

# A New Look at Guest Studios

## The Netherlands / Flanders

### Flanders / The Netherlands

#### What are the current challenges for international guest studios and residence workshops in the Netherlands and Flanders?

Artist-in-residence is popular. The number of guest studios on offer is growing. This brings changes along with it. There is more mutual "competition" between guest studios. Artists are becoming more selective when making a choice from what is offered. The public, sponsors, and government are asking for recognisable results, for visibility. The quality requirements are being tightened.

- How are providers of guest studios dealing with this changing situation?
- What similarities and differences in approach exist between the Dutch guest studios and the Flemish workshops?
- What can we learn from these differences and similarities?
  
- **Two-day working visit to guest studios in Flanders:** 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> November 2007.
- **Two-day working visit to guest studios in the Netherlands:** 30<sup>th</sup> November and 1<sup>st</sup> December 2007.
- **Conference in Flemish Culture House De Brakke Grond** in Amsterdam: 1<sup>st</sup> December 2007.

#### Flanders

Organisers of Dutch guest studios travelled for two days around workshops in Flanders:

- Buda in Kortrijk
- Nadine in Brussels
- Wiels in Brussels
- FLACC in Genk
- AIR in Antwerp
- Extra presentations were given at AIR-Antwerp by Lokaal 01 from Antwerp and X=10C from Gent.

#### The Netherlands

Organisers of Flemish workshops travelled for two days, visiting guest studios in the Netherlands:

- Kaus Australis in Rotterdam
- Stichting Vrij Glas in Zaandam
- Hotel Mariakapel in Hoorn
- BAK in Utrecht
- Extra presentations were given at Kaus Australis and Hotel Mariakapel by Duende, Stichting B.a.d., Het Wilde Weten, and Kunsthuis Syb.

*"A new look at guest studios" is a project from Trans Artists and Flemish Culture House De Brakke Grond in collaboration with guest studios and workshops in the Netherlands and Flanders.*

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[www.transartists.org](http://www.transartists.org)



VLAAMS CULTUURHUIS  
DE BRAKKE GROND [www.brakkegrond.nl](http://www.brakkegrond.nl)

## **BUDA: residencies with “accomplices”**

It is morning, and our bus is squeezed onto the old, narrow bridge which leads to the BUDA “arts island” in the centre of Kortrijk, the first stop in Flanders. We reach the BUDA arts centre on foot. Within half an hour, Kristof Jonckheere and Frank de Vos have informed us about the history, the residency programme, and the current challenges faced by BUDA. The BUDA arts centre (the name of the island is derived from Budapest) came into being in 2006 as an amalgamation of three cultural organisations. The new location on the “arts island” offers many possibilities, among which are the use of other cultural buildings on the island.

BUDA is characterised by the diverse range of residencies offered: for production, for research, for collaboration, and for experimentation. The organisation wishes to tune its offer as much as possible to the wishes of the artists. This creates challenges for the centre. More and more artists are making applications to BUDA: this means that resources are becoming more thinly spread. The diversity of projects is increasing. How can one give effective guidance to all these projects, and how is it possible to fit the budget with this?

To make the residencies more visible, BUDA has chosen for some exciting solutions. A pool of approximately 100 “accomplices” have made themselves available to follow the research of the guest artists. These “accomplices” take part in “show moments” and give feedback afterwards in a discussion or via a weblog. Additionally, artists who develop new technical applications are connected with businesses. Finally, to draw the attention of the residents of Kortrijk to the existence of BUDA, container-shaped “boxes” have been placed elsewhere in the town. These can be rented for cultural purposes.

The visit to BUDA was rounded off with an ascent of the impressive “BUDA tower”, a former brewery which now houses five rehearsal spaces for guest artists. These are accessible twenty-four hours per day.

**Arts Centre BUDA, Kortrijk**  
**[www.budakortrijk.be](http://www.budakortrijk.be)**



Buda, Kortrijk

## Laboratory paradise

A beautiful old stage-front bears witness to the former function of the rear area of Nadine in Brussels. High in this space hangs the guest residence, as an inclining container. Below this is a pleasant lounge space. Ultra-modern computers sit on a long table against the old brick wall. This is PLATEAU, where artists, scientists, and theoreticians are offered the chance to work in collaboration.

Composer and artist David Helbich received the group and explained the manner in which Nadine offers artists the opportunity of a retreat from the pressure of production. How is it possible to create a place for non-production-orientated work? How can this studio work be nevertheless brought to a wider public? And, what sort of “tools” are necessary to make work processes accessible and insightful?

Every project at PLATEAU results in a publication and a DVD, so that others may gain insight into the research process. PLATEAU also provides an archive of all Nadine projects: a library and a database of visual material. There is a lot of interest in the technical workshops (intended amongst other things to improve skills in the use of computer software) from graphic artists, designers, composers, and architects.

