



## ARTISTS' DESKS

BY ANDREA ALESSI

Whether they're doing residencies or research, teaching or travel, or whether they're simply responding to the contingencies of affordable and available studio space, artists today are in constant motion. What's the marker of the artist's studio in this peripatetic climate? Is the artist's "desk" a piece of furniture, an anchored object? Or is it something they can pick up and carry away—a laptop or notebook that travels with them wherever they go? Is place paramount, or is it what the itinerant artist brings with them, from space to space, that matters most to their practice?

In this edition of Artists' Desks, four artists whose work will be shown in four different sectors at Art Rotterdam share an intimate look at their workspaces with us. These artists are all on the move, whether they've recently settled into a new studio, like Thijs Ebbe Fokkens and Liz Magic Laser, or have multiple studios spanning countries—or even continents!—like Ola Lanko and Antonio Jose Guzman. Here they share their latest projects and consider how their workspaces influence their practices, telling us what essential items travel with them, and what's incidental.

### **Ola Lanko**

Amsterdam, the Netherlands | Ghent, Belgium



At the moment I work between two places: Amsterdam in The Netherlands and Ghent in Belgium. The two space that I have are very different, not only in sense of content and context but also in the mood they have and put me in. Amsterdam is busy, full of things and objects. Ghent, on the contrary, is quiet, deep, and concentrated. These two have very different energies; in one I am a practitioner and in the other I can find silence, slow down and reflect upon my deeds.

I have had my studio in Amsterdam (shown above) for a longer period so the amount of things that surround me is growing there. Usually these objects are either remains of older works or potential elements for new installations. I often reuse the objects in different works. In the end, to me they are only empty containers that can be filled with meaning. After we project our knowledge, expectations, memory and many other things, they become carriers of ideas. Often I use objects that tell the same story but have different formal execution. In this way I try to disconnect material form immaterial essence of the object. Even though I use a lot of things for my installations I am interested when the object loses its materiality. I try to make this disconnection visible in different ways. There is a collection of golden objects at my studio right now. I like the word golden; it kind of refers only to the surface but doesn't take all the hopes away.

For the past years I've changed four studios. Almost always I fill new space with new things. They are interchangeable to me. I usually don't get attached to things that much. But one of the objects I always take with me and have on my desk is a picture of a happy worker. An old framed photograph of an unknown man at work in some kind of industrial production factory. The man is smiling, he is happy with his job. This picture is an archaic image of labor that disappears. I really like it—it reminds me of the relativity of happiness, our dependency on historical moment we live in and the ability of an image to change its meaning throughout time. All the clocks in my studio are not working, I listen to the radio from different remote time zones and I almost have no daylight inside. All these things help me to remember the multiple possibilities for existence, interpretation, and experience.

*Ola Lanko will be presenting her work in Prospects & Concepts: The Mondriaan Fund Shows Talent in the former distribution center of the Van Nellefabriek during Art Rotterdam.*

### **Antonio Jose Guzman**

Amsterdam & Veluwe, The Netherlands | Panama City, Panama | Dakar, Senegal



It's so complicated to describe my desk, or desks, that I don't know where to start or which desk to show. The above photos are of my favorite desk located in the Veluwe. My real desk is actually more or less my iPhone and a little Moleskine book I bring everywhere. That is where the ideas always originate, especially when I'm sitting on a train, boat, car, or an airplane.

Atelier GF Workstation is divided across four desks: my main desk is in the Veluwe, one of the most beautiful natural forests in the Netherlands. This is where I keep all my work, but I only work there in the weekends and from spring to fall, because it is too cold in the winter; the use of the heating system for such a large space is too expensive. The other desks are in Amsterdam, Dakar, and Panama. The last two are where I spend one or two months a year photographing and sketching the material that I will be developing the rest of the year in the Netherlands. This process is similar to the nomadic cycle of my projects, researching my DNA ancestry.

I know that this all seems very attractive, but in reality I spend most of the time in Amsterdam. Since my son was born two years ago, there is not so much time to move from one place to the other, and I want to be closer to him. So all my projects are thought up, as I said before, on my iPhone and Moleskine notebook.

All of my desks are a portrait of an Afro-futuristic universe. That is because I work using Pan-African principles, DNA, cultural appropriation, and architecture. I believe that everyone should create his or her own universe to go through life. The projects I do in tropical climates are what keep me warm the rest of the year in the west. The ideas and the cultures from Dakar and Panama are of great influence in my work, and it is because of this way of working that my projects develop in such a transcultural way.

Right now during the winter, I'm doing less physical work than the work that I do in the Veluwe studio from spring to fall, using wood, paint, and iron nails. These days I spend mostly in Amsterdam editing videos, looking for grants, cataloguing my portfolio, contacting possible places to display my work, designing installations, Photoshopping, reading books, writing ideas, and parenting our beautiful son.

*Antonio Jose Guzman is presented by Framer Framed, Amsterdam, in Intersections, a sector for international project spaces and artists' initiatives at Art Rotterdam.*

**Thijs Ebbe Fokkens**  
The Hague, The Netherlands





At the moment I'm unpacking and re-settling as I've just moved my studio. But until January this was my "clean space," which functioned mostly as an office, as base of operations. A green wall for clippings, notes, prints and sketches. A white wall and light box for drawing. Big surfaces for paperwork. The more messy 3D work happened outside this space, in the project space of Locatie Z, or on location.

For ten years my studio space and the project space of Locatie Z were based in the magnificent Villa Ockenburgh, beautifully located on the outskirts of The Hague near the dunes and sea. For my work, organization, and process, the specifics of this location has been of enormous influence. Now I—and the other nine artists of Locatie Z—operate out of two temporary locations: a project space in the city center, where we'll realize a monthly program, and studio spaces in the southern periphery of The Hague.

The change of space provides the opportunity to recalibrate certain aspects of my practice, such as the set up of my desk, my base, the use the space. I'm curious about what specific activities lend themselves most naturally to the new space and although it is disruptive, I'm actually looking forward to this process, which will hopefully get up to full speed while realizing my solo project *The Escapist Cookbook* at Locatie Z this March, in which I'll experiment with video and theatrical and performative elements.

*Thijs Ebbe Fokkens is presented by Joey Ramone, Rotterdam, in the New Art section with solo shows by young galleries at Art Rotterdam. Booth 088.*

**Liz Magic Laser**  
Brooklyn, New York



In December I moved into a new studio in Gowanus, Brooklyn, with friends who renovated the floor of a warehouse space. I'm working on my first survey show at Kunstverein Göttingen, Germany, which will take place in March. I make collages from time to time, but this is the first time I'm using it as a tool to plan an exhibition, cutting out images of my work and moving them around on the floor plan. It's making me think about how I use this montage method on many levels. I'm interested in the way early photomontage artists like John Heartfield and Hannah Höch radically recomposed magazine images, the dominant form of mass communication in their era. In my work I'm often trying to dissect and re-imagine news media and political rhetoric. Also scattered on my desk are collage pieces I'm using to devise a new installation for the show that will serve as a site for local high school students to predict future world events through a series of workshops I will lead.

*Liz Magic Laser is presented by Wilfried Lentz, Rotterdam, in the fourth edition of Projections, an Art Rotterdam presentation of large-scale video works by international artists. Booth 106.*

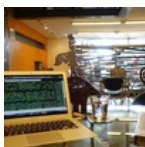
—As told to Andrea Alessi

(Image at top: Antonio Jose Guzman's Veluwe studio in The Netherlands)

Posted by Andrea Alessi on 11/02/16

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