the odd “gallows humour” many artists embraced now. If properly curated I think In Situ will be a wonderful way to help fill in the “lost space” of the pandemic. A way to humorously, but critically recall many years from now what we each did to survive this horrible moment.

The 8th Susak expo was due to take place in May 2020 but had to be cancelled (postedoon to a date we won’t know for a while).

Susak expo is a contemporary art biennale founded by Herzog Dellafiore and con-artist Daniel Devlin, that has taken place on the remote Croatian island of Susak since 2006. The original reason for organising Susak expo was as a reaction to all the art fairs, biennales and museums of contemporary art sprouting up everywhere, and to highlight the absurdity of this proliferation by staging an international art biennale in the most unlikely of places where, apart from a few people seeing it by mistake and, of course, the participating artists, the chances are no-one will see it.

Even though it started as a joke it gradually transformed into a space and time where every two years artists (including those who who haven’t yet realised that we are all artists) got together in a spirit of exchange. Conversation wore had, art objects were made, poems, performances, music ... but mainly, being together.

As the expo started growing in popularity, it attracted artists who would like to take part and some artists would say that they would like to be in susak expo but can’t make it in person so will send an art object and I have always been clear that to be part of it you have to be in person even if you plan to do nothing there.

Since the pandemic most of the ways we have approached making and experiencing art has had to change; art experienced as in Susak expo has had to be put on pause but artists have carried on making art and I together with millions of artists around the world have kept on communicating and exchanging ideas but in the new virtual ways which include Facebook, Instagram, I imagine Twitter, Zoom meetings etc.
KERAN JAMES: FAREWELL (Extinction Event)
Ex situ

I know the truth -- give up all other truths!
No need for people anywhere on earth to struggle.
Look -- it is evening, look, it is nearly night:
what do you speak of, poets, lovers, generals?

The wind is level now, the earth is wet with dew,
the storm of stars in the sky will turn to quiet.
And soon all of us will sleep under the earth, we
who never let each other sleep above it.

— Marina Tsvetaeva, ‘I Know the Truth’
translated from the Russian by Elaine Feinstein.

March 2020 ongoing
Taking Friends on Day Trips X

Taking those nearest (and or dearest) friends, artists,
lovers far away. Bringing us no closer in reality but
occupying the same space in imagination. A simultaneity
that momentarily collapses time. Releasing a bird from a
ship. Waiting for signs of life.

Recalling those that searched the skies before me and
those who will not return...

Eric, Martin, Carlos, Mark, Derek, Darran, Michael, Imanod,
Tony, Ivan, Panda, Terry, Hugo, Vaughan, Aidan, Maria,
Patrick, Rik, Lorenzo, Mitzi (Michael), Sylvia, Denis, Mark,
Yolanda, Peppo, Mark, Thomas, Orsella, Friday, Grace,
Stuart, Felix, Ray, John, Guy, Herve, Eric, Charles, Al,
Larry, Robert, Ray, Alan, Carola, Steve, Anthony, Paul,
Keith, Ronald, Colette, Richard, Jean, Brad, Stephen,
Glenn, Victor, Louis, David, Step...

— In_situ.indd   4-5

KERAN JAMES: FAREWELL (Extinction Event)
Ex situ

I know the truth -- give up all other truths!
No need for people anywhere on earth to struggle.
Look -- it is evening, look, it is nearly night:
what do you speak of, poets, lovers, generals?

The wind is level now, the earth is wet with dew,
the storm of stars in the sky will turn to quiet.
And soon all of us will sleep under the earth, we
who never let each other sleep above it.

— Marina Tsvetaeva, ‘I Know the Truth’
translated from the Russian by Elaine Feinstein.

March 2020 ongoing
Taking Friends on Day Trips X

Taking those nearest (and or dearest) friends, artists,
lovers far away. Bringing us no closer in reality but
occupying the same space in imagination. A simultaneity
that momentarily collapses time. Releasing a bird from a
ship. Waiting for signs of life.

Recalling those that searched the skies before me and
those who will not return...

Eric, Martin, Carlos, Mark, Derek, Darran, Michael, Imanod,
Tony, Ivan, Panda, Terry, Hugo, Vaughan, Aidan, Maria,
Patrick, Rik, Lorenzo, Mitzi (Michael), Sylvia, Denis, Mark,
Yolanda, Peppo, Mark, Thomas, Orsella, Friday, Grace,
Stuart, Felix, Ray, John, Guy, Herve, Eric, Charles, Al,
Larry, Robert, Ray, Alan, Carola, Steve, Anthony, Paul,
Keith, Ronald, Colette, Richard, Jean, Brad, Stephen,
Glenn, Victor, Louis, David, Step...

