

Mythologies.

A discussion between Sebastian Craig & Juliette Blightman of i-cabin and Richard Birkett, on the occasion of the i-cabin exhibition *What is it?* which made up part of the series *Seja Marginal, Seja Heroi** (Be Marginal, Be a Hero) at Wysing Arts, Cambridge.

RB. Hello everybody, welcome to our discussion. I run a gallery space in London called Whitechapel Project Space with Maria Trimikliniotis, and I've known Sebastian and Juliette who run i-cabin for a good five years or so through mutual acquaintances, friends and then through having also shown as an artist myself with them and we've had an ongoing discourse about what it is to run an artist run space. So I'm going to ask them a few questions, and get them to expand a bit on this show perhaps and also their practice in general and the space i-cabin. So very simplistically, maybe they can start by telling us how they came to set up the space and a bit about what the agenda was when they first started i-cabin?

JB. Well we've been running a course of shows for about 2 years now, in the space which Sebastian came across. When we first left Art college in 2003 we wanted to start up a place with artists studios that had a gallery as well but the practicalities of that seemed unfeasible, it's a lot more of a responsibility to have tenants so we abolished the idea of the studios and decided to set up the project space that we run. After leaving art school, we didn't want to jump right into that commercial world of having to get your work out and be showing in other galleries; there wasn't really any galleries that we were interested in or would want to have our work put in the context of. We thought of it as a way of creating a place to continue what we'd been doing at art college, meeting artists and going to other spaces, showing work, getting to work with artists and putting on shows with them etc.

SC. There's definitely something about opening a space with regards to trying to position yourself within an art world. With regards to our space I wouldn't like to say that it opened accidentally but we had had this idea to open this collective arts organisation but that had been abandoned by the time we opened i-cabin, it was 2 years before that we had toyed with that idea and obviously that's where our original core group came from. We stumbled across the space and at first even when we had the gallery we didn't even know what we were going to do with it. Obviously there was going to be a gallery there but what sort of gallery it would be or if it was going to be an office from which we based a kind of practice which was going to be both our artistic practice and then another practice wasn't necessarily defined at the time.

R. When starting an artist run space you have a very clear idea in your head that it's an artist run space and that you're not starting a commercial gallery for instance which you'd do under such a different remit; so how do you see it operating alongside your own work and how you were going to manifest that as an artist run space rather than a commercial gallery for instance?

S. It's a project space, it happens to be artist run but that was what we wanted to set up and what we thought a project space was involved to a certain degree with artists conducting a mini-residency, site specific work and to be honest it was only ever going to be a gallery. With regards to how that fitted into our creative practice I'd say that my individual practice has organisational elements going on but that wasn't really the issue at the time.

R. Was it more about the people that you knew around you for instance because something that you said Juliette is that you wanted to discover other art. It's quite a similar feeling that I have about running a space; you empathise with people around you and their work, you want to find a different way to engage with it other than just standing back and viewing it in somebody else's gallery for instance.

J. Also to encourage people to actually go on making stuff, to give them a space which they don't have to pay for but they can work. You can talk about your work, actually it continues what they base art school on, or that kind of educational process of actually discussing what you're going to do and why you're going to do it and having a place to do that that you don't have to pay for.

S. I see the whole thing as twofold. When you're opening a young gallery, of course you have your core group, you have your peer group and there's always a little bit of you that wants to run a space because you want to support whatever you consider to be what's *going on* and obviously you consider what's going on to be what's taking place around you personally. However, at the same time I felt that our peer group included some international artists and even then it was quite a wide group so it definitely wasn't about supporting just our friends, I always had a serious problem with that, which Juliette didn't have, she always thought that that was a nice part of the practice.

J. They're friends of friends and things stretch out that way.

R. Is that to do with ambition though? There is that thing where you first start up a space and it's an amateur activity almost but that desire to not really want to be pigeonholed by just showing your friends is perhaps about having a wider idea of where it might go and of what it might become.

J. You don't want to cancel other people out, you don't want to be seen as really cliquey or just totally introverted.

R. So how did you choose people that you were showing to start of with, I mean what was your agenda in terms of the kind of practice that you wanted to see in the space?

S. The agenda grew up as we went along, just with any other space, and then by about show 5 we had very rigid agenda but initially our intention was just to show art that was important. Which is why you cannot limit it, obviously you don't limit it in any way, but why I thought it was very important to not only work from the artists that were around us even though there was quite a few of them, there's important art that we wanted to show and many of the people that we might have dreamed about showing, we didn't know.

J. But of course that comes later.

S. There's something in that isn't there, about ambition. You mentioned ambition in a way but just working with people is what its about, and that is ambitious.

R. It's quite a difficult thing to define because the notion of the artist run space is mythologized. The myth that exists around it now post YBA if you like, how artist run spaces were so successful in becoming feeder systems for commercial galleries in the 90s, that its almost difficult to get away from a notion of ambition when running a space because so many spaces of the artist run independent variety opened up with the sole intention of "we want to be successful artists; we're going to improve our own career and improve the career of others around us by having a space and showing ourselves and other people as much as we can."

S. Hmm.

R. It's a level of ambition that's tied into that. I don't see i-cabin as having that sensibility at all because I don't really think it started off with the need to do that. It felt like it didn't and it seemed that it was just about showing work.

J. Mmm.

R. I'm uncertain about how that works.

S. I didn't feel that it was ambitious in that way but I see what you mean. I didn't think that you meant personal ambition, and I don't think we opened it with regards to our ambition career wise.

J. No.

S. It wasn't directly about promoting our own careers as artists although at the same time there is two ways to go about doing it.

J. It was also to continue our practice, just to make work and when you carry on speaking to other artists it only aids your own practice because it inspires you to work. You're helping by encouraging other artists and working with other people which can be very influential upon yourself. When these projects become possible in the space it only makes you think what you would do in that space, I would say that is why running a gallery ends up being involved with your own practice.

S. I think in every generation of artists there is this idea about having or being shown by a gallery, of having some kind of representation. I gave a talk a little while ago, which was called “you don’t have to be that sort of artist”, and *that sort* of artist is the artist who starts making work with the idea of chasing that career path. By that I mean that kind of set career path which follows all the little markers which say you are on the right road. I think we always had something against doing that. I don’t really know what it was but it just seemed a lot more appropriate for artists like us to do things ourselves, we though “why wait around for other galleries?” Also there’s the fact that we opened the gallery in part because we could not realistically think of many other galleries, or any other galleries in London that that we would want to be represented by or want to show with.

J. At that time it felt stale because of the knock-on from the YBA’s. I think that the generation that came after that just felt a bit flat, at least, in the work that we were seeing. Also we were very naïve.

S. Of course, we now know a lot more about galleries that were there at the time which we were unaware of; but when you’re coming into the scene, or whatever it is, you only know what you know.

R. But there is something in that. What you’re talking about perhaps is the fact that when you’re showing work with somebody that’s constructing what your practice is as much as your actual work. You have a sensibility you want that to be echoed in the place that you’re showing because it ends up aiding what you do.

J. Mmm.

R. It’s contributing to it.

J. As a gallery we also wanted to make the point that artists were to make work for the works sake rather than for selling’s sake I suppose which was also a huge part of it. The reason why we set up the rules of the space was to try and discourage someone’s studio practice existing in their studio, where they just continue with without ever stepping outside of it. They actually had to think about what the space involved and what they were actually going to do in that space rather than just picking up a picture and putting it in another space.

R. So what were the rules of the space? Say a bit more about how that happened.

J. The first year rule was no work on the walls. That was the first one.

S. That was really the only fixed rule wasn’t it?

J. Yes and that the work had to be made for the space.

R. Why did you come up with that rule, that there was no work on the walls?

J. Because we didn’t want someone to bring in a painting, put it on the wall and that would be the show.

S. The majority of the walls in i-cabin are built in a type of laminate wood effect panelling and the space looks like a an old taxi rank or something like that, and some walls are a type of pin-board which is just painted white so what we didn’t want was for people to come in and hang really clean work on these walls and then say ‘oh you know i-cabin, they’ve just got some dodgy wood panelling and that’s their thing.’ It would just be too easy because the show would look good, but it would appear to be us trying to look different to other galleries which wasn’t the issue for us.

J. It’d be very quick I think, like once they’d got that momentary idea.

S. It’s too simplistic. Because what we like about the space, like the fabric of the space, has always been really important, that’s why it’s a project space and that’s why we intend for people to negotiate it but we thought that that would be a really immediate way of pigeonholing ourselves as a gallery which doesn’t look like other galleries.

R. Mm.

S. So we decided to keep all the work off that fabric for a year or so and we thought it’d be a great achievement to be able to know we had the first year program without hanging.

R. Of just video work!

J. (laughter) It wasn’t just video work.

S. Rules are there to be broken too; they were bypassed and shifted around during the programme.

J. Artists would always test us.

R. It seems that what was an important point for you was setting up constraints for people that you were working with but also for yourselves, there's the point also with what you've done over the last couple of years that there's an important point where suddenly you become, or should I say i-cabin becomes, an artistic identity.

