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A BASIC T-SHIRT FOR A SPECTACULAR EVENT

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Louise Jacobs

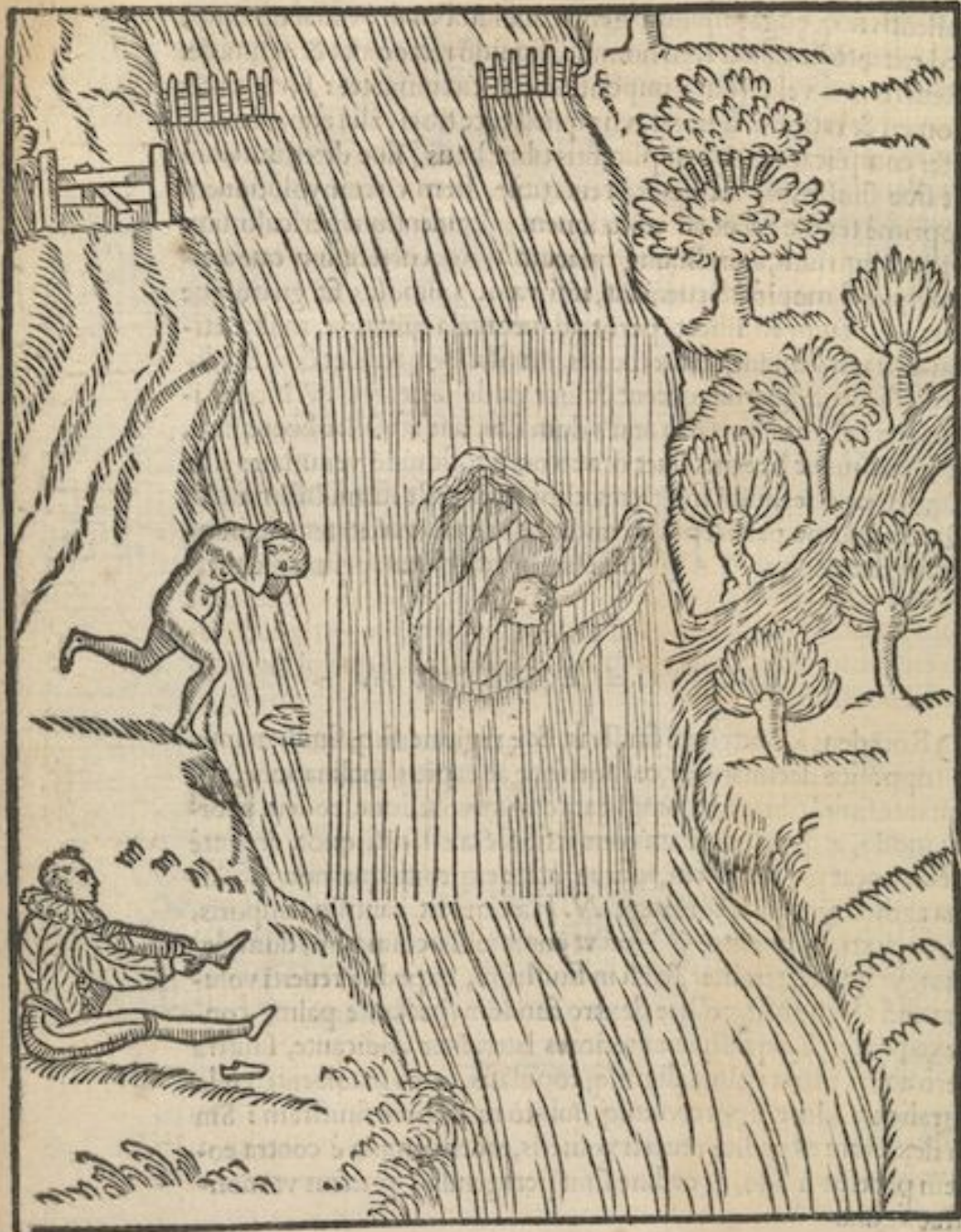
MA Essay

“A BASIC T-SHIRT FOR A SPECTACULAR EVENT”

