

# LESS IS BEST...

The Artist's Institute has a novel approach to exhibition-making, but is its focus on artists too much?

ONE THING INEVITABLY comes after the other at this place, and yet it is far from monotonous. Admittedly it is somewhat minimal, but more than anything, it is about slowly exploring what is at hand. Through a sustained interest in a single artist.

I am talking about the Artist's Institute, which opened in New York last year. In a small storefront space a few steps down from street level on Eldridge Street, one artist at a time takes centre stage, only ever showing a couple of works at once. Each whole 'season' – the institute has two a year – is programmed around a few carefully selected works by an 'anchor artist'. This year's first season was devoted to minimalist painter Jo Baer – whose works were animated by a few additional and changing artworks – drawings and prints by Anne-Mie van Kerckhoven, for instance – and other events such as talks and performances.

Less and longer are key features here. And to spend more time with a limited number of artworks is indeed refreshing. Such a protocol has several benefits: one of them, in an age of chronic information overload, is the relief of being invited to pay attention to a couple of pieces that, throughout the season, are continuously recontextualised. And 'invited' is exactly what you are. The charming website, designed by Dexter Sinister, performs a careful choreography, which, in keeping with the aims of the institute, also leads you through one thing at a time, adopting the tone of a friend encouraging you to come visit, have a chat and hang around. And yet no text on the website is



person to enjoy the institute's special treatment was André Cadere, an 'outsider' artist who infiltrated the art establishment by attending openings of exhibitions by other artists and then leaving his own work in the gallery space: rounded wooden bars – a cross between toys, walking sticks and ceremonial spires – would be discovered in gallery corners.

The Artist's Institute, with the emphasis on 'artist', is formally a part of Hunter College at the City University of New York, connected to a graduate seminar for artists and art historians there. Once again, an activity beyond standard practice is emerging within the framework of an educational institution. Rethinking institutional formats and methods of curating is necessary. We are stuck with too many cemented habits. But the line between substantial commitment to

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signed and there are no named staff. However, if you venture to the space you are likely to bump into Anthony Huberman, the founder and director, who tends to strike up a conversation. Preferably seated at the domestic dinner table that occupies a quarter of the space.

In efficiency terms it makes sense to focus on one artist at a time – you maximise investment. Two of Baer's paintings have, for example, been juxtaposed with paintings by Silke Otto-Knapp and a talk by Jan Verwoert. And then there was the day on which her paintings were surrounded by orchids, when an orchid sale was held at the institute in honour of the fact that Baer is a devoted orchid grower. These pairings are more associative than conceptually grounded, and there is a sense of wanting to retain art's object base and to cultivate irreverence and irrationality. With that in mind, it makes sense that the first

developing new forms for curating and formalist curating is getting thinner. I worry about the prevalence of 'curatorial pirouetting', those self-absorbed exercises in which curators show off, where neither art nor its audience is given proper attention.

At the Artist's Institute the dance still seems to be taking place on the interesting side of the line. But I wonder about the fact that it is dedicated to artists rather than art, and that the artists involved are described by the same old categories of nationality, or media: say, 'painters' or 'performance artists' who are, for example, 'Japanese' or 'German'. These types of categorisation point to inherited protocols that are today hard to take at face value. Even more out of date is the use, in the institute's literature, of 'potency' and 'virility' as supposedly positive terms for women artists. But then again, within this literature, the only person I can find who is addressed by first name alone – a grace typically bestowed on women, children and servants – is Jan Verwoert.