

ANOUK KRUIJTHOF

WORDS BY JOLINE PLATJE

Multidisciplinary Dutch artist Anouk Kruijthof won't be boxed in. Whether it concerns her places of residence (Berlin, New York, Mexico City, et al) or her art (photography, video, sculpture, animation and performance, to name but a few) her explorations are boundless. Consigning the "artist signature" to the past and exploring a fascination with the online representation of societal issues are Kruijthof's common denominators. *Glamcult* dove headfirst into an email conversation with the artist about her brilliant body of work—on show at Foam Amsterdam this winter—and the critical questions behind it.

On Nov 9, 2017, at 16:48, info@glamcult.com wrote:

Hey Anouk,

How are you? It's been a while since we've seen each other. Funny how Glamcult asked me if I could ask you some questions about your work for the "Modern Family" issue—without knowing that we come from the same hometown, that we went to the same pre-school and later met again in high school. It was really nice to prepare myself for our talk, to see what you've been up to in the last couple of years. So many wonderful projects!

We both left Dordrecht (age 18?) to study somewhere else. I didn't get any further than Amsterdam, while you've lived in Berlin, New York and now Mexico City. What do you like most about working and living there? How's the art scene? *Lonely Planet* says a "cultural renaissance is flourishing"! Would you say living in CDMX influences your work?

Love to hear from you!

Joline

On Nov 10, 2017, at 14:20, mail@anoukkruihof.nl wrote:

Hi Joline!

I'm fine, thanks. Busy in Paris on a solo presentation with my gallery, Escougnou-Cetraro, at the Satellite Fair next to Paris Photo. It's for artists who use the photography medium but aren't straight-up photographers, like those presented at Paris Photo.

Oh yes, good old Dordrecht... I do remember you as a little one, and my mother has updated me on you here and there. Even though we grew into a field where we share similar interests now, we haven't really met a lot physically.

The art scene in Mexico is very small compared to New York (obviously), but yeah, you bump into the same people all the time. Maybe it's a bit more like the "art crowd" in Amsterdam. What's published about Mexico City being the "new Berlin" and hyped by superficial blogs/magazines, is not true. Well, partly of course it is. Mexico City is definitely experiencing gentrification and it might look hot, but the city and the country are very complex, politically and socially. People seem to forget this and just see a trendy facade. One can't speak about Mexico City in comparison to Berlin. In Mexico, 85% of people earn less than 10,000 pesos (under €500) for a full-time job.

In terms of content, the work I developed in Mexico City has nothing to do with living here. Actually, the research of what you'll see at Foam Amsterdam started before my move there and it's more global/universal rather than focused on a place. It doesn't feel right to make work about Mexico as a privileged foreigner having lived here for a year now. It needs a lot of time and understanding of this new culture to be able to make sense of the Mexican discourse as a European. But in a simple way, the fibreglass sculptures you'll see in Foam, I made them in Mexico with the help of specialist workshops there. It's new territory for me and the possibilities of craft in Mexico are infinite and amazing. The title of my show, *¡Agua!*, is Mexican slang. Of course, living here has influenced me a little as a human being. All the steps you take and places you live, they shape you slowly, you know?

Well, you figure it out once you see the exhibition and judge for yourself, okay? Let me know!

On Nov 9, 2017, at 16:48, info@glamcult.com wrote:

Hi again,

Enjoying Paris? :-)

You say the fair is not for "straight-up photographers"? You're definitely not that, since you approach the medium of photography from so many angles. I think it's really interesting when artists investigate how they can stretch their discipline. Your work consists of photo collages, video animations, installations, sculptures, publications, performances and public interventions. Do you ever impose restrictions on yourself when it comes to your creative process? People can easily recognize your work, it really has your signature. How would you describe it? I mean, when you look back on the work you've created, do you see recurring aspects? What connects your pieces with each other and with you?

