

ERIK VAN DER WEIJDE

Entrevista realizada por Antonio Zúñiga. Agosto, 2018

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ENTREVISTA REALIZADA POR ANTONIO ZÚÑIGA, AGOSTO, 2018

RESUMEN: El trabajo de Erik van der Weijde está tramado por una práctica fotográfica considerada desde múltiples perspectivas convergentes. La apropiación y producción de imágenes configuran su obra en una extensa galería de publicaciones editadas desde *4478zine*, editorial creada por el autor para editar sus obras.

Art in the Public Space - Ara, Luli, Flor, Diana, Sheila, Nicol, Belén and Aylin es la pieza que Erik van der Weijde ha seleccionado para SOBRE N05, una reflexión sobre la prensa entendida como un espacio público de comunicación y, en concreto, sobre la estética y las estrategias de comunicación en las páginas de contactos de los diarios. Consta de 8 imágenes acompañadas de un texto cargado de humor e ironía. Contextualizamos la participación de Erik van der Weijde en este número con una entrevista que nos lo presenta. En esta entrevista nos habla de su método de trabajo, sus intereses y sus inicios en la Gerrit Rietveld Academie de Amsterdam.

PALABRAS CLAVES: comunicación, fotografía, apropiación, publicaciones, espacio público, Paul Kooiker

ABSTRACT: The work of Erik van der Weijde is framed by a photographic practice considered from multiple converging perspectives. The appropriation and production of images make up his work in an extensive gallery of publications edited from *4478zine*, an publishing house created by the author to edit his works.

Art in the Public Space - Ara, Luli, Flower, Diana, Sheila, Nicol, Belén and Aylin is the piece that Erik van der Weijde has selected for ENVELOPE nº 5, a reflection on the press understood as a public space of communication and, in particular, on aesthetics and communication strategies in the newspaper's contact pages. It consists of 8 images accompanied by a text, which is full of humor and irony. We contextualize the participation of Erik van der Weijde in this issue with an interview that presents it to us. In this interview he talks about his work methodology, his interests and his beginnings in the Gerrit Rietveld Academie at Amsterdam.

KEYWORDS: communication, photography, apropiation, publishing, public space, Paul Kooiker



Volante entregado en mano no arrojar en la vía pública - ley 260



Luli

4811-2949

Volante entregado en mano no arrojar en la vía pública - ley 260



Sheila

4822-6461

Volante entregado en mano no arrojar en la vía pública - ley 260



Aylin

4772-1693

Volante entregado en mano no arrojar en la vía pública - ley 260



Flor

4828-0247

Volante entregado en mano no arrojar en la vía pública - ley 260



Ara

4776-3903

Volante entregado en mano no arrojar en la vía pública - ley 260



Belén

4811-2949

Volante entregado en mano no arrojar en la vía pública - ley 260



Nicol

4822-6461

Volante entregado en mano no arrojar en la vía pública - ley 260



Diana

4828-0247

Art in the Public Space - Ara, Luli, Flor, Diana, Sheila, Nicol, Belén and Aylin

Phone booths are a vastly used vehicle in large cities all over the world to showcase the works of call girls. I already knew the digitally printed pornographic cards from London, New York and Tokyo, but was surprised by the quality shown in Buenos Aires' phone booths. *Ara, Luli, Flor, Diana, Sheila, Nicol, Belén and Aylin* make use of older printing techniques and thus seem to position themselves in a more historical context: The oldest profession in the world doesn't need to follow the digital (r) evolution at high speed. Ara, Luli, Flor, Diana, Sheila, Nicol, Belén and Aylin simply communicate their message using the form and content principle as taught in all art schools.

Ara, Luli, Flor, Diana, Sheila, Nicol, Belén and Aylin use newspaper stock in their tiny pamphlets, each one the size of a credit card. This paper choice clearly reflects on one of the older mass communication vehicles, the newspaper itself. Any viewer can immediately connect to the material. The choice of material and printing might seem a bit old fashioned at first glance, especially for younger viewers, now that internet and digital printing is taking over so fast. But I recognise the consistent use of form and content here, used by Ara, Luli, Flor, Diana, Sheila, Nicol, Belén and Aylin. Both the public phone and printed newspaper are disappearing from the public space and by using them as a vehicle the message is clear: Call us now (before it's too late). A colder approach in their profession is making up ground quickly. Webcam porn and apps like Tinder are pushing away part of the human touch Ara, Luli, Flor, Diana, Sheila, Nicol, Belén and Aylin seem to stand for. Silkscreening allows Ara, Luli, Flor, Diana, Sheila, Nicol, Belén and Aylin not only to re-use (parts of the) screens and thus print in different colors, but also strengthen another underlying message, Our labour is manual. No digital shortcuts, no lazy Let the machines do the work. But old fashioned, dirty, sweaty, hard manual labour.

