

Veronica  
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Dear Reader,

What follows is a text looking at the recent past of Veronica, an exhibition space I started operating from my living room, for the development, presentation and archiving of performance. Here are a few notes on some its values and bedrock since opening in December 2017.

Veronica began as a figurative gym. Somewhere to work out, developing skills in curating, collaborating, performance making and archiving. I wanted to found a place where artists could get fit and toned. What would the apparatus at this gym look like, what does it do? Does it tone one muscle or focus on overall fitness? Promote attention to breathing or exhaustion? Is it a gym focused on group exercise or the individual? Must there be a teacher or can the exchange of skill happen amongst the group?

Over time exchange occurred and Veronica gave reason for accountability. A middle entity through which all of us working beneath its umbrella were accountable for and to.

“Veronica”, is a given name, of greek, latin and slavic descent, most popular in the year 1974. “Veronica”, has been ascribed to mean “she who brings victory” and refers to the latin translation of “true image”. Locally there is a well loved television channel and radio station also with this name. A boat with large letters V E R O N I C A sits near NDSM. Since starting Veronica people like to tell me of it’s significance to them, and commonly misname it Victoria. I’ve noticed the word is often given to denote containers of narrative and image. There are a smorgasbord of glamorous

characters named Veronica, or characters who aspire to glamour but don't achieve it. Somewhere between glamour and the aspiration for it there sits an intention for a specific recognition based on appearance. The cycle between images, their intention and their meaning is Veronica . But most significantly to me, "Veronica" is the name of my closest friend. We've known each other since the late 80's. This friendship has been cared for, maintained over the years, it's been softened, hardened and now it's been so long I feel like we are a mental appendage for each other. As an artist she creates image forms and content containers constantly, the name suits her. I would say she causes disruption between image intentions and their landed meanings, most visible in her experimental PR collective, Literal Fuck. And as in both our experience, people often mistake her name for Victoria.. And just as my friend does, I let it go with a smile and a wince.

The decision to use the name Veronica took time, I rested on the working title Horse and Cart for a while. There's a quote relating to the relationship between Hannah Arendt and novelist Mary McCarthy which helped me choose which goes, 'It's not that we think so much alike, but rather that we do this thinking-business for and with each other.' this is how I see our friendship, a person to think on behalf of and in collaboration with, despite our differences, this is how I would like to see Veronica the institution. A commitment to co-conspirative thinking. Can that commitment be translated and embedded into an art institution? I want to think of ideas and the spaces we meet them as companions and places within which to collaborate in this business of thinking. How can the institution itself ever be a contributor? I don't know if it can immediately, but I think it can be the subject of befriending and it can provide the conditions for a practice of friendship. A medium for the flow of practicing friendship and befriending.

Friendship can be a structure that negates current social, political

climates. It can be an architecture through which new forms of engagement, reasoning, understanding can grow. Through this understanding friendship as value from which Veronica is built and from which actions are intended to grow from.

In practice talking about friendship produced a lot, quite literally. From discussing the desire to incorporate practices of friendship into the institution Max Harris then built a lecture performance around the topic. Most memorably for me noting:

“Out of this maelstrom of loneliness, friendlessness, or imperfect bonds, the invitation to be a ‘friend’ on Facebook takes on a particular valence – and an especial emptiness. Being a friend on Facebook offers the prospect of the features of friendship we have discussed – support, attentiveness, synchronicity – but no guarantee of any of them. An offer to accept a friend request is an invitation to a zero-hours friendship contract. It is an emblem of how hollowed out friendship has become in our time. “