The building also provides space for TANI, the second programme space from Nadine. Here, shorter term residencies are supported, for artists who are in the preparatory phase of their projects. TANI is a versatile working space, where artists can come with embryonic ideas. During our visit, numerous objects were laid out on the floor, perhaps props for a production. The visit made clear that Nadine satisfies a great desire among performing artists. Brussels is an international platform for performers and dancers. It is therefore of importance that a place exists where they can work in peace on the development of their newest ideas.

**Nadine, Brussels**  
**Trans-disciplinary laboratory for contemporary artists**  
[www.nadine.be](http://www.nadine.be)

## Pressure away from the crowd: Wiels in Brussels

That it can be busy even away from limelight was demonstrated by a visit to Wiels, a brand new mega-residence in Brussels. “Creating an oasis of calm in the overheated contemporary art world” is the motto of Wiels, writes director Dirk Snauwaert in the project's programme booklet. This statement of intent does not necessarily make Wiels a quiet place. The monumental turbine hall of the former brewery near Brussels South station prickles one's

curiosity, and the enormous copper beer vats further entice visitors in. The area where these vats were not replaced after the renovation of the building provides space for eye-catching art. During our visit, Wiels was adorned with an gigantic pink balloon with black spots by the Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama. A group of visitors taking part in a tour stood around. Wiels wishes namely to attract visitors, to be lively, to draw attention to art. For this reason, the art space is orientated towards the street, and much attention is given to tours and education.

Director Dirk Snauwaert leads us in to the second, freshly-painted, wing of the building: the workshop wing for guest artists. Here too the dimensions are gigantic. The programme is also ambitious, with six Belgian artists and three from other countries. The focus is on visual art, since there are already enough residencies for performing artists in Brussels, Snauwaert explains.

Wiels is an institute where the conception, production, presentation, reflection upon, and facilitation of art, as well as art education, can find place in one ongoing process. The residence naturally forms a part of this. Other art spaces could certainly learn from this example.

**Wiels Centre for Contemporary Art, Brussels**  
[www.wiels.org](http://www.wiels.org)



Nadine, Brussel



Wiels, Brussel

## Close to the skin of the artist: FLACC in Genk

In the leafy mining village of Genk, the beautiful Casino Modern building certainly stands out. In former times, this building was brought into being for the cultural enlightenment of the mineworkers. It is now a centre for various cultural festivals, and the home of FLACC.

After an introductory talk in the large theatre hall, Steven Op De Beeck lead the group of visitors around the building: professionally-equipped studios for metal- and woodwork, a digital studio, and a kiln studio for ceramics, bronze, and glass applications.

In the kiln studio, ceramicist Anne Wenzel was at work on the finishing touches of a new work: an enormous black, ghostly chandelier. She explained about the unusual approach of FLACC. From the outset, the centre works in collaboration with the artist to find the way towards realisation of a work which could only take place thanks to the setting of the workshop. Op De Beeck pointed out the made-to-measure approach that FLACC wishes to offer. This often takes the form of large-scale projects, although this is not required. The length of the residence varies from artist to artist. Sometimes, the artist has been working for several years in his or her studio with the preparations before spending a week at FLACC, whereas the on-site collaboration can also last more than a year.

During a hearty lunch, challenges also came to be discussed. In order to realise projects, FLACC deploys subsidies flexibly and works as much as possible in collaboration with other institutions. Museums can display the results, and facilities can be shared with academies. This indisputably asks much from the staff of FLACC. Everyone was impressed by the considerable engagement of FLACC with the artist, which is brought into focus by the requirements of the work period. To be as little as possible an institute, and as close to the skin of the artist: that is the motto of FLACC.

**FLACC, Genk**  
**[www.flacc.info](http://www.flacc.info)**



Flacc, Genk

## AIR Antwerp

Cosy *and* functional serves as the best description of the former lock-keeper's house in which AIR Antwerp is established. Upon a small industrial island, on the border between the old and new harbour, this is an ideal spot for work *and* reflection: peace and quiet, space, light, water, and the beautiful harbour building in the distance. Not to mention the museums and galleries of Antwerp, ten minutes away by bicycle.

The lock-keeper's house offers the ambience of a villa, in which guests can make themselves at home. A number of clever architectural interventions indicate the conceptual function of the building. On the ground floor, a presentation and discussion area is separated from the rest of the villa by a wall of bright red plastic strips. On the first floor is the office of the art magazine Gagarin. In short, AIR Antwerp is a place to put heads together and to reflect upon the position of art. After the tour, curator and artist Alan Quireyns made clear that while ambitions for AIR are high, the organisers have a realistic vision of what is possible. The centre wants to work professionally, rather than exhausting volunteers. The continual changes in cultural policy by the authorities require an independent, stable programme with small-scale presentations, lectures, workshops, and debates. AIR Antwerp is an international base station for its guests: a place to meet other artists, and to orientate oneself within the Flemish art world. In order to provide facilities, the centre works in collaboration with Lokaal 01 and other institutes.