S. Mm.

R. Which maybe stems from that setting up of constraints, it becomes a conceptual project rather than just a gallery we which artists show in.

S. Mm.

R. What was the point at which you made a decision that it was going to be a conceptual project in the sense that you were going to frame yourselves as i-cabin and show *as* an artist rather than just having a gallery?

S. No. I mean that obviously there was a point at which we made that decision, but it was made in response to a choice which was imposed by someone else.

J. The idea of i-cabin being an artist was proposed to us, or should I say brought to our attention.

S. Yes, it followed the first Zoo Art Fair we took part in. This project in the middle of the room is the first ZOO project (indicates *Project for Zoo Art Fair*), that's the project we contributed. It fitted exactly into the stand we had there and because we had this seemingly arbitrary rule of having nothing on the wall at the space and that everything had to be made specifically for that space it would be ridiculous for us to not carry those rules onto the other site. Seeing as we considered taking part in Zoo Art Fair as simply an offsite project we took the same rules, so we ended up having this singular sculptural structure which affectively was our strategy for showing a group of artists on the stand and still maintaining what we'd been doing. It was not until we installed it that it occurred to us that the majority of people were reading it as one artists work. On the back of that realisation we priced it as one work.

J. The art fair was an odd experience for us anyway because we'd put ourselves in this really commercial situation. I don't think any of us had got a clue what we were doing there, especially when we saw all of the other stands around us making a lot of sales. It had not been a consideration of ours that someone might think about buying the work, we had only intended to present a project and have people look at it.

R. By pricing the work as a group did you want to remove the possibility of people buying individual work?

J. No it could be bought individually.

S. Actually if someone bought the individual works it would end up being a lot cheaper. I think the total of each of the individual works, of which there are 9, priced as they were was £19,400 but we priced the whole piece at £45,000 so in theory a collector could have bought them individually,

J. (laughs)

S. and then reassembled them back in their own home to make our piece but it wouldn't be our piece. However they would have got it for a third of the price.

J. It would be each artist's piece but a different whole.

S. So in a way they were in the position where they could choose whether they were buying an i-cabin work, or if they were collecting individual artworks.

R. So what you're saying is that somebody else made the decision that's what you were essentially?

S. We can go onto that. A certain curator that had seen the project and had read it as an individual work but had then looked a little further and found out that it wasn't. He also knew the gallery and a little bit about the rule systems. The long and the short of it is that he nominated us, which is something that he's done before for other people, for Beck's Futures

as an artistic unit. That was the first time that we were forced into actually considering being an artistic entity because obviously we were in a position where for Beck's we had to propose something under the name of i-cabin as opposed to under the name of our individual practices. That was very problematic for us and at the same time exciting. I think it is in those kinds of flaws where something becomes something or it doesn't and that's obviously a space where interesting things can happen.

R. Mm.

S. So we had to invent some i-cabin works, which made us address what it was that made this an i-cabin work or not and then everything that follows of has stemmed from that.

R. It's a strange paradox that you have a curator deciding that you as a curatorial practice are actually an artistic practice and maybe you never thought of yourselves as a curatorial practice in the first place because you're an artist run space but then isn't that curating anyway?

S. Well we call it programme directing don't we?

J. Yes

R. Programme directing? (laughs)

J. Yes because we don't choose the work that exists already.

S. We don't curate and in fact we try very hard not to curate as much as possible.

R. But if you're not curating where do the rules come from? Surely you are as curating is, in a sense, imposing rules upon work that already exists.

S. I don't agree, that's not what I read the practice of curating as. I mean I don't think that's what curators do.

R. Ok, in reverse of that, what you're doing by imposing rules fits into what we know now as being 'creative curating' if you like. By adding something additional to peoples work that isn't there in the first place or by forcing them into certain decisions that they wouldn't normally make you're exercising some kind of curatorial role in that sense.

J. I think you're creating limits, but yes, I never really thought of that as curating or as what I see curating as.

S. I mean if that's your definition of it then that's more what we have done that in other projects for example in *Cabin Baggage*, (to audience) which is the project up there which was made for a show at Tanya Bonakdar. We set a project and in a way *Cabin Baggage* could be a metaphor for the way that i-cabin works in that we set a physical parameter and then commissioned works from artists. They then deal with or not deal with that parameter as they see fit, and as I said all the rules at i-cabin were malleable; it's basically just handing them a foil which they can use either in their defence or in attack. So many people turned the rules back on us, and that's the beauty of the exchange between you and an artist.

R. Yes.

J. That's the reason why we work with those kinds of artists I suppose, the ones who we thought were going to approach the challenge, or challenge us; artists who think about the situation, hopefully.

R. Yes.

S. I suppose it reflects our interest in that we show artists who we think are important and the work that we think is important happens to be work which is open to those kind of games.

R. That's what I was going to ask in a way is how do artists that you invite to take part react? Because it's a different situation if you're an artist, being asked to show at i-cabin, where you know that you've got two rooms that have got funny wood panelling and chipboard, to being asked to be in an i-cabin offsite project.

S. Mm.

J. Mm.

R. You know its going to be i-cabin, not that your going to be wiped out of the equation (inaudible) but how do people normally respond to the knowledge that that's the situation which they're being fed into?

S. It's a good question, for the first project which is *Project for Zoo Art Fair* that was never an issue because at that point the situation did not exist.

J. i-cabin wasn't *i-cabin* at that point I suppose.

S. The later one which is *Cabin Baggage*; (to audience) I'll just explain the project: the case on the left is a case made to the exact proportions for an American airlines cabin restriction size bag and we would hand carry it to the show we were taking part in New York. Then we tried to collect together a kind of mini museum of works by artists who were important to i-cabin. The only agenda was they had to fit. All the works had to fit into this box and we were allotting people space depending on what they proposed to us.

J. Yes.

S. So you asked how they dealt with that? Well to be honest since making that work our practice has changed in response to it. Partly it's a reaction to us having made that work which has caused us to make this film (indicates *What is it?*), which is our newest i-cabin project. I think that the artists reacted very well and in that situation some of them really tackled the issues that we were imposing. Some of them, because we asked them to, made miniaturisations of their normal practice and through doing that we really started to question what i-cabin was. We questioned whether setting these rules actually added to the work that you got or if it didn't, we were always happy to throw a spanner in the works of an artists practice, but now, even with regards to the gallery, I think we have a looser approach.

J. We became very aware of the fact that artists may or may not want to work in the gallery if they think that we have so much control over what they actually make and some of the projects have these limits and I think we wanted to loosen it up at the gallery to make sure that they knew that it is about them and their work rather than about what we're setting up (laughs). This is a conclusion we came to through doing these offsite projects.

R. I mean it's quite an aggressive act, that's what I quite like about it. We we're talking about the post YBA mythology of the artist run space in the 90's becoming a ground for artists who then became really commercially successful. It was perhaps the original socialist idea or that kind of communal idea that the space is open for people to show in and is going to give people the best possible place to show their work, and what you're doing is, in a sense, imposing so much control over it that you're almost making it not that persons work anymore. It's aggressive and then antagonistic and I don't see that you are necessarily trying to do that as such. I don't see you as robbing things from artists but there's that idea as an artist when you show at a space that the authorship is all-important to you, it's that you want to be seen as the figure behind it, and then what you're doing is taking it somewhere else. You are not necessarily degrading the work but you're not allowing them that whole freedom, so you're not allowing that process of feeding to continue.

S. Yes partly. We have two separate approaches to what we're doing at the gallery. There's the year one programme and the year two programme. Partly the year two programme was really setting ourselves the idea that we would work with more established artists and really give them what we considered to be an opportunity. It was to stick them in a scenario whereas they would have the opportunity to work outside of their normal practice and to be honest most of the artists that we worked with that were part of that year two programme were eager to do that.

J. Mmm.

S. I mean that these are artists who are in a routine of showing in commercial spaces, they are represented and I think people can feel the pressure of having to follow their own practice.

J. Yes.

R. Mm.

S. Whereas with us it's almost like a breath of fresh air for them and they can show other things. The scenario allows for showing things that they wouldn't show otherwise, maybe because it's a smaller work or maybe it's a quirky work.

J. Perhaps it's something that they feel awkward with or wouldn't be able to show with their dealer or in commercial space because they aren't quite sure how they feel with it.

S. It takes one type of responsibility off an artist to a certain degree.

J. Yes. For an artist to say "I did something at i-cabin, I worked with those people," can be considered separately to their practice because it becomes almost about all three of us, or however many people are involved.

J. So far at least, artists seem to want to do it.

S. Absolutely, that's where the interesting things happen.

J. Mm.

S. So I think it's not that we were forceful on them but just that we give an opportunity to have a sideline and I think that's something which we considered an important role.

