

Laudatory Speech Edna van Duyn September 18, 2015 *Whispers: Ulay on Ulay*, Valiz 2014
AICA (www.aicanederland.org) AWARD PUBLICATIONS 2015 @ Artfair Amsterdam Drawing

Dear attendees,

Dear Ulay, Dear Maria Rus Bojan, Dear Alessandro Cassin,

When I was asked in February of this year to sit on the jury for nominating publications of contemporary art from the (past) years 2012, 2013 and 2014, my heart skipped a bit of enthusiasm. I have devoted my heart to books, especially art books. In recent years I have had the great pleasure of making and editing many books. These publications, especially by *De Appel*, found their way and place especially in the collegial environment of the contemporary art field in which books with the same verve, flair and fire are made. These professional books often lack no quality whatsoever, except for public attention. A certificate ceremony like the present one is an opportunity to create a place and moment of attention for the public.

As a result of digitization, the book would become more and more in the background, this discussion already started in the 1990s. But meanwhile the one does not seem to exclude the other. And the jury's research also shows that the analogue book has not lost any of its importance in contemporary art. Despite the cutbacks, the number of books from Dutch soil rose to around 400, a surprisingly high number of relevant publications. From this inventory of the past three years, the jury chose a shortlist of 3 publications.

My long experience in art publishing started with making intimate artist's books. These artist booklets, booklets in diminutive form yes, were at the request of artists an extension of the artist pages in the bulletin of *De Appel* where they were granted *carte blanche*. But as the stage on paper expanded into a publication, more and more dialogue arose. In the publications the artist worked closely with the editor slash publisher and the designer, in my case especially designer *Irma Boom*.

In performance art, as well as in installation and time-bound art, there is an area of tension between the temporality of the work, the uniqueness of the experience on the one hand, and documentation, photography, recording by the writing press and art critics whether or not outside the walls on the other. For example, *Lily van Ginneken*, *Tineke Reijnders* and *Antje von Graevenitz*, fellow members of AICA, reported on ephemeral and temporary activities in newspapers and trade journals such as *Metropolis M*, which, incidentally, also gave space to artists' pages.

Besides *Anthon Beeke* and other designers I worked, as said, mainly with *Irma Boom* on the books. *Boom* has of course proven to be one of the most interesting book designers in the Netherlands. The meticulousness of her designs was and is reflected in her way of working. She also put it into words in her lecture at the *Johannes Vermeer Award* in 2014: "that it never becomes routine, that perfection is strived for and that this involves a process of becoming, so it takes a lot of time..." and that is also reflected in this book designed by *Sonja Haller and Pascal Brun* who worked at *Boom* and also at *Thonik* and combine this experience with their Swiss background of precision in design.

It is of course a cliché, the Swiss precision, and I mention it because the designers themselves use this wording in the colophon to characterize their experience of making this book, which is paved from front to back millimetre by millimetre. The attention that has gone into all parts of the work is to capture time in the flat surface.

Nothing special actually for a photographer, an artist working with Polaroids and very exceptional for a performer, who records his time, his life, a period of creating, of producing children, of working, already during his lifetime in an extensive archive.

Marina Abramovic, with whom *Ulay* worked for 13 years and built up an iconic oeuvre in performance art, is strikingly absent from the book at her own request. The images to which she did not grant publication rights are included in the book like pink, skin-coloured pages, a soft way of showing and reconciling them with apparently necessary choices. At the presentation of this book in the *Stedelijk*, *Ulay's* performance gave shape to the physical absence of what once seemed to be their indivisible unity.

Solo and in retrospective, *Ulay* comes across in this book as reflective and controlled. Despite its sturdy format, there is no drama, no grotesque gesture, but rather a restrained, contemplative ability to put things into perspective with a special attention that magnetizes the reader, at least me. This was my experience when reading this voluminous yet whispering book.

The book practice has gradually become less and less local. In order to share the costs and broaden the support base, productions are becoming increasingly international. So not only the artists and their work, the source, but also co-publishers, co-producers such as galleries and presentation institutions have become more and more part of the creative process over the years. The co-producers have a voice, often constructive but also linked to numbers...

No matter how extensive this book project may be, there are no pioneering or commercial motives at its roots, it has an international allure but without bowing down at the expense of its content. The source, the work and life of the artist, is embedded in a context that transcends a pure monograph in that it also gives a time image of 45 years. In dialogue with all those involved, a balanced whole has been created.

Whispers: Ulay on Ulay is both a work monograph and an artist's book, both a visual biography and an art historical reflection to which *Ulay's* voice, the whispering voice, has been added by means of interviews. However extensive this project may be, it does not shout from the rooftops but is restrained, inward-looking, with a considered result achieved together by the artist, editor, authors, designers and publisher.

Congratulations!

Thank you very much.

Edna van Duyn