Talks and Events Calendar

Exhibition Catalogue
This exhibition is accompanied by a new publication designed by Irma Boom.
ISBN 9781900470636
400 pages, colour illustrations
Available from the bookshop priced £15

The exhibition DVD is available from the bookshop priced £15.

On Television: Ian White
Wednesday 30 May, 6.30–7.30pm.
Tickets £4/£3 concession. Booking essential.
This talk explores the relationship between film and video artists such as Mik's use of the documentary in their filmmaking, and television. Through British video art of the 1980s and Aernout Mik's current exhibition – the talk illuminates the adequacy and inadequacy of television as an exhibition format, its formal influence on the medium and the transference from the small screen to the gallery space.

Dan Graham's Art as Design/Design as Art: John Marshall and Dr. Troels Degn Johansson
Monday 19 June, 6.30–7.30pm. Free. Booking essential.
This talk marks the 20th anniversary of the publication by Dan Graham and The Fruitmarket Gallery of the text 'Art as Design/Design as Art' which explored the sources of Graham's work *Interior Design for Space Showing Videotapes*, 1986. This talk will look at contemporary art practice in the context of this important text.

Ways of Seeing Gallery Tour
Thursday 5 July, 11.30am–1.30pm. Free.
A guided tour of the Aernout Mik exhibition for over 60s led by freelance educator Mary Keegan.

To book for all talks and events, contact **the bookshop**
P 0131 226 8181 **E** bookshop@fruitmarket.co.uk

This guide is available in large print, on tape and by email.
Please ask at the bookshop for an alternative format guide or contact
P 0131 226 8181 **E** bookshop@fruitmarket.co.uk

The Fruitmarket **Gallery**
45 Market Street, Edinburgh EH1 1DF
P +44 (0) 131 225 2383 **F** +44 (0) 131 220 3130
info@fruitmarket.co.uk www.fruitmarket.co.uk

Aernout Mik
Shifting Shifting

Exhibition 19 May – 11 July 2007

Opening Hours Mon–Sat 11am–6pm, Sun 12–5pm
Admission free

Shifting Shifting is organised by Camden Arts Centre with The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, Bergen Kunsthall and Kunstverein Hanover.
The exhibition is supported by the Mondriaan Foundation.
Additional support from the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The Fruitmarket **Gallery**
45 Market Street Edinburgh EH1 1DF
P +44 (0) 131 225 2383 **F** +44 (0) 131 220 3130
info@fruitmarket.co.uk www.fruitmarket.co.uk

Scottish Arts Council

I trained as a sculptor, and when I started out, I worked as a sculptor. At some point in the early 90s, the sculptures started to develop into installations or situations. Then I found myself working with live elements, either animals or people, who came to inhabit these situations and consequently I became more interested in the sculptural presence of action and with live elements in a space. From there it was a short step towards video. But what I really wanted to do was bring video back into space as a physical element(…) When I started working with video, I focused on small groups of people and the work was relationship-based. It came out of a sculptural attitude – simple gestures or very simple situations that held a certain kind of tension. Then my work became more about public spaces and started to develop on a larger scale, moving towards things that have a socio-political meaning. But in place of a scenario, I focus on relationships, the balance between different elements or between incidents. For me the most important thing is the tone and that comes about through the relationship between a crisis and its resolution, or action and non-action. It's a much more static thing than a narrative or scenario.
Aernout Mik, Interviewed in *Art Monthly*, April 2007

Preferring not to present his videos in the dark neutrality of a cinema or gallery projection space, Aernout Mik is known for work which engages the viewer in physical as well as filmic space. He builds his videos into precisely-specified architectural environments, seeking to control every aspect of the viewing experience so that he may, in his words, 'interfere with your own sense of body in space'.

