

# Outside / Inside Kiki Petratou

Kiki Petratou is an artist from Greece that combines a practice as a photographer with work as a curator. Together with Hans Bakker she owns gallery JOEY RAMONE (Josephstraat 166 - 168). *Puntkomma* speaks with her at the gallery on the last day of a show by Yasser Balleman, while several befriended artists and art-organisers drop by.

## Outside

text by: Eva Visser

"My parents were initially opposed to my desire to study arts, so I went to Athens and started medical training. I did so for two years and I prepared the exams required for art school in the meanwhile. After my Bachelor in Fine Arts I wanted to do abroad to get a Masters degree. I applied with five institutions, four in England, like Goldsmiths and Plymouth, and the Piet Zwart Institute here in Rotterdam and I got accepted everywhere. I choose to come here because the Piet Zwart is a very small course and I thought it would therefore be more focused and intense. And it was the more exotic choice, since I didn't know anybody here yet.

I did know Rotterdam from the stories my father had told. He worked as an officer on cargo ship and they often docked here. Back then, they stayed up to a month in a city while the ship was being unloaded and loaded, so he got to see a lot of the city. He told me about the buildings and the bikes and how green it was and I think these stories influenced me. My mother and he were proud that I moved abroad - my father claims that I have his need to travel and discover. I still travel a lot - it's very easy to go everywhere from here.

I was ill with a fever when I first got here, in 2001, and had these two big suitcases. People helped me without me having to ask. I felt very lucky and that luck continued. I heard finding a place to stay was very difficult, so I was happy that I could stay in the apartment of a fellow student that went away for some time. The first day I was there the landlord came by. I asked him if he maybe had something available and he did: next door. So I had found an apartment, in this nice old house at Tiendplein, on my second day in Rotterdam. This made me feel I somehow fit here. The only thing I couldn't love in the beginning was the food - I couldn't understand how you could grow so tall on this food.

The Piet Zwart Institute changed the way I work and think - it somehow made me more open in my ideas and declarations. In the beginning I hated the Group Critiques because everybody was so critical about everything. But then I realized you have to make work that is good for yourself, that you can explain, and then you can use the input of others to make you think about it more. After graduating here, I went to do Media Studies at the UvA. I didn't move to Amsterdam, because it was cheaper to live here and travel to there.

With some people I met in Amsterdam I set up an artist-run space, Overtroom 301, in 2008. We did a bee-hive experiment: we had 32 boxes, each 60 cm high, wide and deep, stacked up 8 by 4 and invited artists to fill a box with their work; so we worked with 32 artist at a time and we programmed performances as well. We were only open on Mondays and the shows ran for two weeks each. In the two years Overtroom 301

ran we showcased many hundreds of artists working in the Netherlands. I also worked on my practice in this period and showed it a lot, also internationally.

End 2010, I met Hans, who was running the HB-gallery in a temporary space on the Zwaanshals. We travelled a lot together, visited lots of international art fairs, and decided we wanted to work together. For Cucosa, an artists' initiative that was located at the Hofbogen, we worked together with Bob Smit on the show *Attraction of the Opposites*, for which we invited 44 artists from all over the world, two years in a row, in 2011 and 2012, in collaboration with the Film Festival Rotterdam. After that we wanted to curate and produce on a more regular basis. We went looking for a small space, half of our current space, and started gallery JOEY RAMONE.

We have the attitude of a non-profit artist-run space, but we do have the label of a gallery. We want to contribute to the development of the artists we show and enrich the cultural climate of the city by showing their work. We never program established artists because we want to grow together with 'our' artists. We travel, visit studios and academies and sometimes show people fresh from the academy. This February the gallery exists for five years and we're still learning and growing. We want to focus more on collaborations, hosting more artist talks and more thematic projects.

