



**Koninklijke
Academie van
Beeldende
Kunsten**

**Royal
Academy of Art**

Hogeschool der Kunsten
Den Haag
University of the Arts
The Hague

ONCE UPON OUR TIME

We began this journey acknowledging two parameters of the Royal Academy of Art, The Hague: it being the oldest art academy of the Netherlands; and it being located in the administrative and political capital of the Netherlands, a city that historically has been associated with peace and justice.

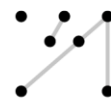
We formulated a brief for ourselves—*My Practice, My Politics*—which was to inform our conversations with students and staff, and our way of looking as we went through the Academy’s archival material dating back to 2011. With it, we wanted to get to know how students and alumni relate to the world through their practice: how do they conceive and manifest the link between their world-views and their artistic work? We wanted to explore the breadth of that question, inquiring how artistic tools such as language, gesture, form, sound, and colour could uphold and convey a personal politics; and different modes of political expression.

“To enable the possibility of reimagining alternative futures, it is essential to adopt subversive strategies towards the archive,” wrote Miguel Peres dos Santos, one of the participating artists in *My Practice, My Politics*. An important strand that emerged during our search was the interrogation of history. Whether through challenging official accounts, writing their own, or by engaging with others, the artists and designers captured the notion that history, in its attempt to fixate reality, is in many ways a construction of reality. Some of the works in *My Practice, My Politics* demonstrate various ways they participate in the process of its de- and reconstruction. They subvert, intervene, and tell the stories as they experience them, capturing the truth that they find in their experience of the world. Part and parcel of this is the migration of stories—from Albania, Egypt, Suriname, former Yugoslavia, and an underground former NATO headquarters in the Netherlands—real stories that don’t always see the light of day, despite the urgency of their message.

In many of the works included in *My Practice, My Politics*, one can sense a sensitivity to power imbalance. Whether dealing with the shortcomings of modernism, the repercussions of climate change, or the disappointments of a generation that was told it could do whatever it wanted to, the artists and designers respond to questions that they consider to be emblematic of this time.

They study language, acknowledging it as something that structures reality. They challenge constructs of gender, give space to non-binary ways of thinking, create settings where a queer utopia can unfold, develop tools and methods to challenge current modes of production, collect and reconstruct trash, protest global warming, and otherwise demonstrate ways to regain control over how the world around us is constructed.

The question that this journey now poses is: In what ways has our selection of works informed our understanding of the political, and its intersection with artistic practices? What became evident is a sense of just how committed the artists and designers are to the values entailed in the work that they make, and a sense of how important those values are as a basis for their artistic practice. What was reinforced is that everything we do—in everyday life, and in artistic practice—is political, whether we are conscious of it or not.



What asks for reflection, is what it means to bring an educational institution into what in essence is a commercial context for displaying the latest developments in the design industry. Our exhibition, created together with the Academy's Interior Architecture and Furniture Design department, responds to this by employing the typology of the white cube. It is a gesture of quietness amongst the hustle and bustle of the furniture fair.

One of our intentions since the start of this project was to bring it back home. We are happy to announce that a second edition of *My Practice, My Politics* will take place at the art center STROOM, The Hague from May 19th until July 15th, 2018.

It has been a great pleasure and joy to get a glimpse into the minds and practices of all the participants, and into the Academy itself. We would like to express our gratitude for that.

Saskia van Stein and Agata Jaworska