Ara, Luli, Flor, Diana, Sheila, Nicol, Belén and Aylin use repetition in their series, to hint on pop art works like Andy Warhol's soup cans, but also on advertising campaigns in which message and form are repeated to create a jingle in our head («Call. Us. Now. Call. Us. Now.»). Ara, Luli, Flor, Diana, Sheila, Nicol, Belén and Aylin also make me wonder about their names, are they real or is their function to wonder about their looks, who they are? This little doubt returns the mystery-as-part-of-the-fun element in their business which the internet has taken away. A customer can go online and choose a girl on her looks, like searching Wikipedia for the meaning of an artwork. Ara, Luli, Flor, Diana, Sheila, Nicol, Belén and Aylin seduce by fantasy: Call me and find out for yourself.

At this exact point the work by Ara, Luli, Flor, Diana, Sheila, Nicol, Belén and Aylin enters a new direction, namely performance art. This second part comes after the graphic part (in the public space) and moves on to become a performative one in a private space. Where in the first part Ara, Luli, Flor, Diana, Sheila, Nicol, Belén and Aylin say «We are here for all of you», in the second part Ara, Luli, Flor, Diana, Sheila, Nicol, Belén and Aylin say «I am here only for you». Ara, Luli, Flor, Diana, Sheila, Nicol, Belén and Aylin are only a phone call and a (small) monetary transaction away. Allowing the viewer to become an active part in the performance.

This transition from public space to private performance could be seen as a weaker part in the work. The inconsistency of the clear message that was communicated to me remains unsatisfied if I do not pick up the phone. But is it? It is up to me to act. It is up to me to decide to buy that new chocolate I saw on a billboard in the city. It is up to me to pick up the phone. So this final character of the work, that of free will, already makes me an active participant in this piece. It's my choice to find out what lies behind the intention of *Ara, Luli, Flor, Diana, Sheila, Nicol, Belén and Aylin* or to continue my walk through the city with a remaining feeling of mystery.

Back in mother's home town the abstract sculptures on the public roundabouts do not communicate to me. I don't see the form and content principle. I don't see reflection on the possible message. I don't feel the invitation to react on the work in any way. But I do wonder what the Buenos Aires' girls look like. Well done, Ara, Luli, Flor, Diana, Sheila, Nicol, Belén and Aylin.

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[Antonio Zúñiga] I would like to ask two questions to begin with, one will lead me to the other.

The first one is about your transfer to Brazil and the time you have lived there.

How long have you been?

I ask it because you were born in Dordrecht, in the Netherlands and you have lived for a few years in Natal, a city in the north of Brazil. From a country with a Protestant spirit you passed to another one with a Catholic religious majority.

The images produced in both cultures have a different character, clearly dramatic in the Catholic culture and more calm and contained in the Protestant. The topic and production of artist's books is not exempt from these considerations.

Have you experienced this cultural change in your work?

[Erik van der Weijde] I believe this cultural change is present in the work, partly for the reasons you point out: I moved to Brazil in 2003 and have always traveled a lot for my work. When I travel and photograph, I am usually working on projects for which I have done a lot of research and preparations. I work very methodically: Months of research, planning the itinerary, taking the actual photographs, editing the material back in the studio. So my photos and series follow this rigid way of working and I can imagine that this might seem at least contained or maybe even Protestant. But back in Brazil, I use a different approach to photograph. I call it 'cleaning my camera' and I shoot in a much looser way, not preparing my shoots in the same way as during my travels. This way of working feels more like being on holiday and I photograph relaxed! Working in and around home I work much looser and my subject matter is also less fixed. It is more about the actual shooting and my approach to photography and images. So yes, I use distinct approaches to my work on different continents, and I do think that this shifting between Protestant and Catholic backgrounds sifts through in my projects. Also note that my life and work in Europe does not turn around my own family (my wife and son are both from and in Brazil), but around my memories as a protestant raised child. Whereas my family life in Brazil revolves around a catholic background and morals, coming from my wife's family, so very different from my own education. I think my fascination for these different approaches to (family) life are visible in some of my work.

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[AZ] What kind of work did you do before settling in Brazil? What were your reference artists at those moments?