— In_situ.indd   4-5

KERAN JAMES: FAREWELL (Extinction Event)
Ex situ

I know the truth -- give up all other truths!
No need for people anywhere on earth to struggle.
Look -- it is evening, look, it is nearly night:
what do you speak of, poets, lovers, generals?

The wind is level now, the earth is wet with dew,
the storm of stars in the sky will turn to quiet.
And soon all of us will sleep under the earth, we
who never let each other sleep above it.

— Marina Tsvetaeva, ‘I Know the Truth’
translated from the Russian by Elaine Feinstein.

March 2020 ongoing
Taking Friends on Day Trips X

Taking those nearest (and or dearest) friends, artists,
lovers far away. Bringing us no closer in reality but
occupying the same space in imagination. A simultaneity
that momentarily collapses time. Releasing a bird from a
ship. Waiting for signs of life.

Recalling those that searched the skies before me and
those who will not return...

Eric, Martin, Carlos, Mark, Derek, Darran, Michael, Imanod,
Tony, Ivan, Panda, Terry, Hugo, Vaughan, Aidan, Maria,
Patrick, Rik, Lorenzo, Mitzi (Michael), Sylvia, Denis, Mark,
Yolanda, Peppo, Mark, Thomas, Orsella, Friday, Grace,
Stuart, Felix, Ray, John, Guy, Herve, Eric, Charles, Al,
Larry, Robert, Ray, Alan, Carola, Steve, Anthony, Paul,
Keith, Ronald, Colette, Richard, Jean, Brad, Stephen,
Glenn, Victor, Louis, David, Step...
During Covid I, like millions of others, felt trapped in some strange movie we could not escape from.

Since the pandemic took effect in mid-March, I spent many hours reading (and drinking, and looking out windows) in this red leather chair in our living room. I tried to re-read everything I had in my library—over 1,000 books—that I treasure.

One in particular I enjoyed immensely has been the Collected Short Stories of Richard Yates. Who cataloged the underlying unease in mid-century dystopian American suburbs.

His most famous book, Revolutionary Road, was made into a movie starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet reprising their pairing from the Titanic.

Several scenes of the movie were filmed 500 meters from my own home. I even briefly met Winslet on set during filming of the «school» scene. My daughter was in the background shots.

During Covid I, like millions of others, felt trapped in some strange movie we could not escape from. To free myself from too many dark thoughts I would periodically re-arrange furniture in my house. By moving everything in sight into a configuration that was not typical, and precarious I felt strangely «in control» again. If only for a few minutes.

**Revolutionary Road trailer**
Megan Evans:

My project looks at deception through objects, particularly within the context of Covid-19. The end result was a tea-set that couldn't hold hot tea, lying materially, adorned with illustrations of lies surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic, lying decoratively.

Spilling the tea on Covid-19
we loved playing with dolls, and putting on plays as kids. This seemed a natural way to stay engaged with our own needs, and anxieties during the lockdown.

Jack and Jenna X are 20 year old twins born to a family of art patrons. During the pandemic they have been in quarantine in their family home in The Hamptons. Both identify as gay, and have a deep love of art, but a strong distrust of the art world.

Jack (not his real name) is studying art at UCLA, and Jenna (not her real name) plans to open a gallery someday.

Jack: We started making these tableaus as a way to stay busy while sheltering here in The Hamptons away from all our friends.

Jenna: Yeah, we loved playing with dolls, and putting on plays as kids.

Jack: This seemed a natural way to stay engaged with our own needs, and anxieties during the lockdown.

Jenna: We saw firsthand the ways that the people in our world were nearly completely cut off by what was happening in New York City, an hour away.

Jack: Shopping and dining went on for a while as if nothing had changed. It was super weird. What we were seeing on TV versus what we saw going on out here.

Jenna: We just sat around looking at online HO scale train figures. We would come up with a theme, or an idea then order what we needed. We would get really excited when our little packages arrived by mail!

Jack: This one is called “Shop ‘til you Drop”. The tiny “dead” figures are wrapped in torn up facial tissue. We made certain to get a woman of color as one of the bodies being recorded. A good friend of ours from school had his nanny suddenly disappear. She died a week later from Covid.
CHEL LOGAN: THE GREAT BRITISH FUCK OFF CAKE

Decorate with Ambivalence

Ingredients:
- Spite: 3 kilograms
- Self raising flour: 400 grammes
- Wish it was LARD: 400 grammes
- How do you like those eggs? A Cuckoos nest full
- I Beg your Pardon: 1 Table Leg
- Vanilla thoughts: Not enough
- Shit with Sugar on it: a Pinch.

Method:
- Get all the ingredients and stare at them for ten minutes
- Pour the wine.
- Think of something relevant, forget it.
- Empty it a into an mini cement mixer and bum for as long as you care about someone.
- Decorate with Ambivalence
- Serve to those you think are applicable to your feeling of apathy.
- Merrily bury in the garden all the leftovers and pray to the god of Bread.
I aim to confuse the viewer, forcing them to question what they see, a reminder that all photography is in some way constructed.

