

INSIDE THE BARK OF A TREE

Library exhibition

17 June – 24 September 2021

Inside the bark of a tree marks the opening of If I Can't Dance's library to the public. The library is dedicated to performance art practices, histories and methodologies and has grown in tandem with the artist commissions, research projects and fields of inquiries since the institution's inception in 2005. *Inside the bark of a tree* proposes to see the library as a living topos that will continue to grow through textured encounters with its readers; it is a generative site of continuous cross-pollination that prompts moments of attention, of distraction, of discomfort, and of pleasure. The liveliness and materiality of the library is captured in the word's proto-italic root, *lufro, referring to "the inner bark of trees" and *lubh-ro, meaning "leaf or rind".

On display are works that together carve out an image of the library as dynamic and sensorial, and that is rigged with the potential for the reader to be lost or overwhelmed. The library is a space of searching, affect and desire, even while underscribed with a violence inherent in what is present and what is missing. *Inside the bark of a tree* situates the reader at the center of the library's materiality, interpolating forms of readership and modes of attention that negate the distinction between the inside of the library and the quotidian ways in which we 'read' the material world and life around us.

The display unit, designed by Maud Vervenne, is nestled into the shelving of the library, showcasing for this inaugural exhibition works by Frédérique Bergholtz and Maria Pask, Bik Van der Pol, Naomi Collier Broms and Amalia Calderón, Mariana Castillo Deball, İnci Eviner, Karl Holmqvist, Snejanka Mihaylova, Lisa Robertson, Sarah Pierce, Tao G. Vrhovec Sambolec, and Steiner Shepherd.

Inside the bark of a tree is curated by Naomi Collier Broms, archival assistant, and If I Can't Dance's Curator Archive and Research, Anik Fournier.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Established in 2005, If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution is an art organisation dedicated to exploring the evolution and typology of performance and performativity in contemporary art. We do this through the development, production, and presentation of commissioned projects with artists, curators, and researchers on the basis of long-term collaboration and support.

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I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution
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SELECTED MATERIAL

Frédérique Bergholtz and Maria Pask,
A Way of Making, 2014, video.

Frédérique Bergholtz, curator and director of If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution, together with performance artist Maria Pask, have an ongoing artistic practice in ceramics. On more than one occasion they have staged encounters between their ceramic works and performers resulting in video installations. In this piece, which was filmed here in the Westerdok offices, Bergholtz and Pask were interested in how the performers' exchanges with the works would affect their movement and potentially produce meaning. The piece is divided into moments, each dedicated to the performers' successive reading of, and bodily response to, the materiality, shape, weight, behaviors and textures of different ceramic objects.

Bik Van der Pol, *Catching Some Air: Library Drawings by Bik Van der Pol*, Leeds: Henry Moore Institute, 2002.

Catching Some Air is an ongoing project grounded in Bik Van der Pol's practice of working with found images and information from art history, journals, news magazines, and advertisements. During their fellowship at the Henri Moore Institute in Leeds in 2000, the artists accumulated images that they photocopied from the institution's library holdings. Travelling from Leeds on to New York and Stockholm for other projects, they began retracing the photocopies as a means to revisit ideas. The drawings are acts of appropriation that form, in the artists' words, "a collection of choices [...] which functions as an active laboratory for (re) constructing and (re) setting." This artist book embodies the generative nature of libraries, their capacity to disperse and move as visitors exit, bringing bits and pieces with them that find new materialization, trajectories and meaning in the process.

Naomi Collier Broms and Amalia Calderón,
Deviant Archival Cosmologies, Amsterdam, 2021.

After several months of sifting through, sorting, categorizing, pulling out keywords and entering the books, printed matter, and media of the If I Can't Dance library into our database, Amalia Calderón and Naomi Collier Broms realized they had both produced extensive personal archives of anonymous fragments gleaned from the material, and destined to feed into their respective creative projects. Amalia had stacks of yellow post-its on which she had jotted down quotes, while Naomi had amassed heaps of photos on her phone of covers and passages to refer back to. Already in the moment of its unpacking, the library was already growing, not through accumulation of new material but through its encounter with its 'first' readers.

Mariana Castillo Deball, *Interlude: The Reader's Traces*, Maastricht: Jan van Eyck Academie, 2005.

The library disperses into the research, projects, bodies and thought of its visitors, but visitors also leave traces that become part of what is read in the library. Folded back pages to mark passages of interest, notes on a scrap of paper left in a book, penciled markings, coffee stains, all become material that hints to the library's users, a cartography of encounters intimating the library's unique narrative. Deball, who was an artist commission with If I Can't Dance in 2005, questions to what extent reading in the library goes beyond the reading of written texts to the reading of the traces and performances of the other visitors.

One is familiar with the vision of someone slowly scanning the shelving in search mode, or of figures hunched over

notebooks at tables covered with research material, or of those who are completely keeled over in abandonment, heads resting on arms that serve as a cushion for a quick catnap. Deball insights how even while the library is ordered around the activity of work, one is easily derailed from the task at hand.

İnci Eviner, 'Acting in the Library' *Offside Effect: Academy as Exhibition*, 1st Tbilisi Triennial, Metropolis M Books, Utrecht: Metropolis M Books, 2012. pp.33-38.

