

Blue Velvet Projects

“DAY CARE DRILL”

BY ANNE DE VRIES

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Excretion is automatic, but how we do it is not. Parents are advised to teach their children how to use a toilet when they're around 18-24 months, and diapers are substituted for toddler toilets. Scaled down for smaller limbs, they resemble the real thing but without the architectonic devices — doors, walls, dividers — that define their referent. For what is considered the most intimate of architectural spaces, privacy is earned not given. Like with most training techniques, these are performative objects, like stage sets, upon which the digestive rites of adulthood are mimed under the watchful gaze of parents.

Like children's toilets, children's toys are designed more for the buyer than the user. For example, when the toy company Hasbro released the first “G.I. Joe” in 1964, they coined the term “action figure” to appeal to gender-anxious mid-century American parents who didn't want their boys playing with dolls. Since then, action figure has become the generic eponym for posable plastic toys marketed male — a wide range of products that shift with the times. Not long after the militaristic original hit shelves, cop-themed action figures emerged, including those released in conjunction with the 1970s crime drama show S.W.A.T., which chronicled the fictional adventures of a “Special Weapons And Tactics” team in California.

Violent delights marketed to children, whether action figures or video games, offer a projection screen for the adult world that makes them. For some, they're the cause of all the blood and guts smeared across our grown-up world — a scapegoat for the AR-15s wielded by young adults (if not those by the men-in-blue who swat them down as they enter school). Others construe them as a cathartic device, or at least a palliative, for the violence that children perceive around them: a way to get your gusto for gore out of the system through play acting. Violence is presented as a socially transmitted disease, and role-play as either predictive or prophylactic. Everyone eventually grows up, of course; some become cops themselves, while others become collectors. Today 1:6 scale action figures are tailored as much to children as adults — infantilized violence matured into a speculative market.

For DAY CARE DRILL, an exhibition at Blue Velvet Projects in Zürich, Anne de Vries brings his lion-in-knight's-armor into a drama of toy policing. The exhibition constitutes the next chapter in the avatar's twisted hero's journey, which has unfolded across different spaces and pages throughout the last year. Previously the heraldic figure stomped its paws across landscapes of sand, first at Berlin's Fragile Gallery and later at the former building of the famous Tresor club. Not long after, the knight became De Wachter: a public sculpture perched on the roof of the Dutch secret service in Zoetermeer. At Blue Velvet Project, the monument peers domestic and dresses in drag. It invades a children's nursery inflected with sadistic intent — a fever dream of infantilized power and infant power structures. 1:6 scale SWAT figures are made sticky with chocolate syrup, posed on cradles, and deflated by the brass-patinated, engorged paws of de Vries' heraldic lion in armor. DAY CARE DRILL interrogates childhood tropes as a proxy for adulthood, when role-play delaminates. Characters become identities, props appear structural, and when the performance is misperformed, it signifies something else: artificiality.

— Nicholas Korody

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ANNE DE VRIES (Den Haag, 1977*)

Anne de Vries oeuvre ranges from video installations, dioramas, sculptures and mixed media collages, publications and interventions. Trained as a video artist, Anne creates storylines by connecting and manipulating media fragments often to the point where there is no narrated continuity anymore. By integrating elements of popular culture, subcultures and self-invented characters, the artist forms an eclectic labyrinth of interrelated narratives. Interconnectivity between differently perceived realities play a central role in Anne's work. Therefore, his approach invites the viewer to question the fundamental mechanisms of making meaning.

SELECTED SOLO/PARTNER EXHIBITIONS

2022 'STOMPING GROUNDS' XXL installation at Kraftwerk, Berlin, Germany
2022 'De Wachter' at Secret Service, Zoetermeer, Netherlands
2021 'OBLIVION 22' at Colli-Independent, Rome, Italy
2021 'HEAVY LOAD' at FRAGILE, Berlin, Germany
2020 'TRANCE IN AMSTERDAM' at Martin van Zomeren, Amsterdam, Netherlands
2020 'Safe the World' outdoor sculpture at Centraal Museum Utrecht, Netherlands
2018 'Qrowd Qontrol' at Friesmuseum, Leeuwarden, Netherlands
2017 'Work on Paper' at ISCP, Brooklyn, New York, USA
2016 'OBLIVION' at Galerie Chez Valentin, Paris, France
2015 'SUBMISSION' at Cell Projects, London, UK
2015 'E_MERGE' at Foam Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands
2015 'LISTENING' Anne de Vries & Olga Balema, at Thibault, Los Angeles, USA
2014 'The (s)Oil we Eat' Martin van Zomeren, Amsterdam, Netherlands
2014 BRANDS – CONCEPT/AFFECT/MODULARITY at Salts Basel, Switzerland
2013 'On Board' at Grand Palais during Fiac, Paris, France
2012 Trails of the Hive Mind, at Sandy Brown Gallery, Berlin, Germany
2011 'Rijks OPEN' 2011 and 2012 at Rijksakademie, Amsterdam, Netherlands

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2022 'The Rhythm of the Night' at Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, Netherlands
2022 'Techno, Berlin und die große Freiheit at Kraftwerk' Berlin, Germany
2021 'Up All Night' at Kumu Art Museum Talin, Estonia
2019 'MOMENTUM10' Nordic Biennale 2019, Moss, Norway
2019 'STONE ROSES' at Die Brücke Museum, Berlin, Germany
2018 Jun. HYBRID at Lustwarande, Contemporary Sculpture Park, Tilburg, Netherlands
2017 BACK 2 SCHOOL by DIS at MOMA PS1 New York, USA
2017 Wonderlijk Weefsel at Stedelijk Museum, Breda, Netherlands
2017 WE ARE THE REMIX, at Röda Sten Konsthall, Göteborg, Sweden
2017 HYBRID LAYERS at ZKM Museum, Karlsruhe, Germany
2017 'Welcome Too Late' at Museum Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Denmark
2017 'Tiny Deaths' at CCA Museum, London, UK
2016 '9th Berlin Biennale' Curated by DIS at KW, Berlin, Germany
2015 'FOCUS Résonance' at La Biennale de Lyon Résonance, Lyon, France
2015 'Asdzáá nádleehé' at Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, USA
2014 'Superficial Hygiene' at De Hallen Haarlem, Netherlands
2013 'Material World' at NEST Den Haag, Netherlands
2012 'The Dark Cube' Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France