

Stefaan Dheedene

TOTAL SUPPORT

There was a second exhibition. Or rather: a first. The exhibition *Total Support*, which officially opened on May 3rd, is the second. One is initially unaware of the first and - with the exception of students who venture in the KRIEG building on a daily basis - one could not have seen it anyway. Yet, the first exhibition is present within the second, in the form of a small publication. The first exhibition was not public. It was installed and dismantled before the second was installed. The first inside the second, entitled *13 points of view*.

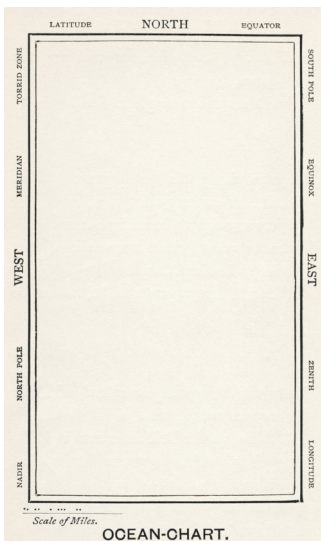
Thirteen frames were shown in the first exhibition, each with a different view of the Atlantic Ocean, in combination with a diagram, the same every time, of the floor plan of the exhibition space of KRIEG. The diagram shows you where you are, as an imaginary visitor of the first exhibition, while you are presented with a view of somewhere you are not. Because the sea views offer no orientation clues, each 'seascape' remains in the same categorical location. The sea functions as a map as well, albeit a very abstract one. How to find your bearings? The confrontation between an exact blueprint of a space and the unknown location of a photograph of the sea, reminded me of Lewis Carroll's ocean map published in "The Hunting of the Snark" and also mentioned by the French author Georges Perec in his book "Species of Spaces and Other Pieces". Perec accompanied Carroll's map with a list of spaces: "free space, open space, closed space, forbidden space, lack of space, calculated space, green space, living space, critical space, position in space" etc. The positioning of oneself is important in both of Stefaan Dheedene's exhibitions, in and for KRIEG; it attempts to provide an answer to the existential question of where you are.

Just like in many of his previous artworks and presentations, absurdism is key in this exhibition. However, it is an absurdism with a tragic undertone. More about that later. The thirteen frames were accompanied by an 'instrument', a wooden handle containing a pencil at the height of the artist's nose, and a 'bench'. Both objects are so-called supporters: the instrument served to hang the thirteen frames at the same height, specifically the height of the artist's nose, like a personal specification of the horizon. At first sight, the bench seemed to serve as a resting place for the tired visitor, regardless of whether the exhibition could be visited or not. After re-examination, however, the object appears more sophisticated than an everyday bench. A wooden shape is attached to the seating area, something that was intended as a chassis for a scale model of a boat. However, the model itself was missing. The bench as a viewpoint for something that remains unknown.

In *Total Support*, the second exhibition, the objects of the first show are 'replaced' (so formulated by the artist) by other artworks: various shelves secured at regular intervals are entitled *Total Support*, both the title of the exhibition and of the artwork itself. On one of these shelves, a bottle of bug spray is placed. The 'bench' has been traded in for the 'pièce de résistance' of the second exhibition: a sculpture that resembles a hot tub, entitled *Puddle*. Instead of the 'standard-nose-height', three different yokes are displayed, arranged vertically in the corner, like walking sticks. This constellation is accompanied by the first exhibition in print.

The exhibition *Total Support* can soberly be described as a temporary collection of several support systems. Support in the sense of (physical) support, whereby the different objects function as (potential) carriers. Additionally, each of the sculptures - handmade by Dheedene - are 'instruments that could be used outside the context of the exhibition,' as Simon Delobel put it in the accompanying text of a recent exhibition of the artist at gallery *trampoline* in Antwerp. Dheedene's artworks are structures and shapes that play a role in the everyday environment, they are already adapted in a specific order and subjected to rules to make them recognizable. By putting the objects in an exhibition, they also become simulations of things that they could be. That's how the different shelves function, each with their own character and looks, but created in such a way that we can recognize it as a shelf, as a typology of the shelf. But they are more than that: they are a sculpture and a plank, artwork and instrument, supporter and autonomous work. The exhibition itself is a support system as well: it holds things together temporarily, not just spatially, by following the subtle rules associated with the act of exhibiting.

Just like *13 points of view*, *Total Support* has a common denominator; the carrier, the supporter in the shape of the water surface. The surface as an indicator of the horizon, with the shelves forming an imaginary skyline. Also, the yokes could be used to carry water from one place to another. Even the bug spray is related to the



A map that is useful anywhere showing where to find the deadly snark, hidden amidst bandersnatch, beamish, frumious, galumphing, jubjub, mimsiest, outgrabe, and uffish.

Illustration by Henry Holiday to "The Hunting of the Snark" (1876) by Lewis Carroll

KRIEG

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Elfde-Liniestraat 25
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water, following an anecdote of the artist himself. In former Leopoldsville, now Kinshasa, there used to be a law forbidding stagnant water, in an effort to eradicate malaria. It was effective for a time, rendering Leopoldsville malaria free. The bug spray symbolizes hygiene and control – movement as opposed to inertia. In this way, it contrasts with the stagnant water of *Puddle*. In this last work, the meaning of the support becomes absurd; the plump structure carries a very small puddle, which will slowly evaporate and needs to be refilled regularly. Because water alone is a useless material for a sculptor, something had to be made to hold the water. Dheedene ended up with the hot tub, the bourgeois cliché of a load-bearing construction. The support is there where the puddle needs it, but the water is also overshadowed by its own support system. The hierarchy between carrier, and the one being carried, is jeopardized.

Two years ago, the artist's father disappeared at sea. While Dheedene searched for his father, he made portraits of the sea, absurd souvenirs of places on the Atlantic Ocean where he had been. These portraits were exhibited in *13 points of view*. 'The sea,' as the artist puts it, 'is a place where something floats or sinks.' It is a sublime carrier. With this, we are full circle: the caricatured hot tub which carries the small puddle, the bench-with-chassis, and the boat which allows movement across water without drowning. The support that finally became insufficient: disappeared under the water surface.

Noor Mertens

Stefaan Dheedene studied Sculpture at KASK, Ghent and attended the HISK post-academic programme in Antwerp, Belgium. He currently teaches at KASK, Ghent. Recent solo exhibitions include: *Half an optimist, a brand new rockerbox and a blow on broad daylight* - trampoline, Antwerp (2017); *Slapstick - P/////AKT*, Amsterdam (2016); *Swing the bat, throw a ball* - White out studio, Knokke (2016); *Done. Finished.*, Deweer Gallery, Otegem (2011); *Ghost shift*, S.M.A.K., Ghent (2009). Dheedene also participated in group exhibitions at BUDA, Kortrijk (2016), cc strombeek (2015), Stadslimiet, Antwerp (2014), De Vleeshal, Middelburg (2013) and Netwerk, Aalst (2012).

Works on show:

Total Support, 2016–18

birch, beech, merbau, pine, mdf, lacquer paint, varnish, bug spray

Puddle, 2018

marupa wood, pine, varnish, epoxy, water

yoke / yoke / yoke, 2017

marupa wood

13 points of view, 2018

publication, 52 pp.