KHiO, Kunstakademiet i Oslo/ Oslo National Academy of the Arts, The Academy of Fine Art

2019

DE ARTE NATANDI



But a good Swimmer may not only preserve his own Life, but several others also. An open vessel on the main sea, in a Storm may be kept from sinking by a good Diver; Or having lost her Anchors and Cables, and being ready to be cast on the Shore, may by him be haled thither, and avoid being dashed against the Rocks, and so the Lives of all in it saved; and the occasions of being thus helpful are only too frequent, as those who are used to the Seas very well know. By the same means one may attack an Enemy posted on the adverse sides of Rivers, and thereby sometimes gain a Victory. [..]

Melchisedec Thevenot, *The Art of Swimming*, 1696

A BASIC T-SHIRT FOR A SPECTACULAR EVENT

An alternative title for this essay was "How To Not Care Less Over Time" but somehow that didn't fly home to the heart of the writer. "Swim Good" came close, but as its also the name of a Frank Ocean song, it became more and more demeaning to work from; both as an image and as a reference. Come to think about it, there have been many promising titles and fancy ideas for chapters that were difficult to let go off, because they all represented the beautiful potential of what an essay could become. Sadly, they all shared lethal ingredients, which were suffocating any form of continuation. They were in fact suffocating me as a writer. I would stare at the table of content page for hours like a hostess perfecting a menu for a dinner party. Words were becoming tastes, as oppose to meaningful indicators. It turns out that I have strong affinity for titles which is stronger than the texts that were to follow. Being inclined to write poetic rants, I knew that this was not the time to play sporadically with syntaxes, but rather a chance to discover a more journalistic approach to language. I am a terrible academic in terms of formal approaches and secondly, because I would have to dive into two worlds simultaneously(the art historical and the art critical) with my head on a stick. Triumph and innovation were becoming heavy sensations to bear. Openness, as this thesis encouraged, can corner the intellect. Like with most artists, I think that the desire to impress oneself and others can burden as much as it propels competence. This essay will deal with various "Kill your darlings" themes or sections that inevitably lead to a meta-Eureka moment; when what you disown become writing material on its own. I want to address what I couldn't write about.

*

The beginning looked promising. The question I borrowed from Karl Larsson's book "Poetic Assumption", *Could this be a start of beautiful joke?*, inspired me to think because it was such a rhetorical question. Before I could begin to even interpret that question as a postulate, it dawned upon

me that the question was in fact a work in itself. It was so self containing that it only sparked further poetic confusion. For a moment I thought that linking that question art-smarty up against the assisted readymade was a brilliant discovery. Actually, for several months I believed that the question could guide me through parts of art historical moments and contemporary practices similar to my own. The relationship with the joke, beauty and Duchamp- could this be a beginning of a heavy detour? Is the assisted readymade a joke? I never thought so, but it seemed like I was thinking about the viewer and somehow put myself in that “first experience” of the vernacular spirit in a spectacular context. But I'm not interested in jokes. I'm so bad at telling jokes, that when I manage to remember parts of a jokeful narrative, the twist or the climax always gets lost on the way. I understand the word beautiful as a more subjective experience, whereas beauty might be felt as a more universal moment in time. How does a beautiful joke look like if it haven't fully taken form? Conceptual impediments aside, the beautiful and the funny as partners wouldn't dance for me as an artist. Larsson's question didn't make sense. It felt written in stone. My work simply doesn't correlate to those topical ventures. The first chapter of my essay was developing into a joke by itself.

*

Duchamp, who put a pissoir into an art space and a bike wheel on top of a stool, must have understood something important. But like with most intellectuals and mystics, he suffered from withdrawal fantasies. A slow return to “real life” after a life as an artist defending things from the “real world” as art. The paradox of disappearing from it all is that one become more visible as a figure in the context of art. Lee Lozano and Bas Jan Ader are two good examples of artists careers and lives that perhaps more radically perfected their goodbyes. Consistency or expectancy was Duchamp's greatest fear. Maybe he was afraid that there wouldn't be any good ideas for art anymore. No good combinations to explore in light of the everyday.