The way you use photography reminds me of the way Isa Genzken approaches sculpture. One of your most recent works, *AHEAD*, an installation that shows the back of people's heads, made me think of her work *Ohren* (1980), for which she portrayed the ears of women on the streets of New York. She was amazed that not a single woman refused. I believe she told Wolfgang Tillmans in a



AHEAD in Mexico City, 2017

talk: "Because I didn't ask for their face, but for something largely anonymous... The women always said, 'What, my ear? Sure!' Everyone thought it was great." I'm wondering, how did people react when you asked them if you could capture the backs of their heads? You started this project because you wanted to explore the possibilities of creating anonymous portraits. What makes privacy such an interesting concept for you to work with?

And yes, of course I'm going to check out your exhibition at Foam. *¡Agua!* centres on your investigation into the online representation of other urgent societal themes as well, such as government surveillance, pollution and climate change next to privacy, right? What hit you the most when you dove into those topics?

Speak soon,
Joline

On Nov 12, 2017, at 13:33, mail@anoukkruihof.nl wrote:

Hi, I am currently on my way to the Netherlands in the Thalys :-)

I don't see myself restricted to a discipline, but I feel more like the world around me and the field I work in does this and needs to place these labels everywhere. Do I ever impose restrictions on myself? No. I always think that since my work is quite versatile, people might not exactly recognize it and be surprised. The idea of signature is a bit dusty, non? It's more about attitude, opinion and approach.

People say that the way I use colour has some sort of strong mental impact and/or is indeed more meditatively organized in a soft hue—which works in a calming way. I guess that's true but for me it's pretty natural and instinctive how I work with colour.

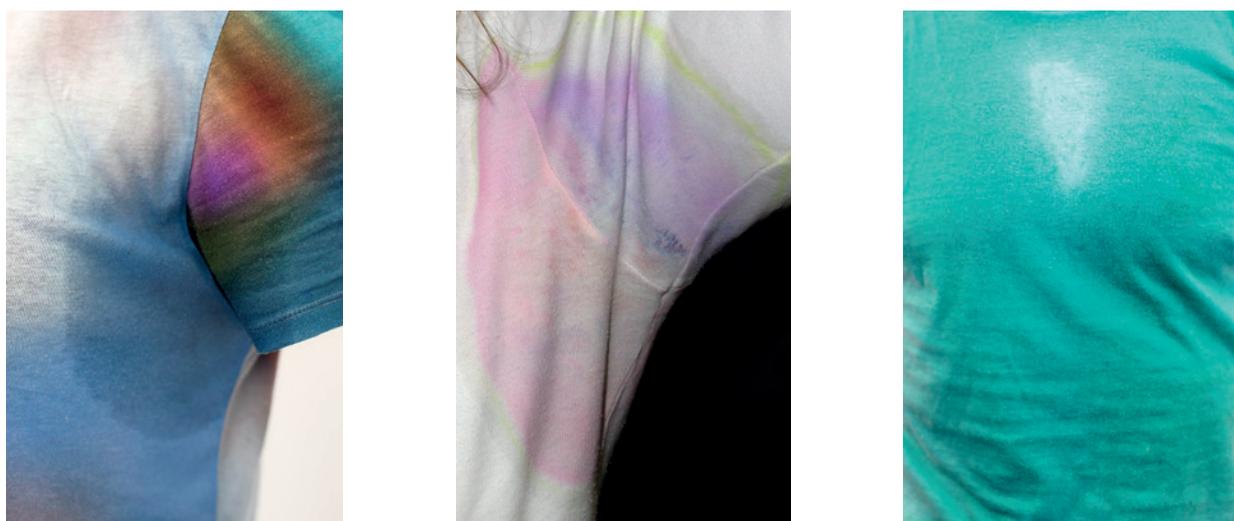
Ha-ha, who cares about their ear coming out in an art project? And more important: Isa Genzken! I would prefer to have both my ears photographed by her. Too bad I wasn't even born at that time... When I was on the street for *AHEAD*, 40% of the people, mostly in NYC, said, "No, no time." On the other hand, in Mexico we put up some example posters, and people were neatly queuing to have their picture taken. They found it fun!

