

## Conflict Paintings - Boy & Erik Stappaerts

### *KILLING COLOURS by Hans De Wolf*

Een vraag waarmee elke generatie opnieuw wordt geconfronteerd is deze: is het werkelijk zo dat de verlichting voor eens en altijd haar licht heeft laten schijnen over de ware natuur van de kleuren? Voor velen onder ons is het een onomkeerbaar feit dat het prisma-experiment van Newton de werkelijke kwaliteiten van de kleuren aan het licht heeft gebracht en tegen de feitelijke kracht van een dergelijk empirisch experiment lijkt dan ook geen enkele andere overweging nog van enig gewicht te zijn. Newton lijkt de wereld te hebben behoed voor vergissingen en verkeerde interpretaties, meer nog, sinds Newton lijkt de idee dat alles wat ons omringt in overeenstemming kan worden gebracht met het beginsel van de  $\approx$ waarheid $\Delta$  maakbaar geworden, en dat geldt dus ook voor de kleuren. In de geschiedenis van de wetenschap wordt dit moment vaak voorgesteld als een triomf van het menselijke verstand, in werkelijkheid betekent Newton op dat vlak echter niet veel meer dan het beginpunt van een definitieve tweespalt die ons sindsdien verdeelt.  $\approx$ Ons $\Delta$  dat zijn aan de ene kant al diegenen die zich aansluiten bij een empirische traditie die aan de kleuren waarden toekent die gelijk staan aan feiten en kunnen uitgedrukt worden in codes. Daartegenover bevinden zich diegenen voor wie kleuren als feiten betekenisloos zijn omdat kleuren nooit als nummers ageren, op dragers verschijnen waarmee ze interageren, zeer waardevolle psychologische dimensies bezitten die verbindingen kunnen aangaan met de metafysische natuur der dingen en bovendien eerst dan de bijzondere eigenschappen die ze bezitten beginnen prijs te geven wanneer ze in vrijblijvende experimenten worden geagiteerd. Sinds Newton verdeelt zich de wereld bijgevolg tussen hen die met kleuren de meest heldere wetenschappelijke kwaliteiten verbinden en zij die de kleuren interpreteren als een laatste bastion van de diepste menselijke intenties dat zich tegen het empirisme opwerpen kan. Geen wonder dus dat - nadat Adorno en Horkheimer het project van de verlichting hadden ontmaskerd als een genadeloze  $\approx$ entzauberung $\Delta$  van de realiteit met vernietigende gevolgen voor de mens  $\vee$  de ultieme reactie van de kunst zou leiden tot de absolute kleur in de meest overweldigende abstracties. Geen wonder dat een kunstenaar als Marc Rothko deze kleuren zou verbinden met de herinnering aan de diepste menselijke primitiviteit en dat zijn kleurenvlakken steeds zonder duidelijke grenzen komen omdat ze principieel in wording zijn en zich eerst vervolledigen in het gemoed van de toeschouwer. De belangrijkste les die daaruit kan worden getrokken werd al in de tweede helft van de 19de eeuw verwoord door de Duitse kunsthistoricus Konrad Fiedler. Fiedler situeert creatieve processen binnen de complexe psychologische structuur van de geest van de kunstenaar. Tijdens de creatie van het kunstwerk ontstaat daar  $\vee$  in het zogenaamde innerlijke atelier - geen mimesis van de natuur, maar wel de productie van iets wat voordien nog niet bestond. In het gerealiseerde kunstwerk voltrekt zich bijgevolg iets wat volkomen nieuw is en dat geldt in het bijzonder voor de kleuren die zich daarbij kunnen laden met waardevolle nooit eerder begrepen nuances. De productie van het kunstwerk betekent dus tegelijk het in het leven roepen van nieuwe contexten en beeldconcepten en de kleuren dienen zich daarbij aan als bijzonder geëigend experimenteel materiaal, tegelijk bindstof en erts.

Fiedler suggereert hierbij dus dat binnen creatieve processen in de schilderkunst de code die de wetenschap aan een kleur heeft toegevoegd onmiddellijk buiten werking wordt gesteld omdat deze doorheen het productieproces van het beeld betekenisloos geworden is. In de woorden van Karl Krauss: Kunst ist was Welt wird, nicht was Welt ist. Een statische en een dynamische interpretatie van de wereld raken hierdoor dus in conflict met elkaar, een conflict dat zich met elke generatie herhaalt en daarvan vormen de reeksen van Conflict Paintings van Boy & Erik Stappaerts de meest recente illustratie.