So why did I end up thinking that the assisted readymade was worthwhile writing about? Not very magical to explain and neither very sexy to expound upon, as it's basically just two things trying to talk to each other in a dislocated context. It felt obsolete to address as an art historical genre. The irony here is of course that my work tend to lean very formally into the category of the assisted

readymade. But I'd like to assist that observation of my own work into another place that perhaps doesn't have a zip code yet.

Looking at some sculptures in my studio, I realise that I have a tendency to put an earring on things. Maybe this is an unconscious attempt at making a signature or a way to "personalize" impersonal material. A professor in my former art academy would always bring a newspaper during a group critique and throw it next to a work to see "what happens". In a way, this is very much how I work in the studio- but this "happening" of co-joined elements cannot fully be described here. Unlike the newspaper, that always tended to add the day's immediacy on board with something seemingly unrelatable, the path to personalize a work is better suited with those gestures that are connected to the body. This earring fascination of mine for instance. Only troublesome thing is that it adds a very girly vibe to pretty much all the non-plastic material or found objects I've worked with. The most successful job this earring has done so far, is hanging existentially from a piece of transparent tape that was taped to the wall(pierced through a little loop). I titled this work "La Vie", which is French for "Life".

Air France. It must be a magnificent airline, right? Or is it simply the name that allure the feeble heart into a wave of clichè like associations? The flaneuring romanticism I daydream about next to a half-punkish reality had to be confronted, so since as I was going to Milan one day to see my father, I booked a flight via Paris with my beloved airline Air France. The experience culminated in an essay on passenger discomfort and the fallen romance expected from spending 8 hours in Paris during a layover. Paris was daft, wet and foggy. And I was broke. But while returning to Oslo I tried to connect Air France as a title to the overall experience in the form of an exhibition, incorporating the tape and earring next to bags of water where Air France tissues were floating. The essay of course, was attempting to bring an existential journey together with other components in the space. *Airborne vs my artistic voice*. Longing is kind of my method. Somehow this state sets motion into form and co-create a material narrative. Complexity with a cause. Magic loves the hungry. I'm drawn to that which cannot fully be fathomed. Describing a work is of course not the same as explaining it, the first being a pathway to existence and the other being a sagging corridor of demystification.

*

Returning to a central and suffocating source that spiralled inspiration into a mishap, was the article from The New York Times, that ended up not being very inspirational to write about. To flinch out examples some journalist has already typed, was this an act of adoration or despair? I was so drawn into the glossy domain of private collectors and allured by the possibility of my work being bought and installed in some fancy Upper East side apartment, that I forgot about the relevance of this article as a catalyst for writing about the content. First of all, the secondary market represents buyers that doesn't necessarily invest in art because of speculation. They simply want to buy art they personally like. "The love for Art" and not the market value was appealing to read about, because these collectors seemed to have a profound perspective on what art is and what it can be. Even though the examples of difficult art mentioned in that piece from The Times were coming from haywired artists playing commercial tricks, it was somehow refreshing to consider a warmer embrace out there, rather than the more cynical reality of work as mere transactions.

"What It's Like To Live With Art That Doesn't Love You Back" seemed contradictory to consider as an article, as caring for an artist's ideas is a direct way to make the collector a part of the work (collecting being an act of love). And the title was misleading. It seemed that a neutralized situation was rising from this ownership, the artist treated as a surrogate and a mediator; the art work as a life unwitnessed. As opposed to the static bronze sculpture resting by the fireplace, these sculptures, well, they are like living entities. A square watermelon that needs to be replaced now and then from a rare farmer willing to foster this specific kind. An Amish farmer even. The list could go on. I realized at the core it's also just about rich socialites who have so much free time to speculate and further mythologize artists like Tino Sehgal in between shopping at Barney's and bragging among friends about their new acquisitions (being interviewed in the Times is also a way of gaining cultural capital). A love and hate relationship was beginning to develop from holding on to this article as a source. A love for the radical investments in art from a new generation of collectors, but with more spiteful undertones, as these artists were already selling and having a foot in both markets. In one of the images from the article dangle a lavender Prada coat (as if to look randomly hung) on the bottom stair rail of a two story apartment, just squeezed into the frame so that Pierre Huyghe's aquarium work gets another enticing layer of a benefactor's personal taste. The journalist poses the collector of Hughes work the million dollar question; what's the difference between acquiring this specific aquarium work next to just buying one yourself and drop some endangered crabs into the mix?

