

Anouk Kruithof, 32

Two years ago you heard her name spoken everywhere as word of Anouk Kruithof's energy and enthusiasm preceded her prolific artistic output, involving photography, madcap performance and social experiment. Age has made her more reflective, she tells Colin Pantall, but she's not about to slow down



Portrait © Rene Habermacher

A Dutch artist whose projects merge the social, the conceptual and the photographic, Anouk Kruithof is best-known for *Happy Birthday To You*, an artist's book that she created with the residents of a psychiatric hospital, which, coupled with her publication of a free newspaper, *The Daily Exhaustion*, won her the Prix du Jury Photographie at the Festival d'Hyères in 2011 and along with it a year's residency in New York.

Kruithof graduated from art college in the Netherlands a decade ago and has embarked on a high-energy career, powered by the people she meets and the places where she lives. Her first

project after university came about by a chance interview with a Dutch national newspaper. "When I left college, I worked as a duo with [photographer] Jaap Scheeren," says Kruithof. "We were interviewed by *Volkskrant* newspaper, which asked artists if they would fall into the metaphorical black hole after graduation. We took this term as the title of a project and made a photobook from it – it was exhibited at Foam in Amsterdam in April 2006 and got an honourable mention at the Rencontres d'Arles Book Award. It was a good beginning, but we were also doing commissions and portraits to make ends meet.

"Maybe the collaboration was a good thing because we were very young, and when you work with someone you motivate each other. If one is down, the other one brings you up. At the same time, there are a lot of collisions: there are different ways of working, so this results in a lot of time spent discussing and examining the work. All the photographers working as duos have different personalities, and they use these to bounce ideas off each other."

However, the downside of the collaboration came when she and Scheeren, who were in a relationship, broke up. Kruithof realised that

she had to become an autonomous being. This is where the energy of a city helped her develop a unique artistic practice. "I moved to Berlin as an artist-in-residence at international cultural centre Künstlerhaus Bethanien. I had a grant so this meant I didn't have to do any more commissions, and I could develop my own work using different mediums in different ways in a different place. The cultural environment was very rich, with artists from all over the world. I continued with bookmaking – releasing *Becoming Blue* and *Playing Borders* at the end of this time – as well as working with video.





2



"In some ways I wasn't good enough, but I saw how I wanted to work. The Netherlands is a great creative environment, but it is very small and everybody knows each other. In Berlin, I wasn't in my own little country. When you leave your country, it can free you and you start listening to different perspectives. You get ideas from artists from Taiwan or Ghana who have a different way of seeing things, and this is really stimulating."

The novelty of Berlin and the desire to meet new people with new ideas also appealed. "When I was a child, the most interesting people were those I didn't know, who were of a different age, nationality or background to me. My whole

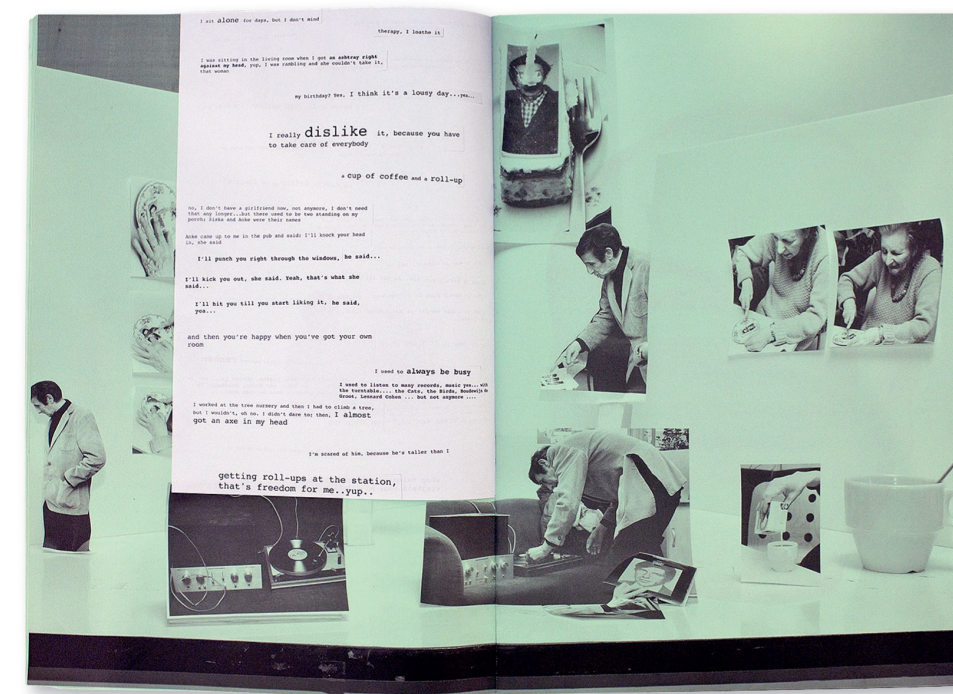
practice is based on me being a very social person. I interview a lot of people and talk to strangers. My antennae are always up."

