



Who's Werner?

Contemporary Art Centre (CAC), Vilnius
6 September – 3 November 2019

Curator: Yana Foqué

Exhibition architecture: Benjamin Roth

Graphic Design: Nerijus Rimkus

In 1981 Martin Kippenberger commissioned a local sign painter named Werner to paint a number of crisp, realistic paintings for him, and with those mocked the audaciousness of the (Berlin) art world at the time. Then, and today still, it is commonly believed that an artist is a genius whose work is created without the help or input of anybody else, an idea that is upheld by the commercial realities that are tied to art since it became a commodity. There are many studies of medieval authorship—of its frequent communality and anonymity—and of Renaissance workshops, with their complex, hierarchical divisions of labor and graded scales that individually defined an assistant according to his position in an atelier. But since the Romantic era artistic practices have become overly mystified and to that is added that in contemporary art the idea takes precedence over traditional aesthetic, technical, and material concerns. Yet anyone that has tried to draw something as simple as a straight line will have to admit that material changes ideas, and that skill is not unimportant when executing it. Though Kippenberger fully acknowledged Werner's role in his project, not much more is known about him aside from his first name. What Werner embodies is a figure whose work commonly is kept a public secret; *Les Petite Mains* that stand behind an artist and whose own language, conversation, labour, etc. helped to create a unique piece that would have looked extremely different if not for their partnership.

Like Kippenberger's work *Dear Painter, Paint Me, Who's Werner?* aims to reveal the collaborative efforts that go into making a work of art through a series of objects—efforts that are not always reflected in the authorship assigned to them. It explores artistic practices in various disciplines that have become intertwined and where it is difficult to tear apart who brought in what piece of the puzzle... It unveils the complexities of collaborative artistic production, a topic that, at a time where it has become common to outsource everything from manufacturing to daycare, begs questioning. But not only does *Who's Werner?* reveal many misconceptions that exist around how a piece of art is made, it also exposes the structures that keep those misconceptions intact. Because sadly, a study of artistic collaborations also offers a telescopic view onto a larger problem of "place", equality of partnerships, gender and race.

Still, it remains difficult to gauge if one can remain completely objective when studying collaborative practices

when most of the information that can be discovered about them can only be found by studying the colophons and “thank you” words in the back of monographs of known artists, typing in an artists name followed by “ + wife” into your Google browser numerous times, and listening to gossip... In the end, nobody else than those working together truly understands the in’s and out’s of their working relationship, sometimes not even they themselves can put that into words. The works that are included in the show serve as an entry point to understanding that relationship.

“ [...] While there is a joy in finding people with shared affinities, establishing communication and friendships with artists who have shared interests and ideas is not a retreat from the challenges of making tough critical art. Who better to kick your ass a little than your collaborators? The disposable, vague, or one-liner qualities in so much recent art reveals a lack of sufficient peer-to-peer ass-kicking. Collaborative projects by their nature insist on constant feedback and criticism.”

From *Against Competition* by Mark Fisher, Blunt Art text #2, 2006

Artists: Antanas Gerlikas, Benjamin Roth, Celine Condorelli, Denise Scott Brown, Erik Frydenborg, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Isa Genzken, James Langdon, John Baldessari, Jonas Mekas, Laura Kaminskaitė, Elle Burchill, Lucy Skaer, Margot Sandeman, Nerijus Rimkus, Norm Laich, Paul Robbrechts, Robert Venturi, Simon Harlow, Yana Foqué.

This exhibition is a collaboration between Kunstverein and CAC Vilnius. It is financially supported by the Lithuanian Cultural Council and Kunstverein’s (Gold) Members. The second part of the exhibition was on view at Kunstverein Amsterdam from November 23 until December 21, 2019.