

NOTE (December 1, 2013): The following set of questions were sent to Rosika Desnoyers in March 2013 after it was decided that there would not be a second public exhibition of the commissioned work, Millet Matrix, 2010-2012. Instead, the exhibition Millet Matrix II would take place as a private event in order to explore this alternative format, especially in relation to how visual works are presented and experienced in private, semi-private, public and semi-public spaces. Millet Matrix II probed the implications, boundary conventions and alternative possibilities of the exhibition process under different (private) conditions of display, dialogue and exchange. Desnoyers' answers were intended to be used to write a comparative analysis of the socio-political implications of the different experiences generated by the two-part exhibition. They have been reproduced with her permission.

1) Concerning the first exhibition: Can you give me an idea of how you first felt about having an exhibition of your works in your apartment?

I was very pleased by your article in *Intermédialités*. Besides speaking to Marc about my interests, it was the first time I encountered that kind of sustained reading. So the idea of working together was welcomed.

I was both unsure and excited about having people come into my home/studio to see a curated exhibition of my work, and I thought it offered an opportunity to think about the links between my research and needlepainting-needlepoint as a domestic practice.

Beforehand I was anxious about opening my home to strangers, but I told myself there would be only a small number of people and that these would likely be acquaintances of myself or you, or students of yours, and they would arrive with some kind of knowledge of the work.

At that stage in the PhD program my activities were concentrated mostly around archival research and written primary texts. I had returned from doing research in England with the idea of presenting a thesis in the form of visual work, which was incompatible with the program. I was wrestling with wanting to produce a thesis as artwork but did not know how that might happen. The exhibition became an opportunity for me to assess my practice and historical research.

This exhibition was situated between public and private. It thereby created a link between my practice and the development of Berlin work as a modern amateur practice, going back to the early nineteenth century. This also touched on the older practice of displaying needlepainting in private spaces: in the case of Anne Eliza Morrill in her home, for Mary Knowles in the home of the monarch, and for Mary Linwood, in terms of the home as the main space of production – although presented in her own public gallery. The exhibition therefore created a parallel between the space of presentation, the space of the apartment/studio/exhibition space, and the form of production, of embroidery and painting by other means as an intermedial practice. So the exhibition allowed ways for the historical specificity of my practice to be presented in a conceptually original manner.

Having the exhibition in my apartment also made visible the importance of historical research in my practice.

2) Concerning idea of keeping the works up until the second part of the exhibition which was originally scheduled to be presented a year later:

a) How did you feel about this proposition?

We had agreed on leaving the hanging in the studio. I was happy to go along with this, especially since I anticipated working in that space on the related piece for the second exhibition.

b) Did you consider the hanging to still represent an exhibition and if so how and why?

According to Wikipedia, an exhibition, in the most general sense, is an organized presentation and display of a selection of items. The Webster dictionary adds that this presentation is public.

When the public exhibition came to an end, it took on a private aspect and so I began to think of the hanging more along the lines of an ongoing engagement between us. However, casually referring to it to someone I would simply say Dave's show. I think on some level it is possible to conceive of the hanging in the studio as remaining an exhibition mainly because work for the second part of the exhibition was ongoing. This meant that the space and the ideas that were raised remained active, sometimes more than others. Also, inasmuch as it was to be part of *Millet Matrix II*, its permanence over that time acted as a bridge and became part for the future exhibition. That is to say, had the elements been taken down and re-hung for *Millet Matrix II*, they would presuppose a different set of meanings.

c) How did the continued presence of the works over a two year period effect your working domestic habits?

It interfered with my use of the space, but I adapted. I lived and worked in and around the hanging.

I might add that the effect of the exhibition on my habits was most strongly felt in anticipation of the first exhibition. In the months leading up to *Millet Matrix I*, I organized the apartment by separating the studio space and the office space and concentrating these in the front rooms of the apartment. This allowed for a sharper contrast in the presentation. More often than not my studio space and books are found together, and before the exhibition they had been in many rooms but mainly in the middle room, just off from the kitchen. As a result of the exhibition I set up a living room in that space and it is there that *Millet Matrix* is now hung. So perhaps the exhibition forced a more conventional use of the space onto the apartment.

Also, since the time of the first exhibition, and for a four-month period, I rented out the room that was my bedroom. This led to my merging the office into the studio space in order to make my bedroom in what had been the office at the time of the exhibition. I left some remnants of its previous use in place: the large historical map and the images of museum finds, as well as some thesis diagrams.

d) How did the continued presence of the works over a two year period effect your working habits?

I worked around and with the hanging, pinning things up without disturbing anything.

