



Production Site - Heidi Wood

exhibition March 7 to May 30 2015
opening March 6 at 7 p.m.

From March 7 to May 30, Montreuil's contemporary art center, Le 116, presents *Production Site*, an ever-changing exhibition by Heidi Wood. The artist will work *in situ* throughout the exhibition space. She will also set up her studio there, thus transforming Le 116 into a creative workspace

Leïla de Lagausie: This new project continues your work on the theme of suburbia. How is this subject central to your work? Does it take on a particular meaning in the context of Le 116?

Heidi Wood: As an Australian, suburbia has always had a residential, calm, even boring image for me. So I'm astonished to see the stigma attached to a part of town that I always thought was where everybody lived. In France, suburbia - *la banlieue* - is seen as a breeding ground for social problems. High-rise buildings have become a symbol of crime. Yet they were designed as a new way of living together that was meant to be affordable, rational and sociable. Utopia has turned into dystopia, at least in the minds of the French.

I am interested in the fall-out from modernism, but also the promotion strategies used in tourism. I see my exhibitions as visitors' centers for various destinations. I try to extract the essential of a given place so as to cast it in a positive light. At Le 116, I will study the urban landscape of Montreuil to highlight its qualities. For the first time, I will be working on the visual identity of a particular suburb in dialogue with the people who live there. In this way, I raise the question of how permeable an art center is to its social context.

LL: For this exhibition, you have chosen to use part of the exhibition space as your studio. What are you looking for in this direct confrontation with the public?

HW: It is an ironic look at the demands politicians make on artists to act as interpreters of their practices. I see this experience as an extension of my exhibition *Use-by Date* at Galerie Anne Barrault in late 2008. At the time, I announced that my paintings would be destroyed after five years if they had not been bought. The exhibition changed weekly. I highlighted the art market's voracious taste for the new just as the bottom fell out of the market and a profound change in context was underway. As it turned out, it was the quarter that saw the greatest economic shrinkage since the Depression.

Since then, public money in support of art has become less plentiful. From the Ministry of Culture to municipalities, more and more demands are made of artists to explain their work to the public. Somehow, they are supposed to rub soothing ointments on situations of distress due to the global financial crisis. I have no problem with that. Yet I think it is legitimate to ask how it changes the artworks. I am submitting to this exercise as an attempt at a response. What do I make when I am acting as a social worker for the municipality of Montreuil?

LL: *Production Site* is taking place in a particular context, given that it is Marlène Rigler's last show as the director of Le 116. What do you think of this situation? What are the implications for your exhibition?

HW: The municipality of Montreuil has chosen not to renew the contract of the curator who has been in charge, for only 18 months, of an ambitious international undertaking strongly focused on interaction with the people of Montreuil. The municipal Head of Culture has announced a reorientation in favor of local artists and local concerns. I think it's appalling. I find myself in the strange position of being the exhibition that marks a transition to a much-reduced venture. I hope that *Production Site* will draw attention to just what is being thrown away, and provoke a debate on the relationship between artistic expression and the political issues raised by financing it.

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