[EW] Before I went to Brazil I studied at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in the photography department. I had classes from Willem van Zoetendaal, Frido Troost and Paul Kooiker, so the photo book was already a significant part of the department. I also assisted Paul Kooiker in his studio and his approach to photography and artist practice in general has been a great

influence on my work. But besides him and a little bit further away, amongst my influences were Hans-Peter Feldmann, the Bechers and Boris Mikhailov.

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[AZ] I share the enthusiasm for these fundamental artists; in addition Boris Mikhailov would be outside out of the duality Catholicism-Protestantism that we discussed. Both, he and Paul Kooiker or Hans-Peter Feldmann, treat eroticism, intimacy, sexuality and prostitution, which refers to a classic theme and the relationship between the artist and the model. This theme also appears in your compilation book *This Is Not My Book*.

Why do you explicitly approach prostitution?

How do you carry out the research and realization of photographic work?

[EW] My interest lies in where society or humanity has gone wrong, so I search for the edges or borders of that society. I want to try to understand humanity by looking at specific subjects that lie outside the acceptable. Prostitution in all its manifestations is one of these subjects: how men can objectify women in a certain way, the economic factor of sex, the shutting out of emotions, etc. Other subjects I show, from same motivation, include war and violence, nazi Germany and psychopaths.

Whenever I start a project, coming from something I might have read or which I just find too curious, I try to read as much about the subject and I usually start collecting books, other reading material and/or photo books. In that reading I will find some interesting detail that you could see as the smallest part of the subject (or 'problem' I am researching), that still contains the full spectrum of that specific subject. Mostly that has become, or I turn it into, an object, representing this 'problem'. I then carefully plan the collecting of the material, in most cases that will be taking pictures of this object, or place, or whatever. Following the detailed planning, which includes even maps and weather reports, I take the photos as quick as possible, ideally in a couple of days. After this phase I have all the material to work with, back in the studio, and I concentrate on the editing of the material. In this editing process I will get most of the ideas of how the work should look like, be it a book, or an exhibition.

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[AZ] In Barcelona we have a market that you would like very much, is the Mercado de San Antonio. On Sunday mornings he offers books, magazines, postcards and other second-hand photographic material for curious, collectors or students of the image.

Did you find stores, files or singular photographic material that you could buy for your works, for your study, in the markets of Brazil?

[EW] I love those markets! In Brazil I found little material, the things I found weren't of good quality for me. The best things in the past I have found in Belgium. And of course online, through eBay from Germany. In the northeast, due to humidity, most of the paper and printed material is ready for the trash after a few years. Even the negatives of the photos I took from my son's birth are completely destroyed...

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[AZ] It is a pity that you comment. The photos of the children have something special. Your son shows up a lot of your work and I think your wife too, why are these books called, *This Is Not My Son* and *This Is Not My Wife*? They really are, are not they?

[EW] Haha... Yes they are my wife and son! This series started with *This Is Not My Son*, the book I produced together with Rollo Press from Zürich. I was photographing my son at home, but did not do for sure if I was 'working' and thus looking for a certain pose or picture, or if I was being a father, taking pictures of his family. And my son was also a bit confused about the role playing, wearing masks and playing, but then having to stop to reenact some poses, so there was this weird triangular relationship between father - son/ model - photographer going on. That's why I said, in a *ceçi ne'st pas une pipe* way, «this is not my son». The book about my wife was a continuation of this project, but in a different context...

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[AZ] let's talk about the books context: *This Is Not My Wife...*, *Home Is Where The Dog Is*.

[EW] *This Is Not My Wife* is clearly a follow up after *This Is Not My Son*. As a husband I take, of course, many pictures of my wife. The photos in this book were taken over a time span of 6 years, the same period I was working on *O. Niemeyer*. These two books are also the same in size, same amount of pages and have a similar design. Where for *Niemeyer* I photographed architecture, exterior and formality, for *This Is Not My Wife* I made more intimate portraits and show a more personal and private subjects. These two projects complement each other. Niemeyer also used to sketch the female body before he started drawing buildings: he sometimes used a line from a drawing in a sketch for a building. So these two books are a good example to show how all my books are linked to each other, sometimes complementing, sometimes juxtaposing. In *This Is Not My Wife* I also show a few other women, because even though I am married, I also look at other women (that are similar to my own wife). That's why I used this title here... *Home Is Where The Dog Is*, is completely photographed with an iPhone 4, in and around our house, during the first hour of darkness, over a period of roughly nine months. It is a more intimate series, bound by an intimate space, the house we live in. This work is directly linked to Instagram and the way we put our lives on the internet. How much do we want / need / can / should (or not) put our private lives online? So both projects have different photographic approaches, within a similar theme.

