

Anouk Kruithof

Anouk Kruithof, *Sweaty Sculpture*
(denim), 2015, inkjet print on radiant
plexiglass, sponges, cellophane, radiant
plexiglass and photostickers on polysty-
rene, 112x100x50cm



“The world is dominated by images,” Anouk Kruithof’s most recent publication *The Bungalow* asserts in its opening pages. We are living in exceptional times. A vortex, a whirlpool, a torrent; call it what you will, we are drowning, caught in a tangled net of visual information. Reluctant to wade into the deluge, many sit at its edge, warily complaining about the trivial swamp of images that flood the everyday, lamenting a sinking medium. Then there are those that dive in.

Text by Sophie Wright

Anouk Kruithof. *Sweaty Sculpture (uneven)*, 2015, photostickers on polystyrene, cellophane, sponges, radiant plexiglass, 115x110x102cm

A world of images is a challenging one for an artist like Kruithof, whose practice revolves around making things we have never seen before. But it is exactly this challenge that drives her unbridled approach to photography. Moving in-between sculpture, performance, video, collage, text, artist books and installations, her conceptual work loosens photography from its archaic parameters, taking it on adventures beneath its own surface. Breaking away from the gallery wall and out of the print, it is brought back to life as an idea, to be frenetically shaped into strange incarnations of our equally strange contemporary existence. Where boundaries dissolve, new possibilities emerge and photography becomes a vital and unpredictable encounter between artist, subject and viewer. Often developed from social interventions and performances in the public sphere, Kruithof's projects pervade both the inside and outside world, making visible the peculiar corners of the human psyche.

The artist began her studies in both sculpture and photography. Despite finally ending up in the photography department, this acute awareness of the physical stuck; "The whole thing about questioning photography as a medium started with my frustrations I guess. I'd end up more in the installation, thinking about space and how people would physically react with works. You need to think about all those ingredients. To hang just a series of photos, for me, has always been difficult because I don't really see the urgency of shows in that way, especially now with the Internet." Always working on the autonomous side, her approach has never been led by a fixed notion of photography, nor defined by the tools she uses, which change with every work. The form of each project tends instead to develop from a more psychological perspective, often resulting in congregations of images and objects that play off each other, taking cue from the chaotic way we perceive images nowadays.

The viewer plays an active role in the stage set of Kruithof's installations, where images are freed from their original forms and extended across different surfaces and façades, mutating at every step; "Because I work with reflective material, the images that I use on plexiglass or photostickers on the blocks continuously change; they morph, breaking the fixation that a photo originally inherits. It's exciting because every point of view gives another perspective. You're freer to create

and frame your own world or your own pictures. I think what happens is another step after what is depicted in the images."

Transfigured objects from daily life collide with fragments and actions recorded from trips into the mind and around the body, re-visioned together in a physical space. Perhaps it's the sheer impossibility of Kruithof's aim that drives her practice; "Working with photography and talking in your work about something that is going on mentally is an impossible target. It's like, why don't you give up? You know photography is a surface and you can't really show that. It's really difficult; it's something I don't believe you can capture in a photo. But with all these projects, or how I work around it, how I address that in the works, maybe I can. That's up to other people to decide."

From early projects like *Becoming Blue*, *Playing borders this contemporary state of mind* and the *Daily Exhaustion* to more recent work, Kruithof has been drawn to the emotional and physical facets of our contemporary human condition. Both investigating, and at times celebrating, the peculiar codes of behaviour that define our society and ourselves, her focus has for some time now been settled on stress: an overlooked yet universal ailment. Intrigued by the positive and negative relationship between productivity and burnout and the fine line between sane and insane, New York, her home since late 2011, has provided a suitably manic environment to observe and engage with.