She replies, well, of course, *it's just not the same*. And I agree. Case closed.

When I look around in my shared studio, so much impermanent and sentimental material is scattered and attempted display worthy. I have hair sprayed smoked salmon and a Celine Dion CD with a slice of prosciutto covering her face. There's a stone covered in white chocolate. The recent prototype added to my collection is a 5 litres water bottle filled with de-freeze car window liquid(blue) and two white t-shirts swirling like dead fetuses. The year long fascination with melted sugar has culminated in a bug like sculpture that hovers in the centre, carefully placed on a mass produced pedestal(that I'm using for practical reasons as I'm unable to build anything myself and too proud to ask anyone to make them for me). This "Bug" is simply a jeans skirt dipped in heated sugar and "frozen" in a motionless form implying motion. It's shiny and I wonder if it appeals to a world that would unionize the abject with a fragile sense of delicacy. The striped shirts(Ralph Lauren) must have been given to me from my father with the thought of them being timeless friends of hangers. I never really wore the shirts he gave me so I decided to dip them in a mix of powdered sugar and water, placing them in a position to dry. Whenever I look at them I think of movement in fabric as some kind of hopeful event, as with stone carved saints in previous centuries and the Spanish court paintings. Drapery, with their detailed folds feels evocative and sensuous. What my sculptural works have in common is that they are trying to look materially ambiguous. They relate to something else than what they are made of. By retinal deception, the material is second priority. Am I playing surface tricks? The chocolate covered stone for instance, it looks more like a stone covered in wax. The melted sugar and jeans skirt resemble bronze. The t-shirts in the bottles with blue car liquid make you think about marble.



Artist and title unknown, The Still House Group, an artist run organization in New York.

Sweater with fake sweat marks.

One of the chapters that I fixated on for a long time was "The Fetish of The Rare". In hindsight, I would have replaced fetish with obsession, because I feel fetish reminds me too much about some old creepy man sucking on toes. A dive into a "One of a Kind" terrain, nevertheless. With "rare" follows a different value system that I was eager to explore. When I was a child, I used to love to go to IKEA. A heaven for Homo Sapiens. I would lie down in the girly interior decorated rooms and fantasise about furniture and new bed linens in my own bedroom. A cheap and chic gateway to satisfaction. IKEA was and still is, able to make you feel like an individual amongst generic structures and build-it-yourself kits. I have an idea for a work that involves placing rare ming vases(as a loan from antique shops) in the allocated spaces of IKEA. The laminated price tags would state the estimated price, and would consequently change, dependant on fluctuating auction values. The trademark of the rare is that it cannot easily be replaced, or in the rarest kinds, never. My lack of craftsmanship in general renders my sculptures unique. But this is a gestural consequence that perhaps stayed with me during the years of mostly working with performance. With performances, the logic of the temporal was perfected as a method. Making a work feels like a singular event or a private situation for performing. Reduced to being images of eventful insertions, my performances look like the sculptures I make today; frozen and unrepeatably. Not like one-liners, but as elements of stories written once and told differently after.

*

If there's anyone that I adore more than Frank O'Hara, it's John Cheever. *Having a Coke With you* (O'Hara) still stands as an emblem of poetic condensation of time. Let's stay with Cheever, who wrote the most fascinating short stories about the upper middle class in New York in the 60's. "The Swimmer" written in 68, became an all-time favourite. I thought that the story would function as a blueprint for my thesis. Maybe because the protagonist Neil, who swims through a series of suburban pools and garden parties, would match my own unverified position as a writer. Taking multiple dives into chlorine infused waters as the prime affinity to fetching contemporary art! Or as hollow squares into the land. Is Neil a character similar to myself as an artist? Could it be that I had similar roles in mind when considering "The Swimmer"? In many cases, the answer is yes, as Neil might as well be my "patron". The adventurer seemingly lost, but with a staked out route. What it means to be "The Swimmer" connecting all the pools together was a greater avenue than the rocky street I was limping on. As beautiful or brilliant this might have turned out to be, the position of a swimmer is also one that is reaching for a beyond, and a non-gravitational position. The worst thing about plunging into a pool, is to pull oneself out of one. The allure of weightlessness is a contrast the door that might shut behind you, when the towel has dried up and summer is a distant memory. Neil is a dreamer, afloat in his escapade-like mentality. I can feel his raisin skin drying up.

