

UITBURGEREN, BABY*

Simona Denicolai & Ivo Provoost

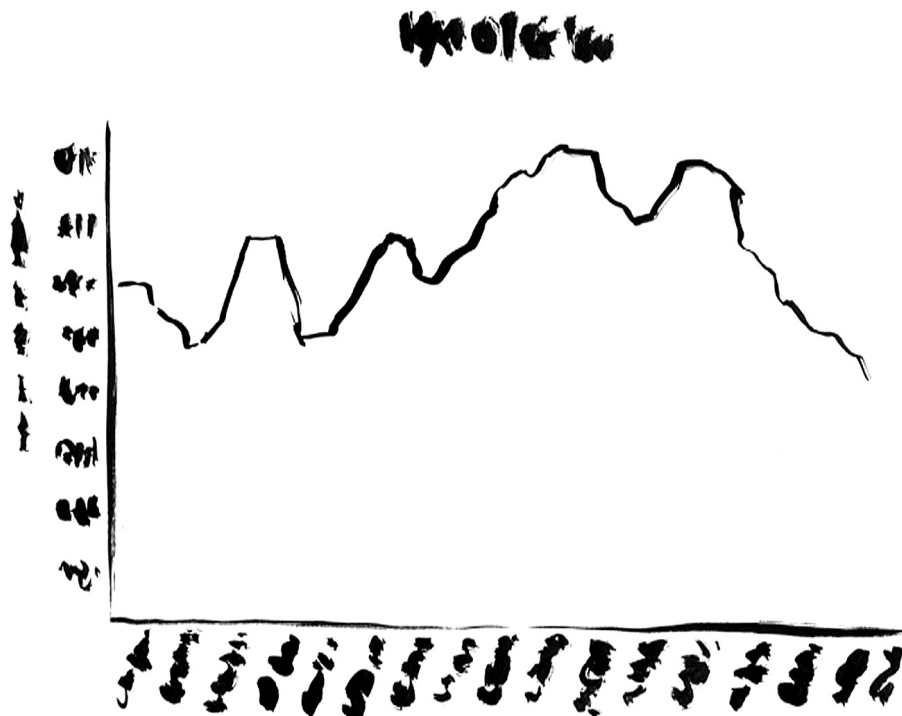
*Literal translation: DENATURALIZE, BABY!

THE DREDGING OF NATURALIZATION VERSUS
THE NATURALIZATION OF DREDGING

If this would not have excessively disturbed the work of translators, publishers and gallery owners, this text should have been written in several languages that would have been entangled or intertwined. In case of Denicolai & Provoost it is obvious to talk about semantic porosity, about displacements, distortions, reversals of codes and languages, of any possible nature for that matter (idiomatic, expressive, etc. ...).

For them, language is also a public space that each of us can newly appropriate in an individual way and according to our own liking; a space for encounters and interchanges and as such, inevitably also a space for crossovers, erasures, discrepancies and misunderstandings, fruitful and meaningful.

Fully in harmony with their linguistic usage and practices as KUNST-WÜRME, we shall also allow ourselves, using some relevant quotes, to insert certain previous critical discourses in the corpus of the text and to let them assimilate once more.



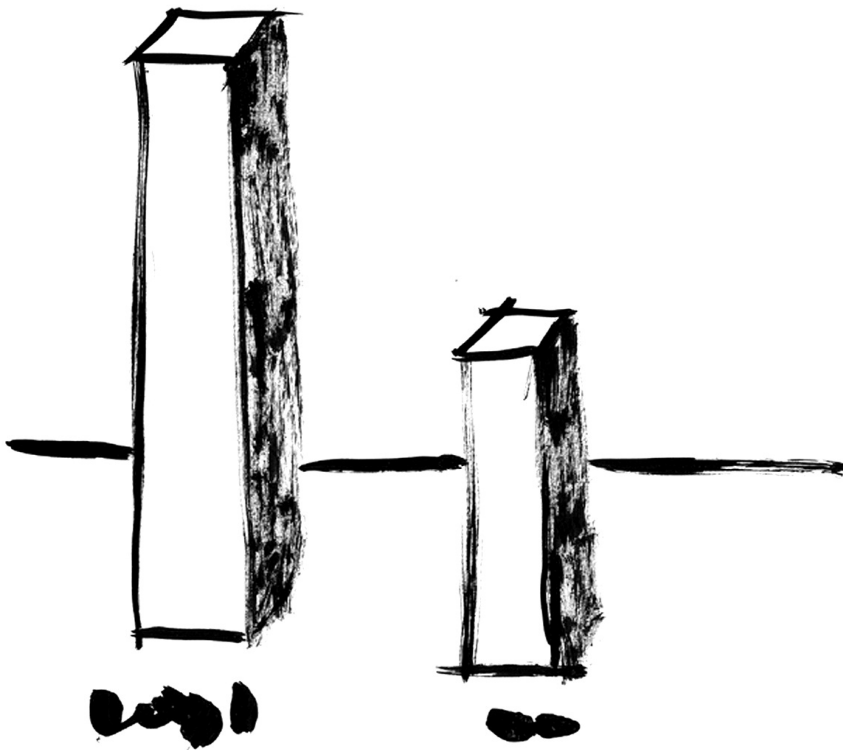
In this exhibition at West, of which the catchy, contrary title disregards the conventions of political correctness; in this project that is just as progressively auto-referential as it is open, inclusive and evolutive, direct affinities with previous works are improved and interwoven with the ties between the mutual works that arise as they are discovered in space and time in the course of the display.

