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2007

Rietveld Research

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Introduction text of GRAY Magazine # 3

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Research is in the air. Like a shiny bubble it floats around the art world, filled with promises of a better future for the arts. Art spaces that before saw it as their main task to present interesting developments in the visual arts suddenly call themselves R&D-centres. That means that they think of themselves as places for Research and Development. Art schools sometimes have special departments for artistic research, for instance the KHU in Utrecht.

And this fall, the University of Amsterdam starts a Masters in Artistic Research where students with a BA in Visual Arts, Music and the Performing Arts can get a degree in a combination of theoretical research and art practice. The Rietveld Academy, of course, cannot stay behind. But what is research in the arts?

In this issue of GRAY Magazine you will find some answers and some examples. In general you could say that research is just an extra tool to produce works of art, another way of being curious about the world. Doing research in art does not only mean working in an experimental way along the lines of more scientific research, it can also imply using existing methods and results of scientific disciplines to enrich the work of art with more facets. Instead of intently staring into your inner self, or exploiting once again the pictures of a boring childhood, you can explore the riches of philosophy, sociology, anthropology, the natural sciences etc. All the results and ideas of these disciplines are freely available in libraries and on the web and offer an enormous amount of material that is just as suitable to use as paint or existing photographic images. But, just as with paint or photography, you first have to learn how to use before you can do it in your own way.

Learning to handle the material of research, learning to look at art as a way to do research on the world around us, demands a new way of working that is not yet common in the Academy. It needs more than teaching ideas and histories, more than using the right text that connects to your work. It needs a consistent training in working with ideas and research results, a discussion of concepts and difficult approaches in order to establish a discourse, a way of talking, that can handle these ideas, results and concepts just as easily as the hand can handle a video camera or a pc. What the Academy needs is not more theory, but training in how to use theory as practice.

Doing research in art or art as research does not make you a better artist. But it does not make you a worse one either. Theory is in the air. Maybe it is just a seductive bubble that can explode at any minute. But it can also be a balloon that lifts you high into the sky.

In this magazine you get an introduction to artistic research by Deborah Cherry, Professor of Art History of the

Modern Times at the University of Amsterdam, who was previously Research Professor at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London. Henk Borgdorff, Professor of Art Theory and Research at the Amsterdam School of the Arts, compares artistic research with the foundations of scientific research. Widely varying examples of research are provided in the projects of Saskia Janssen, who has drug users drawing spider webs, and that of René Put and Rianne Petter who, for the last couple of years, have been conducting a research project on the quality of the poster. Janssen and Put are both teaching at the Rietveld Academy and have conducted their research as part of the Academy's Research Group (Lectoraat) Art and Public Space. Two projects by students of the Rietveld and the University of Amsterdam that were a result of the ongoing honours program are also presented here. One deals with the theory of the *dérive* and the other researches the possibility of art as a new form of religion. Finally, the design of this issue of GRAY Magazine, is a research project by Kalle Mattsson.

Not opposing existing ways of looking at the world, but using them. Being in line and deviating slightly at the same time.

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