

On the fanclub we created for artist Vaast Colson

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One of the first projects we had as the newly re-formed w wh at* collective in 2014 was the idea of the voorforvaast fanclub, which came from an innocent fascination and curiosity with the work of Antwerp-based artist Vaast Colson. We had never actually met Vaast at this point, let alone have a personal relationship with him – we just always admired his approach in constantly questioning what art actually is, and the “world” surrounding it. Starting by collecting his artwork and relevant tidbits of information, we compiled all of this in our “Vaast Closet” here in our Brussels office with the help of Maes & Matthys Gallery, Vaast’s first

gallery as a resident artist. Eventually, Luc Matthys actually introduced us to Vaast, although our relationship remained strictly professional: the fanclub is focused on his work attitude – how he sees the world around him – as opposed to him as an individual. The project quickly grew beyond just the two of us, as others showed an interest in what we were doing and joined our sessions. The fanclub today is roughly made up of ten people, but we frequently invite groups to participate in this shared practice, so all in all we’ve easily had over 2,000 people – from artists to amateurs – come work with us at some point. Using “handbooks” on Vaast’s artwork and attitudes as our starting

point – publications focusing on his artistic career supplied by Maes & Matthys, which we later (re-)compiled into numerous fanclub catalogues and fanzines – the fanclub collectively takes his work further using his tactics and artistic strategies. Like his use of overlapping symbolism and inversion, or of accidental happenings and light-hearted humour. Turning things on top of their heads. We also make sure to adopt certain signature elements, like his abundant use of colours – especially pinks and blues. In a way, his work serves as templates for our re-activated ready-mades. Making a new kind of sense and questioning what art actually is; by researching, experimenting and co-creating. Vaast makes art with the intention of creating significant meaning, which will work further in the minds of the spectator and that’s what we aim to do through the shared practice of our fanclub. What’s more, his goal in art is to exercise. Not so much in the exhibition sense but more in terms of research and creativity. So the fanclub in a way is a metaphor for this continuous, collaborative work. It’s quite a conceptual project – especially since we take Vaast’s work as the concept itself – but really, what we’re doing is not any different from what the essence of art is. In the same way as a painter’s raw material is his paint, Vaast’s artwork is ours to create something arguably familiar, yet new. Think Marcel Duchamp’s ready-made *L.H.O.O.Q.*, where he re-interpreted the Mona Lisa, complete with full-grown devil’s tash and all. Even Vaast as the individual becomes a strategy within the fanclub: for instance, we asked to photograph him for a fanzine, but specifically from the back: we inverted the typical perspective of fandom and idolisation (*à la* teenage bedroom posters) whilst also playing on the idea that we’re “following” him from behind.

✓ W WH AT* is a non-profit collective art space, based in the Brussels neighbourhood of Midi-Lemonnier, that runs numerous art projects, including the voorforvaast fanclub, which is on show until the 5th of November at the Gaasbeek Castle Museum.
▷ www.what.org