

San Keller

interviewed by Agustina Strüngmann

AS: What is your relation to the Dušan Murić Learning Centre / NOT MY LAB?

SK: I mentored Martin Schick in other projects and in the development of the Learning Centre. In this sense, I am like the brand or the name for the developing phase of the Learning Centre. Now it is up to Martin Schick to create its institutional power.

AS: What are your thoughts about the Learning Centre?

SK: Martin Schick's idea is to create a space that is definitely not an art institution. It is much more about learning in a basic sense; it is more a creativity-learning centre related to daily art practice and exchange. To provide a structure where one can learn how to make living more ecological and independent from the capitalist system.

AS: Does the centre have any historical models or influences?

SK: Martin played with the fact to be influenced, influenced by me and by others. I also think that Martin is a clever mind in the way he samples information and brings it together in the form of a play. But here, he is also capable of adding a real "do it." He thought it was necessary to give the piece a real space, another type of space to the play that is going from stage to stage, from Brussels to Rome; it is like giving it an identity somehow. I think it is also interesting to work in this way. You create a play and you go on tour, and it has in this way a starting point but it also stays. Fribourg is the place where he comes from; it is related to his original roots. You can definitely work nicely with a place that is close to where you come from and that is related to your identity.

AS: In your work you are very much working with communities, and people participate. How would you define a community? Can anything be a community?

SK: I don't have a definition for community, but one could think of the concept of community on different levels or as the framework one is using. Is it related to something public? Or is it related to your profession or to your private life? Will these parts be separated or mixed? Do you provide the mediums that create the community?

AS: In terms of your artistic practice, are you interested in the afterlife of the projects? How does your work impact the community around you? Do you create a community?

SK: It is an interesting question. I also ask myself why I started working in the social field. I think that in the social space you are never able to have the total control of the form; you are providing structures. I must say that I am starting communities, though I wouldn't say that I am interested in being the "founder" of a community. I always carry out research to try to understand how the system and communities work. I am not there just to build a community or to have the idea of what I would like to build, but it is more a way of understanding societies. Many would say that if you want to try to understand social behaviour, you could then study sociology theory. Contrary to that, I do my research in the real world, and that is the way I think I can go into a process that will bring me farther. I always need to connect the research information with the real, backwards and forwards. In that case, that is also maybe the reason why I would say that it is a process of understanding.

AS: Maybe it is more about raising questions?

SK: Yes, to myself and also to the public, to others. So then you can ask yourself: "Where are the communities that are interested in raising the type of questions you are concerned with?" and "Are you at the right place if you are in an educational institution, or is it impossible there?" Is it interesting to

raise these questions as an artist, or is it better to do that within your family? I don't know.

AS: What is your current field of interest?

SK: As an artist and a teacher, I am interested in the question of how to create your identity in an institution, as someone who is getting paid, getting a fixed salary. It is interesting to compare if there is a way of combining the work as a teacher with something of your own, like a free space inside the institution. What would that mean? I think it is a very interesting question.

It is not only about trying to find your own voice inside the institution, but also about creating a place where you can do something more liberating. I think it is possible to accomplish that, especially in an institution where there are hidden spaces that one could use to make things happen. I mean not everything has to go public. For many things it is also good if there is a space that could grow. Not only joining the institution to do one's job, but also looking artistically at the institutional space and what one could do with it.

San Keller was born in 1971 in Bern, Switzerland, and currently lives and works in Zurich, Switzerland. He is well known for his participatory performances and ephemeral actions that frequently approximate social experiments. The overall tone of Keller's oeuvre is critical, conceptual and playful and reflects on the relationship between art and life.

His investigation of art as a service ultimately gives the audience the opportunity to question out-dated paradigms and experience them in a new way, while also placing them under critical scrutiny.

His actions start off with contractual arrangements that set up the rules for his works, but since they rely on the participation of others, the course they take and their ultimate outcome is unpredictable.

Recent exhibitions include: Deleted Scenes, Galerie Brigitte Weiss, Zurich (2015); Invent The Future With Elements of the Past, Cabaret Voltaire, Zurich (2015); Disteli – Keller – Warhol, Art Museum Olten, Switzerland (2013). Forthcoming projects include: Twisting C (r) ash, Athens and Le Commun, Geneva (2015) and PerformanceProcess, Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris (2015).

<http://www.museumsankeller.ch>