Wat onmiddellijk opvalt bij het ondergaan van deze gewelddadige kleurenvelden is het feit dat de kunstenaar hier elke illusie van de maakbaarheid een harmonische kleurenwereld a priori buiten beschouwing laat. De vlakken zijn vlijmscherp en van een glanzende hardheid die elk compromis buiten werking stelt. In niet eerder geziene confrontaties met elkaar worden de kleuren ontdaan van elke mogelijkheid om zelfrepresentatief te zijn en tegelijk halen ze hun kracht uit de onomkeerbaarheid van de situaties waarin ze door de kunstenaar worden gebracht. Deze composities die allen volgens hetzelfde principe van het horizont model zijn opgebouwd (ons traditionele kijkbeeld) kunnen tegelijk als dominant in hun geheel en dominerend ten aanzien van de afzonderlijke kleuren worden ervaren. Dit is wat er gebeurt wanneer een kunstenaar zich de vrijheid neemt de orde van de kleurenschaal overhoop of onderuit te halen. Alle parameters reageren mee. Een geheel nieuw perspectief ontstaat in een klimaat van grote onzekerheid. Alles wordt plots weer mogelijk.

## Between allegory and user-friendly virtual communities.

### The work of Boy & Erik Stappaerts

Those who have followed the artistic practice and agenda of Boy & Erik Stappaerts may detect an almost theological commitment the artist nurtures towards the confrontation between his material body of work and its systematic catapult into a virtually created environment. As a conceptual continuation of his previous exhibitions, the current one displays the usual enigmatic suspects: a series of paintings, a sculptural work, several drawings bond to a patterned surface, an office desk.

On closer inspection, the paintings reveal themselves as conflict paintings, the sculptural object as *le pact des loups*, the patterned surface as background, the office desk as Pentagronium registration desk. All objects are virtually converted into their avatars, which are subsequently subjected to inspection, transformation and manipulation by the users of the Pentagronium program, the digital databank containing all of the above mentioned avatars.

Strangely, this arrangement creates the impression of having just stepped in an exclusive club, which by definition may generate in the spectator a kind of shyness, particularly at odds with vulcanizing the ambitious social interaction the program focuses on. This is partly due to the polysemic, mysterious beauty of the objects, suspiciously echoing nostalgia for the late modernism doctrine. Such nostalgia, however, does not constitute the core principle governing the enterprise. There's too much digital interference from the side of the Pentagronium and the term "principle" itself would point to an overtly rationalistic endeavor, one which is not very loved by contemporary artists, Boy & Erik Stappaerts being no exception in this sense.

It is rather an impulse, an "allegorical impulse" as Craig Owens would put it, which traverses his practice and transforms the gathered elements into figures that convey meanings other than the literal ones and appeal to the spectator's imagination rather than to his/her reason. *Le pact des loups* silently stands for a psychological situation sublimated into an architectural object that also resonates with the carefully designed spaces populating his drawings. Similar sublimations are to be found within the Room 5, the reception area of the Pentagronium, namely pieces that were exhibited in previous years and now reappear in their virtual bodies only. The allegorical work, in the language of contemporary art, points towards a synthetic, eclectic one, gathering diverse media and is cut through by a drive towards discursivity. Similarly, Boy & Erik Stappaerts works in the media of painting, sculpture, drawing, software/internet and the homepage of the Pentagronium.org is packed with his subjectivist critical vocabulary. One is immediately invited to get familiar with labyrinths, dance floors, explosions, conflict-landscapes, work-consoles or backgrounds to name just a few. This kind of discursivity manifests a preference for allegory and symbol rather than classical narration, even though a good deal of his work is based on private stories, filtered through his personal art historical consciousness, aesthetic preferences and social intervention instinct. All exhibited objects breath under the umbrella of an anti-theatrical aesthetics whose origins may be traced in the times of artists like Ingres or Gustave Moreau, who also preferred to replace the dramatic pose of figures with immobility and allegorization. Such a rejection of the narrative is accompanied by a complete indifference towards the figurative, quite a surprise in account of the tradition against which the conflict paintings lend themselves to be considered.

