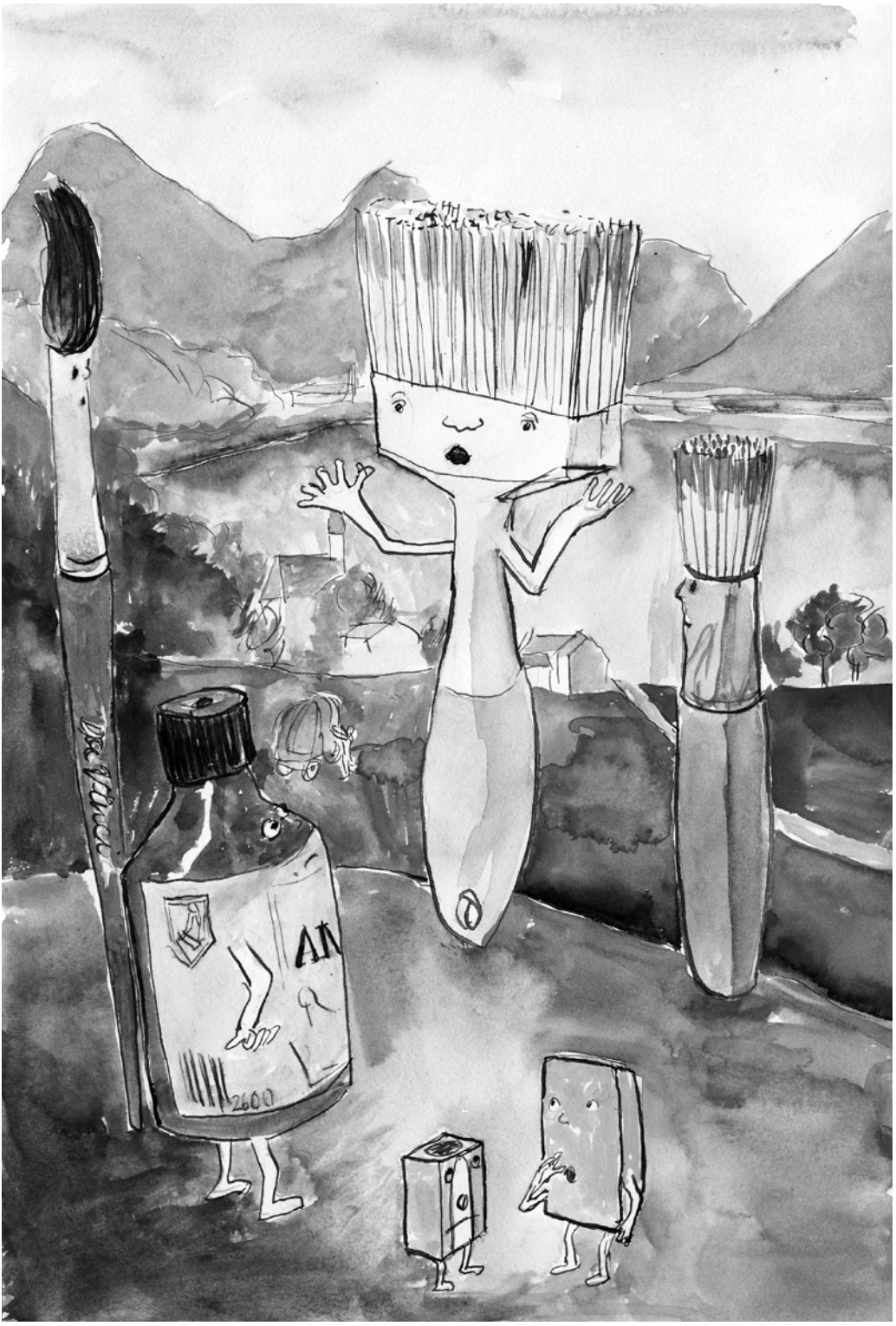

This bulletin is reassembled from two previous versions of the text: "Raise your Glass," written for a book to accompany *The Way it Wasn't (Celebrating ten years of castillo/corrales, Paris)* at Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis, and Culturgest, Porto, 2010–11; and "Take Care," written for *Circular Facts* (Binna Choi, Mai Abu ElDahab, Emily Pethick, eds., Sternberg Press, 2011).

