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"I believe that humor is the most intellectual language" - interview with Olaf Breuning

By [Anna Savitskaya](#) Wed, Jan 14, 2015

Olaf Breuning, one of the most talented artists of our generation, works in different media. His artwork is shown at fairs and is exhibited worldwide, but he doesn't make such a big and serious deal out of contemporary art. Have you met artists like this? Humor is his trademark, along with honesty and openness.



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Artdependence Magazine: You presented a public installation called "Clouds" in NY City this year. Should we look for some hidden meanings in this, like the climate change problem, or have you just brought a bit of the beautiful Swiss sky to NY?

Olaf Breuning: I think my works don't usually have a mission. I create works without a big mission. It is very rare that I produce works saying exactly this or that. The work could be about the climate change or it could be about iCloud from Apple (and the Apple store is right next to "Clouds"). So I produce works and people give their own meanings to them, but I am not the one who wants to do it.



© Olaf Breuning, Liz Ligon, 2014, CLOUDS, NEW YORK CITY, PUBLIC ART FUND, STEEL AND ALUMINUM

AD: Do you like questions: "What does your work mean?"

OB: I may sometimes give a hint if you ask me what this work is about and do I care about this and that or is that why I did it. And when people ask me: "What is your art about in general?" I always answer: "About life, my situation", so it's very easy. But besides that, I really like it when people have their own choice, their interpretation. I deliver something that motivates them to think.

AD: I like your sense of humor and how it defines your artwork. However, it is not very common in contemporary art (not to mention classic and modern art) for the viewer to laugh or smile while looking at it. Why do you think it is such a rarity?

OB: First of all, I am a funny person, I cannot help it. And secondly, well, why is this such a rarity in contemporary art? Maybe because contemporary art always tries to make more than it really is, pretends to be more, pretends to be smarter or more exclusive. I think that contemporary art is actually a small island whose people are curators, magazine makers or artists. They all can slap each other on the shoulder. It's a small club of understanding people and outside of that island no one gives a shit, because no one understands it. For me, art is a sensitive place where really murky things can be discussed.



But I do not want to become an artist who produces art to make other art people happy or to make the collectors happy. I guess some people do not see humor in art as really intellectual. But I believe that humor is the most intellectual language that we can have because only people with brains can have a good sense of humor. And when it comes to contemporary art, how serious it is, how academic it is - I do not want to have anything with it and I hope it will change soon. Because is just so f.. boring.

AD: *Yes, that is why you are so different, that's true...*

OB: Yeah, I hope. People know my work, but I feel that I am not really in the focus at the moment, not in the market wave, but at the same time this shows that I am a special voice and I like that. People like my work, but not many collectors collect it at the moment. And that is a very good time I guess.



© Olaf Breuning, 2014, MARBLES (GARY TATINTSIAN GALLERY, MOSCOW), CARRARA MARBLE

AD: *Do you want people just to laugh and have fun looking at your work or you expect more insight from them? Or is it some sort of a provocation?*

OB: My work is really like a diary, I do it for myself. That is the way I go through life. That is why I am an artist. These are my questions and my answers. And as I said, I want to make it easy and playful for people, so that they can do something with it without having that pretentious knowledge. I want a direct impact, like music has, like fashion has, like architecture has. I like to do something where you need to be smart. Where you can take the backdoor, not the front door. I do not want to make art where the front door is already kind of closed. It's an arrogant way to say: You know, it's contemporary art, get your shit together otherwise you won't understand it.

