



Ben Kinmont Kunstverein Amsterdam

Ben Kinmont
From the series
'Waffles for an Opening'
1990
Black and white
photograph

'Prospectus Amsterdam', an ambitious presentation of the work of American Conceptualist Ben Kinmont, is the first incarnation of a travelling survey show initiated by Kunstverein Amsterdam, a 'curatorial office' founded by Krist Gruijthuijsen and Maxine Kopsa in September 2009. Since the late 1980s Kinmont has been organizing extra-institutional encounters with a spontaneously produced public and meticulously recording them in his archives. Each subsequent venue of this survey will 're-activate' this extensive archive by focusing on a different theme.

The text piece *Carl Andre Killed His Wife* (1988) served as this show's chronological point of departure. Dating from the year Andre was acquitted of all charges related to the death of his wife, the artist Ana Mendieta, the work is more cryptic than a simple indictment; it also embodies Kinmont's idea of 'the third sculpture', an expansion of Joseph Beuys's 'social sculpture', which serves as the conceptual basis for his projects. For Kinmont, the 'third sculpture' is not materialized form, but a 'space in-between' the self and the other – a gesture, or a promise – like washing a stranger's dishes or giving away his paintings.

All of Kinmont's descriptions of his 'project art' appear in *Prospectus 1998–2010 Forty-two works by Ben Kinmont* (2011), a second-edition printed letterpress for this occasion, which should be required reading for anyone interested in revising his or her genealogy of 'relational aesthetics'. Each description in the book summarizes the impetus and results of each project, while all

the documents and objects associated with them are kept in Kinmont's archives – the centrepiece of the exhibition. The documents comprise letters, photographs, reviews and ephemera, the purchase of which is regulated by a contract between the artist and the eventual owner. At Kunstverein Amsterdam, some of the contents were spread out on a large table, but the archival boxes were nestled in a ledge beneath it. The documents in them could be consulted to the heart's content and photocopied on site for free. Archive boxes were rotated on a weekly basis, just like the bouquet of flowers the artist delivered to the space (*Congratulations*, 1995–ongoing).

While the historian in me is constitutionally attracted to the archive, and my inner snoop thrills in reading other people's correspondence, Kinmont's projects promoting the gustatory and social pleasures of sharing food and wine were the most enticing. In these works, the sticky fingerprints of sensuality began to trespass on the overwhelming accumulation of recorded fact. In *Waffles for an Opening* (1990) the artist invited people to his home for waffle breakfasts over a two-month period; *Sometimes a nicer sculpture is to be able to provide a living for your family* (1998–ongoing) entailed starting a business selling antiquarian tomes on food and wine. For *On becoming something else* (2009), Kinmont wrote seven paragraphs about seven works by artists who shifted out of the art world to take up other pursuits they had discovered through their artistic practice. He then invited chefs to create recipes in homage to them for a private and a public dinner in Paris. For 'Prospectus Amsterdam', in collaboration with the Stedelijk Museum, Kinmont re-presented *Exhibition in your mouth*, a dinner made exclusively from recipes written by artists. A menu from a previous occasion in 2002 included such delicacies as *Fig Pervert* (1965) by Philip Corner and Salvador Dalí's *Toffee Pinecones* (1973). When Kinmont writes in his description that 'Cooking is the act of ingredients becoming something else, something to be eaten and shared', he also alludes to transformations in artistic identity, including the relinquishing of it, as well as the infinite malleability of the art object and the sociability it engenders – all issues that continue to structure his practice. I've never eaten one of Kinmont's meals, but if we take cooking as a metaphor for archiving, where documents are added then consumed and our interpretations are altered and shared – then perhaps I've come close.

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