Cover image: Amelie von Wulffen, from the series *This is How it Happened*, 2010. With thanks to Alex Zachary

Much has been said about what artists have done over the past several hundred years. We've been told about what they made, when they made it, why they made it, how they made it, and what it all means. We're told about who influenced whom, what led to what, who saw what when, in what context, and what they did about it. Names have been coined to categorize it all, from Classical to Baroque to Cubist to Pop to Neo-Pop, and for reasons that are rarely clear, some pictures are worth millions more than others.

Beyond WHAT artists have done, however, is HOW they have behaved. To rehearse a common truism: it's not just what you say, it's how you say it. Another way to look at the history of art might be to look at artists not according to the different styles, techniques, or subject-matters that characterize their work, but the different codes of conduct that guide their behavior.[1]

FOLLOW THE LIFE OF AN IDEA

Artists in the 20th century, for example, could be divided into two distinct behavioral types. The first 50 years would have to be The Age of the Boxer. This was the period of the historical avant-gardes, when artists wrote manifestos and declared allegiances. This was when the artist was the heroic protagonist in a dramatic story that ended either in treason or glory. He (and too rarely, she) needed to be loud, outspoken, reckless, even dangerous. The artist was the self-appointed revolutionary —either a genius or a madman: Picasso and his epic battle against Matisse, Marinetti and his obsession with speed, Debord and his rejection of authority, Pollock and his grandiose posturing. Each was fighting to be newer and more radical than the other, and the more attention an artist could draw to him or herself, the better.

Next came The Age of the Chess Player, whose patron saint, Marcel Duchamp, behaved quite differently. He was quiet, patient, and secretive. Under his watch, what mattered was to be smart, sneaky, and strategic. Like good chess players, artists came up with more and more sophisticated ways to subvert and compromise the enemy: what might seem innocuous at first turns out to be damaging a few moves later, as you think through

its implications. Knowledge is power, the medium is the message, and you know that I know that you know that I know. While artists made works that were just as radical as those in the early part of the century, their behavior was a bit less dramatic: Andy Warhol was blasé, Donald Judd was boring, Joseph Kosuth was reading, On Kawara was elsewhere, and Reena Spaulings didn't even exist.

Today, many artists continue to work (and thrive) according to these two historical behavioral models. Olafur Eliasson or Matthew Barney, like the proud Boxers in the first half of the century, make a lot of noise and enjoy plenty of attention. Danh Vo or Tino Sehgal, like the smart Chess Players in the second half of the century, absorbed the lessons from an age of marketing and media manipulation, and understand that whispering is far more effective than yelling—the best way to be noticed is to be unnoticed. While the Boxers hire armies of assistants and erect huge monuments, the Chess Players defiantly reject any sign of commercialism, or complicity, benefiting instead from elusive maneuvering, biting wit, and rebellious politics. In other words, all are behaving themselves.

But what happens when those who have mastered the cunning arts of calculated maneuvering become indistinguishable from cynical competitors in a capitalist system gone awry? when Damien Hirst is just as guilty as Goldman Sachs' CEO Lloyd Blankfein? when the world of art, like the world of politics, grants careers to those who know how to win, rather than to those who know how to care? If an artist wants to find a way out, how is he or she to behave?

BE UNCONTEMPORARY

Let us imagine a different code of conduct, a new ethics of behavior, where winning matters less than wandering. Following the Swiss artists Peter Fischli & David Weiss's notorious mascots into the wilderness, we are now entering The Age of Rat and Bear.[2]

Replacing the epic hero or the cunning Grandmaster, artists today could become more like Rat and Bear—a pair of empathetic, vulnerable

friends trying to understand the world together. Having digested the important lessons passed on to them by their predecessors, and with goals and intentions no less serious than theirs, artists in this period might echo Rat and Bear's behavior by fearlessly committing to the affective turn, a politics of care, an ethic of the commons, and a good sense of humor.

In the Age of Rat and Bear, artists reject the idea of obeying or disobeying rules. Instead of performing within the boundaries of a legitimized chessboard—strategizing the next right move—artists today can upend the game itself by ignoring the configuration of the board entirely and inventing their own field of play. They can reject the very idea of "being contemporary," the options this makes available, and the power this has over their choices and their desires. And so Matt Mullican scrawls his impulsive theory of everything; Franz Erhard Walther unfolds his evocative fabrics; Joan Jonas tells her impossible tales; Susan Philipsz sings her naked songs; Francis Alÿs moves his mountain; and Jimmie Durham throws his stones.

