

Interview artists in residence Bart & Klaar

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Bart and Klaar are the type of artists that don't always make tangible 2D and 3D art, but they create movement in the society they are currently in; they do intervention art.

Bart says: "We don't say that art for the white space is over and done with. Everybody says these days that art must be all about society. But that is not necessarily so, because it's also about ethics, and art is just art. But when we arrived on Curaçao we saw a society for which the best way to understand it was to go and visit where it happens. So it depends on the local context what we do."

So it is not about a country, or to make a work about a country, but *with* that country. And then you need to be where the things are happening, where there dynamics are. And that is not always in a museum.”

Klaar says: “If I may sum it up: To me the context is the location, and the physical location is irrelevant. To me the central question is: how do I relate to the context? I’m convinced that the context shapes me. I am not a neutral Klaar. I’m in interaction with the context all the time. I am different elsewhere, and here I’m clearly the Dutch Klaar. I’m a different Klaar in Surinam or in Peru. This is something that intrigues me. Also there is a very specific history here. If you haven’t immersed yourself in that, you actually haven’t been here.”

On Curacao the expectations about artists are different: people quickly assume that if you are an artist that you can paint well. Have you encountered this a lot here? How do you go about it?

Bart: “If we explain what we do, people ask: Yes, but what do you *make*

And we say: it is sometimes ‘*a hard question*’, sometimes not, but it is hard to explain. It’s hard to explain here that a hard question like that, can be part of your thoughts about something. It doesn’t have to be only a drawing or schedule. Artists are often reduced to only making objects. We often say that there are already many objects. It can feel like you are producing objects like an assembly line.

That’s what I like about IBB: you don’t only produce. There is also space for reflection, citizenship and being involved in social processes. It’s not just this assembly line where each time a painting drops off. You don’t do art justice when you reduce it to only making works that are tangible objects, although, that is what people can buy.”

Klaar: “Here people don’t even ask *if* you paint but *what* you paint. Landscapes or portraits? But because we are more about relation-based instead of transactions, objects are not relevant. They are only relevant as medium or as stumbling rock or as intermediary. And an art object without context or relationship is something we haven’t made in a long time. We are now at the point that we wish to make souvenirs, and those are objects to remember the relationship. And that is the downside of

relationships: if you leave, the relationship fades away.”

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What do you think is necessary to make a work like that, a souvenir, come out in the best way possible?

“The souvenir is a success if it recalls the specific relationship and not the cliché. We have seen a lot of souvenirs here and you are guided to a not realistic experience. For example the Chichis refer to big sized women in colourful bathing suits, but you don’t see women smiling happily at the beach sitting in those and it’s not something you really experience. It would be ideal if a souvenir would refer to a more personal experience.”

You are very engaged with the students here. They immediately notice that you are here to pour your time and knowledge into them and not that you are here primarily to do your own thing, they love this. Did you always have this sort of

effect?

“Here comes the IBB promo”, Bart jokes. “No, It really depends on who invites us. The interest we always have, but at some places there is this stiff doctrine of how things are done; you can feel that you are the Christmas decoration as an artist. And that can be okay, that you do something on the side, parallel. But what we found interesting here is that we could think about different approaches and how to think about making art. But also about the few lectures we gave that are about the creative process, what is in your mind, and not what comes from your hands. To be aware about concepts. If I look at art I always try to look at the person, those things go together.

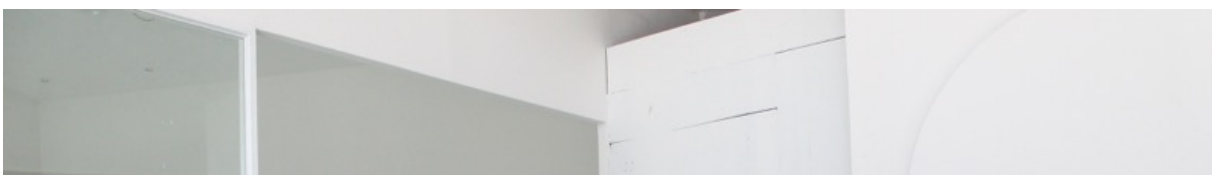
For me when I look at a great artist, I also see a great person. For me a great artist can't be a bad person

With art you can also do good. And this is something that we try to do with interaction at IBB. Not to only feed our own ego, which we have too, but that it can be mainly about the interaction. So the students are also open towards us. So it also depends on the demand.”