**Alan Quireyns**  
**AIR Antwerp**  
**[www.airantwerpen.be](http://www.airantwerpen.be)**

### **Presentations Lokaal 01 and X=10c**

Lokaal 01 and X=10c also gave presentations on their part in the Flemish residency scene at AIR Antwerp.

### **X=10c**

Anyone who wishes to establish an artist-in-residence programme must begin with a critique of the residency phenomenon, argues Christoph de Jaeger from the Ghent-based initiative X=10c. This meeting place and discussion platform came into being as the consequence of a collaboration with SMAK, and arose out of the desire for a place for reflection. Such deep reflection stands foremost, not least of which upon the residency phenomenon. During a whirlwind Powerpoint presentation, Christoph de Jaeger asked namely if it is necessary for artists to travel the world, "hopping from one residency to the next"? Some artists have never found such an experience abroad necessary, and instead seek the essence of their art in their own daily surroundings. They can achieve such depth in this that their message

becomes nevertheless universal.

Therefore, asserts De Jaeger, X=10c wishes first to seek the essence: what does X=10c wish to offer its candidates? To offer insight into the beliefs and ways of life in Ghent is perhaps more interesting than sticking to production budgets, or developing a new network or a more colourful CV. For this reason, X=10c has chosen to offer artists and researchers a "laboratory situation", in collaboration with curators, critics, or scientists. Projects can achieve practical form in the halls of the Acec building and in spaces of the Liedts-Meesen foundation.

**X=10c**  
**[www.existentie.be](http://www.existentie.be)**

### **Lokaal 01**

Lokaal 01 offers work periods in their project space in Antwerp. The space is made available to the artist for three weeks on the basis of a project proposal. The facilities are practical and basic. Frederik Vergaert points out that a visual result is important for Lokaal 01, therefore the guest works towards a public presentation. During their stay, the guest is not left to fend for themselves; Lokaal 01 attracts experienced artists in order to offer coaching to young artists during the production process.

Vergaert explains that Lokaal 01 is not afraid to impose conditions. Artists are only invited on the basis of plans that are challenging and refreshing. This is of prime importance. All sorts of artists are welcome: international and local artists who wish to conduct preparatory or follow-up research, students from art academies and postgraduate programmes, as well as researchers from disciplines such as architecture, design, and science.

**Lokaal 01**  
**[www.lokaal01.be](http://www.lokaal01.be)**



Air Antwerp

## Mini-conference at Kaus Australis

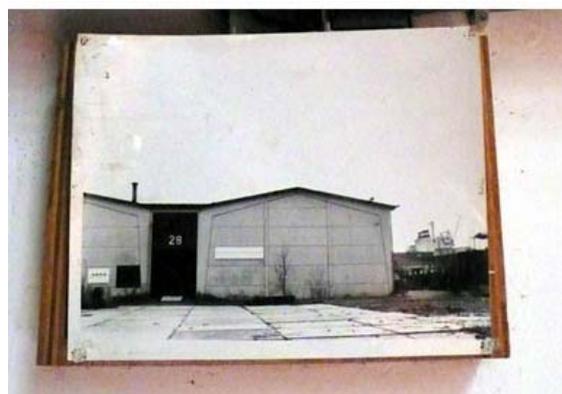
From the outset at Kaus Australis in Rotterdam, things fell into place for our little group from Flanders and the Netherlands. The presentation by Kaus Australis and the other guest studios developed by itself into a mini-conference on the challenges faced by guest studios. All those present emphasised that collaboration is important. For this reason, five guest studios from Rotterdam - Stichting B.a.d., Kaus Australis, Kunst & Complex, Duende and Het Wilde Weten - have taken the initiative and established a common platform: the Bureau Buitenland Rotterdam (Rotterdam Foreign Office). The question of how far you can go in combining forces persists, however. There are considerable differences of opinion on this matter.

“Tread carefully with institutionalisation”, states Erik Wijntjes from Kaus Australis. He said that the differences between artists' residencies must in fact be placed at the forefront. It is in these differences, he argued, that the quality of each guest studio lies, despite the fact that guest studios are at heart quite similar; the key words are and remain independence and hospitality. Each and every guest studio desires to realise these things, argues Bezemer.