One of the pool works I had in mind as an analogy to swimming was Darren Bader's "Proposal for A Pool filled With Couscous". Hilarious in its "proposing" format, but devastating to deconstruct with language. Bader kept returning to me at this point as an artist, because of his humour and his "joking" nature. He has, in my opinion, perfected the assisted readymade. Evidently, his practice is more amusing to think about. The trenches of the Duchampian heritage that hit right home, but that created a further distance from my own work. Practice is another domain than the isolated work. The conceptual aspects in my practice doesn't always follow through as purely conceptual work, that goes for Bader as well. Coming from a performance and dance background, I no longer really work actively with the body as a medium. But the body as a consuming agent in regards to material I choose is evident. From the body to the human, I considered Viktoria Pihl's "The New Human" as an image document for the thesis. This was more of an appraising act. Existentially, I related it more to a private longing. A large and empty pool with erect jumping towers of different heights; Frognerbadet, as used in Pihl's performance, was my main summer hang-out during adolescence. This site is also used in the last scene in *Oslo 31st of August* (a film by Joachim Trier), where the main character regards the impending gloom of a new morning after a night out, staring into the terracotta sunrise. The beginning of the last day where they close the bath to the public (and rinse it of water). This is also

the morning Trier's protagonist vacate the public pool for an overdose on heroin in a fancy west side villa. Bader injected heroin into a piece of Lasagna. The analogies and turns I was composing felt conspiratorial. Pools and tragedies were definitely depressing to write about. Maybe I was drowning in my own while trying to formally understand them as artwork incorporations. The one thing the poolworks have in common was some form of existential essentialism that perspired through the pages in indesign. They were pool works and scenes that had left an impression during the years. An unconscious wave of pieces plotting together, but the picture in the end could expand open endedly. If you mention a tree, what about the soil? Considering Deleuze at this point would have rendered the most accurate statement in "A Thousand Plateaus"(A Thousand Plateaus; Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, 1980), *This book is like a broken record*, endearingly precise. Like the avid jogger, racing on asphalt, where is he headed? What is he running from?

Warning! (Spoiler if the reader wants to read "The Swimmer"); Neil, after his glorious adventure as a petit-bourgeois aquatic drifter, ends up at his own house, which turns out to be impenetrable. I thought, how brilliant, the last venture for the text would be directed towards the artist contract. The "locked down" commitment that would enable judicial control of ephemeral and conceptual work. I realised quickly that the history of the artist contract was densely out of my interest as an artist, that doing a few google search on the matter, rendered me lost. I didn't want to go back to Tino Sehgal as a reference to performance as sculpture and his oral agreements with institutions and collectors. Not because I don't appreciate Sehgal as an artist or his own peculiar ways. But because he sort of reminded me too much about my past fascinations that somehow were not so relevant anymore. His world of dematerialized strategies towards performative works belong to a complex world of people and situations. Control mechanisms (or rules) as main supportive walls for transient and impermanent work were quite a load to consider. It annoys me that he sort of has this monopoly of "situations" as sellable moments.

