



Outside / Inside

MG&M Collective

Outside

Text by Eva Visser

A lot of the space of the Charlois' atelier of artist duo Gil & Moti is taken up by boxes that contain work that would be shipped to Antwerp, for their show at Pedrami Gallery, in two days. Another room filler is the installation they build to make the 10-meter long series of drawings they made together with Mosab Anzo – a collaboration they named the MG&M Collective – a work for an exhibition in Nieuw Dakota (Amsterdam) that will open at the end of August, after their return from their Mondriaan Fund residence at Capacete in Rio de Janeiro, Brasil, for which they are leaving in a bit over a week. So yes, they are very busy but have made some time in their hectic schedule for a conversation, in equal parts Dutch and English, over tea and superb Belgium chocolates.

DOUBLE ACT

GM: "Ever since we met, in art school in Israel, we influenced each other's practice profoundly and we developed thoughts together - and Moti had painted Gil and introduced him as his muse, which was amusing - but we weren't yet the duo that we're now. We applied for the Master Fine Arts of the Piet Zwart Institute [WdKA] separately, but both on the condition that the other would also be accepted. After we heard that we got in, we moved here. It was then, in 1998, that we decided to only make work as a duo and make being a duo in life part of our work.

Being the duo we are [looking the same and doing the same things] is a constant performance and there're consequences for that. People stop us and they want to ask questions. We have learnt how to deal with it, we know when to be submissive when people want a selfie with us. It is our job - we have to be friendly and accessible. People know a lot more about us than we do about them. We went to Paris to do a project in Belleville, which is a immigrant neighbourhood, and this lady comes to us: "Oh you're from Rotterdam, I know you from the Zuidhoek."

GETTING STUCK

GM: "The first time we walked out of the central station, we said "oh wow; this would make it an interesting home for us." We liked Rotterdam immediately because it's an old-new city with room for new buildings to grow. Also, people were very friendly on the street, so it simply felt good. The curriculum of the Piet Zwart Institute was very appealing and combined art and activism. It felt fresh; the Course Director asked us how we wanted the program to develop. That was very characteristic for Rotterdam, that you could change a lot of things. We feel the city changes with us: it is growing and so are we. We need to keep developing ourselves, our work, our personality. There is this notion that artists should have a signature style. But we think it is important to keep evolving, and so our style is growing and changing. We also tell students that: don't do just one thing.

After we did the Gil & Moti wedding project [in 2001 Gil & Moti got married by then-major Opstelten on the day same sex marriage was legalized; they held their honeymoon in the city hall] we felt married to the city.

In 2007 our accountant advised us to buy our own studio, and that was only financially possible here, in Charlois. At first we only worked here because we thought 'we're not going to live in this little village at the other side of the tunnel' - it was a psychological barrier. But in 2010, we finally moved from the Witte de Withstraat, where we had the Gil & Moti Homegallery, to Charlois. The south is greener, more peaceful. Life here is simpler, more real; there are people here with families, people with dogs. We're here for nearly ten years now, and it has changed a lot. There're so many artists living and working here now.

When we bought the studio we realized it would mean that we stay here in Rotterdam. We asked ourselves: 'do we want to get stuck here?' And actually we do. We like that the Dutch don't believe in drama; they're not as radical as Israelis. Changing our nationality in 2013 [for The Dutch Volunteers project, 2014-2016] was also a statement for us. This is our home and we miss it when we're away. Our immigration was our choice. We were not forced, like Mosab Anzo was."

THIRD PARTY

GM: "We were looking for a refugee artist to work with, because we want to help the Dutch society to open up more. We met Mosab last year, at the Open Studio's in Borgerstraat. He had made these abstract paintings that were hanging in the corridor. We are afraid of abstract paintings, so we were checking our tolerance. The accompanying text said that Mosab was from Syria. This made us realize he was the one and that we needed to convince him to work with us." MA: "At first I was a bit afraid of them. I asked my friend Bert [Knaap, painter]: "what do they want from me?" But he said it was all good and that Gil & Moti are very well known artists."

