

**DESIRE LINES**  
**A SYMPOSIUM ON EXPERIMENTAL**  
**INSTITUTIONAL FORMATS**  
**28 & 29.11.2014**

“**Why do we need institutions today?**”<sup>1</sup> In his essay *Institutional Change; The Protocol as a Productive Space of Conflict*, Markus Miessen discusses this question asked many times in the last four decades, bringing mostly frustration, pessimism and answers confined by perspectives of limitations, appropriations and conflicts. Miessen suggests we now invert the question: “How can the institution be understood as an enabler rather than a hindrance, an agency for critical production and discourses rather than a creature that generates stasis?”<sup>2</sup>

DRAF is a platform for collectively sharing and re-thinking the curatorial. It offers a space for artists, curators, writers, and researchers to work, to experiment and to generate dynamic responses to current artistic developments. Co-production and commissioning are operating systems for a public programme of artistic, discursive and participatory events. Since opening in 2007, DRAF has produced several projects addressing the question of **what an art institution is**, and *Desire Lines* continues this commitment.

*Desire Lines* borrows its title from Richard Long’s work *A Line Made by Walking*, in order to reflect on what it presently means for a contemporary art institution to commit to critical modes of working with artists and curators. In 1967, Long walked a straight line back and forth across a field in an improvised track until his steps flattened the grass. Predetermined paths do not always lead to desirable destinations in contemporary curatorial theory and practice. Over time, maps of longing and predilection wear away regulated groundcover. We invite a range of diverse institutions to trace the paths within current curatorial activities and **research methodologies** in the complex system of art organisations. Based in Egypt, Germany, Lebanon, the Netherlands, and Portugal, the institutions have positioned their identities not solely within expectations of markets and audiences, but through their commitment to research and focus on non-traditional programmes and formats. All founded after 2007, they consider new routes to negotiate socio-political, economical and spatial fields, within alternative institutional models for thinking, producing and communicating.

We selected the notion of **desire** as a way of addressing the potential of curatorial work within an institution. In this context, desire is considered as a necessity that is never fulfilled but that always has to be reconfigured according to one’s own position and identity. For Jacques Lacan, desire has its own logic,

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1 Markus Miessen, *Institutional Change; The Protocol as a Productive Space of Conflict*, 2013

2 Markus Miessen, *Institutional Change; The Protocol as a Productive Space of Conflict*, 2013

language and intentionality; to desire is to express the question *What does the Other desire?* This Other might be another person in their essentially enigmatic dimension; or it might be the assumed virtues, morals and ideals of our culture and upbringing: we must equally recognise the Other within our own subjectivity. In *Desire Lines* we question how desire is produced through a programme of creative activities. How do we recognise this desire within an ongoing process of redefinition and self-awareness? How can each organisation's vision effectively respond to present situations while inspiring audiences, artists and collaborators? When understanding desire as a collaborative activity for recognition, dialogues and discussions become an event.

Next to the concept of desire dwells hospitality. **Hospitality** is not just a cultural practice of reception, but a universal gesture that facilitates the encounter and understanding between people.<sup>3</sup> Alex Farquharson (Director, Nottingham Contemporary) advances a model of hospitality and generosity in the essay *Institutional Mores*: "Be welcoming, particularly if you want to work critically and you want what your institution produces to challenge normative wisdom, to open up new regions of thought".<sup>4</sup> For *Desire Lines*, we researched a number of institutional practices to inform a discussion that welcomes divergent concepts of what a contemporary art institution is or can be, how it functions and the cultural and social responsibilities behind it.

A trait of the institutions participating in *Desire Lines* is that exhibitions are not the primary concern of their programmes. Some of the institutions also share spaces and work across different locations. For instance, *Beirut* recently developed with Kadist Art Foundation, Paris, a project around its collection entitled *A guest Without a Host is a Ghost* in an inversion of Marcel Duchamp's *A Guest + A Host = A Ghost*. 98weeks positions itself as both a project space and research centre, dedicating an extended period of time to a specific theme. These institutions are interested in education in a broader sense, expanding opportunities for equal exchange and learning outside of traditional educational models. Rongwrong launched the programme *SCHOOL OF LIFE - things we don't learn in school*, to address the intrinsic relations between the quotidian, the inner self and more abstract realms of ethics, politics and aesthetics. Another common characteristic is public engagement through journals with commissioned essays, artist books and papers, that act as parallel platforms to explore their strands of programming. Kunsthalle Lissabon, for example,

