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Extracted out of the article "The expanding subsidiary motif – on various aspects of the work of Kristof Van Gestel and Koenraad Dedobbeleer" by Phillip van den Bossche in 'Raymond Vanderzande', edited by Netwerk, Aalst, 2006.

"Robbert Dijkgraaf, Professor of Mathematical Physics at the University of Amsterdam, compares the scientist to the traditional housewife. In his view, scientists are hardly, if at all, interested in the philosophical question of the truth of science. They are busy in the kitchen slaving over bubbling pans and hot ovens. They shrug their shoulders when they hear their dear husband with his pipe in his mouth telling fine stories in the living room about his collection of cookery books. According to Dijkgraaf, the real moment of truth comes when the pudding is served and tasted: "a successful pudding is a question of details, a great many details, and a long and laborious preparatory process.". The following article is not about truth in art as compared to science. Though it is an interesting question. Dijkgraaf himself argues for what he calls "dark knowledge" – the knowledge of what we do not know – and in some cases that is as much as 96%. In this case science finds itself in a position of luxury, knowing or thinking it knows precisely what it does not know. In art this "dark knowledge" is to be found in, among other things, the combination of form and content, in what arises after fusion. Perhaps we should leave it there for now. What follows is an attempt to circle round several aspects of the art work of Kristof Van Gestel and Koenraad Dedobbeleer, or else to approach it from several different angles. We shall come across the concepts of the kitchen, the studio, the living room, the exhibition and documentation, together with, among other things, Frances Stark's theory of "the housewife and the architect".

— The exhibition —

In 1994 Jorge Pardo declared that photographic images would increasingly take the place of space and the quality of the object: "I make works that are best represented by copies in slides." He sees it as a condition and not as the ongoing erosion of the quality of a work of art. In his opinion physical space is no longer the 'battlefield' or the centre of action. A couple of years later Pardo built a house in the form of a work of art and exhibition in Los Angeles. The Museum of Contemporary Art invited him to hold a solo exhibition, but he opted for an architectural project outside the exhibition space. There is a lot to be said about it, among other things regarding the 'place' of the work of art. The artist and writer Frances Stark visited the house in 1999 and found Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* in the bookcase. Jorge Pardo had underlined the following passage: "The flower is always in the almond. With this excellent motto, both the house and the bedchamber bear the mark of an unforgettable intimacy. For there exists no more compact form of intimacy, none that is more sure of its centre than a flower's dream of the future while it is still enclosed, tightly folded, inside its seed." These individual ideas float around in my mind as I study the documentation for the Raymond Vanderzande exhibition by Kristof Van Gestel and Koenraad Dedobbeleer. There is a connection, and a motif runs from the one to the other, but it is not yet interpretable. According to the press release the exhibition at Netwerk consists of "a landscape of sculptures, objects, installations and photos". It is the first time the two artists have worked together. Sometimes their work literally links together: concrete elements and modular tiles by Kristof van Gestel lie and support the red-painted wooden structure by Koenraad Dedobbeleer. Judging by the photos, the exhibition space is 'filled' in every way. Big photos by Dedobbeleer, including a fascinating perspective view of the interior of a carpet shop, alternate with sculptural forms and volumes by Van Gestel. Size, weight, scale, function, colour, position: everything tells us that these artists are constantly formulating proposals, creating a spatial context in which they let the works hold a conversation with no definite character. I have not seen the exhibition and that is, to put it mildly, a big problem, certainly when the following quote from Donald Judd heads the press release:

"Space is made by an artist or an architect; it is not found and packaged. It is made by thought. Therefore most buildings have no space. Most people are not aware of this absence. They are not bothered by a confusion and enclosed nothingness. Of course they don't miss real space and they don't

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desire it. Sometimes when they are travelling they enter a cathedral, recognize space, and thank God instead of the architect." How do they now see the exhibition in hindsight?

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In Dedobbeleer's view, today they would create a different 'presentation' given the same elements, and who knows, perhaps with a contrasting result. In this respect he expressly does not use the word 'exhibition', but 'presentation': offering something, voluntarily making it available. This is a major shade of difference. In Raymond Vanderzande the two artists, each from their own individual angle, have tried to present a picture of the way something can be presented and can take on a meaning. Dedobbeleer defines 'presentation' as "offering or proposing something, voluntarily making it available and then subjecting it to someone's judgement and suppositions."

He therefore also agrees with Van Gestel's definition of 'ideal sculpture'. His works unfold in the preparation, devising and implementation of a presentation. In this way something is put forward. Conversely, when it comes to storing it away he has an important comment to make: "I would describe it more as a computer switched to 'stand-by'. Certain ideas have to be tested almost constantly, and the truth of a statement lies in a particular environment or context. They are rarely ultimate things. The consequence of presenting a particular work again – or, even more extremely, sometimes only the onset or idea of a work – is almost always that the 'thing' is tested against its environment."

