

Preface

This publication, *Undone*, appears at the occasion of the solo exhibition *Hans van Houwelingen - Until It Stops Resembling Itself*, hosted by Stroom Den Haag, The Hague, and the exhibition *1:1* (in cooperation with Jonas Staal) at Extra City, Antwerp. *Undone* and *Until It Stops Resembling Itself* do not only appear at the same time, but also form a diptych approaching the work of this prominent artist, whose work is indispensable for any thought on the relation between art and public space, power, and politics.

Stroom Den Haag is a centre for contemporary art and architecture, with a focus on art in public space. It always operates in a disposition aimed at research and interrogation. Naturally, one of its central concerns is the monument, that visual authority in which art and power find each other.

In 2007, Stroom established the program 'nu monument'. According to artist and critic Calin Dan, the monument owes its existence to public space where it is 'staged.' Public space, as he puts it, is an empty shell waiting for monuments to arise, provoking 'monumental activity,' placing otherwise inconspicuous events in a monumental perspective.

Is contemporary art able to create and maintain a collective consciousness; to function as a memory, commemoration, or even glorification of people or events? Is it able to bring together different communities? Can it truly give meaning to publicness - not being purely instrumental, such as embodied by for example community art? Or has contemporary art succumbed to forms of appreciation and identification based on expert knowledge? Too much of an expression of individuality that doesn't bear the collectivity borne by monumentality?

Does society's complexity, the abundant availability of information and public opinion actually still allow univocality and authority? Or should every artwork appealing to society as a monument actually be able to embody complexity, contradictions, dynamics, and fragmentation?

The question whether contemporary art is (still) able to produce monuments allows us to refine our thoughts on the relation between visual culture and publicness. This question harbours, according to our opinion, the significance of 'nu monument.'

Both this publication's protagonist, Hans van Houwelingen, and its main editor, Mihnea Mircan, were heavily involved in the 'nu monument' program. The former lectured, participated in 'Workshop Thorbecke' and the international group exhibition *Since We Last Spoke About Monuments* (all 2008), curated by Mircan.

The majority of Van Houwelingen's works formulates a strong argument against the suppositions and common considerations determining the ideas concerning monumentality, often resulting in fake apparitions facilitating the work of commemoration and remembrance. Moreover, the political aspect of his work is always accompanied by a penetrating reflection on the autonomy of art and the ambitions of 'public art.'

From the perspective of Stroom, Hans van Houwelingen's exhibition fits in a series of 'crucial references.' Artists occupy an important position in Stroom's policy and program. Some of them may be considered as guiding. Stroom pays special attention to these artists, so as to remain focused and inspired, and to publicly exhibit selected topics from their thought and oeuvre and the mutual relations they engage in.

If there would be a common denominator for this publication, it would be *capita selecta*, 'selected topics,' with regard to both the book's structure and the authors' contributions.

I would also like to thank everyone involved in this publication, the authors, the publisher, Mihnea Mircan, Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei, and of course Hans van Houwelingen for their lasting contribution to our frame of reference.

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