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<sup>3</sup> Professor Nikos Papastergiadis, *Cosmopolitanism and Culture*, 2012

<sup>4</sup> Alex Farquharson, *Institutional Mores*, 2013

publishes *Performing the institution(al)*, which invites curators, artists and writers to probe the perceptions of institutional practice within specific cultural dynamics, and PRAXES makes available online their “growing atlas of analysis, documentation, commissioned essays, calls-for-action, talk-back, habitual self-reflection, visual responses, artistic works, and material not included in the displays in the physical space.”<sup>5</sup>

For *Desire Lines* we were concerned to generate a productive dialogue with institutions not only located in traditional social democracies, as has been prevalent in discussions about **New Institutionalism**. The term was borrowed from economics and sociology, and used in 2003 for the first time by Jonas Ekeberg to define curatorial, art educational and administrative practices from the mid-1990s to early 2000s that endeavoured to reorganise the structure of medium size art institutions. We also wanted to consider forums without a physical location, such as the European Kunsthalle, as producers of a public sphere. Lastly, we considered it crucial to bring together practitioners and students. The collaboration of the Masters in Fine Arts Curating at Goldsmiths College, University of London, thus bridges an intergenerational dialogue, contributing questions of what institutional and curatorial practices might be in the future.

DRAF believes that an art institution is something that is **continually in the making**, and that an identity is built out of a constant process of recognition through questioning, researching, and desiring.

“Don’t be afraid of popularity, and don’t confuse it with populism. In being critical, let’s not forget **pleasure!**”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.praxes.de/contact.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Alex Farquharson, *Institutional Mores*, 2013

## PROGRAMME

### Friday, 28 November

**2.00pm** Welcome introduction by Nicoletta Lambertucci (Curator, DRAF)

**2.15pm** Jens Maier-Rothe (Co-Director, Beirut) presents the not-for-profit art initiative and exhibition space in Cairo (EG), *Beirut*

**2.45pm** Luis Silva and João Mourão (Co-Founders, Kunsthalle Lissabon) present the Lisbon-based (PT) Kunsthalle Lissabon as an institutional hoax

**3.15pm** Kristine Siegel and Rhea Dall (Co-Directors, PRAXES) speak about PRAXES Centre for Contemporary Art a not-for-profit venue for international contemporary art and research based in Berlin (DE)

**3.45pm** Break

**4.00pm** Arnisa Zeqo and Antonia Carrara (Co-Founders, rongwrong) discuss rongwrong, a space for art and theory in Amsterdam (NL)

**4.30pm** Mirene Arsanios (Co-Director, 98weeks) presents 98weeks a research project based in Beirut (LB)

**5.00pm** Break

**5.15pm** Discussion with the art institutions moderated by Vanessa Müller (Director, European Kunsthalle) followed by Q&A

**7pm** Drinks

### Saturday, 29 November

**11.00am** Vanessa Müller (Director, European Kunsthalle) introduces the themes of the day and presents European Kunsthalle, followed by Q&A

**12.00pm** Rachel Mader (Researcher, Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Art) discusses the production of institutional identities, followed by Q&A

**1.00pm** Break

**2.00pm** Simon Sheikh (Programme Director MFA in Curating, Goldsmiths College) explores the legacy of New Institutionalism, followed by Q&A

**3.00pm** Discussion with all participants moderated by Nicoletta Lambertucci (Curator, DRAF) and Simon Sheikh (Programme Director MFA Curating, Goldsmiths College) followed by Q&A



## INSTITUTIONS

**98weeks** is directed by Zeina Assaf and co-founded by Mirene and Marwa Arsanios. Based in Beirut (LB) it is conceived as a research project that shifts its attention to a new topic every 98 weeks. Since opening in 2007, it focuses on artistic research, combining both theoretical and practical forms of inquiry.

**Beirut** is a not-for-profit art initiative and exhibition space in Cairo (EG). Since its opening in 2012, *Beirut* has been considering institution building as a curatorial act. Its programme and activities are directed alternately by Antonia Alampi, Jens Maier-Rothe and Sarah Rifky. *Beirut* exhibits, writes, talks, shows, teaches, commissions artworks and organizes research, in Cairo and elsewhere. From October 2014 to May 2015, *Beirut* also runs the first edition of the *Imaginary School Program*.

**Kunsthalle Lissabon** directed by João Mourão and Luis Silva is based in Lisbon (PT). It was founded in 2009 as a wish for self-reflexivity for thinking about the existing conditions for the development and perception of a so-called institutional practice.