R. Going back to what you said before about the *Cabin Baggage* project, what's quite nice about The Hut Project piece is that it does to you what you've done to them. It reverses the constraints that you put on them and forces you to make a decision in a thing where they had to make a decision.

R. (inaudible)

S. (inaudible)

R. Yes.

S. Yes they proposed a piece which just blatantly went completely against the project boundaries and obviously we had conceptual differences just as you're supposed to have.

J. (laughter)

R. In terms of this show, this is another level of that kind of positioning yourself, of having an identity because this is some kind of retrospective.

S. Yes.

R. For a gallery or an artistic project that's been going for two years there's a lot of irony to that.

J. (laughs)

R. It's also quite cheeky in some ways.

S. Hmm.

R. How do you see it? What was the idea behind it being this kind of show?

S. (coughs) Well again i-cabin is in a position of having always enjoyed working with curators, I think this is when curators operate at their best is when they throw a spanner in to your works in the same way that we do to others.

J. Which is what Sebastian (Ramirez) did to us.

S. So you can basically blame Sebastian (R) for that, he asked us to take part as an art group or as a type of collective. We were reeling from the *Cabin Baggage* piece, reeling in terms of not knowing if we were happy with where i-cabin's practice had gone when we were asked to do a large show of it's work. We've made *What is it?* for this show which is the title work for the show. We saw this as a way of conducting our practice without actually having to impose rules on the physical manifestations of an artists work. What we end up with is some kind of group show of what I think are ideas which is our answer to ourselves really.

J. Originally we intended to show only the film but throughout the conversation with Seb (R.) that it became the retrospective.

S. He challenged us to represent ourselves or the history of our practice.

J. Which we were uncomfortable with.

S. Generally we do a very tightly structured thing, or that's what i-cabin does, obviously we have our practice as individual artists as well and the idea of i-cabin being an artist in itself is

so messy that normally we reflect it in these structured ways. To put more than one i-cabin project together in a room has been an eye opener in a way.

J. It also makes you see them all as unified, there is a definite aesthetic, which I don't think we realised.

R. This is what we were talking about the other night isn't it?

J. If we had considered it, it would seem obvious because it's always us and the artists that we we're working with coming in and out of the projects, there does tend to be a core of people.

R. It's quite a conceptual aesthetic but it's also very much based around spatial constraints. What I mean is that part of your own practice in some way enters. I mean the aesthetic that you have here is has so many different reference points in terms of conceptual practices, the way that conceptual art from the 70s looks and then also some kind of added level of the display, a shiny surfaces aesthetic, does that feed into what you do individually or where does that come from?

J. I don't really know if you can escape that. The funny thing is that our individual practices couldn't be more different, this comes from the conversation between what we do and it ends up being something else but there's definitely elements, I'd say, of both practices.

S. Even within these projects our individual work is represented as well. Where it starts getting really conceptually complex is when our own works are then put within the context of our combined practice of commissioning other people. It's really a conceptual minefield but then you can't escape the fact that that our aesthetic is represented, or the aesthetic of our personal work is represented in these projects.

R. Ok, I mean that asks a lot about the content of the actual work and whether the content ends up slipping into the whole piece other than standing on it's own, I'm just trying to think because a lot of the people I know who you work with are not as clean and defined in their ideas or their formal aesthetics as it becomes when they're showing in this context.

S. In these projects?

R. Yes, it's again that question of you're not taking anything away from those people I don't think but then the content slips. Take Adam Latham for instance. Adam is quite a scatological artist for want of a better word, his work is drawing and its frantic and it's all over the place and you've shown him a couple of times, you've shown him at i-cabin and you've shown him in projects that you've done. Where does his work become conceptually part of your work or does it become positioned by you in a different place than it is normally.

J. Mmm.

S. Yes it's a good question.

J. I guess with the projects it's to become the author of the work, that's where that fits.

S. No I don't think that, I don't think that applies to this scenario at all, I mean if you actually talking about the practicalities of how did we work with an artist like that then I think that on the contrary to being awkward to us he is exactly one of those artists whose work would just look so handsome in i-cabin.

J. He proposed to us the idea of the show he wanted to do and asked if he, and the other two artists could put this show in that space.

S. He curated that show.

J. So he put it together which was our first outside curator, it took a lot for us to do it. We agreed to it but also not (laughs) at the same time. I suppose you have a say in so many ways in what they actually choose to do.

S. Well its hard to really say or reflect how he worked with us and, as you say, he's a mentally frantic artist. At the time the physical structure outside i-cabin was a bit different so at this time you couldn't really tell where the space began and where the outside ended and his work ran through the building.

J. Because these offsite projects are very much set they're very different to what goes on in the gallery.

S. Yes they're absolutely specific.

R. That is what's really interesting in this situation, as someone who knows i-cabin the gallery, to be presented so clearly with i-cabin the practice is quite a weird scenario because it is two different things entirely. This one is actually a practice that sits above and looks down on things in many ways. Its commentary is about what it is to curate or what it is to frame peoples work perhaps, I'm looking for something there, I don't know whether I'm going the wrong way but what I find exciting about it is that the work doesn't really matter anymore, to a certain extent obviously its paramount within i-cabin the space but in this context it feels like it's more about what it is to be in the position that you're in and have an identity that you have.

S. Hmm.

R. And to work with other people and exchange ideas could it not be that?

J. I think it's completely that.

S. Yes and it even touches on that idea of the comedy of what group shows are. Alec Steadman's talking in the film about this point of how every artist has different practices and he's talking about artists producing work that they only produce for group shows and the difference in their practice of producing work for a solo show and for a group show. He's reflecting an idea which is similar to that which has ended up taking place in some of our projects. I mean that there's artists work that's been produced for our projects which they wouldn't have produced if they were doing a completely different project.

R. Mmm.

S. I mean they're twofold in their practice in the same way that we are. I certainly wouldn't say that the work becomes 'completely unimportant' and in one way that's why we kicked back against being called curators because with some curators there's a sense of the show being pushed as a kind of conceptual space for which they've used artists work as materials. Some of our pieces could be considered in that light but I think hopefully knowingly and I don't know how comfortably we sit with it. Mainly I'm talking about *Cabin Baggage*, which is somewhat of a thorn in my side, but it's definitely an important part of what we've done.

J. Yes.

R. I suppose the problem is in the way in which this works. It presents itself as avoiding certain things and being uncertain about certain things rather than fulfilling a role that we're familiar with as an art audience. It sits somewhere else and therefore some of these things don't matter so much that normally do matter, those kind of issues of curating are pulled away a bit, this doesn't feel like curating in that sense.

J. The film was a big part of that because we made it as a group show in a film; almost off the back of our last project (being the one for New York). We felt that we were in a weird position of putting together these projects; we've wanted to make it for a while.

R. As a way of opening up again rather than something else?

J. Yes, or to move it somewhere, so here we didn't just invite another group of artists to do another piece of work, although it ends up being a piece of work it's different by getting the actual artists to appear in it rather than a work that represents what they are talking about or what they feel. It's not even just artists, we opened it up to musicians and critics and curators and all the kind of people that we are interested in.

S. We've changed our practice basically and this project (*What is it?*) and the one on the wall (*Zoo6*) are actually made by a completely different organisation, we have shifted our stance so whereas *Project for Zoo Art Fair* and *Cabin Baggage* are made by i-cabin, the set of posters (*Zoo6*) which is considered a publication and this film which is considered a publication is made by i-cabin(texts) which is a publishing company run by Juliette and I. The way that we consider ourselves in these two works is something that I sit a lot more happily with.

R. What does that kind of little change in name do? Is it that you're now i-cabin(texts) or there is a separate project called i-cabin(texts)? How does that enable you to step outside into a different space?

S. Well it's a it's a very simplistic one in that i-cabin(texts) could be considered an author, which is what Juliette was touching on before, therefore i-cabin(texts) has the possibility of authorship of a work which is slightly different I think to being the artist of a work. So it's in that move in how we judge ourselves from a kind of artistic one to a literary one.

J. It allows us to make ourselves more absent in many ways. In the two publications, it's not so much about us it's about the content which is generated by the people that are appearing in them.

R. So does i-cabin(texts) not impose the same kind of restrictions that i-cabin does?

S. Not really. i-cabin(texts) makes publications and it makes books whether they appear as film or in a cardboard tube.

J. They wouldn't ever happen at the gallery. i-cabin(texts) is something offsite; so the gallery becomes more of a gallery basically, or more of a project space.

S. I disagree with that, I think it's more that offsite projects are now produced by i-cabin(texts) not by i-cabin or at the moment they are.

