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Doing Everything, Always

Words by Lila Allen

Photography by Valentina Von Klencke



Still, she's honest with her interns about the day-to-day realities of being an artist. "I always say, there's always shit work to do. Don't think that being an artist is like 'Oh! Creation!' and some intellectual research all the time." Interns at her studio may assist her in organising production for projects, emailing, and even setting up and maintaining a *Kickstarter* page, like the one she created for a current project, *Automagica*.

"I give them a lot of responsibility," Anouk says, "maybe even, sometimes, almost too much! I think they can do that, because I know that's what I could do when I was in the third year of the art academy." (Dutch students traditionally complete an internship during their third year of school.)

Of course there are days that she needs to be alone to focus on her work. During those times, she finds other ways to engage her interns through the many opportunities afforded by being in Manhattan.

"I'll give them things to do in New York that I think they can learn from," she says.

Outside of mentoring interns, Anouk supports other artists through her work with

the Anamorphosis Prize, a \$10,000 USD no-strings-attached honorarium she established in the spring of 2015. As we speak, Anouk is in the process of selecting the winner, with fellow judges Charlotte Cotton, a curator, and John PheLAN, a collector.

At her studio, the variety of books she's considering is vast, each with its own unique qualities in construction and content.

Having made nine books and being a collector in her own right, Anouk is well versed in finding the interesting facets of these publications. It's clear from her interactions with them that the choice for a winner will not be easy. She thumbs through several, pointing out the features she admires in each of them — the binding in one, the story in another.

One of the goals of the prize, she says, is supporting self-Enterprise at a time when major publishers overlook young or emerging talent due to limited budgets and a need for a guaranteed return on investment.

Being beholden only to oneself, though, has its advantages. Anouk believes that self-publishing allows artists to create according to their own vision and timeline. »

Dutch artist Anouk Kruithof has juggled a variety of projects in the last year, and in her Soho, New York-based studio, it shows.

Artist books — submissions for the *Anamorphosis Prize* that Anouk established this year — cover one table from end to end. Poster prints of gridded portraits from her project *Ahead* adorn the back wall, peppering the white space with grids of colour. Along another wall hang sheets of clear plastic and latex, the unconventional materials she used for printing images as part of the set of sculptures called *Neutrals* from her recent project *#Evidence*.

"I always make work where I am, and about what I think is going on there," Anouk says.

Looking at images from *#Evidence*, her immersion in American culture over the past several years is apparent.

In the project, Anouk examined the *Instagram* accounts of selected major American corporations and government agencies. Appropriating, manipulating, and recomposing the images in a new context, Anouk was informed by the canonical 1977 book *Evidence*, by Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel. One of the agencies she followed was the TSA, the United States' Transportation Security Administration.

In 2014, the TSA confiscated over 2,200 weapons at airport security checkpoints, cataloguing each seizure with a photograph of the item. Later, the agency combined this multitude of pictures into a bite-sized, shareable patchwork image, and posted it to *Instagram*.

"They made this collage, which is kind of creative and beautiful, but also shows violence," Anouk says. All together, the images are abstracted from their original context — violence, terrorism, and American bureaucracy — and become colourful, almost pixel-looking stamps of social media content.

Anouk didn't always plan on being an artist. As a child, she dreamed of practising medicine, hoping to land in the tropics to work for an organisation like *Doctors Without Borders*. Although she grew up a creative child ("I was always making things," she says), it wasn't until her mother took her on tours of art academies at the end of Dutch secondary school that she became interested in pursuing a profession in the arts.

"I thought like, wow, that's my world, you can do everything!" says Anouk. Today, examining her multidisciplinary approach to art, which encompasses practices as diverse as bookmaking, sculpture, installation, event organising, writing, and photography, it's clear why "doing everything" would be appealing.

Enrolling in a photography program at the *St. Joost Art Academy*, Breda in 1999, Anouk spent four years honing her craft. As a student, she says she was tireless, spending long hours in the studio. Working alongside fellow classmates Jaap Scheeren, Bob van der Vlist, and Babette Kleijn, Anouk says the four were committed to their practices.

"We were always in school, all night," she says. "We were always working."

Their dedication paid off. Today, Anouk says, they are the classmates from her programme who are able to live off their art.

"I think we had so much that we wanted, it was hard to imagine doing something else," she says. As an artist, she believes this commitment and determination is critical. "You need to have that — I think that's so important. Talent, of course, but also a drive."

Being proactive, independent, and motivated, Anouk believes, is essential to success for young artists.

"If I see certain students who are just kind of 'there' in art education, and not doing things out on their own, I'm like, wow," she says. "You're spending money, and if you have this attitude right now, you will never become an artist, because it's fucking hard work. You need to go for it all the time, and invest all your time in it."

Anouk regularly works with interns for her projects, usually taking on one at a time for several months.

"You learn a lot, I think, from an internship," she says, "if you have a good person who tries to teach you a lot."

To that end, Anouk immerses her interns in her process, from exchanging and discussing ideas for upcoming work, to researching, attending artist talks and bookmaking evenings.

"I mostly just try to show them as much as possible from my personal practice," she says. "Everything I'm doing, I'm telling them. And of course they're a part of certain projects that they're going to take care of." »

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"You have an idea, you make the book, and boom, it's there," she says.

For Anouk, another appealing aspect of books is the immediate, physical relationship between object and viewer: "It's very intimate — you, with your book, there are no closing hours like [there are] in a space."

As an artist, Anouk recognises the feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt that are common in the creative process. But, she advises, an artist trusting his or her vision is critical to making meaningful work: "I think you need to really believe in what you want to make, or create, or write, or express. It's good enough. And you need to stand for that, and behind it."

"You think your own work sucks so much, or you get really desperate. Then it's a bit hard to go on. But I think it's part of the deal, you know?" she says. "You can't be, just, always high."

Anouk admits there were difficult moments early in her career, but one work stands out for her as an early success:

Enclosed Content Challenging Away in the Colour Invisibility, from 2009. The work consisted of 3,500 dyed books, mainly Communist texts that had been discarded or purchased from thrift stores, which Anouk arranged into a wall of gradated colour. Existing as a sculptural installation, looped video, and photograph, it foretold much of the artist's work today: her nimble negotiation of multiple media, her interest in spatial works, and the psychic power of collecting.

Today, with her *#Evidence* solo show in Amsterdam, a work featured in *Ocean of Images* at *MaMA*, an upcoming book (*Automagic*), and the start of the Anamorphosis Prize, it's clear that the work ethic she exhibited in her early days at the art academy has not waned.

And she shows no sign of letting up. "Any time you feel like you push yourself," she says, "and you're like, whoa, I'm not in my safety zone — then you're proud." 🍷