**PRAXES** Center for Contemporary Art is a not-for-profit venue for international contemporary art and research based in Berlin (DE). Founded in 2013 by Rhea Dall and Kristine Siegel, it investigates the objects, process and interactions that combined constitute an artistic practice, through half-year cycles centered on the full span of work of two unassociated artists. Recently Dall and Siegel were appointed Conveners of *The Bergen Assembly 2016*, a large-scale international triennial in Norway. In addition, they both currently hold positions as PhD Research Fellows at University of Copenhagen.

**rongwrong** is a space for art and theory based in Amsterdam (NL), run by Arnisa Zeqo and Antonia Carrara, with Laurie Cluitmans and Vincent Verhoef. Opened in 2011, it explores recurrent questions concerned with the constant friction between the inner self and the theoretical, professional and artistic practices that describe and inscribe us in daily life.

## PARTICIPANTS

**Mirene Arsanios** has been based in Beirut since 2008. Arsanios co-founded the collective 98weeks research project in 2007 and launched 98editions, a small press for experimental and cross-genre writing in 2013. Her writings have appeared both in arts and literary magazines such as *Bidoun*, *Cura Magazine*, *The Rumpus*, *Ibraaz*, *Ink & Coda* and *Enizagam*. Arsanios holds a Masters in Contemporary Art Theory from Goldsmiths College and an MFA from the Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts at Bard College.

**Antonia Carrara** is an artist. Carrara lives and works in Paris and Amsterdam where she co-runs rongwrong. Recent projects include in *Despite of Death*, Yale Union, *Portland Cement*, Publication Studio, (Portland); *The Issues of Our Times III*, Artists Space Books & Talks (New York); *Supernaturel*, Fondation Ricard (Paris) and Schlöss Ringenberg (Nordrhein-Westfalen); and *De Fabriek*, (Eindhoven).

**Rhea Dall** has been based in Berlin since 2006. Dall held positions at the Berlin Biennial's 5th and 6th editions, in between which she coordinated The Danish & Nordic Pavilions at the Venice Biennial 2009. From 2010 to 2012, Dall was the curator at Kunsthal Charlottenborg in Copenhagen, initiating the Research Programme and curated projects including *Palace Party*, *Corso Multisala*, and solo shows with Christina Mackie, Nina Beier, and Clemens von Wedemeyer. Dall has written for and edited a range of papers and catalogues, and recently contributed to *Spike Magazine*, *Bulletins of The Serving Library*, and *Mousse*.

**Jens Maier-Rothe** works as independent researcher, writer and curator. He has exhibited widely and has edited and written for numerous publications and magazines. Since 2012, he co-directs the art initiative *Beirut* in Cairo together with Sarah Rifky. Recent curatorial projects include collaborations with the Lisson Gallery, *The Magic of the State* (London, 2013); the Van Abbemuseum, *Lawrence Abu Hamdan* (Eindhoven, 2013 & 2014); the Stedelijk Museum and Trouw, *Here Today Gone Tomorrow* (Amsterdam, 2014); and the Kadist Art Foundation, *A Guest without a Host is a Ghost* (Paris, 2014–2015).



**João Mourão** and **Luis Silva** are a curatorial duo based in Lisbon, Portugal, where they currently serve as co-directors of Kunsthalle Lissabon. Alongside their curatorial practice, Mourão and Silva are co-editors of the ongoing book series *Performing the Institution(al)*, published by Kunsthalle Lissabon, which addresses recent developments in institutional practice. They are the curators of the 2015 edition of ZONA MACO SUR, the solo projects section of Mexico City's contemporary art fair. Recent curated exhibitions include, Mariana Castillo Deball, *Moi-Peau* (2014), Petrit Halilaj, *I'm hungry to keep you close. I want to find the words to resist but in the end there is a locked sphere. The funny thing is that you're not here, nothing is* (2014), Patrizio Di Massimo, *Me, Mum, Mister, Mad* (2014), Amalia Pica, *Memorial for Intersections* (2013), Leonor Antunes, *a linha é tão fina que o olho, apesar de armado com uma lupa, imagina-a ao invés de vê-la* (2013), Daniel Gustav Cramer and Haris Epaminonda, *Early Summer* (2012), Ahmet Ogut, *Stones to Throw* (2011); and Mounira Al Solh, *The Sea is a Stereo* (2010).