J. So we can generate more discussion.

S. Yes.

R. It's obviously in its early stages.

J. Yes.

R. It reminds me a little of Jeffery Charles Gallery, (to audience) I don't know if anybody know Jeffery Charles gallery; it was operated just round the corner from the gallery I run with Maria, and it had a reputation in a sense because of the idea that the shows it had, which were mainly group shows. It was a very small space and the two artists who ran the space imposed very strict restrictions on the work in many ways. Each show was curated spatially in a different way so for some shows they would build structures. I was in a show there and they built a mezzanine level in a space that's 2m X 2m so you have to like crawl under to get in, and then and as artists we were thinking 'where does our work go? How can we respond to this.' It was a really interesting project in many ways, they showed some really interesting artists and they adapted the space so fundamentally every time that it did become known as an artistic project in a similar way to yours. When they left that space and they moved on they turned themselves into essentially a sort of ephemeral sort of activity, a publishing activity where you would receive an artwork through the post if you signed up to their mailing list. The artworks that were produced became distributed by post. I think that it's interesting how you've plotted a similar path, I think that it's different because theirs is quite a strict conceit in some ways but it is interesting that you're going that same route.

S. Well sometimes it seemed that they deliberately put the artist in a position where their work didn't work anymore which we don't. The show of theirs that was iconic for me was Chockerfuckingblocked. There were over a hundred artists in the show and in the tiny little space works were almost on top of each other and there were little works everywhere. They were particularly pushy at making your work seen irrelevant.

R. Well, I don't know if it became irrelevant, I'm having to say this because I showed there!

J. (inaudible)

R. I think in a bizarre way some people's work really contributed to how you read the work, Terry Atkinson for instance did a show there, it was a real dialogue with what they wanted to do with the space.

S. Yes, that was one of his most important shows in my mind.

R. Yes, a really fundamentally important show and I think in a sense they've now found the right kind of zone for what they're doing because distributing the work via post means that for each project the conceptual apparatus behind it has to be taken into account beforehand, rather than them imposing something on a work that already exists.

S. Mm.

R. It is perhaps similar to how you've found a path through issues that you've had. i-cabin(texts) becomes something that the artists is aware of.

S. Perhaps, I learned a lot from Jeffery Charles Gallery. The one main thing that I took from viewing their projects is that they weren't afraid to include themselves. There was a point where I was very unsure of doing that. In the same way that I didn't want to show our friends and be pigeonholed in that way, I was just as certain that I didn't want to show ourselves but they reminded me that the reason why we opened the gallery was because we wanted to start a space we would be happy to show. The way that they were comfortable to flow in and out of their own projects was reassuring and I definitely took a lot of that on board. They were in what I'd consider a sort of trendy position, they seemed openly tongue in cheek with what they were doing, whereas I think we try and position ourselves a little bit more sincerely or maybe humbly I think but that probably doesn't come across.

R. Yes, I think that's funny because I don't think they'd ever think that or wanted to have that label put on them, I think the problem with it is that you get typecast by other people in terms of what you do.

J. Or in how they read what you do.

R. I mean that you become successful in some sense and people suddenly see it as your being successful because it's the cool or the trendy thing.

S. I think they were simply doing something, and they were doing it very well, and maybe that doesn't look good. Maybe it's better to make mistakes.

R. Maybe we could open it up to questions from the audience, if anyone's got any questions.

Audience Member. I have two questions. What's your definition of curators seeing as you dislike the term?

S. Well, I stopped calling myself a curator of i-cabin, in fact now I call us co-directors. It was through a conversation with Richard Birkett and Adrian Hermanides (he's an artist that's worked with us on projects). We were talking about the position of being a young curator which is something that, in the film, Richard kicks back against. It was really his definition of a curator as someone who uses artworks as a palette or as a set of tools to make a point. I think there are a few different schools of curation, of course there's lots of different ones, but there's a couple of lazy ones. One of which is having an idea and then amassing a load of previously finished works to present that idea and I think that's what he considered a curator to be. That's really the first time I asked myself what the generally accepted definition of the term was. That's basically how it happened so it's really his definition of curating that I'm digging my heels in against not mine.

J. What's your definition?

S. Well, I know a lot of really good curators and I always got a lot out of working with them, as I was saying before, because they challenge what you do and because not only do they talk about what you do they actually shove something else down your throat! That's what good curators are like.

Audience Member. Just being really devil's advocate, I've worked with a lot of curators and I am actually a curator myself in a previous life even though I now do marketing here at Wysing, a lot of curators are frustrated artists, they scratch the surface of making art and they've all done art school and then for whatever reason they haven't carried on, and this is real devil's advocate stuff, but because it's the context we're in would you say a lot of artists are frustrated curators?

J. I wouldn't. I think that people who actually make work see work very differently to people who just view art. I think it's very important that artists put on shows, they're always going to be quite singular to what they're interested in artistically; with curators it will be as well. Maybe it's just from the kind of work I make, but there's something a bit more physical

about the making of the work that makes you take other work into consideration more and see it through another process.

S. I think artists want to be everything, I read in an architecture magazine the other day that all artists want to be architects and all architects want to be artists and it's exactly the same thing. All artists want to be architects and musicians and writers and it's having that taste of wanting to have a hand in everything which is why art is so interesting because they can be writers or publishers or filmmakers. They can do all these different things.

RB. Can I mumble?

SC. Yeah you should mumble, that's what you do apparently.

R. there was me hoping for an introduction!

Laughter

R. no you don't have to, its fine i'll do the introduction. Urrr Hello everybody, welcome to our little discussion, urm, hopefully a discussion, I run urr a gallery space in London called Whitechapel Project Space with Maria here, and urm i know Sebastian and Juliette who run i-cabin urm I've known them for a good five years or so i spose(?) through mutual acquaintances , friends and then through having also shown as an artist myself with them and urm kind of had an ongoing discourse with them i spose about what it is to run an artist run space. Urm, So we're just gonna, i'm going to ask them a few questions, get them to expand a bit on this show perhaps and also their practice in general and the space i-cabin. So very simplistically, maybe they can start by telling us how they came to set up the space and a bit about what the agenda was when they first started i-cabin ?

JB. ok umm well it started started up, we've been running a course of shows for about 2 years now, umm the space Seb came across one day. Um we sort of...when we first left college in 2003 we wanted to start up a place with artists studios that had a galley as well but kindof that the practicalities of that seemed alot, there's a lot more responsibility to have tenants nn so we kind of abolished the idea of the studios and just decided to set up this like project space that we kindof run. Urr And it was more, it was a reason for, after leaving artschool i spose, we kind of didn't want to jump right into that whole commercial world of having to get your work out and be showing in other galleries; there wasn't really any galleries i guess that we were interested in or would want to have our work in the context of and we thought...all of our friends and everyone we'd sort of met through that time...as like a way of creating a place to sort of continue what we'd been doing at college i guess and meeting artists n going to other spaces n so...yeh showing work still, getting to work with artists, n putting on shows with them, that's what i....

S. yeah, um i mean there's definitely a thing about , about opening a space with regards to um trying to position yourself, like, within an artworld um with regards to our space i mean i wouldn't like to say that it opened kind of accidentally um but i mean we had had this idea to open this kind of yeah collective urr like arts organisation as a kind of dream but that had been that i mean that was well abandoned by the time we opened i-cabin, i mean that was kind of 2 years before that we toyed with that idea you're and obviously that was...that's were our original group that we were gonna set up the space came from you know, our kinda core little people but umm, we kind of stumbled across across this place and at first even when we had the gallery we didn't even know what we were gonna do with it (j chuckles) did we? And whether we were gonna

J. it sat there for about...

S. i mean obviously there was always gonna be a gallery there at the time but...

what sort of gallery it would be or if it was more going to be an office from which we based a kind of practice um which was gonna be both our artistic practice and then y'know another practice y'know wasn't necessarily defined at the time.

R. but how did you...because y'know that thing about starting up an artist run space u have a very clear idea in your head that its an artist run space n not...not that your starting a commercial gallery for instance which you'd do under such a different...remit; so how do you see it operating alongside your own work and how...how could you...you were gonna manifest that as an artist run space rather than a commercial gallery for instance?

S. well...urm.....

J. its more for a place where ...

S. i mean its a project space...right so i mean a project space...it happens to be artist run urm but i mean that that was what we wanted to set up and then what, i mean what we thought a project space was you know was involved to a certain degree with um artists conducting a mini, a mini-residency (?), site specific work and to be honest i mean

J. ...made for...

S. it was it was only ever going to be ...at first it was gonna be a gallery um..cough.. and urr and i mean with regards to how that fitted into our creative practice i mean...My individual practice has elements of that ...of that kind of thing going on but that wasn't really the issue at the time and urr

R. yeh i mean was it more about the people that you knew around you for instance cos i mean that's something that you said Juliette is that you wanted to discover other...i mean its quite similar feeling that i have about running a space is that you erm empathise with people around you ...their work and you want to find a different way to engage with it other than just standing back and viewing it in somebody else's gallery for instance

J. hmm..also to carry on people actually making stuff ..to give them a space which they don't have to pay for but they kind of can work...and you get ...you can talk about you actually... it continues what i guess they base artschool on or that kind of educational process of actually discussing what your gonna do and why you gonna do it and having like a place to do that that you don't have to pay for i guess.