The near absurd mechanisms of a city where energy and exhaustion rub shoulders is envisaged in a group of works called *Every thing is wave*. Ever-resourceful, she makes an environment that poetically transfigures the refuse of the everyday; the ordinary household sponge is stacked up to become an imposing wall, a polystyrene block becomes host to a sweaty back bound in cellophane, the pastel light of an Apple Spectrum screensaver douses the scene in a deceptively tranquil light. The question of how to represent something intrinsically unrepresentable led to an examination on the physical qualities of stress; a colourful series of photographs of sweat-marks and a circular arrangement of photographs of men strenuously doing push-ups. Much of the material that makes up this landscape is a result of various public interventions. From organising a sweat workshop to asking business



Anouk Kruithof, *Sweaty Sculpture (spectrum)*, 2013, photostickers on polystyrene, cellophane, sponges, radiant plexiglass, 101x24x50cm



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Anouk Kruihof, *Facade*, 2014,
inkjet print on radiant plexiglass,
sponges, cellophane, photostickers
on polystyrene, bricks



Push-up (detail)

people to do as many push-ups as they can in front of large corporate buildings, social encounters are central to Kruithof's projects. These often humorous interactions reach far and wide, inviting people to step out of their everyday behaviour and engage in her practice and in the process forming new and surprising perspectives on how we look at images.

In *Pixel Stress*, Kruithof took to Wall Street with 14 pixelated prints made from blown up stock images she found after typing the word 'stress' into Google, and tried to engage business people in conversation about the works; "It was interesting because they explained their work to me which feels like an abstraction and they had to look at my works on the floor, which was abstract for them too." She then offered participants the chance to purchase a print at their suggested price, giving away the print for free once they had named a figure; an exchange based not on commerce but rather on human interaction. "I find it interesting how they look at art and what value they put on it, or the importance of exchange and the importance of a talking to a stranger." In another project *Untitled (I've taken too many photos/I've never taken a photo)*, Kruithof found someone to help edit her

automatic archive – a vast collection of photographs taken throughout her career and stored on hard-drives – through an ad that read "Did you never make a photo in your life?" The chosen participant, Harrison Medina, picked 75 images. Choosing images based on intuition, emotion and imagination, the publication documents the conversation between Kruithof and Medina – a rare and honest dissection of looking in an era of visual overload.

Running parallel to the ephemeral installations and performances is the more permanent artist book; a fixation that manifests itself in Kruithof's publishing platform *Stresspress.biz*. With a practice so indebted to movement and metamorphosis, the book presents a different range of challenges. To start with, it has a beginning and an end. But what happens in-between is something that she amuses herself with in each publication. With a tenth book in the making, each of her publications has its own distinct temperament, defying our expectations with every foldout, flap and pop-up. Each is a unique art object, a separate universe from the original photographic event where images coalesce with each other between the covers. Though a more private and



Push-up installation of 14 framed Ultrachrome prints on Hahnemuhle photorag paper, 308 gr. 1 empty frame of 30 x 40cm with projection of slide-show loop.

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intimate viewing experience, the book also transcends spatial borders, allowing ideas to travel.

For several of her most recent books, Kruithof confronts the world of images head on. A great tradition in artist books, the archive has never been so relevant as our cultural image library swells into epic proportions. Photographs are redigested, remixed and reconfigured, displaced from their origins and imagined in new environments that bear little resemblance to their past lives; “It’s a source like language. With words you would construct something and it’s the same with images. I create chapters and you go into different worlds; I see it like a the building up from a Soundcloud track.”

The way these hybrid parables are constructed reflect on the multitude of different processes now involved in how we filter reality. For *The Bungalow*, Kruithof retreated into a bungalow in the south of Holland to work alone with a vast set of images from collector Brad Feuerhelm’s extensive archive of vernacular photographs. The result says a lot about our migration to the digital landscape, where our perception of the world is multi-layered, processed both through the mind and the computer. Here, in her “screen reality”, the grey border of

the screenshot replaces the frame and images come at you all at once. Not one to jump ship from the real world, these experiments are Kruithof’s open-minded explorations of the infinite futures of photography.

Following a successful Kickstarter campaign, her next book *AUTOMAGIC* – “a limbo between fact and fiction” – is perhaps her most ambitious yet. Created using her 12 year long archive, this 1000-page compilation of analogue photomontages, screenshots, reproductions and text is built on the idea of the book as holistic; all material will be mixed in an attempt to transcend social, cultural and geographical boundaries and unify people. Journeying further and further into the world of images, Kruithof is at the helm of the ship leading us through photography’s new frontiers.



Anouk Kruithof, *Sweaty Sculpture (back)*, 2015, inkjet print on clear plexiglass, sponges, cellophane, radiant plexiglass and photostickers on polystyrene, 167x90x107cm