A STRIVING FLIRTATION
IN
SPliced COORDINATES

A thesis
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By
Martijn van Wagendonk, B.F.A.

The Ohio State University
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Master’s Examination Committee:
Malcolm Cochran, Advisor
Ron Green
Tony Mendoza

Approved by
Adviser
Department of Art
ABSTRACT

The work of art that was developed for my M.F.A. thesis exhibition is an installation constructed with six primary components; a color film of blue sky with clouds passing by; two black and white films opposite each other projecting a sequence of heads; sounds of a carillon; white squares painted in a grid on the floor; a wall that divides the space into two separate rooms connected by a doorway; a desk and chair at which to sit while looking through a book of images of men with mustaches; and a mirrored sphere hanging from the ceiling. Every element has its own specifics but also contributes to the installation as a whole.

The identification of the space we (I) live and communicate in was my main goal in exploring the differences between the culture I come from and the one I entered.

Re-discovering Dutch paintings from the seventeenth-century contributed to a large extent in finding solutions for the visual questions that were raised in the production of this installation titled ‘A striving flirtation in spliced coordinates.’
To Teuntje Annigje Pijper (Oma Rotterdam)
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VITA

May 27, 1973 ......................................Born, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

1996 ..................................................B.F.A., Academie voor Beeldende Vorming,
                               Tilburg, The Netherlands

1996 - Present .................................Graduate Teaching Associate,
                               Department of Art,
                               The Ohio State University,
                               Columbus, Ohio

FIELD OF STUDY

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INTRODUCTION

Since entering graduate school and coming to the United States of America for the first time in my life, I have been involved in an exploration of the ways I experience and notice the differences between the culture I come from and the one I have entered. My main goal has been to identify the space we (I) live and communicate in. This exploration has gone through a variety of materials and approaches which have culminated in my M.F.A. thesis exhibition. This show is in the form of an installation with six primary components; a color film of blue sky with clouds passing by; two black and white films opposite each other projecting a sequence of heads in profile; sounds of a carillon, white squares painted in a grid on the floor; a wall that divides the space into two separate rooms connected by a doorway; a desk and chair at which to sit while looking through a book of images of men with mustaches; and a mirrored sphere hanging from the ceiling. The works try to find their way into one unified piece titled 'A striving flirtation in spliced coordinates.'

Over the past two years I have been going back and forth between my daily experience at a Columbus cross-walk where for a split second I make eye contact with a total stranger crossing from the opposite side of the road -- to an exploration of
identifiable 'mirror-images' of seventeenth-century portrait paintings of Dutch men with mustaches – and back again to my house on West 6th Avenue, where the first images I see in the morning are of my own mug reflected in two mirrors hanging in my bedroom.

Never really being aware of where I grew up, coming to the States made me recognize my nationality and, even more, the space in which I had been surrounded. I was (strangely enough) surprised to find this space in a lot of seventeenth-century Dutch genre paintings. These images became my main resource for finding a way in which I could literally install my ideas.
For me, a central element and genesis point in this installation are two films projected next to each other on a white wall. Together they form one projection fourteen feet in length by four feet high, starting three feet from the floor. The film on the right is of a person walking into the frame from the right, standing silently in profile for approximately ten seconds, then turning around and exiting of the frame to the right. This sequence is repeated by another nineteen people, creating a film of six minutes in length. Just to the left of this projection, and lined up exactly at the center edges, is a second sequence of people entering -- this time from the left -- and again standing in profile, facing straight ahead. The second film is one person shorter than the first, creating a film of a little less than six minutes. Both films are looped so that they may be projected continuously as one projection in which the subjects enter from left and right and appear to stare at each other. Because of the difference in length between the two loops, the pairing of figures is constantly changing.

The footage for this piece was developed by filming subjects against a dark background with their faces lit at an angle from the front. Light shields were set around
the light stands so that no light would be cast on the backdrop. As a result, the projected films show only the lighted heads, neck, and tops of shoulders.