S. i mean i see the whole thing as twofold as there's one part of opening a young gallery and any any anybody who takes part in that...of course you have your core group, you have your peer group and um there's always a little bit of y'know, you wanna run a space cos you wanna support whatever you consider to be what's going on and obviously you consider what's going on to be what's taking place around you but then at the same time i mean even then i felt that our peer group included um y know some international artists n n even then it was quite wide so it definitely wasn't...it wasn't about supporting just our friends, an i mean i always had a serious problem with that, which juliette didn't have an she always thought that that was yknow a nice part of the practice

J. mm

S. whereas i was like...always kindof strayed away from that n going, ynow the last thing we want to is just show our mates but then at the same...our peer group was pretty big then

R. but is that to do..

J. but things like yknow their kindof friends of friends and things like stretch out

R. yeah . is that to do with ambition though cos yknow there is that thing where you first start up a space is your, its am amateur activity almost but that that kindof desire to not really want to be pigeonholed by just showing your friends is perhaps about having a wider idea of where it might go and of what it might become

J. and you don't want to cancel other people out guess you dont want to be seen as really cliquey or just totally introverted into your scene or like your close...

R. so how did you choose people that you were showing to start of with, i mean what was your kindof agenda in terms of the kindof practice that you wanted to see in the space?

S. well i mean the agenda was kindof grew up as we went along, just with anywhere else i guess, and then by about...show 5 we had very kindof rigid erm yknow agenda but ...initially it was just showing stuff that was important ,right? (to j.) and then, i mean, which is why you cant just limit it, well obviously you don't limit it in any way but why i though it was very important to not only work from the artists that were like around us even though there was quite a few of

those but i mean there's important art that we wanted to show and yknow most of the people that u kindof dreamed about showing we didn't know.

R.mm

S. i guess like i mean

J.mmm but that comes

S. there's something in that isn't there about ...um u mentioned ambition in a way but just yknow...working with people is what its about .

R. yeh i mean its quite a difficult thing to define because the notion, the artist run space is kindof ...the myth thats exists around it now yknow post kindof yba if you like, urm yknow how artist run spaces were so successful in becoming feeder systems for commercial galleries in the 90s, that its almost difficult to get away from a notion of ambition when running a space because urm because so many spaces of of that of the artist run independent variety opened up

about 9 mins 5

with the sole intention of 'we wanna be successful artists , we're gonna yknow urr kindof improve our own career and improve the career of others around us by having a space and showing ourselves n' other people as much as we can,

S mm

R. n yknow it's a level of ambition that's tied into that, urm, I don't see i-cabin as having that sensibility at all because umm I don-t really think it started off with the need to do that it felt like it didn't...it was just about showing work

J. mmm

R. but I'm uncertain about how that works

S. mm (cough)

Starting at 10minutes in.

S. yeah right, I didn't think, yeah I see what you mean, I didn't think you meant personal ambition, and um and I don't think we opened it...with regards to

J. no

S. promoting our own careers as artists although you know at the same time theres 2 ways to go about doing it and um y'know

J. its also to continue like being interest...like just making it n like when you carry on speaking to other artists it only aids your own practice because it kindof infl...y y'know inspires you to do stuff yourself cos you're helping with, not helping but working with other people n it sortof, that can be very influential like back upon yourself cos you sortof think when these projects become possible that then the space...it only makes you think what you would do in that space or something, I spose which um, I guess would be why it ends up being like involved with your own practice...being in the gallery.

R. mm

S. I mean sortof...people always talk about I mean as a young artist literally when your just starting to make work n' I mean at that time and I think in every generation there's kindof this idea about ...yknow, having or being shown by a gallery, having some kind of representation, um and I mean I did a talk a little while ago which was called "you don't have to be that sort of artist" and that sort of artist is the artist that kind of yknow is one that comes out and starts making work and is kindof chasing that career path yknow that we were talking about the other day that kind of set career path which which follows all these little markers which says yknow, you're on the right road n um and n yknow I think we always had something against doing that. I don't really know what it was but u it just seemed a lot more appropriate for.....people like us to...I mean, why wait around for that, and also there's that thing that partly we opened the gallery because we couldn't realistically think of many

other galleries , or any other galleries in London that that yknow we would want to be represented by or wanna show with

J. yeah that time it just felt...stale I suppose because the whole knock from the yba's I think it, n then sortof the generation that came after that n then it just felt a bit flat, in the stuff that we we're seeing.

S. I mean now we know a lot more..about...

J. yeah I mean also we were very naïve

S. ...galleries that were there at the time that we didn't even know about , that obviously know you know about but

R. yeh

S. ...but like when ya when ya just like coming into the scene or whatever it is yknow you only know...you know what you know

J. mmm

R. hmm..but there is something in that, in that um yknow you're , what you're talking about perhaps is the fact that when youre showing work with somebody that's constructing, what your practice is as much as your actual work yknow and you have a sensibility..you want that to be echoed in the place that youre showing in

J. mm

R. cos it ends up aiding what you do and

J. yeh

R. um contributing to it

J. we also wanted to make the point that...they they were to make work for the works sake rather than for selling's sake I spose which was also a huge part of it that it wasn't...that the, yknow like the reason why we set up the wall...the rules of the space n things was to try n avoid someone's studio practice that exists within their studio that they just continue with without ever stepping outside that they yknow to avoid that, they actually had to think about what the space involved and what they were actually going to do in that space rather than just ur picking up a picture and putting it in another space I spose .

R. so what were the rules of the space say a bit more about how that happened

J. urr the first year was well no work on the walls was the first one

S. that was really the only fixed rule wasn't it

J. yeah...and that the work had to be made for the space.

R. why why did you come up with that...rule that, that there was no work on the walls?

S. well I said to you earlier I mean it was almost.... that was a rule that we attached to year one, but that only appeared probably in show 3

J. but it was like I mean 1. The walls don't really take any weight ..ha.. which is like a big reason

R. flimsy walls! Flimsy walls

J. but they do actually take more now that we thought they did when we first got the space. And 2 because of , like, we didn't want someone to bring in a painting, put it o the wall n that would be the show.

S. I'll tell you what it was...its cus umm cos like the first few well like probably most of them ...the walls are , the majority of the walls are this dodgy kindof fake would panelling and the space looks like a an old sortof taxi rank or something like that, n some walls which are this pin-board which is just painted white so um what we didn't want was for people...its ws it ws, too easy to come in and hang really clean work on these walls and then say...oh yknow i-cabin they've just got some dodgy wood panelling n n its yknow that urr know it would just be too , appear to be too,,trying to be

R. mm

S. ynow

J. It'd be very quick I think, like once they'd kindof got that

S. its too easy

J. Yeah.

15:08

S. because what we like about the space , like the fabric of the space has always been really important, that's why it's a project space and that's why um we intend people to kindof negotiate it but we just thought that that would be a really immediate way of pigeonholing ourselves as a gallery which isn't, which doesn't look like other galleries

R. mm

S. so we thought, keep all the work off that for a year or so and we thought it'd be a great achievement to be able to know we had the first year program without...

R. of just video work!

J. (laughter) it wasn't just video work.

S. and rules are there to be broken too, I mean they were kind of bypassed and...n shifted around

J. yeah, and people would always test us

R. yeh

J. ...for that like, they yknow a lot of artists wanted to

R. I mean its it seems that was a kindof important point ..umm..setting up constraints for for the people that you were working with but also for yourselves as well, umm I mean there's that point also with what you've done over the last couple of years that there's an important point where suddenly you become...i-cabin becomes an artistic identity,

S. mm

R. and that , n that maybe stems from that setting up of kinda constraints is that it becomes a conceptual project rather than just like here's a gallery we want you to show in it

S. mm

R. umm what what was the point at which you, did you make a decisive decision that this was gonna be...

S. a decisive decision?

R. a decisive decision yeah,

J. laughter

R. ... did you make a decision that it was gonna be a conceptual project in the sense that you were gonna ...frame yourselves as i-cabin and and show as artists rather than just having a gallery.

S. no. well I mean, there was a point when we made that decision , but it was um (coughs) ...it was invented by someone else ..basically

J. mm

S. the idea of us being a gallery was invented by um, well not invented but kindo err

J. proposed to us

S. yeah yeah

J. brought to the attention of I spose basically

S. yeh it followed the first ZOO which..(to audience): this project in the middle of the room is the first ZOO project, that's what we we kindof built for that so it kindof fitted exactly into the stand we had there and ur (cough) because we had this kindof appearingly arbitrary rule of having nothing on the wall at the space and that everything had to be made specifically for that space that it would be ridiculous for us to not carry on those rules to the other site , seeing as we considered taking part in the ZOO, which is an art fair in London for anyone..who don't know...yknow, that was just an offsite project for us, so we took the same rules so we ended up having this kindof singular sculptural structure um which affectively was our strategy for showing yknow, a group of artists on the stand n n still maintaining what we'd been doing urm it wasn't until we installed it urm that it occurred to

us that the majority of people were reading it as one artists work erm and in fact we yknow we kindof , even of the back of that, or did we come up with it before, we priced it as one...