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[AZ] One of the most beautiful pictures you have taken of your family took the cover of *Camera Austria* magazine. An image of a woman with a child with clear classical references in the composition and gesture of the child's hand placed on the woman's chest. Does the approach to the image consider it, do you

contemplate it in a different way if it is thought to be published in a book or designed to work as an independent photograph? The challenges of the books seem more washed out, in search of a new image a new composition, sensation.

[EW] Yes, that's a good photo... I think it's visible in that image that I studied two years of Art History, before changing to Art Academy...

Whatever subject I photograph, I try to gather a fair amount of material, but at the same time, I am also always looking for the 'perfect' image. Luckily I never made it -I could retire then- but sometimes an image comes close. I never construct images though, I find them. My use of snapshot cameras strengthens this way of producing images, clicking a lot, walking around my subject and looking for a simple and good image. Sometimes you are just lucky, when light and composition come together.

But I never take a picture to be shown as a single image. I only photograph in series, when working on series. And in the past that was always for a book, or at least with a book project in mind.

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[AZ] In *This Is Not My Book* your work is collected in the following order: Germany, Brazil, prostitution, cars, woman, child, relatives, pets, anonymous, trees, animals, weapons, violence.

Electing the weapons and being Dutch and thinking about the two years of History of Art that you studied, how is it that you don't photograph objects explicitly, still lifes?

[EW] In case of the weapons, the guns and tanks more specifically, are all reproductions from other books on these subjects. So I re-photograph the pages of books and magazines, treat them in some graphic way and then reproduce. These publications are more books about books. I feel that these objects, take a gun for example, already contains so much meaning: it is very pure iconography to which I cannot add more. I just show it and put into a new context, in this case my publishing portfolio. Some publications are really meant to be seen as part of the whole portfolio. On their own they have no more layers of meaning. But you asked about Dutch still lifes, right? I'm not into actual still lifes... I find them too boring.

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[AZ] I understand you!

Just two more questions so as not to abuse your patience: One on architecture and one on your magazines.

You comment on Facebook that you have not photographed for three years and now you do it again. You present on the web, precisely an architecture photograph. In your conversations with Jan Wenzel, editor of Spector Books, the work of Edward Ruscha emerges as a reference for photography books composed of series of images. I believe that Ruscha does not touch on his work this other part of the production of images that were on the edge of the acceptable, as you mentioned earlier. The productions of stereotypes for mass consumption amplify Ruscha and I see them closer to your interests as editor

and photographer.

What are your sources of these landscapes and architectures that fit in the collective imagination as ‘the landscape’ ‘the house’?

[EW] I approach my photography of houses from a very basic point of view. My photography of places in general, that is. It is very important for me to travel and visit the places. The actual traveling to a specific site, going there and taking a picture of that place, or house, functions like a souvenir: I was here. So my photography is both like a postcard of that place, very straightforward, house in the middle of the composition, not more than that. It is just a record of having been at that exact spot. That’s why my photos always show more of the ground, or road: in the picture you can see that the photographer is actually standing there. At the same time of looking for this (not complex) iconic, postcard style, picture, I want the photo to look like anybody could have taken it. That sentence you hear a lot in a museum: «My child could have done that!» Exactly, there is no difficulty in the photography, but there is in a way of looking and providing context for your photography. For that reason I also only use snapshot cameras: anybody could have taken that photo, but it was me who went there and did it. I highlight this collective imagination, I guess.

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[AZ] Subway and the rest of the magazines that you edit are very funny. They are important in your editorial activity. I think they irradiate your work complexity and establish lines of reading for your work. How do you propose these editions, why do you do them?

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[EW] I am glad you think they’re funny! First of all I always had the feeling that the photography community was and still is way too serious. Serious about cameras, about photographs, about printing techniques to an extent that the conversation becomes boring.

I really think that intelligent humour is necessary and can provide new layers to understanding other projects by the same artist. And, don’t get me wrong, it’s not about being funny, or being light about one’s work, because I really believe that humour is very complex and intelligent. Also, my work always has a layer of language in it. In a way some works are even about language and text. My titles are always very specific and if I use text it is always as concise as possible: the viewer will produce the necessary texts and thoughts in his/her head. That’s the strength of visual language. As in any language, humour is always the last thing to learn and understand, because it is so culturally defined and can be very complex. So using humour in my visuals, not in all, but certainly to establish those reading lines, is an important way to introduce other layers in my work. I believe I ‘speak’ the visual language of photography pretty well...