My current project ‘Analogue Disruptions’ considers the disrupted photographic image. For one-hundred-and-ninety years technological advances have refined photographic processes, diverting attention from the physicality of the print. Within this digital age our images now carry the scars of our technology. It is becoming increasingly difficult to look past the once invisible surface of the photograph, to enter the illusionary space of the image. The photographs we view on our mobile devices carry emojis or Snapchat filters that disregard the perspective of the image we view, these images are then layered on top of each other with clocks, icons, menus and dead pixels further drawing our eye to the surface.

I created colourful wooden props that resembled patterns, marks or emojis indicative of the apps I was researching. When photographed these props created the illusion of digital additions to the image, even in analogue photographs.

Analogue Disruptions is made in collaboration with volunteer queer models from various on-line platforms, such as Instagram and Grindr.

I work with these strangers within a relatively short time frame, taking photos and discussing ideas. The photo shoots take place in either the model or photographer’s home. There is no editing or digital manipulation in the images, so the model can see the final image at the end of the shoot. I think of the shoots as small collaborations, aiming to extend how the queer body is represented.

I like to play with various aspects of photographic illusion in my projects. These images have no editing but I use physical props that look like elements of Photoshop or Instagram stories. I aim to confuse the viewer, forcing them to question what they see, a reminder that all photography is in some way constructed.
Drawing influence from the Neo-Concrete movement, my work relies on audience participation for its completion - with each human interaction the work is permanently altered.

Initially non-threatening and appealing to touch, my work explores themes of abjection, desire, danger and repulsion, juxtaposing the human impulse to touch with the fear of touch contagion. Informed by the microscopic natural forms of bacteria and parasites, my materials-based sculptures, drawings and installation explore what happens when two worlds collide, what happens when the micro and macro are represented at the same scale, when human and parasite meet face to face.

Through the use of bright toxic colours, which draw inspiration from the mechanism of aposematism, and the exploration of materiality, my work investigates the dualities of attraction/repulsion and nature/artifice using synthetic materials. It’s mostly neon aesthetic appears hazardous yet enticing, creating a paradoxical response which both revolts and captivates the viewer.

The sculptural organisms that I create are reminiscent of organic forms and are seemingly innocuous and inviting to touch if not slightly sickening and repulsive. Drawing influence from the Neo-Concrete movement, my work relies on audience participation for its completion - with each human interaction the work is permanently altered. Where fingerprints are left behind in slime, the artwork holds onto the identity of each viewer, allowing each individual to have an intimate tactile experience. Focusing on the nature of materiality and tactility, my practice raises questions about shared authorship and material autonomy through relinquishing control of my works final aesthetic form to the materials with which I work, allowing them to follow their own aleatory path and define the outcome.
Everyday a photograph records... what exactly? Nothing. The moment is gone. You are looking at not even a memory. It is a fabrication. Forced. Yet prompted by the artificial structures of the project Devlin embarks on a desperate journey (a flight from the false present of the photograph) hurtling through past lives, reminding himself of the very fickleness of time. A circularity that strikes note after note until the echoes die, the ripples dissipate.


I asked Keran if he could write me a couple of juicy sentences that would help elevate my 2020 project I AM STILL ALIVE into something that could be perceived as being Art and I think he’s done a brilliant job.

In 1988 I was in my second year of a BA in fine art at Reading University. I decided to transform my studio into Dan’s Café; I built some partitions, put in a table and a few chairs, painted a sign and had a hot-plate where I made espressos with my Bialetti and a small pan to warm milk. I offered free coffees to anybody who came in. At first people came and acted “let’s play cafés” but eventually for a while it was just a place where you could come for coffee and a conversation.

It wasn’t intended as art, it was just a thing I did. But ten years later Nicolas Bourriaud published Relational Aesthetics and all of a sudden making tea or coffee for people became respected Art, I wish I had a Bourriaud or a James at the time and elevate my silly games into Art.

I had heard on the radio that a good way to learn to write well would be to force yourself to write 200 words every day; some days you would be inspired and other days not but the act of writing regardless every day was ... and I was thinking that maybe to become a good photographer I should take a photograph every day. I decided to take a self portrait every day as it would be a subject matter that would always be available to me.

I decided to call the project I AM STILL ALIVE as an homage to On Kawara’s Date Paintings and his “I am still alive” telegrams. I had also been re-reading Susan Sontag’s “On Photography” and this title linked nicely with the idea of photography and death.

What I didn’t know on January first was that 2020 would become the year of the world pandemic Covid-19 and that the words I AM STILL ALIVE and this project would take on another meaning.