

Residency for the People
Diary

February 9, 2021

The streets of Eindhoven centre are covered in ice, the sun's reflection is so dazzling it makes me smile. I'm on my way to Lucas' bar and everywhere is light. For a few moments, I'm perfectly happy with a cup of cappuccino in one hand and a marbled chocolate-frosted cake in the other. A young woman materialises from out of the sun to say hello. She sounds surprised, as if she wonders why she's greeting a complete stranger.

Lucas tells me he drove all the way from Leeuwarden yesterday, where he had gone to see Margriet. The roads up north were still covered in snow, but he had taken it easy and made it home without any trouble. I'm just telling him about my daughter's announcement that she is about to get married to a man I haven't met yet, when Angelique and Gieske arrive for our meeting. It has been a long time since we saw each other – it must have been September 22, when I returned the office chair to MU.

When we're settled with tea and coffee, Lucas talks about the residency. The story begins to sound familiar. Opening up this space for non-artists so they can develop themselves as well. Lucas' joy in working with motivated people, which he discovered during the Wall Street project. "There are so many students and artists who have no idea what to do with all that free space. They just wonder how on earth they're going to fill that white cube – while so many people are really eager to actually do something. They are happy to get a chance to realise their ideas." "And it's quite a lot what some residencies offer," I add. "Time, space, expert support, a large network, a platform..." We talk about the residencies we're planning – one focused on documentation, possibly a website; one focused on neuro-diverse persons; and one post-corona residency open to anyone. How important it is to find the right people to assist the residents, that there will be a presentation of some sort at the end of each residency. The collaboration with Atelier NL – the residency could be for an entire street. "So, if I get it right," Angelique says, "it is about motivation and connection." That seems like an excellent analysis to me.

"And how do you select people?" Gieske wants to know. "We're still trying to figure that out," says Lucas, "but motivation is definitely important." "How would you measure that? Before you know it, you have another strict application procedure with all the criteria people have to comply with, just like existing art residencies..." "Well, it's something we're still discussing. Apart from motivation, the proposal should be realistic – doable within the given time and the available budget. If someone wants to catch a whale for instance, we can't help them." I hear Captain Ahab crying 'Ship ahoy! Hast seen the White Whale?' but manage to stay with the conversation. "I think we're also looking for proposals that could potentially open up someone's life, that could have a real impact," I say. I watch my hands describe a globe that falls into two halves, like a split honeydew. "Maybe it's best not to limit yourself

too much,” Angelique says. “You do have to address the question of course, because it will come up in any subsidy application, but you can head it off by saying you’re trying different formats, learning by doing. Open calls, group exhibitions, collaborations.” “That’s very much the idea,” says Lucas: “we just want to get started and find out how it works.”

Fundraising; Snelgeld; KunstLoc’s AiR programme; Angelique knows the right person to talk to at the Cultural Participation Fund, Gerben Willers, and will connect us. “He was artistic director of Roodkapje in Rotterdam, he will totally understand what you are doing.” We’re clearly somewhere in between... “Maybe that’s just where you want to be,” says Gieske. I think that is essentially right: we actually want to be the bridge, not extending it from the art world to the people, or from the people to the art world for that matter. We discuss the selection of the board; Gieske and Angelique are trying hard to come up with possible women candidates. “Lucas wants only women on the board,” Angelique tells Gieske; “I like that.” Gieske knows a theatre maker – Alexandra Broeder? – who worked with L.A. Raeven. “Perhaps you should ask [...],” Angelique suggests; “she’s a member of the senate now. With her, you would have a real personality.” So we would have if Angelique had accepted to become chairperson... She can’t however: if MU wants to do joint projects with us, she can’t be on the board. “I’m not sure how Margriet would feel about [...],” says Lucas. “Did you ask her to be on the board? You can’t do that: no fund will take you seriously,” says Angelique. “Well, it’s obvious that we are totally inexperienced with the whole procedure,” says Lucas. To be honest, we have been pretty clueless.

Both Gieske and Angelique are enthusiastic, they really like the plan. “It just raises so many questions,” says Gieske. “And it’s also holding up a mirror to the art world,” Angelique adds. “I actually like that. I don’t really enjoy looking at the mirror when I’m all by myself, but when someone is confronting me like this, it’s refreshing.” “That’s the other side of the project,” says Lucas. “It’s not our intention to be really critical about art institutions, though – we actually need the cooperation, the platform, to validate the project...” “Otherwise, you would just be a hobby club perhaps,” Gieske says. “We’re also really curious to see what happens when art institutions open their doors to our residents. If it brings any changes, especially over time,” I say. “It’s one thing to do an occasional presentation, it’s quite something different when non-artists appear on a more regular basis. On the other hand, we will need to follow up with the residents, to see how the experience influences their lives.” “The Farmer-in-Residence that came of the pilot project is actually in full swing,” Lucas says; “I’m going there from time to time to see how things progress.”