J. no we came

S. ...work

J. yeh we decided to price it as one piece...but I mean we didn't a , we sortof came up with it at the fair cos the whole fair was sortof...an odd experience anyway, because we'd sortof put ourselves in this really commercial situation...I don't think any of us had got a clue what what we were doing there or like why, n' when you like saw all of the other stands around you made a lot , like we sortof realised that ow, what is this! Like, it was kindof scary so we came up with this idea that if anyone did want to buy it we sortof, hadn't even really thought mm we thought people might buy it but we didn't really think that we would, we just thought...come and look at it n

R. but by pricing the work as a group did you want to remove the possibility of people buying individual work?

J. well no because you could buy it individually..

R. you could buy it..

S. the idea was that if you bought the individual works urm it would end up being a lot cheaper

J. than if you bought

S. I mean I think the total of each of the individual works priced at what they were priced at you could have bought, I think there's 9 is there, and you could have bought them for £19,400 I think, but we priced the whole piece at £45,000 so I mean like in theory a collector could have bought them individually...

J. (laughs)

S. and then reassembled them back in their own home to kindof make our piece but it wouldn't be our piece

R. cheaper

S. ...yeh, and they would've got it for a third of the price,

J. it would be every artists piece but like yeh

S. so its like they they were in the position where they could choose whether they were buying like an i-cabin work, or if they were y'know collecting individual artworks

R. mm

S. I mean (mumble)

R. but then from from that did you, I mean obviously what you're saying about somebody else made the decision that was what you were essentially...

S. yeh well I mean we can go onto that,, that was a a one of the curators that came to that and had read it as an individual work but obviously looked a bit further and found out that it wasn't ...an then yknow, knew the gallery and a little bit about the rule systems um ...I mean the long and the short of it is that he proposed us , which is something that he's done before for other people , he proposed us for Beck's Futures as an artistic unit and and that was the first time that we were forced into actually considering being that because obviously we were in a position where for Beck's we had to propose something under the name of i-cabin as opposed to under the name of like our individual practices as it was i-cabin that had been nominated so, I mean that.....that was very problematic for us and at the same time kindof exciting, and yknow I think in those kindof flaws where something becomes something or it isn't that's obviously where interesting .. a space where interesting things can happen

R. mm

S. so we had to invent some i-cabin works..

J. yeh which kindof

S. which made us address what it was that made this an i-cabin work or not n and then everything that follows of has kindof stemmed from that..

R. its its yeh it's a strange paradox that you have a curator kindof deciding that you as a curatorial practice are actually an artistic practice an and yknow maybe you never thought of yourselves as a curatorial practice in the first place because you're an artist run space but then isn't that curating anyway...?y'know its...

S. well we call it program directing don't we

J. yeh

R. program directing??(laughs)

J. yeah because like you don't choose the work that exists already I spose like everything's..

S. yeah we don't curate and in fact we try very hard not to curate as much as possible

R. but if you're not curating where do the rules come from surely you're..yknow curating is in a sense imposing rules upon work that already exists

S. I don't think that, I don't I mean that's not what I read the practice of curating as I mean I don't think that's what curators do

21:55

R. ok not..in reverse of that... what you're doing by imposing rules is u yknow, fits into what we ur what we know now as being creative curating if you like .yknow that by adding something additional to peoples work that isn't there in the first place um forcing them into certain decisions that they wouldn't normally make you're exercising some kindof curatorial role in that sense.

J. I spose your, I think you're creating limits, sortof like stpping...but yeh I mean I never really thought of that as curating or as what I see curating as I spose

S. I mean if that's your definition of it that's more what what we have, we have done that in other projects...and more in er Cabin Baggage , (to audience)which is the project up there for Tanya's yknow we we set a project and in a way cabin baggage could be a metaphor for the way that i-cabin works in that you you we kindof set a physical parameter and then commission works from artists...and they deal with or not deal with that parameter as they see fit , and like I said all the rules at i-cabin were kindo yknow ...it's basically just handing them a foil which they can yknow use

J. then do ..

S. either in their defence or ...yknow so many people turned the rules back on us

J. mm and yeah ended up quite...

S. and that's the beauty of the exchange between you and an artist.

R. yeah

J. yeah and that's the reason why we work with those kind of artists I spose the ones that almost challenge...that you knew were gonna

R. yeah

J. sort of think..hopefully a bit

23:27

S. I spose it reflects our interest in that we show artists that we think are important and the work that we think is important...yknow, happens to be work which...is is open to that kind of um those kind of games

R. hmm, I mean that's what I was going to ask in a way is how do, how do artists that you invite to take part ..cos it's a different umm situation if you-re an artist, being asked to show at i-cabin where you know that you've got two rooms tat have got funny wood panelling n chipboard than being asked to be in an i-cabin offsite project...

smm

J. m

R. and you know its gonna be i-cabin yknow..not that your gonna be wiped out of the equation(cant hear) but how do people normally respond to that..kindof the knowledge that that's the situation...that theyre being fed into?

S. it's a good question, I mean at the first, the first project which is the zoo project in the middle, ur I mean that was never an issue because at that point that was..

J. i-cabin wasn't i-cabin I spose

S. and then urm yeah, the later, the later one which is that shelving up there ...(to audience, I'll just tell you what the project was ..which was that that box on the left is a isa box made to the exact proportions far a American airlines cabin ur restriction size bag and because we taking part in this show in newyork , and then we tried to collect together a kindof mini sortof museum of works by people around i-cabin u yknow and just, the only agenda was they had to fit...all the works had to fit into this box and we were kindof...u..alloting people space

J. yerh

S. depending on what they proposed

J. yeh

S. and what they wanted, urr and how did they deal with that? Well to be honest after making that work um yknow like I our practice has changed in response to that n and that's part of the reason ...like it's a reaction to us having made that work that we've made this film , wich is our kindof newest i-cabin project, um cos I think that the artists reacted very well and in that situation some of them really tackled the issues that we were imposing upon them urr some of them , because we asked them to did kindof miniaturisations of their normal practice and urr through doing that we really started to question... what i-cabin was . and if, if setting these kind of rules actually improved the work , that you got, or if it didn't,, n we were always happy to kindof throw a spanner in the works weren't we um into an artists practice urm, but I mean now..even with regards to the gallery I think we have a looser approach,

J. we became very aware of like, the fact that artists may or may not want to work in the gallery if they think that we had so much control over what they actually make and with some of the projects , with there rules are set it's...they have these limits and I guess yeah, we sortof wanted to loosen it up at the gallery to make sure that they knew that it is about them and their work rather than about what we're setting them...(laughs) or something that's kindof like..yeh what we realised I guess through doing these offsite projects

R. I mean its quite an aggressive act, that's what I quite like about it, its urm yknow, we we we're talking about like urm , the post YBA mythology of the artist run space in the 90's , becoming a ground for artists who then became really commercially successful (?) was that yknow the kind of original socialist idea or that kindof communal idea was that the space which is..open for people to show in and ykonw yknow and its gonna give people the best place to show their work possible, um and what you're kindof doing in a sense , by imposing so much control over it n' almost making it..not that persons work anymore, its its aggressive and thn antagonistic towards that and I think yknow, I don't see that as like what you are necessarily trying to do I don't see you as robbing things from artists but there's that thing as an artist when you show at a space ..the authorship is all important to you its yknow you want to be seen as the figure

27:50

R. ...behind it, and then what you're doing is kindof taking it somewhere else, not necessarily degrading the work but you're kindof erm not allowing them that whole kindof freedom, so you're not allowing that process to continue on of feeding...

S. ahh mm yeh, um partly I mean I kinda...well we have these two, well theres a year one and a year two programme n partly year two programme was was really um setting ourselves

um a kind of urr idea that we would work with more established people um and really give them what we considered to be an opportunity or yknow just..help or stick them in a scenario whereas they they would have the opportunity to work outside of their their normal practice, um and to be honest yknow most of the artists that we worked with that were part of that year two programme were were kind of eager to do that

J. mmm

S. cos I think its more , I mean these are people who are kind of er, in a routine of showing in in commercial spaces , are represented and yknow and ur and I think they more felt the pressure of having to follow their own practice

J. yeh

R. mm

S. whereas with us its almost like a breath of fresh air for them and they can show things ..in fact it it gives them , it allows them to show things that they wouldn't show otherwise, maybe because its like a smaller work or maybe it's a quirky work..

J. yeah its something that they feel awkward with or yknow wouldn't be able to show with their dealer or in commercial..because ther're , aren't quite sure how they feel with it I spose or

S. it takes the responsibility off them to a certain degree,

J. yeah

to say yknow, yeh I did something at i-cabin, I worked with those people and yknow..

