

Shifting Perspective

Introduction

*I believe – yes, believe – in Equality. And I believe that Art has the power of transformation. The power to transform each human being, each one and equally without any distinction. I agree that equality is the foundation and the condition of Art.*¹ Thomas Hirschhorn

Can binary oppositions like good vs. bad, political vs. apolitical, and contemporary vs. traditional be peacefully housed in the same body? How can the same institution be involved with so many diverse artistic practices, political strands and institutional manners? SKOR's long history has proved the possibility, having become rich and multilayered through diverse conceptual, artistic and socioeconomic streams that converge and diverge from each other while weaving together its historical moments. From the welfare state to the neoliberal era, SKOR has managed to widen its vision to host diversities and differences sequentially and simultaneously.

As SKOR's working context varies extensively, the content of its projects varies as well, from the political to the poetic, while its vocabulary of 'genres' and media ranges from inspirational spatial designs and monumental sculptures to immaterial memorials and revisited land art projects, and from documentary films and photographs to publication projects and performative conferences and events. This polyphony is also found in the art projects completed by SKOR in 2009, some of which started long ago and cover more than one policy period, while others are more recent.

Despite its wide-ranging conceptual agenda and artistic practices, SKOR's embeddedness in sociopolitical changes has been a persistent quality that has provided integrity in diversity, and polyphony over the years. As the credit crisis was unfolding, massive global changes were becoming more visible and beginning to be assessed more critically. As the euphoria around neoliberalism declined, questions were raised concerning its impact at the social as well as the individual level. In diverse formats, artists have been investigating and 'testing' the recent socioeconomic and political transformations and their repercussions on civil rights. In the last couple of years, the 'new democracy' – what Chantal Mouffe calls 'post-political democracy' – and its varied programmes and applications have become major focal points for artistic production.

These current tendencies are reflected in the underlying agenda of the 2009 SKOR programme and were exemplified in different projects, exhibitions and events SKOR was involved in during the year. (Note: For visuals and detailed project descriptions, please see Chapter 02.)

Events and activities for *My Name Is Spinoza*² were realized through a considerable number of partnerships and collaborations with fellow art institutions and organizations based

¹ 'Headless Artist: An Interview with Thomas Hirschhorn on the Friendship between Art and Philosophy' in: *Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas, Context and Methods*, Vol. 3, No.1, Winter 2009/2010.
<http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v3n1/hirschhorn2.html>

² A series of events, lectures and performances were realized in the framework of *My Name Is Spinoza*, initiated by the Amsterdam Spinoza Circle and conceptualized and organized by SKOR in partnership with Foundation Spinoza Center Amsterdam in summer and autumn 2009. *My Name Is Spinoza* received support from SKOR (Foundation Art and Public Space), the Amsterdam Fund for the Arts, SNS Reaal Fonds and the Netherlands Foundation for Visual Arts, Design and Architecture

on a collective platform³. Spinoza's revolutionary views regarding tolerance, respect and freedom of speech, which have maintained their social relevance today, were taken as inspiration by artists such as Job Koelewijn, Francisco Camacho, Thomas Hirschhorn, Aernout Mik and Nicoline van Harskamp.

In their projects, both Mik and Harskamp investigate and articulate the diverse ways and processes in which the democratic apparatus – freedom of speech, debate, demonstration/protest and political staging – operates. While Mik's work investigates this from a global perspective, Harskamp's scripted and staged conference dives into the matter on a micro level. Each project essentially questions pillars of contemporary discourse, such as participation, diversity, freedom of speech, consensus and 'new democracy'.

While these two projects were intended for culturally interested audiences, Thomas Hirschhorn's Bijlmer Spinoza Festival was envisioned for a 'non-exclusive audience': the residents of the Bijlmer neighbourhood in Amsterdam. Likewise, Francisco Camacho's *Group Marriages Initiative* aimed to gather 40,000 signatures to submit a petition to the Dutch parliament to allow more than two citizens to enter into a civil marriage. Camacho managed to collect approximately 10,000 signatures, which was not sufficient for the initiative to be placed on the parliamentary agenda but signified an extraordinary level of audience participation for such an alternative, if not progressive, proposal.

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services (...)." ⁴ The 25th article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights served as a starting point for Tue Greenfort's land art project *HUNGER*, which was produced as part of *Land, art in the Zeeland Wilhelminapolder*, organized in celebration of the 200th birthday of the Koninklijke Maatschap de Wilhelminapolder (Royal Wilhelmina Polder Society) in 2009. GPS-guided tractors mowed the word 'hunger' into one of the polder's extensive sugar beet fields. This majestic work, while referring to the Hongersdijk manor, the site of the exhibition, also contrasted the feeling of well-being in the prosperous Netherlands with the harsh reality of other geographies, where a brutal lack of basic human necessities is part of daily life. A series of events and a temporary exhibition were realized in this context in the barn of Hongersdijk manor, with participation by Maartje Korstanje, Kultivator, Dirk Zoete and Eva Fiore Kovakovsky. A permanent land art project competition was also held, culminating in a winning project by Michael Buetler.