Karin Trenkel from the guest studio Duende accentuated the advantages and the necessity of common action, coordination, and policy. The prosperous years for guest studios, in the Rotterdam of the 1990's, are long gone. In that time, the Rotterdam Centre for Visual Art rented space from the guest studios for foreign guests. This support has now dried up. “Too often, artist-in-residence programmes still operate as exotic islands where the guests are primarily focussed on themselves and other guests”, he states. “If a consistent policy were to appear, if we were better able to tune the various residency models in the city in to each other, and if we were able to enlarge our financial means, then it would be possible to break through that isolation, to work on increasing our visibility and on reaching a broader public”.

A first initiative towards more collaboration has already proved to be remarkably successful: a common presentation from the guest studios from Rotterdam, “Home Is Somewhere Else”, at Duende. At least three hundred visitors came to the event, which included food and music; an initiative that begs repetition therefore. However, when it comes to further collaboration, particularly with regard to policy and programming, things are not so simple. This is not very surprising. The guest studios are often characterised by their differences: their location, history, the organisers, and the guests. This became abundantly clear during the presentations at Kaus Australis,

including those from initiatives from outside of Rotterdam.



Kaus Australis, Rotterdam



Marianne Fontijn, Kunst & Complex; Karin Trenkel, Duende

## Presentations at Kaus Australis

### Freedom: Kunst & Complex

Freedom and independence are of foremost importance at Kunst & Complex. Marianne Fontijn explained the history of Kunst & Complex, a studio complex which has existed since 1980 and which is established in a former school building. Three spaces are now available for guests, with a total area of 130m<sup>2</sup>. By order of the fire brigade, it is unfortunately no longer possible to stay overnight. Thankfully, the rent is very low. It is primarily Dutch guests from Rotterdam who use the space to carry out projects. The artists can determine their work period at their own discretion, and can choose themselves if they wish guidance or to give a presentation. Considering the large number of applications, it may be said that there is a great demand for this form of residency, where the initiative lies with the guest.

### Spin-off: Duende

Maarten Janssen and Karin Trenkel explained the policy and programming of Duende. Duende has 40 studios in total, of which three - with living accommodation - are intended for guests. An unusual development is the contract between Duende and the Kulturstiftung from Hesse in Germany, which has been in place for three years. The foundation hires one studio at Duende. Selection takes place in Germany and the lucky chosen person may stay for a year at Duende. This rather chic foundation consciously made the choice for an artists' initiative in the working city of Rotterdam above that of an expensive apartment in Amsterdam. This arrangement delivers an income for Duende, with which the other guest studios are supported. Janssen and Trenkel are not resting on their laurels, however. To enlarge the spin-off, they want to work in greater collaboration with other guest studios in Rotterdam.

### A place to be lived in: Stichting B.a.d.

Stichting B.a.d. is a place to be lived in. That is the starting point and also the state of things in practice at B.a.d., a living and working space for artists which was established in 1992 in a squat building in the Charlois district of Rotterdam. This must be to your taste if you are a guest artist, tells Anne Schiffer. Retreating to your studio to work in isolation is not the idea. There are families with children, there are always people in the kitchen who will ask what you are busy with, and the large garden is often the venue for parties. The neighbourhood, a close community, is always curious and interested in what is going on. In the light of this social atmosphere, Stichting B.a.d. will take into consideration whether a candidate is prepared to be social and to get to know the city and the neighbourhood.

## New initiatives

### Het Paleis, Groningen

Het Paleis is a new and impressive "cultural collection building" which is currently taking shape in the centre of Groningen. The former chemistry laboratory of the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen is being converted in stages into a cultural breeding-place. Petra Koonstra, an artist who has been closely involved with bringing Het Paleis into being, explained about the artist-in-residence programme which is in development. There will be two guest studios for artists from diverse disciplines. Koonstra has established through experience that a lot is possible in the "creative industry"; the chances are there for the taking. However, she adds that before you know it, everyone is busy with their own thing and the overall vision becomes lost: a residency will stand or fall on the basis of its programme, and on the basis of consistent and stable representation.

### De Bewaerschole, Zeeland

The characteristic former kindergarten built in 1874 in Haamstede in Zeeland has served as a cultural centre since 1982. It is a pretty, intimate building for exhibitions and projects. The programme is modest, although nevertheless ambitious. Marinus van Dijke, member of the working group "De Bewaerschole", took part in both the Flemish and Dutch parts of "A new look at guest studios", in order to explore the possibilities of a guest studio programme. "De Bewaerschole" is not afraid of long-term projects. So it is then that they have entered into a collaboration with the readership Art and Public Space at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, a project which stretches out over a year. Content stands foremost, states Van Dijke. Any artist-in-residence programme must be tuned in with this.



Anne Schiffer, Stichting B.a.d.