Heedless of any chronological or logical order, or without letting ourselves be tempted into any 'alphabetical' arrangement, we choose to start this textual ramble with an apotropaic element, namely the wild barking that resounds from a projection room and echoes in a passage in the middle of the gallery. This roaring is produced by a loop montage of a series of images, compiled from cartoon images from the Internet. This profusion of bloody jaws and stylized animal violence, which forms a structural part of the video ABC, is in fact a *mise en abyme*: the sequence is inserted in the main video image by a projection installation, and the observer descries it as some sort of aside: an aside coming from a screen that is placed in the back of a school class, where the eponymous object or subject of the sequence takes place.

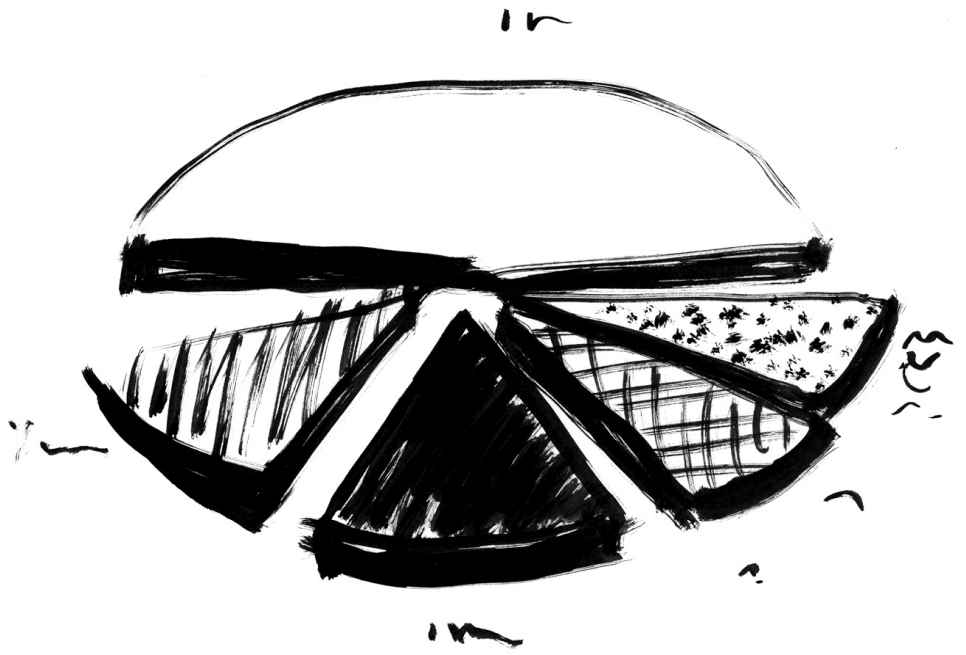
Place and time of the class are far from insignificant, as it is about a Dutch lesson in the first year of primary education at a disadvantaged school in Molenbeek (a community in Brussels); a lesson for the children of 'new-comers' to help them naturalize. The teacher, Mrs Heymans has a very personal pedagogical approach; an approach in which rhythm and multi-sensorial teaching techniques play a major part. For instance, the lesson that is devoted to learning the word rose, is frequently interrupted by intermezzos of movement gymnastics that show some similarity to kung fu exercises; the children are encouraged to couple the learning of new sounds and phonemes to the impulses of expressive gestures and movements. It radiates an impression of free, and at the same time subdued, energy and tempestuousness, which forms an interesting visual and semantic offset to the two sequences, frames in the frame, visual jigsaw that are inserted in the sequence in the back of the classroom, that is to say for us, the observers on the foreground of the image. Because next to the compilation of cartoon fragments, the display of a Mac-laptop shows an animation sequence that was purpose-created by Denicolai and Provoost: a re-interpretation of a historical moment (that, incidentally, has been properly recorded and registered, let us emphasize that) of silent political and cultural protest: the scene that took place during the Olympic Games in Mexico in 1968.