**Kristine Siegel** was based in New York for almost a decade before relocating to Berlin in 2011. Siegel held positions at the Department of Photography at Museum of Modern Art in New York, International Studio & Curatorial Program (ISCP) and Dennis Oppenheim Studio & Archive. Working as an independent curator, she was responsible for several exhibitions and live programs, many of them collaborative endeavors, including *Definitely Provisional* (London) and *Cabaret Tribunale* (New York and Copenhagen). She has contributed to a number of publications, magazines, and catalogues.

**Arnisa Zeqo** studied history of art and philosophy at the University of Amsterdam. In 2011, Zeqo co-founded *rongwrong* on the ground floor of her house in Amsterdam. In 2015, she will be Curator-in-residency at the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College. During her residency, she will research the relationship between art institutes and the presentation of performance art.



## SPEAKERS

**Rachel Mader** is an art researcher. Since 2012 she has directed the competence centre Art in Public Spheres at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Art. Between 2009 and 2014 she led the project *Organising contemporary arts: artistic practice and cultural policy in Postwar Britain*. From 2008 to 2009, she was a Research Assistant at the Institute for Contemporary Arts Research (IFCAR) at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK). Recently, Mader edited the publication *Radikal ambivalent. Engagement und Verantwortung in den Künsten heute*, Zürich (2014). Other notable publications include “How to move in/an institution” in *ONCURATING.org* (2014) and “Nameless Science – künstlerische Forschung zwischen Institutionalisierung und kreativer Autonomie” in *Autorität des Wissens. Kunst – und Wissenschaftsgeschichte im Dialog*, edited by Anne von der Heiden and Nina Zschocke (2012).

**Vanessa Müller** is Head of Dramaturgy at Kunsthalle Wien and an independent writer. From 2000 to 2005 she worked as a Curator at the Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt/Main, and in late 2005 became Academic Director of the project European Kunsthalle, which explores different temporal and spatial models for a potential contemporary art institution. Her concerns for the social and philosophical contexts that contemporary art bring about can be found in numerous contributions to publications on contemporary art and art theory.

**Simon Sheikh** is a curator and theorist dealing with the modalities and potentialities of curating, within the relation between exhibition-making and political imaginaries. He is concerned with how exhibitions articulate through arrangement, narrative and spatialisation, as well as how the very format of the exhibition can be expanded, negated or transformed. His research areas include the making of publics, the instituting of subjectivity and the politics of display, both in terms of critical writing, the conceptualisation and realisation of exhibition projects, and in the form of an ongoing formulation of histories of exhibition making and reception. He is Programme Director, MFA Curating Department of Art, Goldsmiths College.



## ORGANISERS

**DRAF (David Roberts Art Foundation)** is an independent non-profit space for contemporary art in London, founded in 2007. It is directed by Vincent Honoré who with his team produces an ambitious programme of exhibitions, commissions and live events. All DRAF projects are open free to the public.

**European Kunsthalle** conceives itself as a basis for a broad range of art forms including both known and emerging contemporary art practices, approaching these in an interdisciplinary and experimental way. It is a nomadic forum in which the aspect of artistic production is ascribed a similar significance as the presentation and reflection of art and culture. As an institution without a permanent site, the European Kunsthalle focuses on decentralised projects and collaborative structures.

**Goldsmiths MFA Curating** is a postgraduate study programme that draws on the international scope of contemporary arts practice at Goldsmiths College and in London, and instigates debate about the relationship between that practice, current critical discourse and concepts of curating. The programme is designed to provide a practice-led research context for students at any stage of their professional practice by focusing in-depth on aesthetic, social, political and philosophical questions that are brought to bear in any place or at any event in which contemporary art is situated.

*Desire Lines* is a project conceived and organised by Nicoletta Lambertucci (Curator, DRAF) with Sofia Lemos (Curatorial Assistant, DRAF) and produced by DRAF (David Roberts Art Foundation) in collaboration with European Kunsthalle and Goldsmiths MFA Curating.

## **DECEMBER AT DRAF**

### **Nina Beier final weeks**

The solo exhibition by Nina Beier continues to Saturday 13 December.

### **Event**

An evening of performances, events and music by Haroon Mirza on Thursday 18 December. Information soon at [www.davidrobertsartfoundation.com](http://www.davidrobertsartfoundation.com)

## **DRAF**

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The nearest tube stations are Mornington Crescent and Camden Town.  
DRAF is a 15 minute walk from Kings Cross St. Pancras.  
Busses: 24, 27, 29, 88, 134, 168, 214, 253

## **OPENING TIMES**

Thu - Sat, 12 - 6 pm  
Tue - Wed by appointment

## **FREE ADMISSION**



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