As an integral part of its 2009 agenda, which promoted an experimental approach and a strong critical stance, SKOR focused on the actualization of different genres, such as the 1970s Land Art tradition. SKOR also realized another land art project, this one historical: *Portscapes* was launched during Art Rotterdam with a re-enactment of Jan Dibbets' *12 Hours Tide Object with Correction of Perspective* on the Maasvlakte beach. Dibbets' original version of this iconic work was shown on German television as part of Gerry Schum's Fernsehgalerie 1 (1968–1969) series of Land Art films. The film shows Dibbets using a plough to draw a rectangle, with perspectival correction. The drawing was then erased by the incoming tide. "The whole thing is constructed for TV," Dibbets said in 1969. "So during the time at which people are looking at this project on TV, they will have an original artwork by Dibbets in their room. When it is finished, the work of art no longer exists."⁵

³ These include de Appel, Art Amsterdam, De Balie, the Jewish Historical Museum, the Lloyd Hotel, Mediamatic, SMART Project Space, the Stedelijk Museum, the Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam, Straat van Sculpturen/Open Source Amsterdam, Tijdelijk Museum Amsterdam, and W139.

⁴ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, published by the United Nations Department of Public Information.

⁵ Jeffrey Kastner and Brian Wallis, *Land and Environmental Art*, 1998, Phaidon Press, p. 181.

The occasion for *Portscapes* was the construction of Maasvlakte 2, a 2,000-hectare extension of the Port of Rotterdam in the North Sea. *Portscapes* is an artistic voyage of discovery into the architectural, political, social and ecological past, present and future of the Rotterdam harbour with participation by international artists. In 2010, with the collaboration of Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, the projects realized on site in 2009 and documentation thereof were exhibited at the museum.

While the Dibbets project embodied both the political and the poetic, Ilya and Emilia Kabakov's *How to Meet an Angel*, a sculptural intervention on the façade of the Amsterdam psychiatric clinic Mentrum, stays closer to the poetic end of the spectrum, articulating the politics of everyday life. Jutting out of the façade towards the sky, a figure with a hooded shirt and a rucksack reaches for the sky and the angels, in a metaphor for mental liberation. By providing a 'face' for the clinic, the work adds a human touch to the building, while extending an open invitation to passersby to look up and widen their horizons.

Main Objectives of 2009

In 2009, nearing its tenth anniversary the following year, SKOR envisioned radical improvements in its vision, mission and activities. A decade is considered a long period of time in any institution's life for contemplating the evaluation, revision and shifting of its aim, function, activities and organizational structure as well as its profile and position for the purpose of facing the pressures put on it by changing conditions. Consequently, so as to adapt to and cope with changing conditions as well as to formulate a sustainable plan for institutional progress, in 2009 SKOR strived to develop new strategies and methods, through which it anticipates increased public sharing and participation in its activities and transparency around its administration, criteria and projects/activities.

Public Programme:

As a part of the shifting vision of SKOR, which seeks to promote integrated programming and conceives of its public programme as equal to its main activities, an extensive public programme is in development and will be launched in autumn 2010. SKOR sees its public programme as a tool for self-reflection, transparency and self-reinvention.

Instead of starting a public programme from scratch, SKOR has focused and enlarged its already existing programme to embody a critical discursive platform. In order to test the ground and reach out to create hybrid and diversified audiences, the programme has been enriched with different types of activities and communication devices. SKOR's Public Programme consists of six pillars: project-related events, *Open* launches, platforms for professionals/workshops, Pass Travels/tours, a series of artist talks, and an international symposium and workshop series. In 2009, with the exception of the artist talks and the international symposium and workshop series, all the educational activities were realized as planned.

When we began to conceive the public programme for SKOR, our most ambitious plan was to realize an international lecture series. To obtain editorial input and a critical approach for the international lecture series, we formed a 'think tank' team of noted experts in the field of art and the public domain. The challenge the think tank subsequently confronted us with can best be formulated as one of moving from the position of observer to that of participant and creating a discursive platform appropriate to public art (i.e., moving beyond the institutional model and into public space itself). We thus formulated a new discursive model more suited to talking about, thinking about and sharing art in the public realm. For this reason, we have postponed the launch of our public programme to autumn 2010. Healthcare as a political lever will be the main focus of the first edition of the programme. Through the extension of its activities into a more discursive arena, SKOR is endeavouring to

expand its capacity for criticality so as to highlight differences, voice the repressed, and contribute to new formulations of active citizenship.