Boxing and chess, quite obviously, are both games. More specifically, they are both competitive games that end with a clear winner. The Rat and Bear, on the other hand, are playing an infinite game, almost as a form of dance, where winning or competing is not only impossible, but irrelevant. Since the rules keep changing throughout the course of play, the purpose of the game is simply to keep playing the game.

REMEMBER THAT YOU DON'T KNOW

The artist in the Age of Rat and Bear is one who acknowledges his or her own vulnerable relationship to knowledge, and behaves like someone engaged in a constant process of figuring out what knowledge could be. As I've written elsewhere—in the context of a blind man who can't find a black cat that's not in a dark room[3]—, art knows that it knows nothing, and thus embodies a perpetually productive paradox, which has been described with a variety of terms, from Georges Bataille's "non-knowledge" to Sarat Maharaj's "avidya" or Marcel Duchamp's "art that isn't." As a specific type of knowledge, art can create the epistemological

space where knowing effectively co-exists with not-knowing. It can stop operating as an explanation machine. It can reach beyond the false binary between I KNOW and I DON'T KNOW.

WEAR YOUR HEART ON YOUR SLEEVE

The heroic Boxer and the savvy Chess Player are expert performers of the I KNOW and avoid displaying any sign of the I DON'T KNOW. To use the language of critic Jan Verwoert, they epitomize a culture of I CAN and have led to a contemporary landscape of exhausted subjects faced with an impossible demand to endlessly perform. In tune with the Age of Rat and Bear, Verwoert rejects this ethos of legitimized performance and hopes to rescue the I CAN'T from its connotations of failure and disappointment by asking whether the I CAN'T could instead become a productive act of affirmation. In other words, he asks whether it is possible to say, "Yes, I can't!" How to use the vulnerability of the I CAN'T in order to break the corrupt heroism of the I CAN? Verwoert's answer lies in what he calls the politics of dedication and desire, and in the affective labor of the I CARE. Verwoert defines the I CARE as an act of giving what you don't have to people who don't want it—an act that is more affective than effective.

In the Age of Rat and Bear, the goal is not to reject the expertise of the I KNOW in favor of the anti-intellectualism of the I DON'T KNOW, but to perform them both in the key of the I CARE.

If the Boxer and the Chess Player behave like well-trained and invincible politicians—Rule #1: only ask questions to which you already know the answer—, the Rat and Bear embrace the vulnerable, dangerous, and radical act of wearing their heart on their sleeve.

SPEAK FRANKLY

Let's be clear: doing this takes guts. To perform in the key of the I CARE means to operate in a contested space—what Michel Foucault called parrhesia, or fearless speech: faced with the threat of powerful

disagreement, one must express frankness with a mixture of modesty and courage. I DON'T KNOW won't provide the necessary courage, and I KNOW won't provide the necessary modesty, but informed perspectives can still be productively and provocatively shared in the key of I CARE. The experience of art could become more a moment of attachment than of consumption; of I LOVE IT rather than I GET IT. The closing line of Susan Sontag's seminal 1964 essay "Against Interpretation" said it best: "In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art."

INSIST ON TALKING FACE TO FACE

Verwoert also reminds us that in order to properly take care of yourself (and others) you need to stay out of heavy traffic, keep to the smaller roads. The Boxer, of course, wants to be famous—for everyone to know who he is. The Chess Player wants to live a secret life, which is only a sneakier way of wanting everyone to know who he is. Rat and Bear, quite honestly, aren't interested in everyone. Instead, they trust in the self-selecting process whereby those who are interested in what they do will find their way to them and get in touch. In other words, they only care about those who care. Rat and Bear's cultural transactions don't happen in a capitalist economy between competitors who fight, but in a gift economy of friends who care. This will necessarily involve smaller groups of people, and if that sounds apolitical or timid, it isn't. As Verwoert notes, "a culture governed by the economic imperative makes good manners the closest you might get to civil disobedience."

As we inch forward in the Age of the Rat and the Bear, I raise my glass to those vulnerable artists who adjust the way they behave, step onto the smaller roads, and replace winning with wandering, teaching with learning, competition with camaraderie, analysis with homage, and the chess move with the dance move. Cheers.

*

1. The title and subheads of this piece are adapted from Fischli & Weiss's *How to Work Better* (1991)

2. See Fischli & Weiss's films *Der rechte Weg* (*The Right Way*, 1983) and *Der geringste Widerstand* (*The Least Resistance*, 1981)

3. Anthony Huberman, *For The Blind Man in the Dark Room Looking for the Black Cat that Isn't There* (St. Louis: Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, 2009)

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