



Media Information

IN DOUBT

Dries Verhoeven eliminates the boundaries between installation and performance art. In public spaces, art institutions, and theaters he creates unsettling, ambiguous situations that suspend the usual relationships between viewers and performers. »In Doubt«, Verhoeven's first monograph, contextualizes both his early works and his most recent ones.

Bielefeld/Berlin, February 13, 2020 – Dries Verhoeven (*1976) alternates between theater and fine art. The Dutch artist picks up on current themes and social atmospheres and translates them into installations, performances, and happenings.

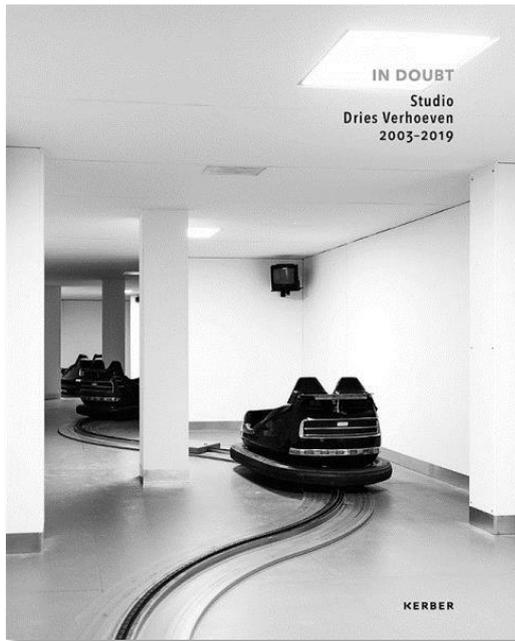
His radical, unexpected works often taken place in public spaces. Audiences stumble directly into his scenes and experience the supposed social reality in a poetic, confusing, or intense way. Verhoeven activates the public, inspires critical reflection, and hopes to be able to cast doubt upon the dominant systems that determine our lives, as well as our spirits and intellects.

His installation Happiness, for instance, is a kind of emergency pharmacy, in which a supposedly female robot by the name of Amy offers medications and drugs for sale. From Prozac to heroin, ketamine and Ritalin, to ayahuasca, mushrooms, alcohol, and soda, Amy sells all kinds of intoxicating or narcotic drugs without making any moral judgments. Instead, she provides tips for correct usage. For example, she advises people to thoroughly clean the injection site after shooting crystal meth, and adds that crystal meth makes you feel emotionally and sexually connected to others. Furthermore, she explains that LSD can lead you to fall in love with a friend or suddenly get a divorce. While describing these things, Amy is always friendly, professional, knowledgeable, and free of any moralizing standards. The mechanical becomes human; the human, mechanical.

Verhoeven questions what would happen if all kinds of medications were legally available in the future, adding: "Viewers can decide for themselves whether this is a utopian or a dystopian vision of the future." He would like to refer to more than just the future, however; he wants viewers to confront the machine in us all. "In the healthcare system artificial aids are already normal: people have artificial hips and look at the world through laser-treated eyes, but what would happen if we were to interfere in our brains, our emotional balance?"

The apocalyptic mood of public debates these days also inspired Verhoeven to create a piece called The Funeral. In it he staged funerals, and, with a group of mourners, he carried defunct values such as the "multicultural society" or the "social welfare state" to the grave. For the burial of our "private sphere," he hired a former cast member of a German TV talent show, Gina-Lisa Lohfink, to deliver the eulogy. In an interview about it, he explained, "I'm always looking for opportunities to break through habitual thought patterns." The "private sphere" is something like a sacred cow in Germany. Gina-Lisa's appearance gave rise to the question of whether we all have the same right to privacy, including pedophiles, suspected terrorists, and PR-hungry celebrities."

In Doubt is Verhoeven's first monograph, and it relates all of his works from recent years to each other. This large book contains essays by author Christiaan Weijts, theater expert Maaïke Bleeker, and the critic Evelyne Coussens, which present Verhoeven's wily ways of dealing with every kind of aesthetic convention.



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