When each film was shot, the left film separately from the right, the figures in front of the lens were confronted with their own facial images by looking in a mirror beyond the fame of the camera. Each person was asked to stare into his or her own eyes, with a fixed gaze, for more or less ten seconds. At that point they were told to turn around and walk out of the camera’s view. Every time a new person was filmed, the camera was adjusted to the specific height of that person. This means that the eye level in the camera (and in the ene in the projection) is on the same horizontal line for all of the thirty-nine people involved in this motion picture. This also means that when both films are projected, the person coming in from the left is at the same eye level as the person coming in from the opposite side.

I wanted people to stand in front of the camera for roughly ten seconds in order to allow viewers time to actually see and view person A next to person B. Sometimes they appear in the projection simultaneously and also leave together. At other times, one person stands in the projection while the person in the opposite film exits, making a place for the upcoming individual in the sequence. Ten seconds seemed to be just enough to notice this progression, to create a notion that some meetings take longer than others,
and to consider who is pairing up with whom. Showing twenty people in one film and
nineteen in the one next to it generates enough of a variety of different people that the
viewer does not get bored with seeing the same person too many times. It is also not so
long that one will miss the repetition of each film. After watching for six minutes one
will see person A in the left projection meet person B in the right projection, and later
see that same person A confronted in the second by with another person.

While the filming took place with only one person at the time, the two films
projected on the wall meet all the practical requirements to have person A from the left
projection make eye contact with person B from the right film. But is there really a
connection, some communication, relationship or eye contact?
LIGHT AND DARK SQUARED FLOOR

Just before I went back to the Netherlands for the summer between my first and second years at OSU, I saw a reproduction of Johannes Vermeer's painting 'Art of Painting.' One of the elements that caught my eye was the ceramic tile floor in the room where the scene in this painting was situated. The floor itself seemed to give me a clear notion of where objects and forms were placed and, in distance, how they related to each other. The dark blue and white ceramic tiled floor made a geometric form and grid. At least, that is what I thought I saw in this painting.

Before, during, and after my stay in Holland, I looked at a lot of reproductions, as well as the real stuff of seventeenth-century Dutch genre paintings, where the scene represented in the painting takes place on a grid of ceramic floor tiles. I was also able to visit several tile and ceramic museums, especially around Delft (famous for its blue Delftware) to see the actual tiles. It was at this point that I realized that what I thought I saw in those paintings were not actually floors with ceramic tiles, but just paint on canvas with a layer of varnish. No floor, no tiles... a grid? Maybe.

After making some perspective drawings of possible objects for my piece, as artists have done since the Renaissance, I experimented with laying down a tile floor out of
paper and masking tape on the concrete floor in the Sherman Studio Clean Space. I began by putting down a grid with \( \frac{1}{2} \)" wide masking tape so that the floor was divided into 16" by 16" squares, laid out at an angle of forty-five degrees to the walls. Every other square was filled in with several pieces of 11" by 8 \( \frac{1}{2} \)" white paper, overlapped so that they filled the 16" square. These were then taped in place using the same off white masking tape. The alternating squares were left open to allow the dark grey concrete floor to remain visible. From a distance, the squares read as a grid. The entire floor of the clean space was covered in this pattern, so that when a viewer entered from the doorway in the corner, he or she looked over a sea of paper tiles that covered the entire expanse of the room.

A painted version of this experiment turned out to be the floor that became the foundation for my installation, as it is the playground for the genre tableaus in the paintings I had been observing. It is a spacial visualization of where the actors play their part in time; a map upon which to apply objects relatively to our own positioning.
A WALL

As important part of this installation is a temporary wall constructed to break the space into smaller rooms, one nearly square, the other a smaller, rectangular space into which one first enters. This wall is not intended to separate objects and projections from each other. Instead, I consider the whole space as one piece. The wall itself acts only as an object that separates the space into parts.

The wall is placed from floor to ceiling and from wall to wall in this 24 ½' by 36' foot space. It divided the space into two parts; viewers first enter through the short end of a rectangular room, 24 ½' deep by 12' wide. A door two-thirds of the way down the temporary wall leads to the second space, which is nearly 24' square.