## Glass Power! Vrij Glas, Zaandam

After passing a garish row of furniture shops in Zaandam, the bus swerves onto a rather swampy dike. Next to us flows the Noordzeekanaal (North Sea Canal). Having passed a wide checkpoint, the bus stops on the Hembrug terrein, an area of land which could well do service as the set for a Cold War film. Not so very long ago, this area was full with bombs and grenades. Now however, this former munitions depot has become the workshop of Stichting Vrij Glas.

Visual artist and initiative-taker at Vrij Glas Anna Carlgren lead the company around, immediately confronting us with the two most important challenges faced by Vrij Glas: "How do you finance a 'grass-roots' initiative such as ours? And how can you keep to the ideal of international hospitality in the jungle of restrictive regulations for residence permits?" Join forces, was Carlgren's immediate answer. Much is within reach with the necessary staying power, or better said with the necessary fighting spirit.

These days it is impossible to think of the Dutch artist-in-residence sector without Vrij Glas. Carlgren is building on close relationships with academies and cultural centres in the Netherlands and further afield, since Vrij Glas is firmly established in the international glass-working network. However, most important of all is day to day practice. During our visit, the glass ovens roared and artist Alicia King lead the visitors in glass-blowing.



Anna Carlgren (on the left), Vrij Glas



Alicia King at work



Vrij Glas, Zaandam

## Continuity in the periphery: Hotel Mariakapel, Hoorn

In the chapel of the former orphanage in Hoorn, now in use as project and exhibition space, dinner was ready. First though came presentations from the host, Hotel Mariakapel, from Kunsthuis Syb from Beetsterzwaag, and from the guest studio M4 from Amsterdam.

Continuity is the most important challenge for guest studios in general and for Hotel Mariakapel in particular, told co-founder Daniëlle van Zuijlen. For both running and programming, and indeed for all facets of an artist-in-residence programme, continuity is of essential importance. This is the conclusion which she has reached after spending five years, together with Bart Lodewijks, at the helm. Being a good host and hostess, being able to offer facilities and funds, fighting for subsidies and political support, clear programming, production as well as presentation: all these facets require an enormous amount of staying power. This continuity can be provided for a long time by the same people, but a change of the guard will sooner or later be necessary. After five years, two new curators are to take over: Jantine Wijnja and Daniël Dennis de Wit.

The most important thing is to be able to offer hospitality under a variety of circumstances, stated Van Zuijlen. Hospitality would seem to go without saying, but how does one ensure that there are enough enthusiastic helpers to be able to support and to guide the artists? How will this function when the guest studio lies on the periphery, without an art academy or other form of higher education in the area, and where it is by no means certain that new people will find their own way to the guest studio?

Unusually, Hotel Mariakapel functions as a “group residency”: there are always multiple guest artists present (often from other countries), who work together on a work presentation in the monumental former chapel. In this way, the group process will always lead to a concrete result. This generates satisfaction and arises interest from the public.

## Professional Goodwill: Kunsthuis Syb, Beetsterzwaag

Kunsthuis Syb lies even further away than Hotel Mariakapel from the cultural centres of the western Netherlands. In this little place, the number of visitors is stable. Financial means will always be limited. Wytske Visser, Maartje Peters, and Emily Williams have made a virtue out of this necessity: namely that this situation allows a lot of freedom. Of prime importance is that exciting projects with interesting content take place there.

Curators are invited to facilitate a five-week-long collaboration; academies have also been involved. Guests have a lot of freedom - process and experiment are central, and the working period need not necessarily lead to a finished presentation. Despite this, the requirement does exist that the Kunsthuis is open every weekend, and that there is at least one public moment for which publicity is prepared. Documentation is also important, to which end a writer is invited to be involved in every project.

During the seven years that Kunsthuis Syb has been in existence, it has become apparent that it keeps going on the basis of the goodwill of a large group of volunteers, who carry out a diverse range of tasks; there is only one paid coordinator. Volunteers feel a sense of responsibility, which is important. And “in exchange” for this, they are involved in the realisation of fascinating projects.



Hotel Mariakapel, Hoorn

## Artistic Research: BAK, Utrecht

Curator Binna Choi received our party in the awkward visitors' space at BAK in Utrecht. She made it apparent that the research-in-residence programme at BAK has a very clear profile. It comes down to "artistic research" which relates to the interest BAK has in analysis of and critique upon the structures of our society. Guests are invited to research such themes as immigration and terrorism. Work periods need not necessarily lead to a presentation. There are however workshops, lectures, and discussions at set times, where the public can exchange thoughts and opinions with the guest.

The conversation quickly turned to the challenges faced by the research-in-residence programme. How does one anticipate the desires of the guests, despite the demanding programming at BAK? And, in which way is it possible to link guests, who function foremost in an international circuit, with the locality? What do their visits do for us, here? And what sort of effect to we, at BAK, have on their visit? Choi emphasised that these sort of questions are relevant for most artist-in-residence centres. Her wish is that the agenda of the nomadic "cultural practitioner" should come under the microscope.