Do you have some educational background?

Klaar: “I don't, but I am a true teacher. I've made a lot of works, performances, in which eventually people participated, and this evolved into a concept. To bring back what you do to a few simpler steps is a good way to teach. I love to give instructions to which people can get a certain think- and acting process. And for us it's like a party to talk about concepts. To me it's the most radical freeing form of art. It's immaterial and doesn't require any techniques than to only see things with a clear eye. The art is egalitarian because just instructions are more than enough, you don't need to possess.

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It would be great to leave behind your manifesto for us.

Bart jokes: “I feel a gentle pressure...”

Klaar: “Yes, in that sense our work is conceptual because we always find ways to pass it on.”

Bart: “And we like to have this airy approach where we teach about other artists too, and not just about ourselves because we want others to learn about other artists. It is not about his ego either or how skilled this artist is, but more about his conceptual approach. For example an assignment on the work of artist Erwin Wurm, we didn’t really explain the students what to do exactly but just showed pictures and talked a bit about it.”

Klaar: “But we like that people just know the basics, just the concept and then just go and do their own thing. And also check if it made sense.”

Bart: “Where is something good or where is something less good? It can be something very small that makes a difference if a picture is good or not. This has to do with beauty or aesthetics.

A student (Leomar Imperator, red.) loves to walk long distances and discover new locations. He came to us and asked if he could use that for his art. It would be great that he can transform the daily things in life to meaning, instead of routine. And with that in some way you gain back your own authority on your daily life. We think that people are losing this more and more. The choices you are allowed to make in life are fewer every day.

The essence of an artist is someone who forms his own opinion but also his own action.

If that tradition loses its foundation, because you decide less and less, this means that art becomes less and less approachable. We can't put ourselves in the perspective of the individual that searches and acts himself.

Still here in Curaçao people wonder: But how do you get food on the table?

“We give lectures, workshops, we teach. We also get assignments. It creates tension because in fact we go against the capitalistic system of buying more, taking more loans, more money, more use of stuff, etc. Always more, but more doesn't lead to a better world, it only makes the piles of waste grow, so there is more tension. We also got this question in the Netherlands and it's a challenge, but the miraculous part of it is that we can live from it, and for a long time already. On the long term we don't have worries but surely there are the little things short term.”

Klaar: “And we live modestly, but it is a switch that you make.”

Bart: “It's uncertainty. It's a dynamic, a choice in which you have so much freedom. You search for the risk because you make art. But this question about income is a good one. When I do studio visits the first question I ask looking at the studio is: how much is the rent? Because this practical question is important to indicate if the artist can keep it up. I'm not a practical idealist, that's too opportunistic, but there is an interaction between thinking to be able to afford this life.”

Klaar: “And that's why because we find that conceptual work is so important, because many artist must work for income next to their creative work. The more time you can transform from pressure to choice, the better. It will be very freeing, to transform for

a large part the time you have to the way you choose. For example Leomar can take his walks, but these he can transform into something. It's the same with worship. You can celebrate creation with work, taking out the characteristic of duty, replacing that with volunteer work and everything you do is in the context of the planet. When you are doing the dishes it get's a total different charge.

And maybe we are lucky bastards and we can't promise the artist life we have to young people, but then at least you are obliged to formulate an alternative strategy. Bart, do you agree?"

Bart: "No, I don't agree. I think that everyone can fight for that if they feel the urgency to do so. We are not raised in luxury, we give lessons to young people because we have the drive to show that you can, without money, without status, without means, make art. Without romanticising it. I love to work in neighbourhoods where there is poverty and problems, but I like those problems more than the problems of a rich neighbourhood. I can relate better to people who improvise than to people who put walls around their mansions being afraid that their possessions will be taken from them. I find those white gated communities here an awful world that is not my own. And that is the difference between capitalism and socialism: it's your starting point, the individual or the collective. But something like this gated community looks like a collective, but it's actually individual people who are afraid to lose what they have gained. Those walls are very symbolic, and to me those gates are disturbing because they are never about trust.

