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### Low Fixed Media Show: A Conversation with Artist Bart Stolle

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'There's an inflation of imagery'; Bart Stolle opens the conversation in his Ghent apartment. Society has entered an era of abundance, where its constituents are subject to a continuous overload of external stimuli, perpetuated through technological development, including social media. The result, he adds: 'people no longer look and sense'. Though Stolle witnesses similar trends in other media, such as music, imagery is his medium. Yet, in Stolle's world, an image is not only defined by its immediate appearance: 'My intention is not to show the image. I aim to reveal what is behind the image, where one is confronted with 'basic' concepts, such as time and space.' Fueled by feelings of apprehension and disempowerment during his teenage years, Stolle set out to 'show as much as [he] could, with the smallest means possible.' To generate and capture maximum empathy through barren visuals, Stolle explains, his characters would need to consist of a maximum of two circles and a square: a 'Low Fixed Media Show'. The characters would have no eyes and no mouth: the spectator should be given the necessary time and space to interpret and process the image.

In 1997 Stolle officially revealed the Low Fixed Media concept. Over the years however, this framework has not solely been a means to present his artwork, but a tool to help him ponder on and cope with his surroundings. Since growing up in the Western eighties Stolle saw and sees himself confronted with the complexities of a hyper mediated society - dating back to commercial television and the beginnings of digitalization -, ongoing globalization and yuppie culture, ecological challenges,... as well as the minutiae of the everyday. He distillates the exponents of this environment into a coherent body of meticulously composed and abstract work, ranging from comput-

er animations, pencil drawings, paintings and mixed media installations.

At first glance, his works appear to be visualizations of technology, circuitry and automated procedures. Indeed, it's quite easy to see similarities to topographic maps, decision-trees, cluster patterns, seismograms, fractals, etc. Representations that seem very recognizable, yet would require training to actually understand. Upon closer scrutiny however, it becomes clear every brush of paint or pencil mark is 'hand-put'. By stripping his subjects to their bare essentials he creates ample room for his audience to use its imagination and project meaning into his work. Stolle is fascinated with time, space and movement - but likes to slow down what's going on around him. These commitments translate to the technical side of this *modus operandi* as well. In his drawings we often see stacks of layered ultra-thin pencil lines and pixelated color separation.

As evidenced by the presence of a Nasa Apollo Saturn V Lego construction kit in his living room, Stolle embodies scientific passion. Though working as a solo artist, Stolle nevertheless shows great admiration for the technical, seeking and enjoying the interaction of those who shape it, as he recalls his conversations with *amongst others* Harold Cohen, Frieder Nake, Georg Nees and Manfred Mohr, pioneers of computer art. 'A computer could generate an image in a split-second. I wanted to capture a part of that process.' By focusing on that brief moment in time and space, Stolle seeks to humanise a process that is often thought of as only 'artificially' human. At the same time, Stolle, through his work, tries to reconstitute the aspirations of those spearheading the computer art movement, and their lack of recognition. Whereas historically, the hard sciences and technology were not considered art proper, Stolle serves the 'detoxification of the computer', a restoration of negative perception. Not dissimilar to his own approach, Stolle notes, 'they also tried to embed human sensitivity into the machine.' Stolle reverse engineers the computer process, in which 'lines and dots', as a form of expression, never lost their relevance. This 'humane' interpretation offers dissonance in an environment where art and media often accentuate rapid technological developments - currently artificial intelligence - as disruptive and dystopian. Yet, indicated by Stolle's metaphor of 'image inflation', the artist does not remain indifferent towards increasing digitalization. Rather his works are multi-dimensional. Indeed, he

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