To compare my experience growing up as a young artist in Aotearoa (New Zealand) to The Netherlands is foregrounded by my experience in artists run spaces, otherwise known as self initiated art spaces, artist run initiatives or ARI's. These self organised art spaces provide key gateways to support and access to likeminded people, especially in the small art community of Aotearoa. My experience as an artist showing work in these spaces, as a viewer and later as an organiser of a space called Plaza, cushioned me to start Veronica here in Amsterdam. Often artist run spaces pick up where tertiary educate leaves off, and can form a space of learning completely distinct from formalised education. These spaces allow for exchange unregulated by usual art world gatekeepers (though they often create new versions), work that is less risk averse, largely free of commercial transaction

as they are almost always unfunded and are on quick turnover, usually surviving around 1 - 2 years or for as long as it's organisers can afford to keep it going. Often the resource these spaces are running on are enthusiasm, care, attention and money that is often hard won through a myriad of side jobs and sources. My experience is that an unregulated, unfunded space can offer itself as a rehearsal spaces for future career steps, innovation spaces for practicing new realities. In light of the funding cuts in 2013 and the ongoing shifts in the cultural climate I don't mean to make The Netherlands seem like cultural utopia in comparison but despite it changes there still is an institutionalised awareness of art as having societal value, there is a broader participation within the arts by people who don't consider themselves working within the arts. So naturally, here in Amsterdam to open a space that is self initiated means somethings entirely different than it does in my motherland. That being said, I am looking to gain funding and curious as to how money will and can play a role. I respect very much the efforts in the Netherlands to stay within institutional arms, to believe in them, hold them accountable. I never came from this belief so by opening Veronica, I became much more aware of the importance of this faith in the institutions that are present.

However, I wanted to open a space that could foster alternatives for practitioners working in the live. Performance that meets between disciplines. Performance is my interest as a viewer, as a student and as a curator. A work at Veronica has to need to meet with an audience, it's performance may not be in it's form but it must be important or even, a completion to the work that it is witnessed. There must be something at stake in having the work viewed. This is why I've come to see the audience as an extension of the scenography and I ask artists to consider this also. As an object for example, can be performative, I ask that the audience be considered for their performativity also. Their presence produces

reality and it matters, so lets take it seriously.

I wanted to offer a service to artists, through my own labour and the resources at my disposal in a way that didn't require them to know how their outcome would be, but to develop it, question it, let it morph and grow. I don't think that I am alone in the struggle to understand a work before it exists. So much infrastructure for creation depends upon the skill of being able to fortune tell and craft a work in it's own premeditated shadow. Writing applications is a kind of performative exercise in conjuring images and creating bridges to reason, reason for someone to part with resources. Over the years I've seen my artist and art workers peers separate into the camps of those who could describe their future work convincingly, ascribe it meaning and perform it's value and those who couldn't. Though, crucially, I don't believe those who have this skill, necessarily make the best work, they are however much more primed to be incorporated within the systems that launches and supports an artist. Perhaps this speaks to the experiencing of art through its' framing devices being inextricably linked to the experience of the art itself. This sentiment led to my understanding of Veronica as an experiment in hosting and asking; how can a work of art be given the respect it deserves while taking into account that every piece of information you encounter to do with the work impacts and contributes to the art experience? This information to me consists of but isn't limited to the invitation, the gossip or conversation leading up to the event, the social media presence, the ease or difficulty at which you find the location, the way you are greeted at the door, the presence or absence of snacks, the temperature, the presence or absence of the artist and the way in which the work is bought to be in front of your eyes and then finally, the way in which it is bought back to your eyes following the event.

In Aotearoa, Māori, the indigenous people, believe one should

walk backwards into the future, facing history as you move forward, acknowledging what has come before you. This sentiment is the last that I will note. At the figurative gym of Veronica, I have tried to practiced a backward gaze and will endeavour to do so. I will no longer operate within the home, moving to a new space in December. I will try new forms of work flow, of collaboration, of presentation, and remembering through the archive, shifting what has not functioned. Leaving the home space separates Veronica further from myself, my own body which seems an important step in it's articulation and further befriending. For Veronica to truly be an entity that can grow from many it has to be less attached to me, it's current nucleus.

Feel free to join in the next season, starting December 2018. And with any questions or queries, email me.

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