J. because it becomes like about all three of us or however many people we work with

S.yeh

J. yeh but they seem to be really like, yeh they want to do it

S. absolutely, that's where the interesting things happen,

J. mm

R. mm

S. so I think that's more what it is..not not that we were forceful on them but just that we kind of like allowed them to have a sideline and I think that that's something that we considered, um, an important role

R. mm I mean does that, what u said before about the cabin, cabin baggage project , it's quite nice about the hut project piece is that, yknow, it does to you what you've done to them, yknow it reverses the kinda kinda constraints that you put on them and forces you to make a decision yknow in a thing where they had to make a decision

S. mm

R. (inaudible)

S. (inaudible) ...they're testing our..

R. yeah

S. ..peramiters um they they like proposed a piece which just blatantly went...completely against the project

R. yeh

S.and obviously we had sorta like conceptual differences

J. and fell out! (laughter)

S. no not at all!

R. and never spoke to them again..!

S. no it's good I mean that's what you're supposed to have.

R. um, in terms of this show I mean how ur this is kind of another level of that kind of erm I dunno, positioning yourself, no having an identity cos that you're...this is some kind of retrospective

S. yeh

R. for a gallery that's..thats..for a artistic project that's been going for two years

S. mm hmm

R. there's kind of a lot of irony to that yknow

J. (laughs)

R. its kindof its its also quite cheeky in some ways yknow

S. mmhmm

R. how do you see that , what was the idea behind it ..this kindof show?

S. (coughs) well again I mean i-cabin's in a position of having a..yknow, always enjoyed working with curators, n I think this is when curators operate at their best is when they kindof throw a spanner in to your works

J. yeh

S. which is kindof I guess what we think we're doing

J. which is what Seb (Ramirez) did to us isn't it.

S. so you can basically blame Sebastian (R) for that , he asked us to take part as urr as an art group or whatever, whatever kindof collective, and that's not ..i I mean reeling from the Tanya, Tanya Bonakdar piece, or the cabin baggage piece urm reeling in terms of m I don't know if we were kindof happy with where we'd gone to um yknow we were kindof asked to um. Yeh and I mean we ..basically we've made this work (indicates What is it?) for this shown this this is obviously the title work for the show What is it? Urr we saw this as a way of , to have like erm ..conducting our practice without actually having to um y yknow impose rules on kindof on the physical manifestations of an artists work

R. m

S. um so so we end up with some kind of group show of I think...ideas which is our kindof answer to ourselves really, umm n then

J. well originally we just wanted the one film wasn't it but I spose it was in...throughout the conversation with Seb (R.) that it became like it, and and him yeh putting the like giving I guess.

S. he challenged us

J. yeh, challenging us to maybe

S. to represent ourselves or our practice urm, because I think generally..

J. which we were uncomfortable with

S. generally we we we kindof do very very kindof I guess tightly structured thing..that's what i-cabin does n I mean obviously we have our practice as individual artists urm but I mean it ...the idea of i-cabin being an artist in itself is so messy that normally we reflect them in these in these things um so I mean to put more than one i-cabin project together in a room uh I mean has been an eye opener for me

J. it also makes you see them all much ..like, there is a definite aesthetic ..(laughs) like every project..

R. yeh this is what we were talking about the other night isn't it that

J. which I don't think we realised

R. or maybe yeh

J. I guess we did because it was always us and the artists that we were working with kindof coming in and out of the projects ...there does tend to be sortof a core of people ...

R. but it quite a, it's quite a conceptual aesthetic but it's also it's a lot based around spatial constraints I mean is that, that part of your own practice in in some way or ...I mean the aesthetic that you have here is kindof it has so many different reference points in terms of conceptual practices , the way that conceptual art from the 70s kindof looks and then also some kindof added level of the display that that kindof yknow...shiny surfaces aesthetic , does that kindof feed into what you do individually or is that how, where does that come from?

J. I don't really know if you can escape that that sortof have our... I mean ... the funny thing is that our practices kindof couldn't be more different I spose, which is maybe how... this comes from the conversation with both of what we do n it sort of ends up being something else again bit there's definitely elements, I'd say, of yeh (inaudible) both practices.

S. and then even within these projects like, our individual work is represented as well, is I mean, this is where it starts getting really scruffy is that yknow our our own works are then put within the concept of our kindof ur combined urm practice of commissioning other people yknow I mean it's really a conceptual minefield but then there's no , you can't escape the fact that that our aesthetic is is represented, or the aesthetic of our personal work is represented in these projects yeah.

R. mm ok, I mean that that kindof asks a lot about the content of the actual work and whether the content ends up kindof slipping into the whole piece other than standing on it's own I mean, I don't know I'm just trying to think cos a lot of the people I know who you work with are not as clean and defined in the ideas or they're or they're kindof formal aesthetics as it becomes when they're showing in this context

S. in the projects?

R. yeh, so I mean you're...it's again that question of you're not taking anything away from those people I don't think but then urm

J. (inaudible)

R. yeah but the the content sortof slips into ...yknow, like adam for instance, Adam Latham who is kindof quite a scatological artist for want of a better word, he's kindof like urm his work is its drawing and its kind of frantic it's all over the place urm, and you've shown him a couple of times well you've shown him at i-cabin and you've shown him in projects that you've done urm, I wonder what I mean where does his work become conceptually um part of your work or does it become positioned by you I a different place than it is normally

J. mmm

S. yeh it's a good question

J. I guess its um, to become the author of the work isn't it but that's where that fits...I mean not deliberately

S. no I don't think that, I don't think that applies to this scenario at all .. not with , I mean if you actually talking about HOW did we work with an artist like that then yknow I think that the place I mean he is exactly one of those artists whose um whose work will just yknow...look so well in i-cabin

J. then he like, proposed to us the idea of the show he wanted and asked if he, n the other two artists could put this show in that space

S. he curated that show

J. so he kindof put it together which again took like a lot off. We kindof let them do it but also not (laughs) at the same time a sponse you have a say in so many ways in what they actually chose to do but then I guess...

S. well its hard to , its hard to really say or reflect how he, how he worked with us because, I mean like you say he's kindof a mentally frantic artist but then at the time when the structure...the outside if i-cabin was a bit different so at this time you couldn't really tell where the space began and where the outside yknow, ended and err yknow he just kinda ran wild through the building

J. yek I sponse because these projects are very much set again, they're very different to what goes on in the gallery

S. yeh they're very specific aren't they

37:44

R. I mean that's whats really kindof interesting in this situation, as someone who knows i-cabin the gallery to be presented with , so clearly with i-cabin the practice is quite a weird scenario

J. mm

R. because it is two different things entirely n umm yknow this this one is actually an active...a practice that is so...yknow it sits above and looks down on on things in many ways it kindof erm yknow its its commentary is about what it is to curate or or what it is to

frame peoples work perhaps, I don't know I'm kindof looking for a something there , I don't know whether I'm going the wrong way but umm that's what I kindof find exciting about it is that the the work doesn't really matter anymore, to a certain extent obviously its paramount within i-cabin the space but in this context it feels like its its more about what it is to be in the position that you're in and have an identity that you have

S. hmm

R. and work with other people and exchange ideas could it not be...

S. I think it...

J. I think it's completely that isn't it?

S. yeh and it even touches on that idea doesn't it

J. mm

S. that idea of err of yknow the kindos comedy of of what group shows are and the yknow and he's talking about this point of how every artist in themselves they have kindof different practices and and he's talking about um artists producing work that they only produce for group shows and yknow every and the difference in your practice for a solo show and for a group show I mean that's kindof even reflecting , similar to what, whats ended up taking place here ..i mean there's artists work that's been produced for our projects which they wouldn't have produced if they were doing something completely different

R. mmm

S. I mean they're they're twofold in their practice in the same way that we are um I don't say, I wouldn't say that the work becomes completely unimportant umm and in one way I guess that's what... why we kicked back against being called curators even um because yknow there is, with some curators yknow theres a sence of that of of like urr the show being pushed as as a kindof conceptual space umm by which they've used other people to do that and ..i mean I guess its its ...some of our pieces are could be considered in that same light but I think hopefully knowingly and urr and I don't know even how comfortably we sit with that mainly I'm talking about that thing over there (indicates cabin baggage)

(laughter)

which yknow is definitely a thorn in our side

(laughter)

but its an important, its definitely an important part of what we've done

R. yeh

J. yeh

R. I spose the problem that , well, the way in which this works is that um it does present itself as avoiding certain things and being uncertain about certain things rather than fulfilling a role that we're kindof familiar with as an art audience it sits somewhere else and therefore um it doesn't..some of these things don't matter so much that normally do matter, those kind of issues of curating are pulled away a bit this doesn't feel like curating in that sence,

J. mm

R. I don't know

J. I spose that, I mean the film was a big part of that wsnt it because we sort of made it as a group show in a film almost off the back of our last project being the one for new york as a kindof feeling in this weird position of putting together these these projects and it's a way of , I mean we've been wanting to make it for a while anyway but then..