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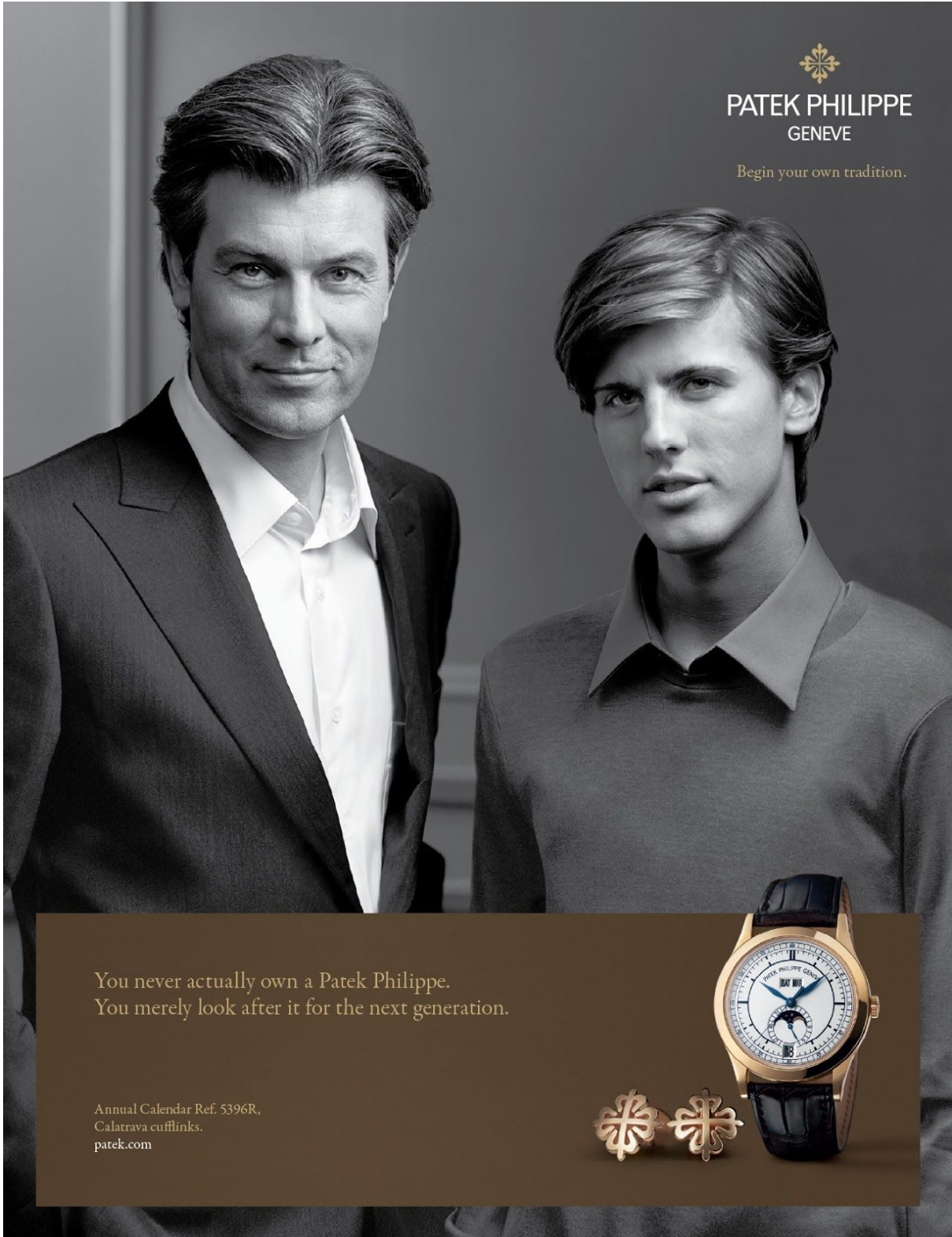
The endless emails I wrote to Astrup Fearnley with no reply in sight, didn't really help either. I would write them questions about acquiring artworks that have withering qualities and if I could interview an in-house curator. Out of curiosity, what do you do with a sculpture made out of dried mango?(Lizzie Fitch and Ryan Trecartin). I was trying to make a subject leap from the private sphere to public institutions. The difference between the private sphere(e.g a collector's apartment) to a public museum must be vast in regards to work waiting to rot or be replaced, just in lieu of resources and the

people involved. The audience, of course, is another matter. The eye of the public has a different sense of demand. "Sign your Name" as the final chapter title didn't match my own. It's also very bizarre to write about something that is closely related to your field, but that have no phenomenological grip on reality. With this I mean my own reality as an artist. I have never sold a work. I can only be hypothetical about future circumstances in regards to this matter. Would someone buy my bubble wrap bubble jacket? Or what about the grapes I coated with transparent nail polish? The overall discrepancy here is that I make work that appear to have some form of value, but after a closer look, they flutter beyond their own matter and drift into temporal statements. They hint at something that cannot be satisfied. Something that feels bizarre to buy or collect. My work is a lonely hunter. The heart, that's way easier to bear.