When the racers Tommie Smith and John Carlos had respectively gained the first and third place and subsequently took their places on the stand, they raised their fists in the air as a symbolic sign of Black Power resistance, at the exact moment that the Olympic brass band struck up the American national anthem. No matter how tacit this gesture was, the consequences were telling: Smith and Carlos were immediately expelled from Mexico and their colleague and winner of the silver medal Peter Norman, who had carried a sympathetic badge, was fined heavily.

Apart from the concerted themes (the phrasing of the question about integration and its limits, the resistance against racism and cultural violence – either implicit or explicit (the dogs)), Denicolai and Provoost's appropriation and translation of a historical sequence into an animation film has in itself something of an aesthetic and political choice, and also metaphorically refers to a freedom that is typical for us, namely the freedom to individually appropriate cultural references.



DISCUT OF FASHION ARTS CAN BE A LOT OF EXPOSURE



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In addition, the assembling of the Denicolai & Provoost-animation with fragments of a filmed reality (the classroom) and 'exogenous' realities – though certainly selected and compiled (the dogs) – could also be interpreted as the statement of a creative strategy that is based on the salutary mixture and porousness of the bearers of significance that are indiscriminately re-appropriated or newly created.

Moreover, there are formal coincidences/similarities/contradictions (the gymnastic gestures of the pupils versus the raised fists of the runners, or the pink colour of a dress in relation to the word rose written on the blackboard) between the various screens (of which there are at least three in ABC, not counting the mental images of the observer who receives, perceives and associates them selectively) that gives us as observers food for thought. When we put these three repeating sequences next to each other (they respectively take 17:00 and 3:30 min.) we arrive at $(24 \times 60 \times 17 \times 3 \times 0,5)$ possibilities for combination of the various visual frames... This meta-textual profusion of connections between the images, meanings and similarities is of course a privilege of the observer, which is not open for the performers in the film sequence. But isn't this precisely one of the essential messages of this video montage, the subtext that is inherent to it, and which, for that matter, could lie hidden in any form of articulated re-interpretation and honest assimilation of the reality: knowing that we are the actors or even the walk-on parts of pools, or rather puzzles (social, cultural, economic, relational...) that are just as interwoven and layered as they are numerous, and that we fail to notice in their global state, but that we nonetheless could try to imagine selectively by acquiring a controlled distancing....

From naturalization to integration is a logical linguistic step, but in particular it makes us return to the proposals that the visitors find when setting foot in the room of West. These works need performative cooperation of associations or professionals for their activation or re-activation. Therefore, we significantly have to return to the project Integration, which was created by Denicolai & Provoost in 2007 as an answer to an official invitation to take part in the planned extension of the art centre Netwerk, by offering an art proposal.

'On 15 September, at exactly 3 p.m., the mayor of Aalst, Belgium, Mrs Uyttersprot, was standing on the banks of the Dender. She stood there in the company of Édouard Martin

and a crowd that could be described as both select and diverse. The officials were there, the artists Simona Denicolai & Ivo Provoost, some of their friends, the management and assistants of Network, plus a number of curious people and bypassers from Aalst and beyond.

With one precise gesture she throws a stone – the first stone – over her right shoulder into the river.

This performative and parabolic project, which was the winner of the competition about the integration of a work of art that was organized by Network on the occasion of finishing the rebuilding works, is called INTEGRATION: the integration of the extension of the art centre that is spreading its wings towards the city.

