

basics

ARTISTINTHEWORLD (André Smits)

ARTISTINTHEWORLD is a journey through the art world with the aim of photographing as many artists and art professionals as possible in their own domain, always portrayed with their backs ("Rückenfigur") to the viewer, with an open mind directed towards the world.

Art is the most beautiful thing that exists, with ARTISTINTHEWORLD I want to embrace the art world with a positive gesture, it is a tribute to all artists, from my wonder and amazement at the beauty and exuberance that I encounter along the way. The importance of connecting, respecting and appreciating people in order to celebrate the diversity of life. I want to show the differences in background, experience and perspective, only in this way can people learn from each other and grow. Making reality visible in a long series of special encounters.

An important starting point of my working method is that I see every encounter as an opportunity to exchange ideas together. The conversations can be about the work, current affairs, the art world, life and about taking the photo. In this short moment we share the studio with a common goal, to take the best possible photo.

The most important part of ARTISTINTHEWORLD are the studio photos. Over time, new parts are added, such as PLAYLIST (600 agenda drawings), LINKMAP (120 drawings and zines), 6 AITW HUBSA AIR'S, AITW-HUBSA-ROCKS, TIMEWRAP paintings, Pop-up shows, three ruins, murals and many exhibitions.

more detailed

Artistintheworld, the studio photos

The idea for ARTISTINTHEWORLD originated when I had a studio at Kunst & Complex in Rotterdam. In 2010, I decided to cancel the lease of my studio and sell my house in order to be able to work entirely on my ARTISTINTHEWORLD series. In the beginning, I made most of my work in the Netherlands, but in recent years I have also taken other destinations, such as New York, Tehran, East Jerusalem, Ramallah, Beijing, Sydney, Taipei, Naples, Beirut, Berlin, Antwerp, Dresden, Paris, Los Angeles, Kiev, Tbilisi, Casablanca and London.

The photo series ARTISTINTHEWORLD consists of two categories: 'Artist' and 'World'. Under 'Artist' are all the photos of the artists in their studios. 'World' contains photos of art professionals such as curators, gallery owners, museum directors and collectors. The contact with the artists and art professionals that I meet along the way is an essential part of my work, their network determines the route that I take for my journey. They introduce me to friends and colleagues. Another important principle for ARTISTINTHEWORLD is that I do not select on the quality of the work of those who are portrayed. I also do not distinguish between known and unknown people. My intention is to work in the professional art world. In this way, an image of the art world is created that grows organically and coincidentally and develops in unpredictable directions. It is special to be able to look at all those places where art is made in this way. Because of my way of photographing, there is no direct contact between the model and the photographer. Taking a photo is a matter of trust. It is a special situation in which the person stands with his/her back to me and therefore does not see what is happening behind him/her. Years of work, in the purest form and perhaps never shown before, he/she gives me here.

In the past sixteen years, I have visited 6500 studios. On my website, all studio photos are shown in chronological order, in this way the journey I have made can be followed in detail. Whatever the status of an artist, in my series everyone gets an equal place in this growing list. ARTISTINTHEWORLD is an

'institute' of and by artists, from the artists' point of view, in which they are given a central place in the universe of their own work. My photos show various types of studio users. Looking at the whole, a fascinating typology unfolds. Mentally and physically, the studio is a lonely world where the artist is the boss, with its own rituals, rules and standards. Where people think, worry and navel-gaze about all possible subjects and relate to their own created (world) image. There are differences, depending on the nature of the artistry and the cultural identity of the artist. By mapping the presence of artists in their workplaces worldwide, I investigate this typology and explain its meaning to some extent.

All studio photos that I take are now archived by the RKD Netherlands Institute for Art History in The Hague. The RKD is a knowledge institute for the visual arts of the Netherlands in an international context. Collecting, managing and making available is their core task.

Back Figure

As I already formulated in the summary, it is important that in my approach I photograph everyone with their back to the camera. The term "Rückenfigur" is a German term that best translates as "figure seen from behind". In Back Figure compositions, the viewer's perspective is placed behind a figure or figures, looking over their shoulders and observing the scene in front of them. This technique is known to evoke a sense of contemplation and solitude, inviting the viewer to imagine themselves in the position of the figure and to observe the place in silence. In my photos you see the studio where the artist works, the conditions that have been created to be able to work, the materials that are used and the work that is created. In addition, it is also a moment of reflection on the past, present and future. The Back Figure technique has been used by various artists, including Caspar David Friedrich, the famous German Romantic painter. Friedrich's paintings often show solitary figures standing with their backs to the viewer and looking out over vast and awe-inspiring landscapes. I consider the painting 'Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer' to be an iconic example of a Rückenfigur composition.

The romantic theme of 'Der Wanderer', which is connected to the Rückenfigur, appeals to me very much. I identify with it in a certain way: a Wanderer is someone who sets off without a fixed destination and embraces a sense of spontaneity and adventure on his journey. The wanderer, as a recurring figure in romantic literature and art, represents the search for meaning, the sublime and the spiritual connection between humanity and the awe-inspiring aspects of the environment. It is a beautiful idea to be on the road forever, my image archive can be seen as a proposal for historiography, a photogenic account of what happens in all those studios and what still lies ahead.

AITW-PLAYLIST

Since 2010 I have been making a 'PLAYLIST' every week, this is a diary drawing with all the appointments I plan for my project. Over time, this diary has developed into a work of art consisting of more than 600 drawings in which my journey can be followed in detail. It gives me the ultimate pleasure of drawing, every day, all year round. In addition, this way I can use the waiting time between my appointments meaningfully and it is a good way to quiet my mind in between.

AITW-LINKMAP

The monthly linkMap is an A2 drawing with A5 magazine (since 2014). The drawing shows the names of all the artists I have photographed in a certain month and the way in which they are connected to each other. The magazine shows a photo report and a story. I came up with this concept as a way to finance my travels: people can subscribe and receive an old-fashioned envelope from far-away destinations in their mailbox every month.

AITW-HUBSA-AIR

Fifteen years ago, the situation on the housing market was fairly relaxed. However, the situation has changed considerably in recent years. The supply of temporary housing became less and less, which gave me the feeling that my position was also becoming more uncertain. Inspired by the network that I built up with ARTISTINTHEWORLD, I started looking for a suitable solution and came up with the idea to set up 'HUBSA's' within my network. An AITW-HUBSA-AIR is for me a place where I can live and work between my travels. A HUBSA is always on the move and is also used as an Artist In Residence, exhibition space or stage. Many conversations that I have had in recent years have been about gentrification and the disappearance of more and more studios from urban centres. A HUBSA is looking for a unique place in this. The stay in a HUBSA will always be free for the artist, a gesture that things can be different in this world. The model of a HUBSA can differ per location, it can be a caravan,

container, ship or trailer, but also a Tiny-house, apartment, hotel room or a studio. In all, these places breathe the atmosphere of ARTISTINTHEWORLD: the appearance is recognizable by the black and white paintings that I have been making for ARTISTINTHEWORLD for years.

The first AITW-HUBSA-AIR is in the sculpture garden at studio building Dauntown in Borgholzhausen (DE). This was followed by Bunderkunst in 's Heer Arendskerke, Verbeke Foundation in Kemzeke (BE), on the Rhine ship MS Lorin in Rotterdam, at Toonbeeld in Terneuzen, in the Jacob Klaaijzenstraat in Goes and in the garden of the Vincent van GoghHuis in Zundert.