

Dear Jaring and Alexander,

Recently I've had to write a few artist's statements and I start all of them by saying that I am (currently) 'focused on exploring the bodily as a liminal space between our psychological world and our social lives'. Does this make sense to you? I like the idea of beginning by defining a space, somewhere in which to run. This one is like an isthmus where the micro meets the macro. With my new works I wanted to remove the context of the studio and the figure of the artist that was central to the previous group and move in opposite directions: looking closer, with more intimacy to include the domestic and personal, whilst at the same time stepping back to let more of the world in.

Whereas a lot of the work I made in the last couple of years was concerned with human behaviour, last year I started to think about the behaviour of the body- that which we can observe directly at least, and what we can take away from it. I thought about approaching it as a lie-detector, to see what it can reveal about how we really feel right now. We are good at ignoring our biology, with alcohol, coffee, maybe given a push we might change our diets. And towards others we are sympathetic but learn that it's not polite to address the expressions of the body.

I recall for example that in her adolescence, my sister had an involuntary double-blinking thing (not sure of the medical term for it), and if attention was drawn to it it would only make it worse. Baudrillard defined embarrassment as the discomfort of being reminded that we are objects. I wonder why is this so hard to face?

When I hear babies crying in public- not the eyes-watering-lips-quivering-crying, but the wailing-screaming-"THIS-IS-FUCKING-SHIT"-on-the-17:28-train-home-crying, my response is envy for how expressive they can be- "this is fucking shit" I think/sweat/ache, but I stay where I am and go back to reading the free newspaper. Jill McKnight's 'Dog Fear Suit', a text-based artwork which I read fortuitously days before being prompted to write this text, describes this living hell brilliantly.

'I said to my friend, "dogs don't hide their fear when they feel scared, so must humans treat them more kindly as a result."

**I was jealous.**

**“Humans are taught from a young age to conceal any fear or anxiety so that they appear on a level playing field with other humans.” But what if they can’t.’**

**I just got up to put the heating on and realised that I’m sweating as I write this, truly. I’ve noticed that I sweat (and harder to explain: tense my calves until they cramp) when in certain social situations. The ‘suits’ I wore for ten years served as a concealment, a professional camouflage, and that’s why for the cover of the ‘suits’ archived book I used a photograph of a wet sweat patch, which I had found on the shirt I was wearing underneath a ‘suit’ during the very last time I wore one. I liked how beautifully it produced a perfect circle that suggested to me an aesthetic synthesis of the abject and the divine. This was the starting point for the series ‘sweat paintings’.**

**On 20 Oct 2017, at 11:08, Alex Farrar <alex.farrar@hotmail.co.uk> wrote:**

**Hi Arend,**

**I’m busy with some paint experiments and though I’m close to the result I want, I’m also frustratingly far away! I’m working with t-shirt cotton, stretched over regular canvas stretcher bars. I want to make a ‘stain’ on the material that will look like wet sweat, but permanently wet. I’ve tried working with oil-painting mediums, which look great when still wet- it bleeds in to the fabric and spreads itself nicely, but dries after a couple hours. Do you have any suggestions/experience in this area? I guess it’s not important that it is literally wet, but I would like it to look wet. Also I would prefer it to be colourless. Really hope you can help!**

**Best wishes,  
Alex**

**Using cotton, mostly the kind associated with under-layers, I dripped, poured and brushed a silicone-based mixture from the SFX industry into organic forms that improvise on the sweat-shapes that appear naturally on our clothes. I wrote to Frank that clothes soaked in sweat (outside the context of physical exercise) reveal a degree of stress**

between the interior and the exterior, 'us' and 'the world', suggesting an alienation that produces an abject response that I don't think we are able to talk about very easily. Putting it in the context of a painting forces viewers to literally face these common feelings.'

The chairs that are shown together with the sweat paintings are a cheap, stackable 'house' furniture that you see everywhere. I've prepared a number of shaker motors and clamped some to each of the chairs, mobilising them in different states of agitation (see the individual titles for clues: 'Agitate', 'Shake', 'Tremble', 'Rattle', 'Judder'). I will just set them off and let them skitter about uncontrollably. I like making things that are independent of me, I suppose that's what artists are doing all the time.

This work is an action which keeps coming back to me— remember the light-boxes that replaced the natural light in my studio at the Rijksakademie with a spasmodic pulse? They were inspired by the muscle-spasm that my eyelids made earlier that year. In the middle of working on these chairs my brother experienced full body tremors and going with him to the doctors I learned this is what they are called- essential-tremors, as in earthquakes. To compound our disorientation the doctors waiting room was full of the same chairs as mine.

I've been working on individual prototypes since July last year so I'm curious to see the effect of a group of them operating simultaneously. It could get quite loud. I wonder if people will laugh at them? Yesterday I listened to an interview with Stephen Colbert and on the subject of his motivations and satire in general I suppose, he quoted Frank Herbert's "I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer" line from Dune, which he interpreted as 'if you can laugh you can think'. I hope that's possible.

I've left the 'slingers' 'till last as they're the most difficult to think about, perhaps because they're so simple, maybe because they're quite angry. I wanted to have a background context for the other works, something which would situate them, perhaps even provide an explanation for them. They came from an observation, which I'm sure many people have made, that the scene after a party or celebration has finished has a devastating melancholia— all the

excitement and joy has been sucked out of the room and even the decorations look tired, as if they don't want to be there, you're not sure if you had a good time, you probably regret a few things, and there's always a few stragglers that are trying to revive it who you wish would leave. I was thinking about what this scene would look like extended– days, weeks, years after the party. Do you think it's a good analogy for the world we live in? I feel like this a lot at the moment, as if I'm regularly waking up from a fever dream in the remnants of someone else's party.

Best wishes,  
Alex

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Alex Farrar would like to thank the Mondriaan Fund for their generous support and Jill McKnight for permission to quote from Dog Fear Suit.

\*Common in this sense refers to the ordinary, shared, but also low-class or vulgar.

\*\* I've used the Dutch word here because I think it's more precise than the English term 'garlands' which suggest hanging paper decorations but also arrangements of flowers etc.