I was curious about this action, where people on the street have to turn their back to me, and the associations this brought. Some people told me they were reminded of Jewish people who had to line up with their heads against the wall before they got shot. Other people screamed: "Great ANTI-SELFIES!!!" So, the reactions were quite different from one to the other. I thought it was interesting that the people in these photos were not seen as people by all social media-related face recognition technology. To me they are people, I was with them, and these are portraits too. The face is what it's about, but somehow you can still tell a lot from the back. When you see the 1,080 photos together, you can celebrate the diversity of what we have here in the world. On the other hand, you take some steps back and the heads become pixels, just like how an abstract image is built up. Human heads simply turn into pixels... That contrast interests me.

On Nov 12, 2017, at 14:27, info@glamcult.com wrote:

Hi there, almost on Dutch soil by now? :-)

Ah, yes, your use of colour. I wanted to ask you about that too, I love how it turns everything you create into a feast to look at. The best artists in my opinion know how to simultaneously stimulate the brain and satisfy the eyes. I noticed that colour gradients seem to be recurring in your work. For *AHEAD* (2014-now) you organized the images by their colour values; for your installation *Enclosed Content Chatting Away In The Colour Invisibility* (2013) you dyed books in different shades that blend together and even sweaty armpits are being transformed into poetic hues of yellow and purple for *Sweat-Stress* (2013). So what, exactly, do colours mean to you?



Sweat-stress, 2013 - 2015

On Nov 12, 2017, at 17:36, mail@anoukkruithof.nl wrote:

I just arrived in Dordrecht, where we're both from. Just told my mother that we're doing this together, she was very excited!

Anyway, thank you for saying my work is a feast for the eyes. I think it's either a feast or very black.

While I know that a work or project needs to be conceptually strong, the art pieces of course need to attract formally, visually and aesthetically on their own. But in my opinion work can never be "pleasing"—at least, I don't want to make such works. They always have to "wring" a bit, you know?

In *AHEAD*, the colour range has a clear reason. The 1,080 back-of-the-head photos were taken all over the world in various place and organized by colour; I erase other archival methods, like date, place or nationality. It's exactly that kind of idealistic mix that the project is about.



Enclosed Content Chatting Away in the Colour Invisibility, 2009 - ongoing

I didn't DYE the books of *Enclosed Content Chatting Away In The Colour Invisibility*! They are recycled and bought/found like this, so originally dyed like this, that's exactly what makes the sculpture special. It has a similar idea, the way it's calmly organized by this colour hue... it takes the brain less work to process, that's why it creates a calming, meditative effect on people. Also, when you step back very far from this wall built out of more than 3,500 books, the books become pixels and the wall forms an abstract image, with a meaning of its own.

For the *Sweaty Sculptures* and the photos called *Sweat-stress* I just asked a bunch of friends and artists to do this hardcore workout in the gallery space. I asked them to wear monochromatic clothes, as long as they had no patterns, brands or texts. So what came out was a surprise for me actually.

I think the power of colour is essential in life, given that our most important energy source is light and the entire spectrum of colour, and that the way we humans experience colours is derived from light.



Sweaty Sculptures, 2015

My new works are mostly about contamination as an assumption.

On Nov 12, 2017, at 17:53, info@glamcult.com wrote:

Ha! My mum loved it too...

What do you mean exactly by “contamination as an assumption”? That most people don’t really (or really don’t) care about the environment? Do you feel as if it’s your task as an artist to address these issues? What’s your role as an artist? Can you elaborate on what you’ve learned while creating *Ice Cry Baby*?

On Nov 12, 2017, at 18:23, mail@anoukkruihof.nl wrote:

I mean that we’re already at a point with us humans living on this planet in which we approach our caused contamination as an assumption. And yes, even though there might be possibilities to save the planet, it feels like we’re in some sort of state of mind beyond the denial of all the facts we have through science. The problem we’ve created is so humongous that it indeed petrifies us; everyone is overwhelmed by what horrible things happen in the world, day after day, but we can’t become hard as rock. Never!

My role concerns anything that gets your mind boggling: it’s what’s around us, what moves us. I don’t believe art can have an effect or needs to be political. But art can certainly move things, issues, people’s minds, ways of seeing, activating, wonder and so much more.