And it is undoubtedly this movement towards the city centre, towards the outskirts of the town and towards the outside world that gives the throw of the stone in Denicolai & Provoost's proposal its first import. The second is very easy to find: the laconic re-interpretation of the laying of a foundation stone; the ritual that forms the historical privilege of chosen and other public representatives.¹

Their proposal – that deviated from the usual efforts offered at this sort of competitions – was made up of a performance by the mayor of Aalst, Mrs Uyttersprot, that was executed (instead of the usual laying of a foundation stone, the throwing of a stone in the Dender, the river in Aalst that flows alongside the art centre) during the inauguration of the building, and of a communication effort before and after the performance during which posters were put up in the public space and advertisements were placed in a well-known magazine.

'The design of these posters and advertisements, using double letters and a wobbly frame, refer to the inclusive, agile and evolving character of this architectural integration. They are re-used in the same way during a poster campaign in Aalst, Gent, Brussels and Antwerp.

The text is subsequently, and according to a certain internal logic, translated into the two other national languages, but also into the two languages that are most frequently spoken by the (whether or not integrated) communities of another origin: Arabic and Italian.

The choice to make translations is telling in itself. But moreover, Denicolai & Provoost decide not to work with skilled translators, but with translation machines such as BABEL FISH. This results in French in a translation with the following words and phrases:

LE MAIRE / ILSE UYTTERSROT
LA PREMIÈRE SI PIERRE / DE LA TRANSFORMATION JETTE
FONCTIONNE DE RÉSEAU / AU SUJET DE SON ÉPAULE DROITE
DANS LE DENDER
EN PRÉSENCE DE / EDOUARD MARTIN
LE SAMEDI 15 SEPTEMBRE 2007
LE BOIS QUAI (SANS N°) ALOST
À 15:00 HEURES PRÉCISE
INTEGRATION (traduits le Babel Fish)

I leave the other translations to the imagination of the reader. In times of technological media disturbances and ditto blindness, this operation is a metaphor for and a questioning of another form of integration. And in the specific geographical context of this small hybrid country, it is now given a specific connotation.

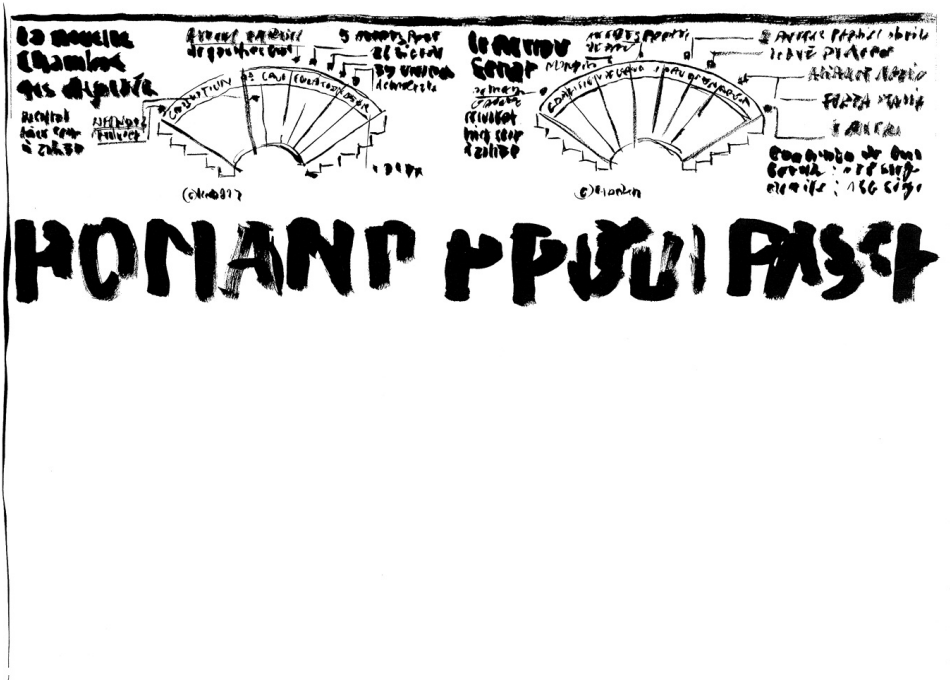
As an initial re-interpretation of the integration of a work of art, this project functions as the marking of hesitating forms of cultural integration, in these times of globalization.²