Boy & Erik Stappaerts baptized his conflict paintings after one of the most venerable genres in art treatises: the history painting. What looks like a stylish formalist exercise that would have gained praise from a figure like Greenberg is actually much more connected to the classical era of history painting, with its focus on representing a multiplicity of scenes from a religious, mythological or historical story and emphasis on a single dramatic moment that required a skillful assimilation of figurative conventions on the part of the artist. The key principle of this genre consisted in representing "the passions of the man" and the academic formula stated that "a picture should be considered as a stage on which each figure plays its role". Charles Le Brun famously theorized such *mise-en-scène* and codified these passions, giving the rules for a long-lasting tradition in pictorial theatricality.

Obviously, Boy & Erik Stappaerts has all the historical rights to be indifferent to such rules, but this doesn't cancel the fascination for picturing that dramatic moment, the conflict, by the use of color modulations precisely applied in their place within the economy of the layering. The perfectly polished paintings bear no expressionistic touch and leave no space for imperfection or viscosity. They witness a battle, between the mental world informing the painting and the flat pictorial quality of the surface.

They marry a neoclassical-derived conception of ideal beauty to a romantic subjective mysticism.

Turning to romanticism, the polymorphously perverted one that informs Boy & Erik Stappaerts's work is rather striking. Perverted, because today's art context is far too diverse and fragmented in order to allow the rebirth of genuinely totalistic projects, perverted nonetheless because the artist himself exposes his entire body of work to a virtual environment where all permutations will be possible and where the original romantic input inscribed in the works themselves will be ignored or mystified. There is, however, another dimension of romanticism to be mentioned: the previous project that has become part of the Pentagronium, namely B.E.S Institute and Associations, aimed at reconsidering classical museology, the artist giving his/her virtual spectator the possibility to configure an individual museum, each according to his/her own selection or display tastes. This implies that the artist sees himself as a legislator, and it is through the transforming act of his imagination, important for itself, not for any moral or aesthetic reason, that he legitimizes his museological project.

Organically, this legislating interest is carried on in the Pentagronium database, a digital platform in the recent tradition of user-friendly social internet-based networks. Questioning authority in the realm of the consumerist society is at stake, since Boy & Erik Stappaerts displays his objects and backgrounds in a desire to facilitate sharing artistic/cultural goods in a parallel market that will be governed by the users themselves. Technology is not important in itself, but it becomes appealing to see what the results are when technology gets internalized and humanized. Maximizing the liberty of individuals while minimizing the power of authority is a feature much linked to the doctrine of the libertarian socialism, but the work remains critically unimaginative enough to insist on such affiliation. Although the artist's Pentagronium echoes the paradigm of the art as a means to the end of social transformation, as initiated by early 19th century utopian socialists like Henri de Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier, the continuous reinvention of the, by now canonized "culture industry", invites a much more detailed discussion on the specificity of his program, that functions at once as public archive and production company.

All in all, Boy & Erik Stappaerts's work, as visible in the current exhibition too, is marked by a tension between the radical particularity of individual artistic existence and its display and abandonment on the mass consumption market, though a virtual one.

Silvia Făgărășan

## A selection of the pentagonium collection

*An individual piece of society*

*“Human societies are characterized by patterns of relationships (social relations) between individuals who share a distinctive culture and institutions; a given society may be described as the sum total of such relationships among its constituent members.”*

‘A selection of the pentagonium collection’ is een verzameling van verschillende grafische elementen uit mijn pentagonium: een virtuele werkplek en archief waar artisanale installaties vereeuwigd worden en objecten niet enkel door mij maar ook door externe toeschouwers gebruikt kunnen worden.

De selectie die ik voor dit werk maakte toont zich als een grote zwarte buis die uit de grond rijst met daarboven een kopertekening ingegoten met zwart composietmateriaal + vernis.

Ik plaats mijn werk tussen de kerk, het huis van God maar tevens het huis dat verschillende generaties overleefde en bindt, en het gemeenschapshuis (bibliotheek, academie).

De techniek die gehanteerd zal worden werd vroeger in kerken gebruikt: koperen lijnvoering opgevuld met verschillende steensoorten.

‘A selection of the pentagonium collection’ is een fysiek object: staan, dansen, zingen, zitten, liggen. Een samenkomen daar waar het vroeger en nog steeds in en rond de kerk gebeurde.

Een nieuw geloof, pick and choose.

We bevinden ons sinds enige tijd in een kantelbeweging waar allerlei artisanale en analoge objecten verder evolueren in een digitale beeldcultuur. Ik zie mijn werk als een monument van deze kantelperiode.