During this period I worked on the writing of my thesis in this space and often met with Marc, who was supporting me by editing my writing. A table was added and we sat 'inside' the installation. During difficult moments when I needed to keep sight of my project the exhibition was a constant reminder of where I was working and writing from.

I also often worked on *Millet Matrix* there, with the stretcher leaning on the table. Although that work is a reproduction of the published B&W image in *Intermédialités*, (which I scanned and printed out in a larger format to work from), I sat under the image's source, *Millet Grid*, and so it was impossible to ignore its presence and I even referred to it a few times when I was stuck.

e) Did the continued presence of the works over a two year period effect in any way your research and PhD project?

The making of the new work (*Millet Matrix*) affected the doctoral project inasmuch as it came to replace the studio work I had started. Though a little frustrated at the time, in hindsight I can see that this has worked out with the other plans now figuring in the post-doctorate work.

During the editing of the thesis, Marc came over and we worked together in the front room, studio/office. So we worked in the exhibition and that did matter. When I began the doctorate I wrote a note to myself reminding me that I was an artist and that I was working from there and not from the position of an art historian. The installation acted as a constant reminder that this is where I was working from.

f) How did the continued presence of the work effect your understanding of the original exhibition, its spatial and conceptual explorations and intentions?

During the exhibition proper the space was 'frozen.' Once the exhibition was finished but the hanging remained, I returned to my research activity and the space became less formal. This allowed new considerations. Sometimes these were strictly influenced by readings and the research I was doing. But I would say that the questioning or understanding more often went in both directions. It was not simply the exhibition that was rethought but also that the exhibition instigated rethinking.

At first I was very aware of your engagement with my work in my space, but this did not last. Soon enough I returned to my interests and motivations, focused on my research and only 'saw' your work when jostled by something that made me see the space again, for example when someone would come over I might become more aware of my space through that person's eyes, which made the installation appear anew.

3) Since we've hung the new exhibition in your apartment for at least two months now and it therefore functions in relation to the first part in a private as opposed to a public register, how do you feel about living with the new exhibition in this manner?

I was happy to finally see the new work displayed. I like the way the *Millet Grid* and *Millet Matrix* embroideries play off of each other. When the exhibition did not happen officially, I considered that it was happening nevertheless. I think it made sense as a private exhibition because of the history of the practice of needlepoint and Berlin work during the nineteenth century.

However, unlike the embroiderer who copied a painting using a chart, I was translating a published reproduction of my own work and without a chart. Before starting, I thought I would be able to use the image as a grid but this did not prove possible because of a lack of detail. So my activity collapsed the work of the nineteenth-century artist (usually a painter), the chart designer and the embroiderer. The exhibition nevertheless positions my labour in a private domestic register. Being self-enclosed, it approaches the invisibility/erasure of the individual embroiderer that is specific to the technique of needlepoint/BWW as well as the practice's near absence in official art and embroidery histories.

The first exhibition was interesting because it presented work in a space similar to the typical white box, accompanied by an office, but in the domestic location of the production of the work, which is not unrelated to the history of the practice in question. The second show develops further the public/private and a professional/amateur distinction but is intersected by contemporary and historical practices and considerations. It is organized around a new artwork by a university-trained artist and is curated by a professional, with the addition of two topical historical works (Society for Exhibition Organizing, and Chambres d'amis). This time, however, the private space is without the public register and so the presentation of the two exhibitions is very intimately related to the specificities of the artworks and the historical research. The two additions to the second show have a dual reading in relation to making artwork, on the one hand, and in relation to exhibition practices.

I haven't had many people over so I'm not sure how the new exhibition is read. I wonder if the placement of the two framed pieces should be reconsidered. Marc asked me why they were each in a bedroom and we talked about the notion of 'front' and 'back spaces' in anthropology. I don't think a back space is possible, in this case proof of this is the

reorganization for the first show and my constant awareness of the one to come. On that level I am much less comfortable with opening up all of the apartment to visitors, with everything in my apartment becoming part of the exhibition. This all gets too close to the idea of a tableau vivant.

4) How do you now feel about producing and hanging the second part of the exhibition in your apartment after such a long time?

