



AMSTERDAM AS A SOURCE OF FRENCH INSPIRATION

by Kees Keijer

Making Things Happen: Young Artists in Dialogue III Mengzhi Zheng & Boris Chouvellon

Marsha Plotnitsky, born in St. Petersburg, first worked as an investment banker on Wall Street, but changed her course in 2013 to start The Merchant House on the Herengracht. The Merchant House is an art space that simultaneously functions as a commercial gallery, or a gallery with a cultural program. What matters is that Plotnitsky uses the money from the sales of art to fund the gallery, to sustain its program of readings and recitals.

This year The Merchant House is organizing a cycle of exhibitions that bring the work of two artists in dialogue. Some of these artists were not acquainted before they were paired, but their collaborative exhibitions have facilitated new connections, and this has led them to new joint projects.

The current exhibition shows the work of two artists from France, Mengzhi Zheng (1983) and Boris Chouvellon (1980); although Zheng was born in China, he has lived in France for much of his life. Zheng makes architectonic models that come across as freely constructed maquettes made of waste materials. Fragments of crates, bits of cardboard, discarded paper or wood form architectural blueprints, which are presented on the wall, on pedestals, or on the ground. His oeuvre confounds painting, sculpture, and architecture.

Zheng's works could be seen as utopian models in the tradition of De Stijl, but they are also easily viewed as proposals for emergency shelters. Architecture is brought back to its absolute fundamentals.

For the exhibition at The Merchant House, he has created a new series of works, starkly and precisely finished with delineated planes. This was clearly something the artist recognized in the canal houses of Amsterdam – the source of inspiration for these works.

Maquettes made of waste materials bring architecture back to its fundamentals

Boris Chouvellon also allows himself to be inspired by what he has encountered in Amsterdam. A video shows him balancing on a heap of old tires and using hubcaps as Frisbees: new things can be made out of the things that

others have left behind, seems to be his message. Chouvellon has also created a cluster of lifting hooks, positioned in the backroom of The Merchant House. With this series the artist is being more nebulous. Bringing Amsterdam's lifting hooks from the outside to the inside might be his way of giving reality a strange twist.

More light-hearted is Chouvellon's intervention at the bar-kitchen between the two main exhibition rooms. Here, he has constructed something akin to a slowly circling mirror ball, but its tapered shape immediately makes one think of a döner kebab or shawarma skewer. The highbrow art space suddenly gives a cheeky nod to a nightclub and a fast food joint.



→ Boris Chouvellon brought lifting hooks from the outside to the inside.