This input from other artists has also informed Kruithof's work. She has moved from photographic work to video, developing a more spatial practice, introducing sculpture, installation, colour theory and performance, in the books she makes and the exhibitions she creates. "The thing that unifies my work is that I made it. I have a wide practice and am more of an inter-disciplinary artist than a photographer."

"There is a shared ground in the works and I take elements from one project into the next.

For example, I use colour to give a structure. I make social rules for myself and these form part of a project. I am interested in the edges of the human mind and the work I make is dynamic."

Kruithof continues to expand the artistic possibilities of her work, and to that end she is currently in New York, making work that responds to the energy and neurosis of the city. "I'm only living here because of the work," says Kruithof. "Many people are frustrated in New York. They get stuck here yet still pretend it is such a great place to live. It's tough to be here. My New York project analyses observations of the city. There is a certain craziness to New York



"MY WORK IS NOT ABOUT ONLY THE VISUAL IMAGES - IT'S ABOUT THE IDEA AND WHAT WE DO WITH PHOTOGRAPHS"

- that's what I love about it. It's a place where people want to be, but the city doesn't want them to be here. It's where people go for success and will do anything to get success. There is an absurdity to the lengths people will go for this.

"Yesterday we did a Google search for stress, found images, blew them up 3000 percent and printed off a few pixels of colour. We framed the picture, and on the back stuck a print of the original. We took 14 of them to Wall Street and asked people what they would pay for a print. They told us and we gave them a print (we would have made \$800 if we had taken money, but we didn't because of my visa regulations). Once

the print was up on the wall in their home, they sent us a picture of it. It was interesting because it was a project centred on Wall Street - a place based on the movement of imaginary money.

"My work is not about only the visual images - it's about the idea, how to arrive there, the process and what we do with photographs," she explains. "I use photography as a starting point and social interaction is often a starting point for that. The final images can be visually appealing, but the basis of all my projects is an idea, a social intervention, an interview. It is what you do with the photos in terms of presentation that fits the content of the project perfectly."

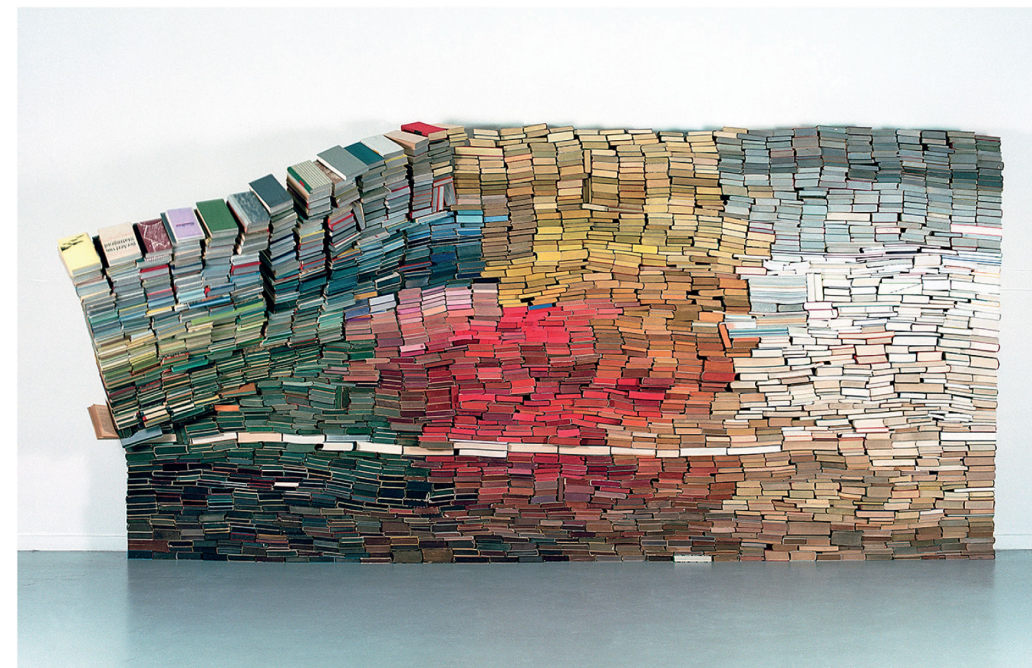
The main change that Kruithof recognises since she graduated is in how she sees her work. "I've been more reflective in the past few years, so I am doing fewer group shows, more solo work and focusing on bookmaking. People tell me: 'You should slow down and look back at what you have already done.' But with my latest work, I don't think I have slowed down. Perhaps that is because the work I am making is in New York, which is not the slowest of cities. I show the books I make to people, listen to what they say and become more conceptual and involved with writing. But there is still spontaneity." *BJP*
www.anoukkruithof.nl

1 *Wall of Fading Memory*, part of the solo show *Fragmented Entity* All Images © Anouk Kruithof

2 *From Happy Birthday To You*, her award-winning publication

3 *Enclosed Content Chatting Away in the Colour Invisibility*, 2009

4-5 *Pixel Stress*: Work in process



3



4



5