One of the other elements of seventeenth-century Dutch genre paintings that captured my interest is the fact that many of these scenes are depicted in a room directly accessible by the viewer, sometimes even suggesting that the viewer is in the room. In these works there is also often another room, a view for which is provided through a doorway in the primary space. The doorway allows one to see only a very small portion of this backroom. This made me wonder what one might find there, but also surprised me -- pleasantly -- with the visual tools of layering and cropping, and the sectioning of an
an image in a image or a space within a space. This device is somewhat like the visual
dilemma of a painting in a painting, but it is different in that both scenes take place in the
same reality. A direct connection is evident between the two rooms. When I say 'the
same reality,' I think of related circumstances such as having a conversation with
someone on the street where both you and the person you are talking to are actually on
the very same street. I compare this to having that same conversation by e-mail, when the
locality you are in is different from the locality from which that other person is sending
his or her information. The imagery provided in a painting within a painting depicts two
different realities, unless one is willing to see paint for what it is, physically and to forget
the content of the symbols used for the imagery on those seventeenth-century Dutch
canvasses. First there is the implied realness of the scene that is the point of focus in the
painting. Second there is the painting hanging on a wall in the room depicted as a
reproduction, a decoration and/or reference to the play on the main stage.

In this installation, it was my intent that the built-in wall with a door opening
would function in similar terms. The major difference between the above mentioned
paintings and this installation is where physical dimensions come into play. Because my
piece has to deal with an extra third dimension, and the fact that the viewer can move
from one room to the other, technically speaking, there is no main room. The viewer's
perspective shifts from standing in the smaller room and only catching a glimpse of the elements in the second room through the doorway, to walking through that doorway, to becoming part of that second room and, at once, having one's view into the first room blocked.
MIRRORS

The first piece I made when I started my M.F.A. degree was realized in the corner of the Clean Space. The piece was comprised of two paintings, one on each wall of the corner. The paintings were stylised versions of two pieces of furniture that sit in my bedroom; a dresser with a mirror, and a fireplace with a mirror above the mantel. The parts of the paintings that were to represent the mirrors were filled in with projections of slides taken of myself in the morning when I got out of bed and saw my mirror image, as I had every day, twice reflected in these pieces of furniture. One mirror image showed the front of my body from my head to the upper part of my legs. The other projection was that same part of my body in profile. The projectors were installed in such a way that a viewer could stand in the spot where I stood when the slides were taken, without casting his or her own shadow in the projection.

This was the first piece made after I arrived in The United States. It was also the first time I ever used a mirror. This element began to play quite a part in the development of my M.F.A. thesis show. It became a part of my final installation in the form of a sphere 26" in diameter, made of hand blown glass. The sphere is suspended by a 3/8" thick dark gray metal rod from the ceiling, and hung only 14" from the floor. The inside
of the sphere was chemically treated to leave a film of silvering, transforming this transparent glass sphere into a 360 degree convex mirror. The image in this spherical mirror was a distorted reflection of all of the elements and goings on of the installation. In it, the viewer sees himself and other people present, and the whole room on one plane, without even having to move around the sphere. When walking around the sphere, the space surrounding the viewer moves with him or her, and a three-dimensional feeling for the placement of all the elements in the installation is established on the convex, reflective surface. In particular, one is aware of the painted grid which distorted moving reflection covers half of the sphere showing the floor from underneath the sphere to the walls.

Mirrors found their way as well into the set for the shooting of the ‘facing profiles’ film. As mentioned before, each person who participated in the making of this film was asked to look in a mirror that was hung just outside of the camera frame and to watch his or her own eyes for approximately ten seconds. This confrontation is similar to the way I was confronted with my mirror image in the early projections of myself in my bedroom.