Mijn oeuvre, en zo ook dit werk, richt zich op het onderzoek van verschillende sociologische identiteiten en entiteiten die vertaald worden in hoofdstukken en labels. Hierin wordt het individu en de verschillende relaties die een invloed hebben op zijn dagelijkse emotionele verkeer centraal gesteld en geanalyseerd. Een duidelijke voorkeur voor allegorie en symboliek boven klassieke narratologie manifesteert zich.

De computer wordt gebruikt als slijper om op die manier de ‘technische’ tekening (persoonlijke ontleding) van nog dichterbij te bekijken en te dissecteren. Structurele elementen van mijn plastische schetsen worden vectorieel omgezet om zo een parallel leven te leiden in de virtuele ruimte. De artisanale handeling wordt doorgetekend in een concrete label/communicatietaal. Het werk wordt dus ‘samengesteld’ en geplaatst. Anekdoten uit het leven worden vertaald naar een structurele tijd.

De gebruiker kan zich onderdompelen in een sociale en artistieke omgeving. Daar consumeert hij in de virtuele wereld van het pentagonium door pick and choose. Hij krijgt bouwstenen aangeboden voor de personalisatie van zijn individu en hij vormt zich eclectisch. De artistieke objecten, structuren en backgrounds zijn belangrijk voor de intellectuele stimulus maar worden tegelijkertijd ook gebruiksvoorwerp. Grenzen worden afgetast, een grenswachter is er niet. Men wordt er aangespoord tot non conformisme en vrije wil.

Bij het voorgestelde werk koos en stelde *ik* samen maar iedereen kan hieraan deelnemen. De labels worden gekozen door een abstractie, minimalisering, versmalling, het in standaardmaten gieten van de emotionaliteiten: jong meisje – bruid – vrouw in verwachting – volwassen fiere vrouw... Het grote glasraam van Duchamp. In de categorisering - de complexe en grote emotionele wereld vereenvoudigd weergegeven - schuilt een zekere agressiviteit ten opzichte van het individu. De gebruiker kiest structuren en labels die zijn eigen emotionele wereld ondersteunen en vertegenwoordigen. *Ik* dien aan, hij kiest en stelt samen, gedachten worden beelden, een ambitieuze sociale interactie, mooi, zuiver en seductief, we worden bevriend, misschien zelfs verliefd.

*“Each time the mind applies its concepts to the world, the concept is revealed to be only partly true, within a certain context; thus the mind continually revises these incomplete concepts so as to reflect a fuller reality (commonly known as the process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis). The individual comes to rise above his or her own particular viewpoint, and grasp's that he or she is a part of a greater whole insofar as he or she is bound to family, a social context, and/or a political order” Hegel*

## The Adamant Pose of a Young Artist.

*Boy & Erik Stappaerts criticizes rational society*

The young artist Boy & Erik Stappaerts (1969) is currently exhibiting his “cabinet d’étude” at Marie-Puck Broodthaers’ gallery in Brussels. The artist has modeled his artistic project after a contemporary enterprise and has baptized it “B & E S INSTITUTE AND ASSOCIATIONS”. His dual first name serves handy as the title for his artistic enterprise.

In addition to its own title and logo, Boy & Erik Stappaerts’ enterprise produces objects. It functions as an architect’s office that designs a complete social and museum environment, upon a client’s request. The first section of this institution generates objects which are presented in the workspace of the gallery. At first sight these polished objects, in industrial lacquer coating, look very clean and sterile “69”, a red flat shape with rounded corners, is not much bigger than the two intertwined bodies which modeled for this object.

There is a black sculpture in two parts called “Embrace” which suggests its superficial image is inspired by a human form of intimacy. This suggestion that human emotions become standard mass products is both ironic and tragic. It is as if the Eros of the object of mass consumption really has diminished all other forms of eroticism.

In comparison to Rodin’s work “The Kiss”, the human embrace in Stappaerts’ work is machine-like. Oddly the work misses the beautiful illusion of the symbioses between man, machine and love which is present in Björk’s video clip (“All is full of love”) by filmmaker Chris Cunningham. Stappaerts’ work is more ironic and possesses too much potential for critical possibilities, making it more reminiscent of the lacquer objects by the left-wing artist Jef Geys.