After this lively discussion, we walked through the centre of Utrecht towards the BAK studio house. Artist Ashley Hunt and choreographer Taisha Paggett from Los Angeles were busy putting the finishing touches to a performance based on their research at BAK. Both were extremely enthusiastic about the possibilities that their work period at BAK had offered, in particular the time and the freedom to pursue theoretical research in parallel with their artistic development.



Mohad Saidi (Lokaal 01) in visit to BAK

## Artists, Go Home!

*Mariëtte Dölle*

Yesterday, the open studio day of the most famous artist-in-residence centre in the Netherlands took place, namely the Rijksacademie. I conducted a straw poll of the visitors: did they find artist-in-residence programmes important?

Rob Bizra (visual artist) finds it mainly something for the uncertain artist. "Why do they stay so long in residence institutes? The need to get outside!"

A galleryholder from Knokke (Stephane Simoens) said that then open days at the Rijksacademie offered a perfect opportunity for talent scouting.

Lars Eijssen (an artist living in the Bijlmer in Amsterdam) had a complaint: "All my friends and colleagues are away when I want to invite them for my birthday!"

Rein van der Lugt (cultural commissioner at the municipal authority in Enschede) found artist-in-residence a brilliant idea, and took the decision on the spot to integrate an artist-in-residence facility into the cultural plan for the city of Enschede.

Sara van der Heide (visual artist, just back from a residence at ISP in New York) said: "Residence?! Actually, after my year as a guest artist, I wanted to move to New York. That didn't work out though, and now I'm back in the Netherlands. My residency did have a positive effect on my career though, since my first large solo show will take place in January at De Pont in Tilburg!"

Paul Perry (artist and teacher at the Rijksacademie) said: "I was recently in the guest studio Kunst & Complex in Rotterdam, and who did I come across? Fantastic! A 70-year old Canadian artist, who is still doing residencies. This is how it should be: we must all journey around the world as nomads!"

Francesca Grilli (Italian artist currently in residence at the Rijksacademie) said that a residency offered first and foremost financial possibilities: "If you don't have a gallery in Italy, or other financial means to make work, then you will not get very far. Thanks to the Rijksacademie, I now can. My work is still about Italy, but is being financed by the Netherlands."

In short, opinions vary considerably.

What do I think of artist-in-residences? As the artistic leader of Tent. in Rotterdam, I am very locally-focussed, since Tent. is subsidised to make

exhibitions about local artists. Therefore, I travel rarely, at the most by public transport to the edge of the city. When it comes to residencies in Rotterdam, I look most of all to the effect that they have on the cultural infrastructure of the city.

In my former position as project leader of *Beyond*, an art project in the new-build district of Leidsche Rijn in Utrecht, things were somewhat different. There, an artist-in-residence programme was part of the project. We asked artists to carry out "active" residencies, aligned with the societal context of a new-build neighbourhood, with the community in the making. They were successful projects, with a very high "1990's content", to refer to Nicolas Bourriaud's *Esthétique Relationelle*. But times have changed.



Rijksacademie, Amsterdam

### New perspectives

The network of guest studios in Rotterdam is unique. These guest studios are organised by and for artists, and have existed for some twenty years. Initiatives such as B.a.d., Kaus Australis, Het Wilde Weten, and Duende ensure a lively, international exchange. The artistic community in Rotterdam does not stop at the city limits; it is demonstrably a European concern.

Despite this strong anchoring in Rotterdam, they remain vulnerable, for three reasons in particular:

1. Lack of visibility.
2. The attitude of the authorities.
3. Inadequate development of the artistic programmes of the residencies.

### Lack of visibility

Much has changed in the Rotterdam art world in the last two years. Different artistic leaders, privatisation, a committee for culture, rebuilding, and scores of new initiatives. It is noticeable that the guest studios rarely if ever play a role in this. In my opinion, this stems from the fact that they concentrate on the function of "refuge for research". The residence of the guest works in the service of the process, and not of presentation.

Through this, the guest studios lack contacts, and they do not build networks with the presentation institutions and with clients and commissioning agencies.

## **The authorities**

The municipal authorities in Rotterdam embrace the artist-in-residence phenomenon, but provide limited financial support. It appears from this that guest studios are seen as a cheap alternative for expensive exhibition spaces. It is to the benefit of the authorities that artists do so much work on a voluntary basis for “their” guest studios. They get by on a limited budget, and guests are often asked to make a contribution to this. The consequence of this is that only a certain type of artist comes to Rotterdam. The city offers only “low budget” hospitality. Compare this with the Rijksacademie, where “international career artists” are wrapped in cotton wool.