Completely in line with the *selbstbewusste KUNSTWÜRME*³, INTEGRATION was thereafter used as the moulding point of departure for the project *BAD TRANSLATIONS ARE CHEAPER* that was presented in Brussels by Aliceday last year. To be precise: the Dutch poster on which the performative gesture of Mrs Uyttersprot was described and which was screen-printed on the lid, served as the basis of the derived edition that made up the essence of the exhibition: a jig-saw puzzle of 1040 pieces of a perfect photo shot, made by a friend during the performance. This picture, which has to be put together again, records the parabolic course of the stone that was thrown in the water. In short, an ideal visual memory, in fact too explicit to directly serve as the image on the puzzlebox. The challenge for the buyers of that

¹ Emmanuel Lambion, Denicolai & Provoost, *Paraboles à vau-l'eau*, in: *L'art même*, IV, 2007, n°37, p.39

² Sylvie Boulanger, Simona Denicolai & Ivo Provoost, *Bad Translations are cheaper* in *Multitudes*, Google et au-delà, summer 2009, quote from Emmanuel Lambion, *Question de traces, traces en perspectives* in *Network Annual 2009*, pp.56-71 & 193-196

³ The earthworm by Simona Denicolai and Ivo Provoost: a drawing, but also a metaphor for aesthetics and creation, and, in a sense, also of the aesthetics of life itself. We make progress by swallowing, digesting and shitting our context – a true image that could easily be transferred to a structural and global metaphor, in a way that is direct and accessible. This could also be related, for that matter, with analytic theories that are based on the myths of the original Creation, the genesis myths of humanity, Created from clay and peat, coming into being due to the phantasmagorical approach of human bearing. (Emmanuel Lambion, *op.cit.*, *ibid.*)



HONANP PPUU PAST

edition, and for the members of the game clubs that were invited to join in a race against time during the vernissage, consists of putting together an image of which they can only approximately guess the subject, as this is based on a textual description that, as mentioned, is distorted due to the automated translation.

A similar activation will take place during *UITBURGEREN, BABY!*, an installation of five tables with jigsaw puzzles; for this occasion members of game clubs have again been invited, this time from Utrecht, and they will temporarily appropriate the functionality of the exhibition room.

In this project there appears to be some sort of contextually adjusted, mirrored involution/prolongation, that we will discover thanks to the cooperation of a frogman (professional diver), who will dive into the canal opposite West. His task is to bring the stones that he finds in the canal to the exhibition room, as a semi-archaeological interference.

We seem to have come full circle: stones found versus stones thrown, from one project that is again brought to the surface from a river (or canal), to the other, from one country to the other, at a distance of three years, rene-

wed and in another context, but not without (be it only in the minds of the devisers or of those that have projected themselves into it) having travelled a certain distance, underground, or more precise, underwater.... Of course, bound by dates of issue, we cannot accurately indicate the results of the dredging action, but the catch will be neatly displayed alongside the walls of the gallery, and the announcement that announces the performance will also be there.

From one thing to another, via those two different invitations, the work of Denicolai & Provoost is characterized by a recurring element, namely suggesting, or even better, creating – following their line of creative thinking and strategy – porosity, even if it is only for a moment, from the exhibition room to reality. Whereas the functionality of the sculpture installations has a bit of an ordinary playful and reassuring touch, the functionality of the diving performance in contrast gets the fictional overtone of a mixed message, due to the preceding dissemination in public space.

‘I have the feeling that therefore – in the context of evolving works or projects – a hierarchical equalization and a form of aesthetic solidarity is taking place between the various components.

That porosity and that selective equalization – phenomena that mingle data such as genre, content and attitude and that manifest themselves both in relation to their environment and within their creative teamwork – obtain the status of a political statement and of an economic exchange model. In strictly formal terms – as we have observed earlier – they wipe out the differences and solve the matter of the aesthetics of the residue, the derived product.’⁴

Through these two evolving derivatives of a parent project, which in some way are also complementary in a symmetric sense (both conceptual and architectural) in *UITBURGEREN, BABY!*, the structural importance of the continually recurring concept of intersection in Denicolai & Provoost’s work becomes obvious. Both regarding the design strategy – the shaping of ideas – and the activating and performance installations.