MA: "I did two years of art school in Damascus and five years in Libanon. I had about twenty exhibitions before I came here, including international ones in Dubai and Germany. When I had to leave Damascus, the trafficker asked me where I'd want to go. I said I wanted to go to the Netherlands - because of Rembrandt, Van Gogh and Jeroen Bosch. For me it is the number one country in Europe for art. Maybe together with France, but life is better here for refugees. It was a long journey: in August 2014 I went to Libanon and stayed there for a bit, then two weeks in Turkey and four in Greece and then I got to the Netherlands. I spend a few months in different AZC's [Dutch refugee centres]; in the one in Dronten I started to paint again.

I could have gotten residence anywhere in Zuid Holland, so it was lucky that I got a place in Rotterdam, in January 2015. The Open Studio's in Borgerstraat was the first time I showed my work in the Netherlands [at the time of the interview Mosab's work is shown in the Maaskamer in the Scheepsvaartkwartier]. I already know a lot of people here, artist as well as people from the Oude Westen where I live. I am very social, but I always worked alone, so this collaboration is a big challenge." **EV**

For more information, see: gilandmoti.nl & mosabanzo.wixsite.com/mosab-anzo

Inside

Text by Gil & Moti

Our artistic involvement in the refugee debate began in 2008. During our exhibition at Kulturhuset in Stockholm we encountered Anas, a Palestinian professional swimmer that was seeking asylum in Sweden. When shooting a video with him in a swimming pool, he concluded that he feels most at home in the water (*Home Is Where You Fit*, 2008, single channel video, 05'20").

Later, in 2015, during a residence at Atelier Mondial in Basel, we met the Gambian gay refugee Ebrina, and with a social intervention we addressed freedom, mobility, homophobia and xenophobia, resulting in a video and photo installation: *The Way You Smile*. Back in the Netherlands we visited, out of curiosity, many exhibitions showing work by artists with a refugee background. Many of them were simply presenting works signed by refugee artists, but not much more than that. We felt the need to do something else and developed the idea that we should get to know a refugee artist personally and work closely with him, in a process revolving around his personal life story, his journey and our encounter with him. It would be a collaboration in which we would share skills, emotions and knowledge, and exchange perspectives, positions and aesthetics. Together with New Dakota director and curator Tanja Karreman, we developed this idea slowly.

In spring 2016 we stayed at New Dakota for several weeks. While the art institute was closed to the public, we made appointments with artists with a refugee background with the hope to find a working partner among them, for a long-term collaboration.

That's how we encountered Mosab Anzo, who was open to this challenge and experiment. Mosab and we come from different educational and cultural backgrounds, and different environments; we are rooted in the Western world, while Mosab Anzo is still Middle Eastern. We have different artistic practices and a different approach to art: Mosab is an abstract painter and we are narrative; he is poetic and we are conceptual; he is lyrical and we are socially committed.

These differences are a fertile ground for a rich collaboration between us three. The basis for a good collaboration has to do with hospitality, but what is the place of one's own ego? How can we learn to give room for the opinion and voice of the other? And how can we manage to create something together despite the differences? We decided right from the beginning that the artistic outcome of this mutual working process would be signed by the three of us: *MG&M Collective* (MG&M stands for: Mosab, Gil & Moti).

What began then as three days of an experimental workshop in Amsterdam, evolved into an intensive, creative and social collaboration during more than one and a half year. In that long process we have examined together the meaning of artistic collaboration, social integration, inclusion and exclusion. Furthermore, we have explored aesthetic, substantive and mental aspects of war, trauma and detachment; how identity and character are reconstructed, and how art can catalyst processes, help with communication and heal mental wounds. The results will be exhibited from August 27th till October 8th at New Dakota, Amsterdam. **GM**

This project is supported by O&O cbk Rotterdam and the Mondriaan Fonds.



OUTSIDE/INSIDE investigates the appeal of Rotterdam as a place to work & live for foreigners engaged in the cultural field. They are interviewed about their reasons to come and stay here, and how they experience the city and its cultural climate. In addition, the interviewees write about how living in Rotterdam resonated in their work. The texts are kept in their original language, the *lingua franca* bad English.



MG&M Collective during filming at Asielzoekerscentrum Dronten, March 2017