Outside of Europe there are many countries where everything is gated, even the car you park in a cage, afraid that it gets stolen. And that is the beauty of a residency; that you are forced to look in a different way to things you don't understand, and you can get familiar with it. Now we also live in a house with gates and it also means peace and safety. But I think: where are we then?

Well, for the same reason you lock your bike in Amsterdam, to say: this bike is not a giveaway. But in a village in the Netherlands you don't need to lock your bike.

Klaar: "I heard from a father of one of the students that young people who don't have the means to buy an expensive watch, committed a robbery on a Chinese store to get

to what they want. Living in a materialistic world and wanting to count, having no work, you will think of all the fast ways to get what you need to get to count; swallowing cocaine pellets, committing robberies, etc. But the stupidity is that you steal from each other, a very destructive way to bring down your own community. So I can understand the gates, but it doesn't solve anything, because it challenges the thief to take the gate down. Instead, how do you make a young person count in this society? How do you take away the urge to have an expensive watch?"

Are there moments that you do want to do a residency purely to make individual work, with that urgency?

Bart: "No, I don't think so, because we are very curious. Of course we will make works, but we are very curious to know new things and to compare things to what we already discovered. And it's always exciting to see what part you will take in this interaction with the previous experiences. So I don't know if you can call me an experience artist, so to speak. To students we say: You think of something large and abstract, bring it back to yourself and to your own experience. It becomes personal and then has an effect. Sometimes concepts like capitalism against communism for example are so large it's very difficult to say something about that, but when you have an experience, you actually care. I find it difficult that the youth now can be indifferent and get easily bored and can't find this spark. Everywhere in the world people are in this way isolating, moving less and meeting less. No coincidences. Kids are brought and picked up from school, being in one safe space. There is little surprise, little disappointment and the chance for failing hard is rarely there. Fact is that we only live within our own lifestyles, and we are like in this trunk. Rich kids lead a very protected life and on the other hand poor kids are that much on the streets that they get this twisted idea that they can become successful without doing any effort. I saw a few videoclips of Curacao rappers in which women are standing on the car, singing and taking out their guns and then their expressions stop, because the gun takes over everything. My point is: what sort of culture do we form together?"