Bodies in space are Mik's primary subject. In all the films in this exhibition, people move or mill about, in patterns both purposeful and random. The films focus on people at moments of crisis, their actions and reactions in situations of anxiety and uncertainty. The low screens on which they are shown, touching the floor or hovering just above it, set up a curiously intimate relationship between these people and ourselves as viewers. Set into walls as in ***Vacuum Room*** and ***Training Ground***, the screens seem to invite us to step through the walls into the new space opening up beyond, to join the action in the films. Rising up out of the floor in ***Scapegoats*** the screen solidifies space, bringing the events and non-events of the film right into the space in which we stand to view it.

Three of the works in this exhibition are fictions, and as such exemplify Mik's usual working methods. Employing people used to working as extras, he gives them minimal instruction before beginning to shoot, preferring that they do not 'act', but react naturally to the unfolding situations. Rather than rehearsing the actors, he directs them as he films, working in long takes which allow incidents to develop. Before starting, Mik has an idea of where a film will go, but he does not plan it in detail, aiming to blur the boundary between fiction and reality by allowing real events to impose themselves on his vision. The resulting films do not have a narrative structure, but progress as accumulations of events, seeming perpetually on the verge of reaching some kind of conclusion, which is indefinitely deferred.

Vacuum Room (2005) takes place in a non-specific political assembly. Members of the assembly go about their business, interrupted by a group of protestors. The work is presented on six screens, each screen relaying the footage taken by one of six security cameras on which the work was shot. Filming in the round, Mik was absent from the shoot, controlling all six cameras via remote control, looking through a one-way mirror and directing the actors through a microphone. The presentation mimics the multiple viewpoints of the shooting, putting the viewer right in the centre of the action. The choice of formal or informal seating further implicates the viewer – by choosing a seat, you chose a position in relation to one or otehr grou of people on the screens.

Scapegoats (2006) is a single screen video, the screen rising up 'like a hallucination', imposing a hellish vision. People, some guards, some captives, are herded together in an empty stadium, the context evoking memories of the aftermath of hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, the action and inaction full of suspended menace. The echo of New Orleans is inevitable, but the work is not about this – in all his films Mik enlists a vague sense of recognition to heighten ambiguity, so that the work 'is always at the crossroads of situations that we feel familiar with', but never presents familiarity itself.

Training Ground (2006) is the most recent film in the exhibition. A tense, ambiguous and unsettling work, it pits a group of border control guards against a group of seemingly displaced people, in a non-specific no man's land. As the action of the film ebbs and flows, control shifts from one group to the next, with crisis points coming and going without resolution. The film makes reference to Jean Rouch's anthropological film 'Mad Masters' (1954), showing the annual ceremony of an African religious sect. Mik's actors seem to enter a trance-like state similar to the African tribesmen, and the wooden guns they carry are a direct quotation from the film. Mik sees the Rouch film as a touchstone for his work, linking into his interest in the behaviours assumed by individuals to help them deal with particular situations.

Raw Footage (2006) is made from television film of the war in the former Yugoslavia, not broadcast at the time, apparently because of its lack of dramatic action. Together the two works bring home the enormity of war fought on civilian ground – soldiers staking out cake shops, children carrying real guns or striking disturbingly convincing poses with toy ones. Imagery that was deemed not shocking enough to represent war on television becomes horrifying in a gallery – its reinvention as art forcing us to look properly at it, and to try to assimilate what we are looking at. The fiction all around it points up how much of this kind of imagery, played out nightly on our television screens, is in fact unassimilable. We can deal with it in our living rooms only if we manage not to let it affect us. In the gallery, we seem not to have that choice.

Mick Taussig, writing in the catalogue to this exhibition, describes Mik's work in terms of 'the routinisation of the fantastic, and the strangeness of the familiar'. He finds in it a powerful banality which leads to a calm 'that is not really calm but a calm that disturbs, a calm out of place'. Mik himself talks of seeking 'to render the normal abnormal'. That the imagery in ***Raw Footage*** is normal is shocking. That it is less shocking than Mik's constructed fictions (in which, in fact, nothing very shocking actually happens at all, it is just that we are kept in an agony of suspense that it is about to, any minute) says much about the power of art to tell the truth about how we live.