A mirror is often thought of as an accurate representation of what is real. When considering this idea and the physical properties of a mirror, I have come to question that reality, and a few visual points at issue have come to mind. First, a mirror is limited by
its size: it can only be so large, and therefore can only reflect so much of this so called reality. The reflected world is cropped by the edges of a mirror and therefore only a cut-out portion of a space is shown. A mirror also reveals elements in a space that one is normally not able to see from a single point of view, such as the room behind you or your own body features. While this reflected representation is considered real it gives me the possibility to be confronted with imagery that questions everyday reality through the cropped and distorted reflection of a mirror.
SOUNDS

Sound is always one of the senses of which I am very conscious. It can represent and touch the imagination as much as visual elements can do. The awareness of sound did not miss its presence in the production of this installation. Noises that are normally considered as interrupting are transformed into soft background acoustics, and pleasing resonances of chiming bells from a church tower in the distance become loud and interrupting accents.

In total, there are three 16mm film projections that are constantly running to provide the projections for the installation. In the first room, one projector is tucked away in a custom-made corner cabinet, projecting the film of blue sky with clouds passing. The two projectors which show films of heads in profile are housed in a wooden booth with plexi-glass sides. Like the corner cabinet, it reduces the noise of the running projectors dramatically. What is left is a soft hum throughout both rooms. This background acoustic is interrupted by the sound of carillon bells which ring out from a high-quality speaker invisible on the top of the projector booth. Every twelve minutes a recording plays of a carillon playing a song by Jacob van Eyck, a seventeenth-century Dutch composer. The duration of the song is only forty-three seconds, leaving the viewer with just a memory of the bells and the remaining tone of the projectors.
DUTCH MUSTACHE BOOK

On a small simple wooden desk (illuminated by a low dark metal desk lamp), placed to one side of the installation, lies a small book. It is the size of a small book that I remember taking with me on the train. The book contains over two-hundred images of men with mustaches taken from reproductions of seventeenth-century Dutch paintings. To create the book, I scanned reproductions of these paintings into a computer and cropped them to include only eyes, nose, mouth and mustache just fit within the four straight corners of the picture. The images are placed on the paper – one on each page – according to an invisible grid that constructs the leaf. This grid allows the illustrations to differ in size and placement, so that there is a playful variety in the way the pages are arranged. The book was hand-bound together which personalizes the contents.

The images in this book could be considered an extended self-portrait. It is a collection of ancestors whose images also could have been representations of me. Further allows the viewer to see familiar faces from his or her community. For me, these pictures are identifiable mirror-images of seventeenth-century portraits.
CROPING

Almost every element of the installation has been cropped in some way. The images that make up the Dutch mustache book are taken from full scale portrait paintings made in seventeenth-century Holland. After they were scanned into the computer, I cropped the image down to the face so that only the eyes, nose, mouth and mustache are visible. The rest of the painting is cut off by the new borders.

The projections of people shown in profile are cropped in more than one respect. First of all, almost the entire body of each individual is left out of the frame -- only the head, neck and the top part of the shoulders remain visible (quite similar to the way in which the images in the Dutch mustache book are cropped). Further, the viewer is not able to identify the context in which the films were taken. The space in which the sequence of people enter is not specifically identifiable; the mirror that the actors use to stare at their own reflections is left out of the view of the camera; the lines and location points used to clarify the way the actor was to move and stand are also left out of the frame. Giving directions and being directed in a very specific manner was a large part of the way these film shoots were organized. What the viewer sees is the two images projected one next to the other.
In producing the looped cloud film, I cropped it in at least four different ways. The use of a movie camera, a lens, and 16mm film to capture this image is, by its nature, a form of cropping. The film shows only a minute part of that sky with only those clouds that were passing by at that particular time. Another cropping takes place when the film is projected. Because of the angle at which the film is projected, the image is stretched diagonally on the wall, creating a distorted trapezoidal shape. I was able to reshape this into a long horizontal rectangle by masking-off parts of the projection in front of the lens. The cropping used is visible to the viewer and takes the form of a similarly shaped trapezoid that 'corrects' in the projected image to make it appear as a rectangle on the wall. A third type of cropping occurs when the viewer is standing in the second room watching the cloud film through the door in the wall between the rooms. Because this projection is extra-wide -- a horizontal rectangle 48" by 149" --, it is never possible to see the whole projection at one glance through the doorway which is 83" high by 39" wide. The frame of the door crops the image on the left and/or right side of the projection, depending on one’s point of view and cuts off a portion of the top of the projected film. A fourth instance of cropping played a major role in the development of the idea for this part of the installation. One main reasons the film is projected from above and the side is to allow the viewer to stand close to the image without casting his or her own shadow on
the wall. In this way, the film can be viewed as if it were a painting. This introduces the possibility of viewing this projection with a reference to landscape paintings, while keeping what one might expect below the horizon line cropped out of the image.
BACK TO SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY HOLLAND?