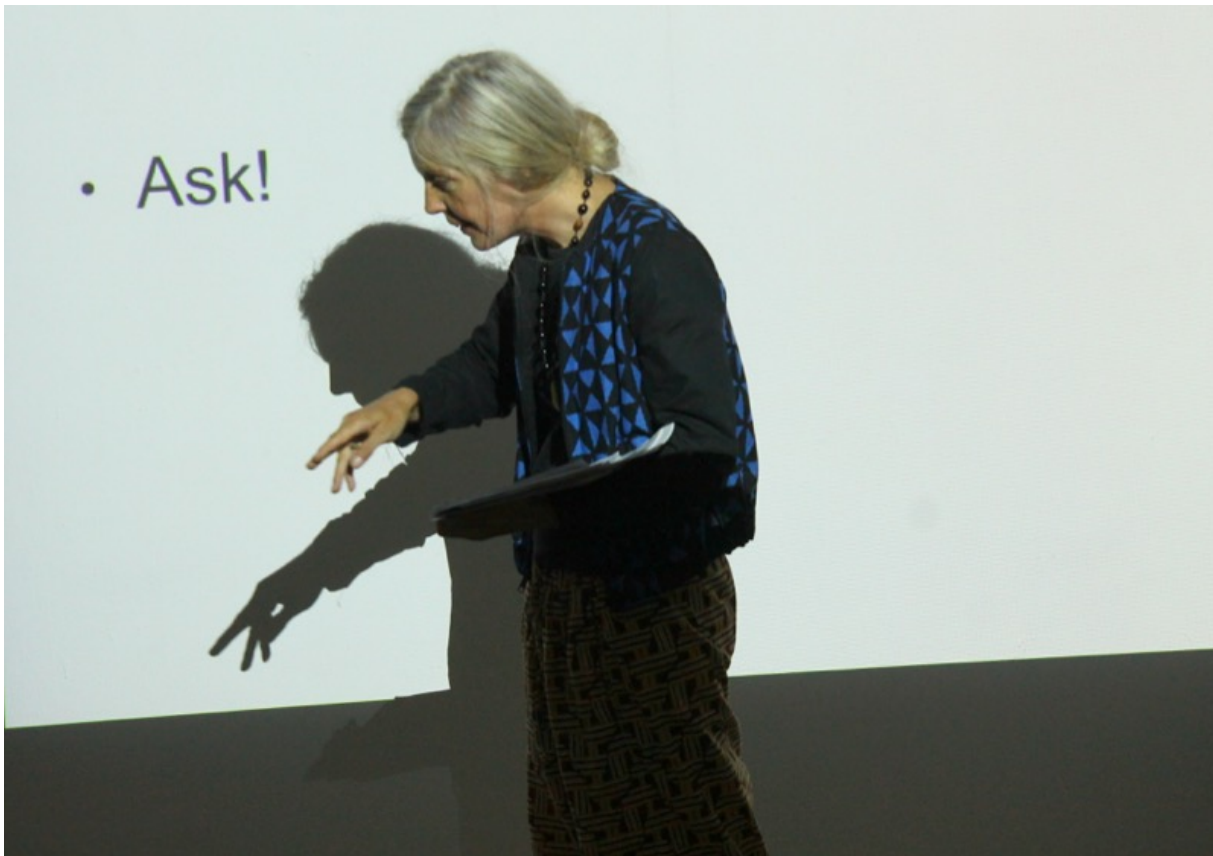
Klaar: "I rather not pay attention to stuff like this because it's not something I took part in, it's a different generation with its own media. If I can't place myself in them I rather not give my opinion. I have no idea how it feels to find it normal to always be "connected" (social media connected). I don't know how it feels to be able to swipe

on a screen since childhood. I have no idea as to how a non-physical world can be such a large part of your memories. It's very strange to have been to places that don't exist. So I think this is mysterious and I rather do something in the physical reality."

Bart: "But we work with the phenomenon of 'we', and we work in public space and then you pay attention to the behaviour on the street. And what makes it different for us is that you don't have the phenomenon of the pavement here. So the pavement is a weird meeting place for neighbours and of the street, but here in Curaçao a lot happens from within the car and from this airconditioned box. There is little space of greeting and chatting with each other from the car.

However families take a whole day to spend time with each other on the beach. This we don't know in the Netherlands and I find that impressive of family life here."

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We don't have many local artists here like you who do socially involved playful actions to bring awareness about something. What makes a fertile soil that could bring forth artists like you?

Bart: "Yesterday we were in the neighbourhood Fleur de Marie, which went through a transformation by a combination of strive and party. The premises are owned by Monumentenzorg, the houses are built by people themselves, a combination of authentic houses and self-built houses. And here you see that they kept the combination of both styles and did not make it all clean and smooth in one style, getting rid of whatever looks poor. I found that really nice to see, it's possible to transform but keep the original character. So I would create artist-in-residence spaces within these neighbourhoods. To go as an artist and live and feel and be there with people who have been living there for 80 years. That I think is a super challenge and those neighbourhoods are here. Not to make art about the people but with the people."

Klaar: "The fertile soil is that it happens and when it happens you will see that more people will follow. When it's there and then it happens more.

But, essential in this process is communication. So it goes together with the willingness to communicate. That is the precarious part. And here people are distant, they stay quiet and don't share, not because they don't have an opinion but because they don't grant it to you

If you don't share it won't work.

So these, communication and trust, are the essential parts."

Does being a foreigner in this process make it easier or more difficult?