I always have to think of Patti Smith because so often I think, I don’t know what to do any more. It’s not okay to just be an artist, you know? It’s not enough. I have to do more and better, but what? And how? That’s very depressing and stagnating and somehow can create a blockade. Patti is always an ambassador for any creative mind to strive, to never give up, to believe in what you do, with the community, with each other, with all the various creative outcomes. And she’s right. The kind of, “Yes we can,” thing; if that spirit fades, we are way, way, way further from home.



Ice Cry Baby, 2017
Glass Over, 2017

My *Ice Cry Baby* is a three-minute video made out of amateur video footage of melting and collapsing, breaking glaciers. It will be projected gigantically and is quite an apocalyptic installation. It emphasizes how disastrous reality is aestheticized and often shared unthinkingly. A compilation of found YouTube videos of melting ice and collapsing glaciers confronts the viewer with the ongoing catastrophe. At the same time, excessive image consumption may elicit oversaturation and eventual indifference; the original clips appear to have been posted mainly for the spectacle. I critically query today’s culture of the spectacle and our digitally mediated relationship to the environment. In this work, the crashing ice comes to symbolize the imbalance between man and nature—and collective moral degradation. The sound piece is made over eight times the speed of the video. So there’s a loop of eight times the same video, but the sound comes in and out sometimes. It’s pretty ugly and horrible to hear tourists celebrating something disastrous and at the same time, quite aesthetically attractive, you know? Everything is so misleading. That’s where we are. This state of *façade*.

On Nov 12, 2017, at 18:36, info@glamcult.com wrote:

I’m sorry that I thought you dyed the books in your installation! I completely misinterpreted “coloured

books”, but this makes it even more special! I also find it interesting that it’s the second time you’ve referred to pixels: heads and books turning into pixels. It’s mesmerizing that technology can transform actual objects into tiny pixels, so I like the idea of reversing that—or rather doing exactly that with your own eyes and imagination. When did you become interested in these technologies, in the online environment and representation of things? I’m also curious, what made you pick up the camera in the first place?

Patti Smith really uses her fame to address societal issues. I think you were specifically referring to *Pathway to Paris*—a collection of artists, activists, academics, musicians and politicians fighting for climate justice together. As an artist you can make a difference. I understand what you mean when you say that the amount of images we digest causes alienation. Our notion of reality will most probably become even more mediatized in the future, with everyone using their phones as cameras all the time and posting these images online. But how do you feel about this as someone who uses photography to make a point? What do you think it will do to human relations when we go on like this? I’m specifically asking this, because *Glamcult* will feature your work in the “Modern Family” issue. I’m wondering, if you were asked to create work around that theme, what would be of interest to you within the realm of online representation to investigate?

I think that with this question we should end our online reunion! Speaking of human relations and the online world... At least I’ll see you at the opening of *iAguas!* :-)

On Nov 12, 2017, at 19:02, mail@anoukkruihof.nl wrote:

Yes, but aren’t we already there? I think photography is an extremely important and strong medium all round. Images are humans’ new global way of communicating without borders. It’s the language of the world. Eventually humans become images.

As a kid I got a camera and started photographing. In high school, around 13/14 years old, I did a photography course in the cultural centre in Dordrecht, where I learned to develop negatives and print my own black-and-white photos there.

My project *AHEAD* has elements of my ideal of “modern family”. In the end us humans are all family and that’s something we don’t see or feel. We’re family of the planet we live on too, but we forget about this. That’s why we treat each other and the planet pretty badly. The Egopocene (a step further than the Anthropocene) we’re living in right now means we have no eyes anymore for what’s further outside ourselves. We’re lost in a loop: an inside chain from our brain to our lungs and back to our heads.

I’m pretty bad at making work when other people choose a theme and I have to do “something”, that’s why I decided years ago to not do commissions any more. It simply all turns into very weak work, because I need to believe it myself—otherwise I make shitty work. It was a good realization during some of the last assignments I did, like, “Wow, how poor is that, for myself to see this?”

See you soon and thanks for typing with me!

xxx Anouk



Skimmer, 2017



MIND(fool)NESS, 2017