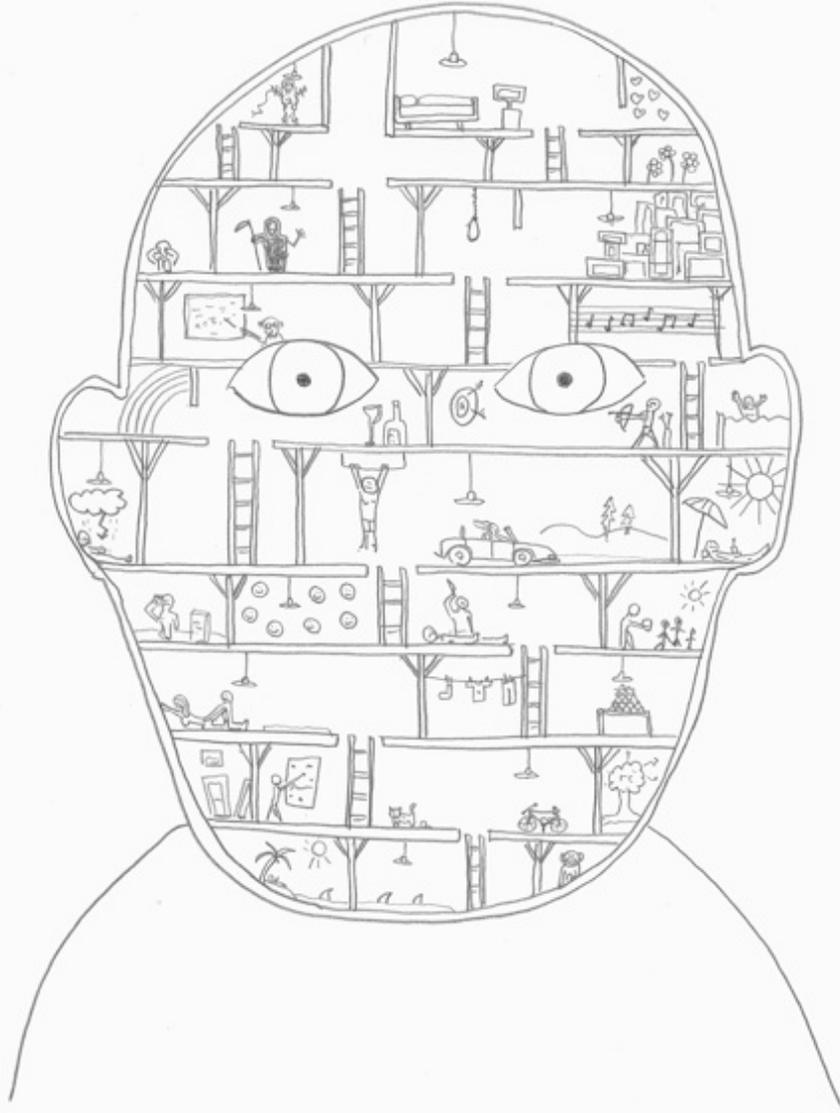


© Olaf Breuning, Bla Bla Bla

© Olaf Breuning, Chicken or Pasta

I have tried to be polite for the last few years but I simply cannot take it any more... I just do not to do it any more. I don't care if I am complaining too much about contemporary art, as i think it really sucks at the moment... Some artists that I know say that now you cannot do anything new, because most of the things are kind of done. For me, humor and complaining and some craziness are in one line, and maybe I should just go for it.

There are a lot of artists now who just talk about art and nothing else. When you see something and you think: oh it looks like that or that... and it's all about reference or reference. They get tired of making references to each other. And I sometimes just think "Oh My God these people have nothing more to do but just to talk and talk about art!" So I do not really want to focus on this... But without a big mission, I do not want to say that I am going to change anything, I want to do it for myself.



© Olaf Breuning, TOO MANY THINGS IN MY MIND

AD: You cover almost all disciplines: sculptures, photos, video, performances, drawings and continuously renew your work. The next Breuning is always a surprise. Being able doing this, I presume, you are a very restless character?

OB: I wish I was. Oh my God, I wish I could be restless. I produce a lot of different things, you are right, but

maybe I am getting slower now, because of age. I always challenge myself to do something new. And it gets more difficult, but I have only one brain. I have reached my capacity for renewing myself, but at the moment I am working on a show for Metro Pictures for next year and I really hope I can come up with something new. I am struggling more to find it, but I like to produce, to do different things.



© Olaf Breuning, 2010, "CAN SOMEONE TELL US WHY WE ARE HERE?", CARDBOARD, CLAY

AD: *For some exhibitions you drew on the walls. What happens with these drawings after the show is over?*