This script was developed by artist İnci Eviner, together with young artists and students from the Kadir Has University in Istanbul on the occasion of the first Tbilisi Triennial. The piece emerged out of a workshop which took the space of the library as a stage for performative practices, and in which the library itself is an actor that grows, has a memory, overwhelms, and displays power. The reader is not innocent in this, as one character reminds us: "every choice casts the other out, [so that] the act of reading is an everlasting act of censorship." The playful script has a call and response structure between several characters and a chorus, offering layered perspectives on the pleasures and struggles that are experienced and performed daily in the library.

Karl Holmqvist, *I On A Lion In Zion*, Frankfurt: Revolver, 2005.

This artist book takes the ten Sephiroths of the kabbalistic Tree of Life as its structure and adopts Brion Gysin and W.S. Burroughs' 'cut-up' technique of mixing excerpts of existing material from three centuries and over thirty different authors. The overwhelming effect of cross-pollination between this heap of sources is amplified by the op-art black and white patterns of circles and squares with the text alternating in turn between black and white to contrast with the background on each page. This creates an expansive, and at times dizzying, effect that highlights the mind's capacity to jump registers during the act of reading.

Snejanka Mihaylova, *Acoustic Thought*, Amsterdam: If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution, 2015.

"You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice." (Deuteronomy 4:12)

Acoustic Thought is the outcome of Snejanka Mihaylova's commission with If I Can't Dance in 2015-16. It is a poetic interpretation of the Gospel of Thomas, a gospel found at Nag Hammadi Library in Upper Egypt in 1945, and contains 114 sayings of Jesus. Mihaylova proposes to see the Gospel of Thomas as "a poem that listens" it has travelled across time, languages and traditions, condemned and excluded from some, and has taken form in songs and poetry via the theologians it encountered along the way. In the texts found at Nag Hammadi, one can read the differing interpretations that point to the plurality inherent to any tradition. This speaks to the role of the reader as listener, the reader as a vehicle for the resurrection of past voices who "began a story knowing that it is an inception of a listening which will be accomplished in a time to come."

Lisa Robertson 'Disquiet', *Nilling*, Bookthug, 2006. pp.56-70.

This essay is by poet Lisa Robertson who is a current Performance in Residence researcher with If I Can't Dance. The text is accompanied by ambient sound recordings made by Robertson at the sites of Eugène Atget's documentary photographs of Paris. Atget's images became instructions for Robertson, indicating locations in the city

that she would revisit in order to capture, this time in sound, the sites' daily urban textures. Imitating Atget thirty second exposures, Robertson made thirty second recordings that accompany each section of the essay. The poet intended that this text and sound piece would embody, in her words: "an ideal library. Infinity, plenum, chaos, dust. I wanted it to be an agora—total availability of the entire thick history of linguistic conviviality and the potential to be completely lost in the strangeness of the civic description." Make yourself comfortable and enjoy reading while listening to Robertson's sound documents (<http://www.bookthug.ca/nilling>).

Sarah Pierce, 'Monk's Garden' *Sketches of Universal History Compiled from Several Authors*, London: Book Works, 2013. p.44.

This text was originally printed on the banner in *Monk's Garden*, Sara Pierce's contribution to the Irish national pavilion at the 2005 Venice Biennale. Pierce was an artist commission with If I Can't Dance in 2006-08. In this short text, an exploration of how we make, and access, cultural memory becomes the grounds for Pierce to draw an analogy between the temporalities at work in a garden, a zine library and Robert Smithson's *Hotel Palenque* (1969-72). For Pierce, "the garden is not one person's vision. It is several, altering, autonomous moments of attention, at varying stages of progress, underway but unfinished." This statement characterizes the unfolding nature and the co-existing layers of time in a library.

Tao G. Vrhovec Sambolec, *Reading Reading*, Ljubljana: Zavod Project Atol, 2020.

"Like an animal in the woods, like a pedestrian in a city, like a researcher in an archive, the eyes are browsing through, passing by touching the surface, veering off getting lost, finding somewhere else. Before seeing, before comprehending, before hearing, before saying."
—Tao G. Vrhovec Sambolec

This publication accompanied Sambolec's installation *Reading Voice* and is part of his artistic research project *Reading Reading* (2017-). The text is a poetic and rigorous exploration of the act of reading and ways to "capture, embody and unsettle the temporal relations that unfold between the written text, eye movement, and the (inner) voice while reading." The reader is made consciously aware of the activity of reading and the performative gestures in text and page composition that choreograph the movement of the reader's gaze.

Shepherd Steiner, 'Unpacking (Their) Library', *Working Title*, Archive, no3 Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki, 2009. pp.32-39.

This essay takes *The Martha Rosler Library*, a nomadic library that is also an artwork, as a starting point to rethink the use value of the library. For Steiner libraries are most commonly understood as places of instrumental use: places of reading for information, for researching a specific topic, or for bettering oneself. However, what *The Martha Rosler Library* highlighted was that in addition to its educative functions, everyone performs or responds to a library in a personal way and on their own terms. In the library, one is called on to work in everyday, habitual ways, and yet, our individual responses in the library are always relational and a question of technics that include personal interpretations and readings. Steiner argues that in this sense, everyone who enters and selects works to read in the library, is simultaneously being read by the library. Specifically, what is being read and exposed is a certain set of individual assumptions, convictions, and preconceptions that constitute the subjectivity of the viewer.