R. as a way of opening up again rather than ?

J. yeh , or to move it somewhere, so its not just like , for here we didn't just invite another group of artists to do another piece of work its like , although it ends up being a piece of work but it's a different way of getting the actual artists I guess to appear in it rather than a work that represent s what they are talking about or what what they feel.

42:06

J. and not even just artists, to to open it up to yknow musicians and critics and curators n all the kind of people that we

S. cos we've changed our practice basically and and this project (What is it?) and the one on the wall (zoo6) are are actually made by yknow a completely different organisation, in that umm yeah we kindof shifted our stance so whereas those two are made by i-cabin this, the set of posters which is considered a publication and and this film which is considered a publication is made by i-cabin(texts) which is urm (laughter)

which is a publishing company (laughing) ur rum by me and Juliette so I mean we we've urr we've kindof , the way that we consider ourselves in this...in these two works urm is something that I sit a lot more happily with , so these are hmm

R. what does that kindof little change in name do? If you're now i-cabin(texts) or there is a sep separate project called i-cabin(texts)

S. mm

R. how does that enable you to step outside into a different space?

S. Well it's a it's a very simplistic one in that urm urr i-cabin(texts) um retains or could be considered an author, which is what Juliette was kinof touching on before, and umm i-cabin(texts) urmhas the possibility of of authorshipof a work which is slightly different I think to being the artist of a work. So urm yknow its kindof that that move in how we judge ourselves from a kind of artistic one to a literary one urm

J. and I guess to make ourselves more absent in many ways in the two publications, so to sortof yeh, so it's not so much about us it's about the people that are appearing in

R. mm

J. in these works as part of i-cabin(texts) rather than like...i-cabin

R. so does i-cabin(texts) not not impose the same kindof restrictions that i-cabin did

J. it still has rules (laughter)

S. Not really I mean i-cabin(texts), (inaudible) there aren't any.

Are there? It makes publications and it makes books whether they appear as film or in a cardboard tube.

J. and thay have to be like, they can't, they wouldn't ever happen at the gallery would they, S. well..

J. its like i-cabin(texts) is something is off, is outside the...so the gallery sortof becomes more of a gallery basically, or nore of a project space

S. I kinda disagree with that I thinks its more that offsite things are now produced by i-cabin(texts) not by i-cabin or at the moment they are..i mean we may go back

J. and so we can argue more (laughter)

S. yeah

R. it's obviously in its early stages

J. (laughs) yeh it's still being thought through!

R. No it's funny cos it kindof feels that umm I mean there was a gallery called Jeffery Charles, I don't know if anybody know Jeffery Charles

45:04

R. ...gallery that was, operated just round the corner from the gallery I run with Maria, umm that kindof urr kinda it had a reputation in a sense because of the the idea that the shows it had, it had mainly group shows , it was a very small space umm and the two artists who ran the space umm they imposed very umm strict restrictions on the work in many ways and they.. each show was curated spatially in a different way so they'd, some shows they would build like a , I mean I was in a show there and they built a kindof urr whats the word a mezzanine level in a space that's is like a ...smaller than your space, like 2m X 2m and there's a mezzanine in the middle so you have to like crawl under to get in, and then and as artists we were just like so where does ourwork go? How can we respond to this umm but I mean they they they, it was a really interesting project in many ways, they showed some

really interesting artists and they adapted the space so fundamentally every time that it did become known as an artistic project in a similar way to yours, but when they left that space and they moved on they turned themselves into a essentially a sort of ephemeral sort of activity, publishing activity where you would receive an artwork through the post if you signed up to their mailing list

S. mm

R. and so the artworks that were produced became distributed by post and they, a wide range of different things, y'know dvds kindof cd's

S. mm

R. y'know whatever , lots of different things that were not necessarily... I mean I think that it's interesting how you've plotted a similar path, I mean I think that its different because

S. yeah

R. ...theirs is quite a strict conceit in some ways but urm it is interesting that you're going that same route.

S. Well they were deliberately I mean deliberately put the artist in a position where their work didn't work anymore and urrr I mean, I know I always mention it but urr the show of theirs that was iconic for me was that Chockafuckinblocked, and where basically they, I mean how many artists did they have in that? 300? In this tiny little space works were just on top of them or little works like just everywhere I mean and they they were particularly pushy at making your work seen irrelevant.

R. Well I don't know if it became irrelevant it was, I'm having to say this because I showed there (laughter) (inaudible speech) , no but (inaudible)

J. (inaudible)

R. no but I think in a bizarre way it kindof err some peoples work really contributed to how you read the work, terry Atkinson for instance did a show there, it was a real kindof dialogue with what they wanted to do with the space

S. yeah

R. with what Terry...

S. yeah and that was one of his most important shows too

R. ..needed, yeah really kinda fundamentally important show and urm and I think in a sense that they've found the right kind of zone for what they're doing because distributing the work via post means they each project the the conceptual apparatus behind it it has to take that into account beforehand rather than then imposing something on a work that already exists or

S. mm

R. or yknow isn't really thought through for that rest..y'know constraint which is perhaps similar to what, what, how you've found a path through issues that you've had is that you're y'know i-cabin(texts) becomes something that yknow the artists is aware of for ..

S. No I , I learned a lot from them, I mean what...the one major thing that I took from viewing their projects is that they weren't afraid to to include themselves and urm I mean there was a point where I was very y'now in the same way thay you didn't want to show your friends and be pigeonholed as that I mean even more you didn't want to show yourself but then yknow they kinda reminded me that the reason why you opened the gallery...because we wanted to start a space we would be happy to show with and yknow and the way that they were comfortable to flow in and out of their own projects and err yknow yeah I definitely took a lot of that on board but then the the only thing is that I consider that their, they were in a much more kindof what I consider a sort of trendy position, were sort of they were kindof openly tongue in cheek with what they were doing, whereas umm I think we kinda try and position ourselves um a little bit more sincerely or maybe um kind of humbly I think but I mean that probably doesn't come across yknow that's...we'd like it to be...

R. Yeah I think that's funny because I don't think they'd ever think of or wanted to have that label put on them, I think its urr the problem with it is it gets you get urr typecast by other people in terms of what you do

S. mm

J. or how they read like...yeah

R. I mean its that you become successful in some sense and people suddenly see it as

S. yeh

R. you're successful because its...the cool yknow the trendy thing

S. I guess they were just doing something, and they were doing it very well, and I guess urrr, maybe that doesn't look good

R. (laughs)

S. maybe it's better to make mistakes

R. maybe we could open it up to questions from the audience, if anyones got any questions....

50:10

S. or points

J. or you can just throw things at us.

Audience Member. I have two questions. What's your definition of curators seeing as you kindof...

S. Well I call it, I stopped calling myself a curator of i-cabin, well in fact now I just call it, I call us co-directors because and it was through a conversation with that kid over there (indicates RB) and urm Adrian Hermanides, do you know that guy? He's an artist that's worked with us on projects and urr we were talking about the position of being a young curator which is even something that in the film Rich you kindof kick back against having that that put upon you , urm and it was really his definition of a curator as someone who erm if you like uses artworks as urr a palette or as a set of tools to make a point urm and I think there's a few different schools of curation, or well theres lots of different, but there's a couple of bad ones which is which both kindof take part in that really umm, one of which is kindof having an idea and the amassing a load of kinda previous finished works to urr yknow present that idea and I think that's what he what he considered a curator to be and that's the first time, I mean, I asked him is that what everyone else thinks a curator does and he thought it was so I said right I'm not going to call myself a curator anymore , that's basically how it happened so its really his definition of curating that I'm digging my heals in against not mine...

J. What's yours?

S. ...cos I know a lot of really good curators and I always got a lot out of working with them, like I was saying before, because they challenge what you do urm because not only do they talk about what you do they actually y'know, shove something else...down your throat! That's what good curators are like...

Audience Member. Just being really devils advocate, I've worked with a lot of curators and they've always been...and I am actually a curator myself in a previous life even though I now do marketing here a Wysing, and a lot of curators are frustrated artists, they scratch the surface and they've all done artschool and then for whatever reason they haven't carried on, and this is real devils advocate stuff because it's the context we're in but would you say a lot of artists are frustrated curators?

S. urrr...yeh, I mean

J. I wouldn't

S. no? what do you think?

J. I think that urr like people who actually make work have a different maybe see work very differently I suppose to people who just view art I I guess urm I think its very important that artists put shows on, and they're always gonna be maybe quite sigular to what they're

interested in and I guess with curators it will be as well but I think that they kind of there's something more, I don't know maybe it's just from the kind of work I make but there's something a bit more physical about the the making of the work that makes you take other work into consideration a bit more and see it through another process where than yeah curators are just viewing the work I think, and I think umm, I've forgotten the point.

S. I think artists wanna be everything, I read in an architecture magazine the other day that all artists want to be architects and all architects want to be artists and y'know it's exactly the same thing, all artists they want to be architects and musicians and writers and I mean it's having that taste of wanting to err have a hand in everything which is y'know why art is so good because they can be writers or publishers or filmmakers of y'know you can do all these different things.

54:00

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