

Kris Van Dessel is not an artist. What he does is not art. In his work he does not start from a personal interest or particular motive, but from a point of reference that lies outside of him. A simple brick or dust from his studio in Antwerp can become a starting point. For 'Living approaches', it was the gallery space of Annie Gentils that raised Van Dessel's initial interest. Although it has been a gallery for thirty years, the space still shows clear traces of the beautiful town house it once was. Van Dessel linked this given to the idea of art in a domestic context, which brought him to his personal art collection. He made a plan of his living room and placed it on the floor of the gallery. Every artwork in his possession was reduced, from memory and by means of a computer programme, to its most prevalent colour. The results were made into prints, which he organizes in the gallery space according to a precise system, measured according to, and based on, the original location of the respective works in his home. Those familiar with the work of Van Dessel will recognize the strategy. The artist effectuates shifts from a particular point of reference. An example: in 'Capture (on-going project)', he exchanged a brick from the wall of his studio with a wooden block. The brick was inserted in a wall of the Mechelen-based space for contemporary art 'Garage'. The piece of wall he took out to accommodate his brick was moved to another art centre and so on. Van Dessel generally realizes these shifts according to calibrated metric or physical systems. For 'Living approaches' the artist translated all 115 prints into an aluminium cube. This approach generates objects with a surprisingly different appearance that are still somehow connected through the laws of physics. Van Dessel leaves the actual realisation of the objects to others; this again because he wants to make as little choices as possible – and preferably none – himself. This is also why he prefers to work with common production methods and standard sizes: the prints are made at the Mister Copy around the corner. 'Living approaches' also comes with a booklet: 'X to Y (and Back Again)'. It presents a rendition of a conversation between the artist and art historian Johan Pas on the artist's art collection. This booklet was printed through the online company Blurb in the most generic design.

Van Dessel shuns the use of paints and other art materials. With painting, there is always a certain expressiveness evident in the brushstroke: it articulates the materiality of the paint. It also somehow makes evident the action behind it and the person who performed the action, namely the artist. Van Dessel however, tries to erase his presence as much as possible from his artistic practice.

In short, the work of Van Dessel does not speak for him, nor does it speak for itself. Kris Van Dessel, as such, is not an artist and what he does is not art.

J. Rodeyns

Kris Van Dessel is an artist. What he creates is art.

The man knows his art history. After Roland Barthes' declaration of the death of the author and the from the 20th century onward rapid succession of statements on the end of art, he explores a new direction. This artist's thinking does not spring from the expressiveness of the object or subject, but from the relational. Nothing in his oeuvre is autonomous: every element manifests itself within a network and always refers to something else. Take 'Living approaches', for instance. Every element is a translation, a shift, an erasure, a reference, a projection, a connection, ... of another and always functions as a source material for something new. One example: Van Dessel made prints based on works of art from his collection. He reduced them, from memory, to their most prevalent colour. Art here, is used as a material, just like sand or dust are used as materials in other projects. A big nod to the vibrant art scene and how one as a creator should relate to all the art that exists already. 'Living approaches' is also about the value of art. Visitors don't get to see the original artworks. In the commercial space of the gallery, only the mechanically produced prints are shown and sold. Left to the mercy of the highly critical context of the public art domain, these prints are, in all their banality, utterly defenceless. Yet this is precisely how a certain sense of poetry and serendipity comes to permeate the work. Whoever looks attentively at these prints, will spot the subtle unintentional 'mistakes'. The colours, also, were different from what the artist had expected. Shifts, even when they are realised using mechanical procedures or according to standard systems, prove not to be an exact science. Van Dessel confronts us with the boundaries of that which is controllable. Precisely by exposing the limitations of the systems upon which we build, he effectuates an overall shift. We are forced to adjust our perception. What seems light in one material (115 prints), appears to be quite heavy when translated into a another (aluminium). What is generally considered either valuable or worthless (original art and cheap prints) becomes interchangeable. Art experts seem to speak gibberish when you have a transcription of their conversation made by an external agency and then run it through an online translating machine like Van Dessel did for his publication 'X to Y (and Back Again)'. It makes for a rather pleasantly absurd quality, coupled with a relativist tone that incidentally also define the overall oeuvre of the artist. It can be seen, for example, in the way the artist prefers not to call himself an artist and the fact that he never works towards a result. In this way, it is entirely possible that a bunch of tiles which Van Dessel used for a particular work end up on the waste pile because the work mutated into a film. Nevertheless, Van Dessel neatly collects all his 'waste'. For him, everything has value and the potential to transform into something new. From this point of view, his work acquires an almost metaphysical cosmic resonance.

The work of Van Dessel does not speak for him. It also does not speak for itself. It encompasses large and small, near and far, banal and interesting ... and in this way invites us to reflect on relationships and globalities. This is, among other things, why Van Dessel is an artist and why what he makes is art.

J. Rodeyns