## **Programme**

“Refuge for research” and “process”: it is sometimes all too easy. Everything is open, and in this way everything is dependent upon the artist: the content, the identity, the profile, and the necessity of the programme. This is a bit cheap compared with the current consideration in contemporary art for such grand themes such as history, politics, and questions about society. If you want to deal with these things, then thorough knowledge is crucial. The question then arises as to whether you will get very far with a residency of at most a few months.

And, how essential is a residency in a new environment for the making of refreshing, site-specific work which is engaged with society? Perhaps it is all just about enlarging your international network? Compare this for a moment with “community arts” projects which have been taking place for years. I would name Bureau Optrek in the Hague, where two artists develop projects in and for the neighbourhood in which they both live and work. Another example would be Florijn in the Bijlmer, where artists make work about the place and its inhabitants. In my opinion, this delivers more interesting work than that produced at the guest studio in the same neighbourhood, BijlmAir, by artists who come from elsewhere and who only stay a few months. Or, take the gallery De Ruimte in Crooswijk in Rotterdam. There, an artist has established a programme about “autonomous art” in six empty buildings in her own district. On her own, she has created a new cultural infrastructure in her own street. Her initiative is also cheered by local shopkeepers and others, who are more than happy with the extra public on the street.

In short, artists certainly do not need to go far from home in order to make interesting, site-specific work.

All things being considered, the residencies are unintentionally complicit in the increasing invisibility of art and of artists. For me, it is important that an artist stays close to the skin of the public, that he or she is active, and also visible. My recommendation for the future is that artist-in-residence programmes not only concentrate on research and process, but also on presentation.

To close, a quick return to the Rijksacademie. There stood six enormous tour buses before the door. In the first instance I thought of bus-loads of visitors, but it later turned out that this was an art project by Maze de Boer: a subtle comment on the nomadic, jet-set behaviour of many artists and curators in the art world. Artists, Go Home!

*Mariëtte Dölle is programme leader of TENT. in Rotterdam*

## Colophon

### *A new look at guest studios The Netherlands - Flanders*

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## Conference “A new look at guest studios” De Brakke Grond

The starting point of this conference was the formation of opinions on the current challenges for guest studios and workshops in the Netherlands and Flanders, on the basis of the experience of the working visits. A number of speakers set the subject matter in order.

### Demonstrating necessity

Elke van Campenhout - chief editor of the performance magazine *Etcetra* and dramatist at the workshop “Nadine” in Brussels - began with the state of affairs in the Flemish workshops.

“Workshops are a relatively new phenomenon in Flanders. In 2004, they were first recognised as filling a separate category from the existing category of art centres. The workshops are intended for pure artistic research. They are places where artists are protected from the pressure to produce and to present. In this way, the process can stand central and there can be room for reflection. The public function is not the most prominent.

Every workshop has its own identity. There are great differences between the workshops, both in terms of discipline and ways of working. There are also considerable differences between the workshops which existed before 2004 and the workshops which (local) government has since brought into being. The older workshops have often been established through the initiative of artists, whereas the newer ones have come about through the combination of various institutes who had been developing workshop-like activities. The authorities expect that the workshops serve as a gateway to the art centres and museums, and that they must most of all be geared towards young artists. However, their budgets are severely limited.

Every workshop has its own specialism. The workshops are thus not for everyone.

My recommendation is that workshops take a critical look at their public function and at the manner in which they profile themselves.

Transparency is important. This will help in convincing the authorities and the public of the necessity of the workshops.

### Do not standardise

Alan Quireyns - one of the driving forces behind AIR-Antwerp - pointed out that in the current situation, we must not place the workshops under the knife as if they have existed so long that change for change's sake was needed.

“The term 'workshop' has only existed here for three years. What is exactly meant by this has not yet crystallised. At present, there is only one commission which judges all subsidy requests for the workshops. The visual arts have only a small stake in this, and draw the short straw as far as subsidies are concerned. The workshops have thus proposed that the subsidy system is organised on the basis of discipline.

A common characteristic is that the majority of the workshops focus themselves on Flemish artists - notwithstanding AIR-Antwerp and Wiels. There are therefore more “national” than “international” residencies in Flanders. This is a very important difference from the more international orientation of the guest studios in the Netherlands.

Yet another important facet of the Flemish visual art workshops is that they are mostly geared towards individual artistic research. In the performing arts, artists work much more in collaboration, often too with people from other disciplines. In that area, there is logically more talk of presentation for the public. It is important not to standardise this as a norm in the visual arts. In short, do not make general statements about *the* workshops.



Lunch at De Brakke Grond

## Clear profiling

Hanna Sohler looked back at the results of the research that she carried out for Trans Artists in 2005 and 2006 into the history and diversity of guest studios in the Netherlands.

