



sica dutch centre
for international
cultural activities



The essential hospitality of guest studios

On 28 January in Amsterdam's Smart Project Space, SICA handed over the first copy of *Dutch Mountains* – a new English language culture magazine – to Isabelle Mallez, director of Maison Descartes and president of EUNIC. This occasion was preceded by a discussion on Artists-in-Residencies in the Netherlands, one of the themes in *Dutch Mountains*.

In *Dutch Mountains* leading artists, culture professionals and photographers reflect on 'Dutch' culture in the world. The debate by SICA and Trans Artists focused on tolerance and hospitality as fundamental aspects of Artist-in-Residencies. An introduction was provided by artist and curator Danielle van Zuijlen, author of an article in *Dutch Mountains*. After this, artists' initiative 1646 and Arno van Roosmalen of the Stroom Den Haag art centre participated in a discussion on the following case study, moderated by Erik Hagoort, critic and researcher: The relationship between working internationally and the local context.

A varied landscape of guest studios

In the Netherlands there are not only more guest studios than in the surrounding countries, but they are also more varied in nature. This is partly thanks to the support guest studios have managed to generate. Danielle van Zuijlen posited that international guest studios have developed a culture of hospitality in the midst of the Dutch culture that is famed more for tolerance than hospitality. All the different international guest studios in the Netherlands – from the established National Academy to the nomadic Agentur, from the KIK dairy factory in Kolderveen to the Kaus Australis hangars – have one thing in common: their desire to offer time and space to artists, on a structural rather than an incidental basis. That is what they want to organise, guarantee and protect. Besides a great deal of effort on the part of the organisers, this also demands strategic and tactical relations with the environment of the guest studio: the neighbourhood, the municipality, the housing corporation and local politicians. Van Zuijlen makes it quite clear that being an artist-in-residence is no sinecure. She ended by saying that you mustn't let anyone divert you from your task: "Fear is the worst enemy of hospitality!"

Artists' initiative 1646

Doing what you really want to do, was the level-headed approach of Italian artist Nico Feragnoli. Together with his associates Johan Gustavsson from Sweden, Clara Palli Monguilod from Spain and Floris Kruidenberg from the Netherlands, he is responsible for the artist-in-residence programme of the artists' initiative 1646 in The Hague. It was clear from the start that fancy talk was wasted on them. When they graduated in 2006, the three foreign students among them were faced with a choice: to either return to their home country or to get down to work where they were, in The Hague. And they chose for the latter, with 1646: to run their own art centre, set up an exhibition programme, and offer foreign artists the opportunity to stay and work for a while. This was in part possible with financial support from Stroom. But, stated Feragnoli, you shouldn't get too worked up about the surroundings and the goals. As an artist you should take the initiative, find yourself some space and invite others to share it.

Stroom

Arno van Roosmalen explained that Stroom is involved in two ways in creating conditions for art to flourish in The Hague: in the first place, Stroom has a formal programme for subsidies, documentation and studios and in the second place it carries out a more informal promotion programme including, for example, curators' visits or the annual study trip abroad for artists' initiatives. Just as a number of other organisations, 1646's programme receives support from both programmes.

Institutions less hospitable?

Stroom is convinced of the importance of hospitality, it stimulates this in others and continuously practices it itself, but Van Roosmalen has noticed certain remarkable ambivalences when it comes to developments in the area of artists-in-residence.

Hospitality is based on personal involvement and flourishes in a small-scale environment, which is why it has difficulty in relation to institutionalism. Artists need to run their a-i-r programme primarily based on their own needs and motivation, and powered by their own energy. Far-reaching institutionalisation (for example as suggested in an advisory report by the Rotterdam Council for Art and Culture, RRC to the Rotterdam art and culture department, dKC) undermines the core qualities of a good a-i-r- programme.

Another ambivalence: in these times of far-reaching globalisation, of unlimited access to information, of fast international communications and of airline tickets at giveaway prices, the desire to accommodate (subsidised) foreign artists for three months in a studio in Bos en Lommer may seem an anachronism.

Hospitality under pressure

The value of artist-in-residencies and therefore the motivation to provide state support, generally leans on unproven premises, according to Van Roosmalen. This is also the case when policy makers overemphasise the importance of a broad fertile ground for bringing forth excellent top-quality art or the value of interdisciplinarity. Van Roosmalen feels that the arts sector should formulate more sharply, clearly and more forcefully why a-i-r is of suprapersonal importance, for the cultural climate itself, but possibly also for our society as a whole. A sector that is incapable of this is in a weak position when faced with those who feel culture should not be subsidised and those whose political vocabulary does not include the word hospitality. And it is precisely from this quarter that political influence is growing. Van Roosmalen: "Don't lean back on the obvious, but stand up for what is important to you."