Stappaerts’ art is ironic because its persistent pose succeeds in touching the Achilles heel of our rational society. Philosophical rationalism is intermingled with the rationalism of production processes and the ratio of the heart. His objects are strongly related to minimalism in a formal manner but this rational art form is infected with inevitable forms of superstition and fetishism. However businesslike, aloof or reasonable a work of Art attempts to be, it never escapes the human habit of assigning human qualities to lifeless things.

### *Parody*

The second important branch of Stappaert’s work is a web site where his projects, text and images are virtualized. The images are made using existing 3-D game technology, illustrating colorful spaces in which the objects are presented. The website’s structure as well as its contents abides by the classic rules of parody. Its serious and professional outline keeps up the façade of a respectable corporation. Only when you reach the futuristically titled “The Mothermachine” does the façade start to falter.

The same serious note persists in the explanatory text that is provided alongside, objects, environments, the enterprise’s building and the plan for the museum: “B&ES Museum is a projection of the dictatorial cultural platform (definition of the museum in Western society) presenting some of the classical museum ingredients: the scale model, the monument, a sculpture on a pedestal with its cast alongside it”.

The English text resembles the snobbish theoretical jargon commonly used in the Art world, but the deliberate fusion of the terminology of semiotics, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, phenomenology, structuralism and deconstructivism is applied according to the rules of parody. This rare and adamant exercise in style is promising for the future.

Jeroen Laureyns

*De Tijd 15/2/04*

## Your Law of Attraction

Patterns - Historical - Repetition - Immersive - Circling - Returning - Endless - Variation - Database

In the current work of Boy & Erik Stappaerts we seemingly can distinguish two premises; color field studies (Conflict Paintings, Polarisation Paintings, Noise Paintings) and his layered drawings. One could think they are not related, but that is only superficially true. Everything is connected. In the depth they are the result of his profound search for expressing different aspects of universal sentiments, to formulate social formations, as a representation of relationships within the self and towards each other. This kind of discursivity manifests a preference for allegory and symbol rather than classical narration, even though a good deal of his work is based on private stories, filtered through his personal art historical consciousness, aesthetic preferences and social intervention instinct.

The perfectly polished paintings bear no expressionistic touch and leave no space for imperfection or viscosity. They witness a battle, between the mental world informing the painting and the flat pictorial quality of the surface. They marry a neoclassical- derived conception of ideal beauty to a romantic subjective mysticism.

His drawings are cultivated out of singular graphical and organical elements, examined layer on top of layer. When there is a sense of completeness they are digitized to be used in different ways.

On the one hand (*public*) they are integrated in a virtual community; The Pentagonium (a work in progress). It aims at reconsidering classical museology, the artist giving the virtual spectator, user, the possibility to configure an individual museum, each according to his/her own selection or display tastes.

Organically, this legislating interest is carried on in the recent tradition of user-friendly social internet-based networks. Questioning authority in the realm of the consumerist society is at stake, since Boy & Erik Stappaerts displays his objects and backgrounds in a desire to facilitate sharing artistic/cultural goods in a parallel market that will be governed by the users themselves. Technology is not important in itself, but it becomes appealing to see what the results are when technology gets internalized and humanized. His work becomes a public archive and production company.

On the other hand (*private*) the artist uses his digital elements to build his own patterns and structures. His private database from which he can choose components to develop objects;

sculptural floors, backgrounds, etc. It is rather an impulse which traverses his practice and transforms the gathered elements into figures that convey meanings other than the literal ones and appeal to the spectator's imagination rather than to his/her reason.

As an ongoing project he is working on 'The Garden for Florian'. This is a realizable model for a park where there is now a big parking space in Antwerp, Belgium. The necessary green environment in the harbor town would comprise; A romantic park; A mysterious hill that moves like a beating heart; a spiraling hill with the Pentagronium interface at the top; an International Bank of good ideas, used by universities, managers, politicians and social thinkers in different fields; athletic interventions; The summer academy: A large collection of cultural (art, design,...), sociological and political subjects will be conceptualized, discussed and carried out; The sweet children's valley... A healthy public space where you are not a consumer, but a citizen.<sup>1</sup>

The New Library meets The Pentagronium would be of course an ideal construction. For the similarity is obvious. Books are scanned and remastered in different media. A database is made of old and new.

Man has always transformed the environment according to his convenience, and all cultures, in one way or the other, have intervened in its most immediate surrounding to make it more pleasant.

