

A Participatory Studio of Utopic Creativity

At the Kunsthal Rotterdam, David Bade and Tirzo Martha create sculptural explorations of still-life paintings.



Louis Bury August 26, 2017



Installation view of “All You Can Art 2” (2017), Kunsthal Rotterdam (photo by Omar Martha)

In 2006, the artists David Bade and Tirzo Martha co-founded the Instituto Buena Bista on their native Curaçao. Housed on the grounds of the Capriles psychiatric clinic, the institute offers holistic arts education for young adults, residencies for visiting artists, art workshops for local seniors, as well as studio space for the clinic’s patients. All of these initiatives are collaborative in nature; artists and participants produce work together as part of a curriculum that has been tailored to each party’s interests and needs. While Bade and Martha both maintain studio practices, exhibiting their artworks internationally, IBB itself can be seen as their most ambitious and acclaimed work of art. It is a Fluxus-inspired cultural laboratory — a Beuysian “social

sculpture” — whose integrity and hard-earned successes provide an all-too-rare glimpse of utopic creativity in action.

For the second of three consecutive summers, Bade and Martha installed an outpost of IBB at the Kunsthal Rotterdam under the name *All You Can Art 2*. The popular show, which makes great use of the Kunsthal’s high-ceilinged and glass-walled exhibition space and loft-like floorplan, imports IBB’s participatory spirit and progressive educational structure into a gallery setting. An exhibition and open studio, it includes historical overviews of IBB, exhibition spaces, stations for visitors to make their own art, workspaces for IBB students, and the unenclosed studios of Bade, Martha, and former IBB artists-in-residence Liesbeth Labeur, Roxette Capriles, Elvis Chen, and Rieneke de Vries (in which visitors are invited to participate). Packed wall-to-wall with art and art supplies, *All You Can Art 2* evokes the carnivalesque atmosphere of an elementary school art fair — only here you don’t have to be the proud parent of a child in the show to find the work compelling.



Installation view of “All You Can Art 2” (2017), Kunsthal Rotterdam (photo by Marco De Swart)

Highlights include a table full of small, visitor-made clay sculptures that shares the world-in-microcosm quality of Fischli and Weiss’ 1981/2006 sculpture series, *Suddenly This Overview*; a wall displaying the infectiously upbeat paintings of the 100-year-old amateur Dutch painter, Lou van der Biezen; a towering collaborative sculpture by Bade and Martha made from the hulls of two abandoned skiffs; and an in-progress series of still life assemblages by Martha. The latter

sculptures, in which blank or near-blank canvases have been festooned with found household objects, incorporate lighthearted, whimsical materials to produce structures that moodily sag and droop. Intended as sculptural explorations of the still life painting tradition, and reminiscent of Robert Rauschenberg's "Combines," these works evidence Martha's puckish compositional sense and his facility for lateral thinking across artistic media.

However, the greatest pleasure of *All You Can Art 2* is simply being in the midst of so much visual and creative energy. Unsuspecting members of the visiting public enter the exhibit, look around, and — at first tentatively, then with greater confidence — meet an artist, receive instructions, don a smock, and get to work. Summer school groups filter through, ebullient, on student- or artist-led tours. Families stretch out on couches and play with some clay. IBB's student apprentices paint a section of a mural or conduct institute business from their laptops. The artists float from workstation to workstation like bees pollinating flowers. Shy visitors stand back and observe the bustling hive of activity. Everybody looks contented and engaged.



"All You Can Art 2" (2017), Kunsthall Rotterdam (photo by Omar Martha)

What makes *All You Can Art 2* more than feel-good participatory art is that it is also a proposition, proved out by IBB's decade-long bloom, about how ambitious collaborative art practices can be forces for good in the world. In its many-pronged forms of cooperative enterprise, IBB functions like an ideal MFA program, concerned more with the growth and well-being of its participants than with its credentialing or reputation-making functions. Such an

emphasis is only possible because the institute's directors put aside their own egos to allow other voices and sensibilities to influence the artwork and the larger institution. As IBB continues to grow, perhaps beyond the capacity of Bade and Martha to manage its day-to-day details, its animating philosophy will ensure it remains a beautifully dynamic force.

All You Can Art 2 *continues at the Kunsthal Rotterdam (Westzeedijk 341, Rotterdam, the Netherlands) through August 27.*

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