I don't think either one of us would have guessed it would take nearly two years for the production of the new work. The wool that was used came from an English producer of embroidery wools, a company dating back to the nineteenth century and said to have been favoured by William Morris. While I like this link, this wool was chosen because it offered a good selection of greys and covered the canvas well. For the monochrome I required that all the wool come from the same dye lot. This caused a backorder on the colour used for the monochrome, which took much longer to fill than I was told, and so the exhibition could not happen the following year as planned. For my needlegraphs I usually ensure uniformity of colour by purchasing balls of wool from the same dye lot and marketed for knitting. I think a little momentum was lost during that time but I accept this kind of working condition as part of my work. I am very aware of how for many people two years is an unimaginably long time for the production of one artwork. But perhaps that is indicative of the capitalist culture we live in which is concerned with the speed of turnover. In other respects, two years is not such a long time. As to the hanging, as I have already stated, I am very pleased with it.

During those two years I was also working on writing my thesis and wrestling with my director. It all worked out well in the end, with the completion of the piece, the hanging of the show and the thesis defense.

If your question is about having a public exhibition now, then I am less interested only because conceptually it has already happened, and that potential is more engaging in relation to the *Matrix I & II* exhibitions.

5) Do you feel that the second part of the exhibition belongs to the past?

Well, I would not say the past exactly; it was conceived and produced during the period of the PhD, and I have since begun a post-doctoral and at this point the post-doctorate space is more open. I am continuing my research and developing a new but related project. This requires attention and needs to happen in a private space, so opening the apartment in the way that *Millet Matrix I* did, but with items in many of the rooms, would not be conducive to the development of the new project.

The original idea to have a second public exhibition functioned as an end, what we did instead in fact opens up another opportunity for thinking critically about art and exhibition practices, thus making our decision to pursue the second exhibition as a non-

public exhibition more stimulating intellectually.

Also, it does not belong to the past because what is significant is that the exhibition is an absence of an exhibition in the space of an expected public presentation. This acts in concert with the methodology of my needlegraphs and is in line with my approach to needlepoint as error, which is ongoing.

Another take on the question is that the exhibition is definitely reflexively connected to the past, as I've already said, to the history and practice of needlepoint, but also to the history of conceptual exhibitions. Because I know of your interest in this history, I would add that the non-public aspect of the second exhibition functions somewhat like your intervention (meta reading) in the first show.

6) Do you feel that the second part of the exhibition is no longer relevant to your practice as you now conceive of it in a post-PhD register?

No, my work is cumulative. The work can be thought of as a bridge from the Cassatt projects, where I first made needlepoint patterns, to the needlegraphs, and now to my present research.

My post-PhD period continues and develops my art practice, with a small shift. If the doctorate was more a research-led practice then the post-doctorate might be more practice-led research, though I would not put too much emphasis on the distinction. So research is part of my artwork. The outcome of the second exhibition is unexpected and thought provoking, and it does that not by newness (cult of the new) but by engaging directly with the subject and its history, which is reflexive of the capitalist culture it is part of. This remains an interest and part of my post-doctoral research.

Also, I pursued a doctorate to develop my art practice and its groundings and understood that research as part of my practice. My approach to the post-doc continues in this manner and so the PhD period is not irrelevant.

7) In retrospect, what are your thoughts on the idea of private apartment exhibitions?

First, the idea of showing the work in the space of its making, especially insofar as needlepoint is a domestic practice, is fertile ground for thought. It communicates something of the studio but in this case also of the history of the medium. However the reality is that the idea of many strangers coming over is not comfortable.

Second, when I work I try to consider the effects of my actions on the short and long term, for my practice and as it might be copied by others. I wonder what is the effect of a domestic exhibition when it becomes widely repeated. I also wonder if the history of domestic exhibitions is related to unfavourable conditions for experimental art practices,

in this case, the need for exhibiting domestically becomes indicative of a bad working context.

I'm not so interested in seeing domestic space become generally exploited for exhibitions. I'm also suspicious of relational work, and of art becoming a lifestyle practice and in this sense can see how domestic space is already commodified.

8) In retrospect, what are your thoughts on the idea of interacting with a public who, for the most part, you do not know in the context of a private apartment exhibition?

Millet Matrix I was very rewarding. It was visited by a small number of people who know you and are interested in your work. Most wanted me to discuss the installation and asked about my research and so I spent on average 40-50 minutes with each person. This created an opportunity for me to go over many aspects of the historical research I had been pursuing and I became aware of just how new or rather unknown and counter-intuitive the material was to people. I had lost touch with that perspective. This was enlightening and helped with the thesis writing.

If I put myself in the visitors' shoes, however, I would be very reticent to visit the domestic space of a stranger, but that would also extend to engaging an artist in the neutral space of a public gallery. Perhaps the important point here is that the visitors to *Millet Matrix I* were there because of their engagement with you; if you suggested I visit a show I would. Also there was the preliminary encounter when setting up an appointment with me to visit, and then once in the space, the person could choose whether or not to engage in a discussion with me (and I with them).