Artwork

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A Modest Proposal (in a Black Box)

Vermeir & Heiremans
Jubilee Platform for Artistic Research, Belgium



Still image from *A Modest Proposal (in a Black Box)*. HD Video, 28' 7'', sound and colour, UK and Belgium, 2018. View in full here: <https://vimeo.com/290694804>.

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Vermeir & Heiremans are an artist duo. Defining their own house as an art work in 2006 became the basis for a long-term artistic practice together. The 'house as art work' is a framing device to open up a meta-perspective on their own work, the art world, and daily life in general. In their practice, they explore different scenarios for a redistribution of value and new forms of mutualisation. Vermeir & Heiremans are also co-founders of Jubilee, a platform for artistic research. <https://jubilee-art.org/>.

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In their film, *A Modest Proposal (in a Black Box)*, Vermeir & Heiremans, who are also the film's protagonists, discuss a new financial model with a lawyer. Their dialogue, witnessed by the lawyer's assistant, focuses on the question of whether financialisation can be repurposed towards generating a more equitable arts ecology.

Considering the financialisation of public art collections, museum real estate, and symbolic capital, the financial model should benefit not only investors and art institutions, but also its stakeholders, the creators of the art assets' value, the artists and art workers. In the film, the artists propose to financialise a specific building as their first case study: Pump House Gallery in Battersea Park. The gallery is located in the vicinity of the Battersea Power Station, a twentieth-century former coal-fired power station, currently under redevelopment. It will house Apple's London headquarters and offers luxury apartments for sale, designed by Frank Gehry and Foster and Partners. All in all, an excellent momentum to leverage rising values that surround the gallery, to 'pump' up the building's value as an asset, and generate a return on investment for the wider art community.

The conversation between the artists and the lawyer takes place in Vermeir & Heiremans' house, which in their practice they define as an art work. Meanwhile, the seemingly absent-minded assistant often slips away from the discussions. She appears to be able to materialise and dematerialise at will the lofty space by caressing the walls, playing with the miniature furniture inside a scale model of the artists' house, or using the latter as a framing device, manipulating the window views. When the artists and the lawyer go on to discuss and celebrate the proposal on the loft's rooftop garden, glass of champagne in hand, she takes control…

Credits

Cast: Vermeir & Heiremans as the artists;
Luke Mason as the legal consultant;
Heike Langsdorf as the assistant.

Directors: Vermeir & Heiremans
Camera: Amir Borenstein
Editors: Katleen Vermeir and Amir Borenstein
Sound: Justin Bennett
Organ Player: Cindy Castillo
Voice-over: Emily Rosamond
Script: Vermeir & Heiremans and Luke Mason
Graphic design: Salome Schmuki
Animation: Amir Borenstein
Production: Jubilee vzw

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