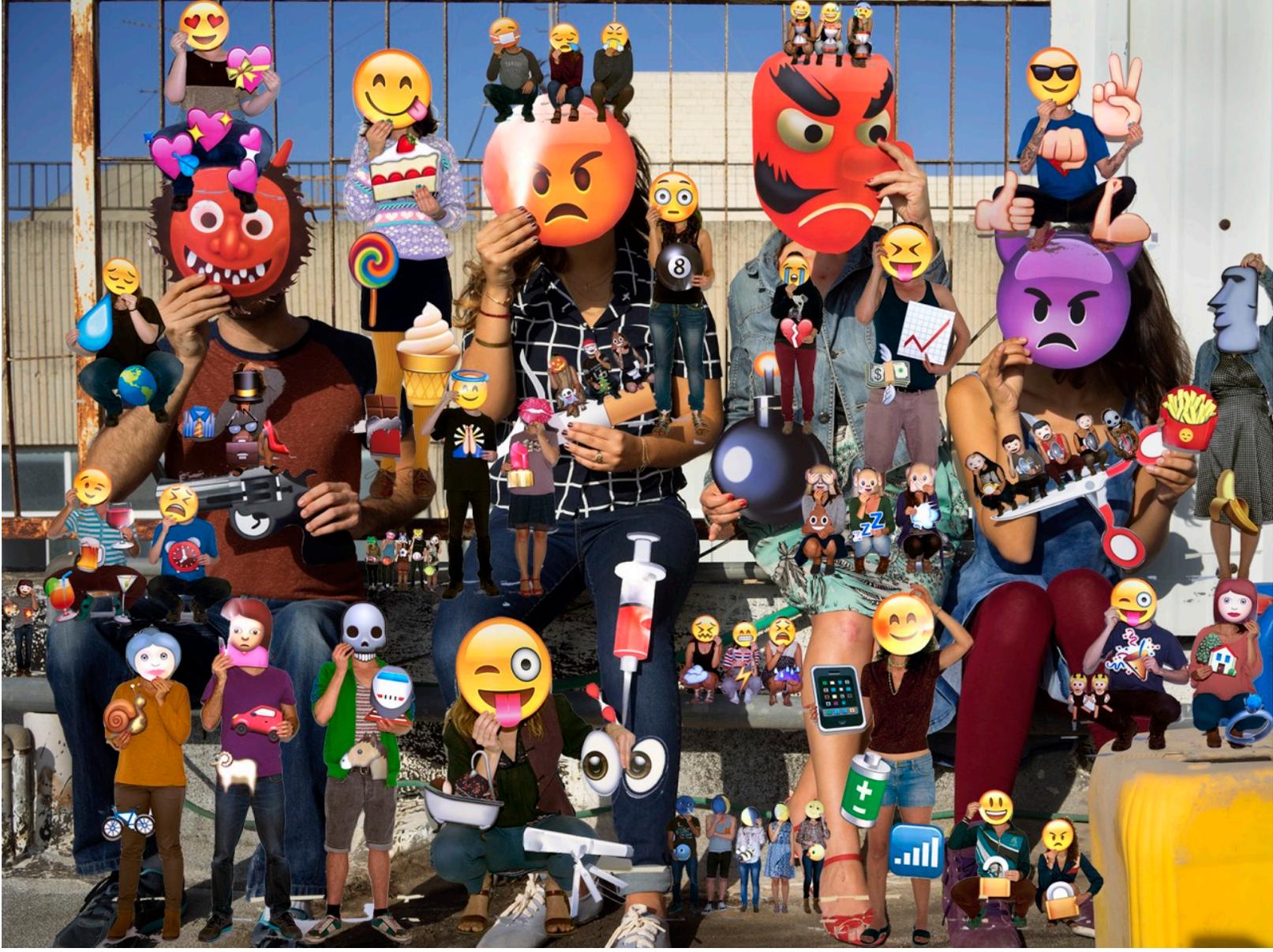
OB: They are simply removed and covered with new walls. I like this graffiti aspect, when the works are just for one show and after they just get removed. I like this idea. It's also convenient, when I come to the venue, draw on the wall and do not have to ship works.

AD: *Also it gives a feeling that it is a one-time thing. So if you don't see it, you will never see it, only in photos. But it is different, of course. It is something that makes shows really special.*

OB: So in the future for my retrospective I will use all these media, all possibilities.

AD: *Your latest photo work is full of emojis. I like it a lot and it so much reflects the up-to-date reality. What do you think about this work?*

OB: I use them, all my friends use them, the whole world uses them, but it's difficult to talk about that, because there is nothing to talk about. They are there. It's very difficult to work with them because they are protected in a way. It is very difficult to find high resolution files. So I thought I just want to make a work that has to do with 2014 and they are the emojis for me.



© Olaf Breuning, 2014, EMOJIS, C-PRINT, 120 CM X 150 CM

But I am very happy that I have finished with this theme. I spoke about emojis. Now it's over and I am happy I did it like that. It worked for me as a set of photos, because it tells a lot of stories and there are a lot of different people in it. I will never really talk about it again. But I am happy that I did.

AD: Thank you Olaf!

By [Anna Savitskaya](#)

Having background in intellectual property rights, Anna studied photography in Photo Academy in Moscow. In 2012 she opened her company Perspektiva Art, dealing in art consultancy, curatorship, organizing of exhibitions. During the bilateral year between Russia and The Netherlands in 2013 Perspektiva Art organised a tour of a Dutch artist across Russia and several exhibitions in the Netherlands, curated by Anna Savitskaya.

From October 2014 Anna is taking an active role in creating and managing Artdependence Magazine. She interviews curators and artists and collaborates with museums and fairs, writes reviews on books and events.