Many elements in this installation refer to or come from seventeenth-century Dutch paintings. Is this installation about that Holland of the seventeenth-century? Is it a three-dimensional version of one of the paintings that was made during that time and at that place? For me, the producer, the answer is no. No in the sense that it is not my main goal in putting this installation together. Of course there is a personal interest for researching and using this period of history. The most direct explanation for that is the fact that my roots are in that particular part of the world, on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

My primary interest is in how we communicate in the space and time we create for ourselves. Our sense of space and the way we use time, in the sense of being tied by a minute to minute schedule or having all the time of the day to gather food together as the only item on the daily calendar, is different for different places. The imagery of seventeenth-century Dutch artists found its way into my work is because it provided me with a visual handle for the contemporary issues I want to deal with. We communicate in space, in an environment. I was able to find that space back in the genre tableaux from Holland in its Golden Age: Paintings in which the space is defined by tile floors.
constructed in perfect perspective; in which the painter put a hold on the noises and movements of every-day-life, and captured the stillness of that moment in history in all varieties of domestic and public living spaces.

Before I left Europe to come to the United States, I considered these paintings to be old stuff that one runs past when confronted with them in a museum or a historical display in the local village exhibition. As is often said; you realize what you have, only when it is gone. This can also be said when considering who and what you think you are. I began to realize more about who I am and where I am from when I left my home-country and lost the familiarity of that place where I was formed. The first time I was consciously confronted with and caught by one of those paintings from seventeenth-century Holland was just before I went back to the Netherlands to spend my summer break after my first year in graduate school at the O.S.U. As mentioned before, it was a reproduction of a painting called 'The Art of Painting' by Johannes Vermeer. I was particularly interested in the way the space was created for this tableau. It presented for me a perfect solution dealing with the space in which I want to work. In addition the system used in the painting, provided a regulated environment for my ideas.
More than a year ago when I began to evolve the idea for this installation, I found a poem by Czeslaw Milosz translated from *The Polish* by the author and Robert Hass that describes Dutch paintings. This poem touches the Dutch space with all its elements represented in these paintings, with a great sensibility. It presents a feeling of space that I think still applies for our time. This allows me to reflect and understand our contemporary living space in relation to the interests in my works of art.
We are not so badly off if we can
Admire Dutch painting. For that means
We shrug off what we have been told
For a hundred, two hundred years. Now we agree
That those trees outside the window, which probably exist,
Only pretend to greenness and treeiness
And that the language loses when it tries to cope
With clusters of molecules. And yet this here:
A jar, a tin, a half-peeled lemon,
Walnuts, a loaf of bread - last, and so strongly
It is hard not to believe in their lastingness ...

... I enter those landscapes
Under a cloudy sky from which a ray
Shoots out, and in the middle of dark plains
A spot of brightness glows. Or the shore
With huts, boats, and, on yellowish ice,
Tiny figures skating. All this
Is here eternally, just because once it was.
Splendor (certainly incomprehensible)
Touches of cracked wall, a refuse heap,
The floor of an inn, jerkins of the rustics,
A broom, and two fish blending on a board.
Rejoice! Give thanks! I raised my voice
To join them in their choral singing,
Amid their ruffles, collets, and silk skirts,
One of them already, who vanished long ago.
And our song soared up like smoke from a censer.