Bart: "We are invited by someone on the inside. If we would just be here as tourists it would be much more difficult. So IBB invited us and being here everyone knows we are here temporarily so that can make it easier and we can get away with asking the strangest questions, but the language Papiamentu can work as an obstacle and can keep us out. Also when people invite you they say, yes come but then when you are there it can be awkward. Sometimes people here aren't too warmly, I have to say. You

feel resistance, I almost don't want to use the word 'makamba' but it has to do with it."

So if you would be Colombian instead of Dutch it would have been totally different?

Bart: "I think so, but I'm not sure."

Klaar: "But here we are also part of the conflicts. And this brings lively discussion. It is a fact that not everything is settled with the relationship between the Netherlands and Curacao. Because of the history being Dutch and being here you'll bear the brunt. In a way I feel honoured to get that role.

Bart: "we find it interesting to be in the middle of these dynamics, it matters. We still haven't gotten the approach to mind our own business. And we don't have the intention to put in our noses in other peoples business. If I can say one thing about the ISLA: a refinery is always something nasty, in every part of the world. Oil is something nasty. It's clear what a refinery does and there hardly is a clean way to go about it. But the entire world is busy with alternative forms of energy. The government here doesn't give the impression to steer the thoughts in this direction. There is so much wind and sun here. The entire island could easily run on these energy sources, you don't even need any research for that. But why doesn't it happen? And questions like this are fun to ask here."

Klaar: "But I do notice that the island is in the grip of the past and not so much focused on the future. Not focused on new visions. What are the visions for in 10 years? Or even 5 years? People live very much in the now and try to solve things from the past."

Bart: "We are shocked that there is no budget for education. You think you would give a better future to children than the one that you had. It's a cliché to say children are the future, but you have to think forward. But a lot here seems to go about what has happened or has not happened in the past.

I have a hopeful ending. IBB is for us a warm bath. We can do a lot and the structure here is in a way that we can touch base on a lot of things. I think it's very necessary to

make stories together about all this useless polarisation, such as what is a real 'Yu di Kòrsou'. So Curacao is already a society, a people as it is. So this nonsense about some people being original 'Yu di Kòrsou' and others not, this is something we should make artworks about. We need to actively fight this, and not only be against this, but to show that you are already something and that you can enjoy each other. Take joy in each other, as you are.

It seems there is a hostage situation taking place, but the robbers are we ourselves. Everyone acts afraid, or in a sort of weird humble way towards each other. But you are already citizens here and in your full right to demand, for example, a better education for our children. Who's children get bad education? Ours right? With cultural projects and art in neighbourhoods, with lots of love and patience you can accomplish a lot."

Klaar: "For us it's new, but we are the number-so-much resident of IBB. So what we want to leave behind is a reader for the next resident. We did a lot of research and we want to share that with the next resident, so they don't need to go through the same ritual dance on Google. I find it a pity that the residence house shows nothing of the former artist. It's very sterile. I would like to see things that give the impression that you are in this tradition. We are the 55th resident. This is a tip."

Bart: "Another tip for IBB is that the students do more internships at companies here on the island.

Third tip: As an artist you are busy with your public, and with social projects it's almost dramatic because your public becomes your topic. Something IBB could think about, besides the Open Day, is to offer a master class 'Public'. What is a Curacao public, skip the palm trees and show different things and educate your public.

After all the workshops and the seminars we gave, it is the time for practice. After all... the proof of the pudding is in the eating. At this moment, we conducted with a team of students, under the guidance of MJ Zapata, ideas/scenarios to be used in public areas of Willemstad. It is intended that a lasting relationship and cooperation remains after we are gone between the government and IBB. Our goal is a laboratory 'art in public space' for the students, so that ideas become experiments you can try out in the real world. Art in the center of society, not only in the white space!

In the end Bart & Klaar for the first time have students execute their concepts in the form of a procession that will take place in Punda. It will be also filmed and shown in the new Esmeralda building of IBB on the 16th of December.

1. <http://interventionmagazine.institutobuenabista.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/BartKlaar02.jpg>
2. <http://interventionmagazine.institutobuenabista.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/BartKlaar02.jpg>
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