Changing Conditions in Healthcare: The Collection

The introduction of the new Dutch public healthcare act on 1 January 2006 ended the specific arrangement on whose basis it had been possible to create works of art for newly built healthcare institutions since 1984. For 25 years, SKOR and its predecessor, the Praktijkbureau Beeldende Kunstopdrachten (Bureau for Visual Art Assignments), have developed art projects that express the delicate relationship between art and healthcare. In order to cope with changing conditions in this field, in 2008 SKOR began to formulate a novel strategy: The Collection. This innovative plan is aimed at creating a 'shared' collection that can eventually be circulated among participating healthcare, artistic and cultural institutions. With this plan, SKOR seeks to protect selected works from the past produced for healthcare institutions, especially in these times of transition with respect to privatization, and to widen public distribution through loans and coproductions with healthcare institutions, museums and biennials. Furthermore, SKOR desires to experiment with novel forms of commissioning, production and ownership with respect to the production of art in the public sphere. A comprehensive book, *De Collectie: 25 jaar kunstprojecten in zorginstellingen 1985-2009* (The Collection: 25 Years of Art Projects in Care Institutions 1985-2009) was published in 2009, with which SKOR not only marks the end of one period but also introduces the start of a new plan in respect of art in care institutions.

SKOR sought similar solutions with different formulations throughout 2008 and 2009 for projects related to the field of education. To this end, a workshop and competition for a redesign of the cellars and garden at SKOR's offices were organized for a group of Eindhoven University of Technology architecture students. The results will be published in 2010.

Partnership Strategies and Internationalization

In order to create a balance between SKOR's working milieus – official and governmental bodies on the one hand and artistic and cultural institutions on the other – which can remap SKOR's position, SKOR needs to develop its collaborations and partnerships in the fields of art and culture nationally and internationally. An international network of similar institutions can provide important case studies as well as an exchange of knowledge and experience that can result in collaborative projects.

SKOR made a head start in 2008 in collaborations with Dutch institutions like W139, SMART Project Space, the Stedelijk Museum, the Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam (for *My Name Is Spinoza*) and NIMk (Nederlands Instituut voor mediakunst)(for the educational project). In 2009, SKOR concentrated on intensifying its partnership strategies, focusing on art education institutions so as to make a longterm investment in the specific field of art in the public domain. Hence, an institutional alliance with de Appel's Curatorial Training Programme (CTP) was realized, and a graduate of de Appel has begun working as a liaison between SKOR and de Appel. With Witte de With, in 2009 we started the *Morality Wall* project, which consists of four façade interventions on the Witte de With building by four international artists. The Russian group AES+F and German artist Isa Genzken's interventions were realized in 2009 and early 2010. The other two will be carried out in 2010. Furthermore, in collaboration with the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, the *Portscapes* exhibition, which presented the works produced and presented in 2009 since the inception of *Portscapes*, took place in the museum in February 2010. Similarly, SKOR started a partnership with BAK in Utrecht and the International Istanbul Biennial for the second edition of the FORMER WEST congress, which will take place in Istanbul in November 2010.

In 2009, SKOR was one of the parties to initiate the filing of an application for EU funding for a rigorous joint venture by seven European public art institutions – SKOR (Amsterdam, the Netherlands), Situations (Bristol, United Kingdom), Consonni (Bilbao, Spain), Vector Association (Iasi, Romania), Baltic Art Center (Visby, Sweden), WMAM –the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (Poland), MOSSUTSTALLINGAR (Stockholm, Sweden) and Marabouparken (Stockholm, Sweden) – to establish a European Network for Public Art Producers (ENPAP) for the purpose of making comparative studies, developing coproduction platforms and reflecting on cultural policies. ENPAP was officially recognized and granted financial support by the EU in early 2010.

We are at the stage of building up partnerships and collaborations with several other national and international institutions, including Stroom Den Haag (The Hague) and Goldsmiths, University of London (London).

In line with SKOR's international ambitions, launches of *Open* were held at Wiels in Brussels in June and the International Istanbul Biennial in September 2009. The launch of the 19th issue of *Open* is planned for the International Berlin Biennial in June 2010.

The basic aim of this strategy is to open up SKOR and place it at the heart of the artistic and cultural milieu in the Netherlands as well as on the international art map, in addition to the position it has already established in Dutch official circles. In this way, the balance between reflection and practice set out as a goal in the existing Policy Plan can be fostered.