This neighborhood is becoming the gallery district of Rotterdam - there are five or six of us now, and more coming. We're all busy working jobs next to having a gallery, because a gallery generally eats your money, and we don't have an association or so, but we do work together. We try to have our openings at the same days, so people come to the district. There's no competition, there's space for everybody, the more the better.

I still curate for other places, such as Roodkapje in Rotterdam, the museum TEA Tenerife and the Re-Culture festival in Greece. I also continue to make my own work, although I have much less time for it now. Maybe my need to produce art works myself is less because of the gallery: working there also answers the questions I deal with in my practice. How I introduce myself depends - sometimes I am an artist, sometimes a gallery owner, and sometimes someone who does 'something in the arts.' **EV**

See also: [www.joeyramone.nl](http://www.joeyramone.nl) en "For Kiki's work: see De Vrijplaats in this Puntkomma"

## Inside

Text by Kiki Petratou

There are 2 things that keep fascinating me when it comes to 'art life' in Rotterdam. The 1st is the amount of Art Initiatives and Artist Run Spaces throughout the city. The 2nd is the amount of inter/national people who choose to stay or at least attempt to stay in Rotterdam after finishing their studies. Belonging to this 2nd category and being an artist myself I believe in the model of the artist that co-operates with his fellow artists and operates within the frame of contemporaneity. I am interested in examining how exchange and co-operation tactics may function as strategies used to stimulate social and cultural capital. These and the constant flux in which the city is into form the ground on which JOEY RAMONE operates.

From day one both Hans and I knew that we wouldn't walk down the path of just being a 'mono-faceted' gallery. JOEY RAMONE's raison d'être was to provide a platform for contemporary art and discourse, by combining the attributes of both a conventional gallery (facilitating the long-term development of the artists' careers) and the more content and context-based approach of a non-profit initiative. Next to the regular gallery program, which presents 6 solo exhibitions a year, the gallery has been running an irregular side program, which includes curated group shows, artist talks, lectures, film screenings, performances and project collaboration. This autumn for example we co-operated with *Conversas Rotterdam* and hosted an edition of 10 weekly meetings during which the *conversadores* discuss projects and interests with the public. This has been a very fruitful and inspiring project for many reasons. Maybe the most interesting for me is that the set-up triggered the public to re-evaluate what a gallery is and what a gallery could do. The very modus operandi of a gallery would be for many people a contradiction to the alternative context of the event organized in that gallery. But what is an alternative way of working in one context might be a necessary manner of operating in another.

The gallery has been home to the *International Film Festival Rotterdam* several times and this co-operation will continue in the upcoming edition of 2017 as well. Working together with a festival is very interesting because it makes the city bigger. People will visit the locations of a festival and discover neighborhoods which otherwise would have disregarded. Another beautiful collaboration for which I feel nostalgic is the one we did with *Roodkapje* in 2015 as part of *Roodkapje Radicals* and later also Motel Mozaique for which we used both our locations and the *WORM* to present a series of exhibitions and performances by the London based collective *The Cult of RAMM:ELL:ZEE*.

At this moment we are setting up a sort of exchange program, which thematically is a recurring topic at JOEY RAMONE and deals with questions of mobility, relocation, diaspora. It will function as an open devise, comprising various types of interdependent and intertwining activities, public presentations, publications, artistic research and production. In between cultural geography, transport geography and the anthropology of circulation, we will be looking at the political and social consequences of spatial movement; how does it affect identities, socialities, as well as the quest for co-existence and a good life - the Aristotelian notion of *eu zein* or *eudaimonia*? **KP**



OUTSIDE/INSIDE is a serie of conversations created by Eva Visser that investigates the appeal of Rotterdam as a place to work & live for foreigners engaged in the cultural field. They are interviewed about their reasons to come and stay here, and how they experience the city and its cultural climate. Next to that, the interviewee writes about how living in Rotterdam resonates in their work. The texts are kept in their original language, the *lingua franca* bad English.



JOEY RAMONE gallery, installation view of work by Iratxe Jaio & Klaas van Gorkum, 2015