“Artists are positioning themselves as less dependent, including being less dependent upon guest studios and workshops. They are seeking out alternative circuits themselves in which to make and exhibit work. Next to this, they are working more on the basis of projects, including with artists from other disciplines. Guest studios could do more to anticipate this, and to develop more hybrid forms of residencies. Of course, the ideal guest studio does not exist; the aim is to find agreement between the wishes of the artist and what can be offered by the guest studio.”

I believe that clear profiling is one of the most important requirements for the future of guest studios. It would then become clearer what the differences were between the various guest studios, and artists would be able to make better choices.

## Stick to your own course

Steven Op De Beeck, director of FLACC in Genk, argued that the workshops must stick to their own, indeed stubborn, course.

“For us, the starting point for every collaboration is the practice of the artist. This delivers a great variation in projects, where FLACC time and again plays a different role and the understanding of the term 'workshop' takes on a different function and definition. One moment the 'workshop' is occupied with an intensive collaboration between artists, agencies or organisations outside of FLACC, and the next moment an artist is busy with an individual work period within our walls. In every case, FLACC also learns something about its own functioning and goals; in the case of a film, we must take on the role of producer and get involved with budgets and suchlike, whereas in other cases we mostly function as a studio or presentation space.

All the same, we must fulfil certain requirements, both towards our subsidy providers and the public. It is not our top priority, but we do organise a public “showing moment” once per month. However, it is not our role to facilitate a wave of visitors to Genk. We prefer to establish bonds with museums in the surrounding towns, who can fill the role of presentation space much more effectively. Collaboration with other institutes and academies, such as the Jan van Eyck academy, is important. In this way, we can fit our facilities and theirs better with each other. All things being considered, we try our best to be as little of an institution and as close to the skin of the artist as possible.”

## Make clear what you stand for!

Daniëlle van Zuijlen, co-founder of Hotel Mariakapel in Hoorn, drew the following conclusion from the lectures:

“Many workshops and guest studios would choose between: 'as close as possible to the skin of the artist', or indeed 'as close as possible to the skin of the public'. That is an essential difference in attitude, which will determine the make up of an artist-in-residence programme. For example, should you take the neighbourhood or surroundings as a starting point, and go looking for artists for whom working in this artistic context can mean something? Or instead, should you take the artist him- or herself as starting point, and look to how you can best support him or her? These are two totally different ways of working, with different results.

Naturally, the one does not need to exclude the other. You can take the liberty of putting central on the one occasion a private, introverted period of research, and on the next a project which is focussed on collaboration with the neighbourhood. In the first case, it would be strange to judge the project on the basis of public visibility, whereas in the second it would just as strange not to do so. As long as it is clear to the outside what you stand for.”

## Evaluation

The differences between the Dutch guest studios and the Flemish workshops are considerable. This also applies to all the residencies mutually. So large are they in fact, that it is almost impossible to make any general statements about the current challenges.

The division between the Flemish and Dutch situation proved to be instructive: In Flanders, recent subsidies for workshops (in particular for the visual arts) have created totally new opportunities. The workshops are a fresh achievement there. At the same time, the subsidies are not only a blessing, but also a curse. The workshops are confronted with all manner of conditions which they must meet. At the same time, the authorities can be very fickle with regard to policy. All the same, the organisers of the workshops do not appear to be grumbling too much. Make do with what you have, and be creative. This positive attitude serves to generate enthusiasm.

Most Dutch guest studios receive little or no subsidy. This creates a lot of freedom and space for artistic research of the kind that is not so easy to weigh up. This is also an achievement. All the same, the organisers of the Dutch guest studios seem to be getting themselves wound up even more than their Flemish colleagues with all sorts of requirements, from being more publicly-focussed to professionalisation and clearer profiling. The necessity of making choices when one has such freedom makes itself clearly felt.

In any case, whether Flemish or Dutch, the participants in the conference could recognise the three most important challenges:

- Increasing the visibility of the guest studios and workshops.
- Defence and improvement of the current position of guest studios and workshops.
- Clearer profiling of individual programmes.

The most fundamental proved to be the challenge of demonstrating the necessity of residencies, while at the same time avoiding attaching a standardising model to this.

These challenges prompted the following questions, which arose time and again:

- Is a focus on artistic research sufficient to justify the existence of an artists' residency?
- Can we devise forms of presentation which can effectively show what happens in the workshops?
- How far can we go in joining forces?
- How can we better integrate the guest studios and workshops into the art world?
- How can one combine consistent programming with the differences in desires of the guests?

No simple answers arose to these questions, and this was in any case not the intention. "A new look at guest studios" was a unique opportunity to gain thorough knowledge of the artist-in-residence scene in the Netherlands and Flanders. The working visits made it possible to take a look on-site, to get into the topic, and to make a contribution to the forming of opinions on the future of the artist-in-residence sector in the Netherlands and Flanders.