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"I want to leave, but where? Seduce, but who? Write, but what?"

Albertine Sarrazin, Astragal(Novel published 1965, France)

Like Albertine Sarrazin's autobiographical novel about a young woman escaping prison, only to find herself searching the forest with a broken ankle bone, I am too, looking for the narrative connecting my efforts with some dislocated pain. To allow a story to unfold under the soles of your feet is to accept the grounds on which you are moving. With this text I have been trying to regain some power over my writing. The motivation was nevertheless to be as sincere as possible. What essentially are my beliefs as an artist? Let's go back to the basics. The studio as an observatory crest. What accumulations are currently orbiting around my presence?

The white Curaçao bottle in the corner of my studio has barely been tasted. My friend gave it to me for my birthday(after first receiving it herself for her own birthday), the same friend who also gave me a friendship photo, mounted in a pink glitter frame. The unpalatable elixir as a token for friendship in the light of a treasured bond between two people. A book by John Kelsey called Rich Texts hovers over Søren Kierkegaard's half broken tombstone. A couple of tall glasses have wine residue in their convex bottoms. Two corn cobs laminated in plastic that were meant to be a part of project about picnics(that never happened because my initial fascination was with picnic tables, and it basically wore off.) A toothbrush carved into a spear, one of the shanks I made that actually could still be used as a functional item. A drawing of a my hand that turned out to being surprisingly good as I never draw. In fact, I thought it was so brilliant that I will never attempt to draw anything again. Now it's full of stains from origins unknown. I tend to hide it under a stack of bills out of embarrassment. An A4 print of Martin Margiela's comforter coat(a coat made out of a comforter). A can of chilli beans that reminds me of being lazy and hungry before its time to celebrate the doings simultaneously with the ending of a day. A respirator tube my mother was breathing through during the last hour of her life. A framed "home kit" map another friend made for me when I crashed at her place.

A map with arrows that were pointing to items neatly spread out on her living room table;

- Half of a Xanax(not strong, don't worry),
- Face mask(fancy),
- Water with lemon(not lime, (which she knows I hate)
- A round chocolate ball wrapped in gold paper
- Keys
- Organic cereal(milk in the fridge)

Eva Hesse's anthology is hidden under an experiment involving paper and evaporated gelatine. A large hair clip that awaits a yet-to-be found companion for a sculptural fusion. The overheated radiator that challenge the validity of my deodorant every time I recline into the grandmother chair next to it. The floor is sticky as hell. The walls have remnants of powdered sugar solidified as drops that once were running away from a shirt. Like small white tears, they haven't forgotten about me. A white t-shirt that I have cut the arms off and sewn back on in reverse order. A marble plate with a cnc engraved letter from the dean at Khio(a letter threatening to kick me out of school for being caught smoking inside). Two brown paper bags(empty) of different sizes stand dormant by the concrete pillar. There's A wooden table-top reminiscent of a surfboard that I realise can never be used for anything remotely swag. But the shape in itself and the dark wood brings something else to the mesh. The oval edges soothes the retinal disturbance from closing my eyes to much. This studio still has the potential of becoming a Brancusi-esque place if I allow it to grow from personal fixations. The studio as "the brain". The image of Brancusi working and producing endless sculptures taking up excessive space. And him one day tripping over a tool box and falling into a wooden erection that further tilts another vertical piece, and then the domino effect sets in and he gets buried under a heap of his life work. The word *Gesamtkunstwerk* is for real.

THE
ART
OF
Swimming.

Illustrated by Proper
FIGURES.
WITH
Advice for BATHING.

By Monsieur *THEVENOT.*

Done out of *French.*

TO WHICH
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concerning Artificial Swimming, or
keeping ones self above Water by se-
veral small Portable Engines, in ca-
ses of danger.

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