Boy & Erik Stappaerts experience in public art until now consists of art pieces placed in the public space or installations made in an exhibitional context. His dream is having the possibility to create a more immersive work on a large scale where his patterns and color fields could be a part of a whole, the total formatting. An integration of the ideas in the fundament of the architecture and design, outside and in. It would even be interesting to extend certain structures, colors or patterns into the graphic styling. As a total experience. *'Art can be another object in the environment or it can contribute to a visual quality and convert spaces into places for people, distinguishing an urban space and providing an identity, as well as contributing to create pleasant environments. This possibility of helping to transform spaces, depends on having took physical factors as well as environmental and social factors of context.'* Remesar, A. Urban regeneration: a challenge for public art. Universidad de Barcelona Edicions Universitat Barcelona, 1997.

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*"Our public spaces are as profound as we allow them to be. They are our shared spaces and reflect what matters to us as a community and as individuals. ... At their greatest, our public spaces can nourish our well-being and help us see that we're not alone as we try to make sense of our lives. They can help us grieve together and celebrate together and console one another and be alone together. Each passerby is another person full of longing, anxiety, fear, and wonder. With more ways to share in public space, the people around us can not only help us make better places, they can help us become our best selves." C. Chang*



## **BOY & ERIK STAPPAERTS**

*Who and what lies hidden behind the art company Boy & Erik Stappaerts?*

*A team?*

*Two men, Boy & Erik?*

*Or one artist with several personalities?*

B & E.S. Institute and Associations is a bit of all that. But the creative process begins and ends all with one man, Boy & Erik. Erik the businessman & Boy the source of inspiration, or Erik the planner & Boy the visionary, it doesn't matter: All aspects of this multiple personality get a chance each one in turn on their well-chosen moment.

You could see B & E.S. Institute and Associations as a firm of architects, or better still as 'an institute that can and wants to furnish your own life and that of your environment according to your own preferred needs'.

B & E.S. Institute and Associations, particularly specialized in a museological and social environment adjusted to you, supplies all the tools you need. For example it has already set up a Cabinet d'Etude + centre d'information, using the PPALC-formula: Precise Production At Large Context. You demand, we deliver (but with a surplus value you could not imagine beforehand).

Imagine a futuristic institute, situated in a romantic and mountainous landscape, just like the one Caspar David Friedrich liked to paint in the 19th century. The visitor has to walk along a country path in order to get there. Actually doing this he has to say good-bye to his everyday world, an environment that somewhat palls on him, otherwise he would not go and visit the Institute.

B & E.S. Institute and Associations contains all the layers of the work of Boy & Erik Stappaerts: It plays along with the suspicions, the wishes and the subconscious of the visitor, depending on his state of mind. Sometimes he needs a domestic atmosphere with his own memories and anecdotes that seem fairly hermetical to others. Other times he rather wants to get in touch with another, new and public world that enables him to distance himself from the triviality or the bleakness he has to face each day.

With existing 3 D-game technology Boy & Erik Stappaerts has created images of what those cosy spaces can look like, how the visitor can see and grasp the work of the artist, how he will be received in the Institute. In the hallway you will find the reception desk where hostesses can help you; with a trolley, symbolic for the cart that is being used in existing museums to assemble and dismantle exhibitions, you can load and unload the objects you chose, present them and rearrange them; so on the basis of the objects the artist created you can put together your own exhibition.

Those objects can roughly be classified into two-dimensional and three-dimensional objects. Two-dimensional are for example the backgrounds, surfaces and geometrical patterns for which Boy & Erik Stappaerts designed an extensive digital data base, and from which the visitor can distil his own contexts and environment. Three-dimensional are the beautiful, minimal-austere looking and polished forms that can be 'romantic': for example the ultimate, expressive emanation of human bodies that are entwined. Streamlined forms that depart from the warm, human body with its flowing outlines, its cavities and openings, in order to breathe together.

The forms can also be 'dramatic', like the sculpture 'Panic Zone' that was erected next to the Berchem district office last summer. It stands for the irrational panic that can uncontrollably come to the surface in each of us, like a spiral, a whirlwind from our most inner self. Therefore 'Panic Zone' is also a piece of man, a subject, a psychological coping machine.

Another essential feature is the colours: the spaces are not only filled with backgrounds and objects, they are also defined by the use of colours (from Yves Klein-blue to Günter Forg-green) that determines moods and small conflicts.