And at that point, it is tempting to take a quick glimpse at the edition of *LET’S HAVE A LOOK* that will also be presented during the exhibition. Its

⁴ Emmanuel Lambion, *op.cit.*, *ibid*, p.65 & 195

point of departure was a drawing that Denicolai & Provoost had chosen to use as a reactivating proposal related to the project-concept the BN PROJECT: LA BIENNALE DELLE BIENNALI. This manifest came in the shape of an article that was published in 2007⁵ and goes into the topic of the proliferation of biennials and other global Salon phenomena, and also the desirability of a repositioning of the Venice Biennial. The drawing imitates a simple example of the set theory, with two verbs on both sides: on the left TO LOOK and on the right TO HAVE, and in the intersection of the two sets, the expression LET'S HAVE A LOOK. An invitation or an order? Or as a sceptical comment on the hectic obsessiveness and superficiality that contort observing and genuine appropriation (in the etymological sense) as the urge for possessions and profusion (of goods, references and even knowledge) take the place of real conscious observing of all this? Indeed, it is all a matter of context and format. In this case, the text of the original drawing is magnified, multiplied and in a way also fixed due to its new status of an adhesive version: it has taken the shape of a sticker as large as 130 centimeter.

The sentence, that is too big to be nondescript, has degenerated into a conceptual work that can be traded, but of which one will lose the pleasure, or at least the free possession, as soon as the functionality of the work is activated. In the context of an exhibition in a gallery, raising the subject of the possession question is of course relevant, but this illustration of the intersection concept also immediately – and in a subtle way – attunes with the other exhibited works, both in format and content.

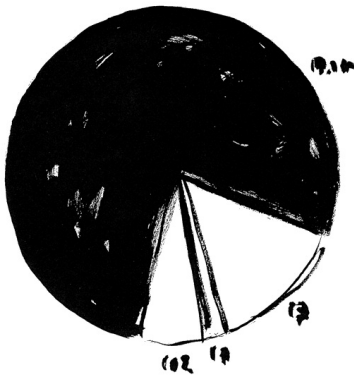
These interconnections and references, these derivatives, these memories and reactivated processes, are step by step active in time, both where shape and content are concerned. But they also make demands on the limitations of the exhibition room.⁶

Conversely, the proposal could also be seen as an incentive to accept – or even to defend – the essential character of the surreptitious look, of that look and that epistemology of the interspace, to which we are exposed in our contemporary time or which structures us; there where the innumera-

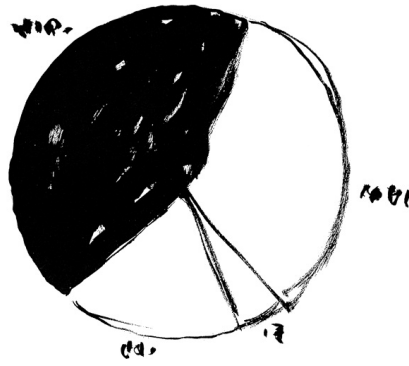
⁵ Emmanuel Lambion, *The Bn Project, La Biennale delle Biennali*, in *Janus* # 11, 1/2007, pp. 29-36

⁶ Emmanuel Lambion, *Question de traces, traces en perspectives* in *Network Annual 2007*, pp.69 & 196

N.O.S. HNSC - (2006-2009) - 11%



2006



2009

ble areas and networks of knowledge (or possessions), that cross and link in the various dimensions of our everyday life, meet each other.

In fact, everything takes place as if the real freedom, the real integration of knowledge, of culture, of codes to which we are irrevocably incited due to the porosity and multiplicity of our frames of reference, is to be found in the fact that we accept it. It is true that in the interspace superficiality often lies in wait, but we also find real freedom there, the freedom to be aware, the freedom of the relativity of view. However, we have to be capable (through art?) of dissociating ourselves from some perspective moments, to take the time to look at an inanimate image or a sticker....

Integration and intersection, the mixture of languages, codes, types and styles are once more clearly illustrated using a series of drawings that will be added a posteriori.

To begin with there is the act: the prolongation of the exhibition through this editorial support, and the parasitizing of a textual oration that could, as the limit, ignore or contradict the drawings.

And next there is the selection of the drawings, which is all but coincidental. The series is entitled IMPRESSIONISM and is an aesthetic appro-

priation of the diagrams, charts and tables that are supposed to render a scientific character to the numerous socio-economic analyses. 'Enriched' with a *flou artistique* they appear to typify the vague, tendentious, economic journalism that is so frequently linked to them.

And finally, there is their history and the history of their accordingly evolving infiltration or presentation methods: initially they were neatly placed in a golden frame to be shown at a contemporary art fair, but here this gilded publication has the honour of solemnly presenting the drawings. And the author of this text will certainly make no objections....

EMMANUEL LAMBION, JANUARY 2010

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UITBURGEREN, BABY!

Simona Denicolai & Ivo Provoost

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