“So... what could MU do for you?” Angelique asks. “I understand there is no use talking about an exhibition before the residency is well on its way,” Lucas says, “but we do look for places where we can show the results.” Residents could give presentations at MU as part of the Thursday Evening Programme; they might participate in group shows; artists working at MU could come to the bar to connect to people here, or share their expertise in a specific residency. “It would need to be structured in some way,” Gieske says. “The intention to collaborate looks neat on an application, but without some clear arrangements, it means nothing.” “We should be keeping each other in the loop of what is happening at MU and

here at the bar,” says Angelique, “someone would have to come over from time to time, to talk about upcoming plans, how residents could fit in at MU, or how artists could fit in at the Residency.” “We’re now focussing on the application,” says Lucas, “but it shouldn’t take too long – we just want to get going.” “I think we can write a nice letter of intention for a partnership; refer to our long-standing collaboration; The Object is Absent, to give it some more perspective. And then we can get together in two weeks and come up with some more concrete ideas,” says Angelique. “Good plan,” says Lucas, “I’m confident that it is going to work out. Once we are actually allowed to start, anything can happen.”

After a quick look at the backroom and the future kitchen, Gieske and Angelique say goodbye. We watch them talk to each other for a while in the street outside the bar. “That was a good meeting,” Lucas says. “Yes it was. Although, when Gieske started about structures and regular meetings, I felt like being sucked into the same old institutional maelstrom we might want to avoid – what do you think?” “I think they might come up with some interesting proposals in two weeks. We’re doing something really cool, and they like to support it and be part of it in some way.” Lucas has to get home to the kids. “We do need some kind of documentation of these meetings,” he says; “but it’s such a drag... Perhaps we should take turns making notes?” “Yeah, something like that. I was thinking, maybe we could start a diary. Much more fun than these boring minutes.” “Nice!” I’ve got my coat, my bag... “Oh,” he says at the door, “I nearly forgot: congratulations with your daughter’s wedding!”

February 11, 2021

I’m calling Lydia to ask her if she would be inclined to join the board of our foundation. She’s hesitant, as I expected she would be. Always busy, practical, not the kind of person who enjoys endless meetings. She does like the idea of a Residency for the People very much. “Let me think about it for a while,” she says. We talk about diversity, how difficult it is for art institutions to attract more people of colour. “Even at MU, where the spirit of emancipation is always tangible in the exhibitions, the office is all-white,” I say. “There are just not so many people of colour who qualify for jobs the art world,” Lydia replies, “so it also becomes a question of how much time you want to invest in training someone.” I see the problem with the ‘should we hire less qualified people simply because of the colour of their skin’ argument, from the way it might be used to perpetuate the status quo to the irremovable suspicion of owing your job not to talent and hard work but to positive discrimination. When Lydia, who worked in art institutions half her life, says there just aren’t many people of different cultural backgrounds who apply, I think she basically just states a fact. But why is it so? “Could it be that the first few generations of migrants are more concerned with settling economically? That the children of migrants choose careers that ensure them an income, or are encouraged to do so?” “Maybe,” Lydia says. We come back to the topic of joining the board. “Perhaps you could ask [...]. She’s working at the Van Abbemuseum and I think she’s about to retire. Maybe she’s would be open to the idea. And then there’s a younger artist, a photographer, I’m sure you would like her [...]. She’s enthusiastic and practical and she might just say yes.”

February 12, 2021

Over coffee, I discuss the lack of diversity in the art institutions with Marianne. “I’m also thinking of the status of economic success. Wages in the art world are notoriously low, especially when you start out. The idea to study art doesn’t square with making money either. Let’s face it: just a handful of art students ever move on to become full time professional artists. So, becoming an artist or working in the art world is simply not very attractive, at least not yet, for young people who are looking to settle. At some point, when people are more secure economically, it becomes easier to think about personal interests, and art becomes a more attractive, challenging career pursuit. An interest in art can also be understood as part of the cultural assets that enhance social status and job opportunities in other fields...” She looks unconvinced. “Am I making sense at all?” “Yes, I get your point, I just don’t know if you’re right. If I look at the Rijksakademie, there are plenty of residents who recently migrated to the Netherlands.” [...] is from Spain – perhaps he doesn’t count – but [...] is from Hungary, and [...] fled the war in Syria.” “But how about their parents? Their social background? Many refugees from Syria are highly trained professionals for instance.” “Well, [...] did study art in Syria. That’s true.” What’s also true: the only non-white persons on the staff of the Rijksakademie are responsible for caretaking and cleaning. “Still, regardless whether my theory is correct or not, it might be interesting to organise a residency to research it in some way. Send out an open call for people of colour who would love to work in the art world but never had the courage to apply for a job. Something like that, perhaps a bit more subtle. And then we would find someone to coach them or introduce them everywhere or...”