Gradually the well hidden, but essential layer behind the work of Boy & Erik Stappaerts becomes clear: an unexpected threat and at the same time a crushing irony. Because the fact that out of intimate and personal postures can be mass-produced industrially looking, beautifully painted and polished forms that the visitor can arrange and rearrange at his heart's content as objects in an imaginary museum, is very disturbing indeed. And the notion that panic can also be seen as a positive power can mix up even more the scale of accepted values and standards: Panic can also be the stage in which you reflect on an image in the most intensive way, in which you can actually turn a thought into an image. Because forgetting an interesting thought is not respectful; replacing it with a dramatic image is much more interesting.

What Boy & Erik Stappaerts aims at is replacing the real world with a parallel world with personal and dramatic spaces that put things into perspective. The visitor creates his own museum, but very different from how humanity has been doing this for centuries: The explorer takes objects out of their original, authentic environment and places them in their own museum with an

architecture of its own. Such a museum is essentially dictatorial: Its contents determine the history (of art). B & E.S wants to get rid of that dictatorship: Make your own virtual museum with your own forms, colours and patterns. Use the graphic computer program especially designed by B & E.S to create that world. Click on those forms, colours and patterns and discover a new world imposed by nobody. Avoid clichés and stereotypes. Create domestic surroundings, all for yourself, filled with your own anecdotes and memories. Or become a public possession, in which the personal is so hermetic to the other that each anecdote is killed and the other looks at an absolutely free work of art. So handle classical ingredients like scale models, monuments and sculpture-on-pedestal in a completely different way.

We have not yet finished with B & E.S. Institute and Associations. Because it should be clear that creating a museum actually is a trap into which the visitor lures himself. It is inevitable that he will respect the classical relation between artist and spectator: the artist creates and shows, the spectator looks and interprets. A dictatorial relationship according to Boy & Erik Stappaerts, that the visitor can lighten somewhat by putting on big 'soft shoes' over his own footwear in order to leave no trace at all. The problem can also be solved by ending up in the I Use-environment after a visit to the museum. The visitor can use his own image (upon entering he was scanned) to construct a harmonic relationship with himself and the objects of art and backgrounds, away from any imposed and manipulating dictatorship of image. Boy & Erik Stappaerts also applied it to himself by means of the image of his brother Timothy Stappaerts, "a well-read, art-critical and contemporary spectator".

There is also the 'Mother Machine', maybe the most enigmatic construction in the whole Institute: It is a dynamic machine with a double iconic object that rolls from the bottom to the top by its own power following an intricate rail system thus generating its own energy: Once at the top the object falls creating enough energy to provide ventilation, light and warmth in the museum. After which the Sisyphian task (but this time with a successful result) can start all over again.

The B & E.S. Institute and Associations is constantly worked on ([www.boy-erik.org](http://www.boy-erik.org)), an Archive gathers all the stages already attained. An on the Terrace, outside the museum, you can talk with other visitors, friends, artists and journalists about your mutual experiences. In the meantime Boy & Erik Stappaerts is building his first skyscraper, a 'macho sculpture', built out of the ego's of so many people who either dream of a better, harmonic world or turn their back on everything and everyone and abandon themselves to their own obsessions.

Some final remarks. If you walk through the whole universe of Boy & Erik Stappaerts and take it all in, you finally come to a surprising as well as sobering experience. B & E.S. Institute and Associations is not bent on dishing up a utopian, better and more agreeable world (of art) with a museological and social environment in which the visitor can find some rest and understanding. It is just the opposite: The alternative that Boy & Erik Stappaerts seems to offer in fact is as dictatorial and manipulative as what we have become used to in our contemporary museums and art institutions. Boy & Erik Stappaerts intentionally constructed an ideology that is seducing in her aesthetics, but is lethal in her consequences. Because beautiful, clean and seductive are the forms, objects and colours; but they are threatening and stultifying in their anonymity, trendsetting and uniform trivializing.

The visitor-spectator who is on to this, inescapably finds himself in the 'panic zone'. He realizes that everyday ugliness, chaos and imperfection are a certainty from which he can never tear himself loose completely.

So panic becomes, as has been said earlier, the moment in which you reflect in the most intensive way on an image, in which you make an image out of a thought. Whether that image gives you peace and relief, is another matter. And we do not think that this is Boy & Erik Stappaerts' intention, on the contrary.

Marc Ruyters

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