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— The studio —

The Raymond Vanderzande presentation at Netwerk, named after a fictional character and in my imagination a sort of dadaist commercial traveller with a big display case, invitingly confronts the visitor with questions on the 'identity' and 'place' of the assembled works. The presentation as a whole becomes a dialogue. The choice of a person's name for the title is perhaps an initial indication in that direction. But who exactly are the compilers of these presentation proposals? What position do the artists occupy and how do they define their artistic practice and area of research? At first sight, Dedobbeleer and Van Gestel belong in the category of poststudio artists. This somewhat instrumental characterisation originates – if I am not mistaken – from the French artist Daniel Buren. In 1979 the October company published his essay *The Function of the Studio*. Buren here describes what he calls "the unspeakable compromise of the portable work of art." A work of art is traditionally made in a studio. It is automatically linked to that place. In a manner of speaking the work of art exists perfectly in the closed or protective space of the studio. At the same time the fact that the work is portable undermines this integrity. If the work of art is intended to exist, it has to be seen. So at a certain moment it moves from its original place to the place where it is promoted: it goes from the artist's world to the art world, the supposedly neutral space of a gallery or museum. According to Daniel Buren, the following contradictions then become visible: first of all it is impossible to see a work of art in its own place. Because if it remains in its original place it does not exist. What is more, the place where we see the work of art influences it more than the original place where it was created.

About thirty-five years have passed since then, and in my view Raymond Vanderzande brings together two different positions that do not so much build on Buren's insights but, with an awareness of his insights, explore a new direction.

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For the Raymond Vanderzande exhibition Dedobbeleer made new works using parts – or what he himself calls "raw materials" – from his exhibition Dedobbeleer and Son held at Artis in 's-Hertogenbosch. He started experimenting on the spot in an almost classical way. This way of working, which is new to him, is in line with what might be called one of the central questions of his work: **what is presentation?** In each exhibition he looks for the way a work can present itself and can thus 'take place'. This is not necessarily the same in each arrangement or mise-en-scène. As he himself indicates, it is here not a question of a modular system, but rather a non-scientific study of possibilities. A sculpture can equally

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well be or become an artefact, an object, relic, memory or obstacle. Keeping the production process open to doubt and change, the changes of perspective and the rejection of the final character of the work of art differ considerably from Daniel Buren's ideological and somewhat 'macho' position in the early seventies. Dedobbeleer recently made a series of slides in collaboration with Sofie Haesaerts and Colombe Marcasiano. The whole thing consists of a slide carousel of 80 pictures, a stool and a slide projector. The provisional title is *Pondering Nothing Much About Even Less* (2006). In each picture we see the corner of a room with an L-shaped storage unit. In each slide the arrangement of elements on and around the storage unit is different. They are circular volumes such as a lampshade, a wicker basket and a melon, and also other domestic and decorative shapes and elements. Sometimes the unit is moved or tilted. The three artists make a different presentation for each slide and in a certain way interior becomes exterior.

— The housewife and the architect —

This last description brings us to Frances Stark's theory of "the housewife and the architect". She uses her living room as a studio in which to produce her paintings, collages and textual pieces. This occasionally makes for awkward situations. Friends sometimes complain about the odd position of the sofa in the room, between her worktable and the sumptuous view of Los Angeles. In other words the arrangement is a compromise between studio and living room. Sometimes she longs for big art projects in the open air or in institutions where – in her perception and circle of friends – it is mainly male artists who are at work. She then looks with a somewhat jealous eye at their way of working and writes: "Was I not like a housewife, toiling within the confines of my home and serving as both hostess and docent of my tiny quarters? Were these men not like architects in that they were constantly carrying out plans – giving instructions, making constructions?" What happens when we think back, on the one hand, to the quote from Donald Judd, Jorge Pardo's house and Raymond Vanderzande, and on the other develop Frances Stark's theory as an expanding subsidiary-motif? The difference between the housewife and the architect has to do with interior and exterior. The housewife looks after the household and that covers a thousand and one activities that are not as a rule interpreted as production. Because she does not build anything, but maintains numerous and varied things so that the house does not fall apart. On his side, the architect solves problems to which the public never gives a moment's thought but which have a great influence on our consciousness of our surroundings. Frances Stark asks herself whether the internal and external are not categories that can be used in the production of meaning. What if the internal evoked a more romantic tradition and the external was more in line with the avant-garde? In that case "the housewife and the architect" becomes a model that can be used to look at what is called the post-studio practice of contemporary artists, such as the research into the success and shortcomings of Modernism, or design and decoration issues. And what should we think about the practice of artists who take little or no account of the complex architectural and institutional structure and the relationship with the 'art world'? In the end we arrive at the examination of the capacity of the handmade, portable art object to generate meaning within its limited framework. From a domestic and relational point of view the compromise aspect of "the unspeakable compromise of the portable work of art" is not a suspicious and destructive area. On the contrary, the compromise opens up an area and range of possibilities and leaves space for interpretations, doubt and change. In this case the compromise is then no more than a temporary agreement on the differences. Raymond Vanderzande's case probably contains many more stories about these 'artist-constructors', for example about melancholy and scenography, ornament and monument, blue scotch tape and the flat where the Polish artist Edward Krasinski lives, Jef Geys' 'music-box of feelings', etc. Perhaps it will be part of a future presentation of Raymond, the self-employed enthusiast from Aalst? It may also be possible that only Elsa Vanderzande really knows what is in her husband's case".