

Alice De Mont's ongoing research revolves around the creation of characters. Whether presented in films or installations, De Mont's characters express human complexity. They are containers of the many possible options, each embodying a certain problem. From Subject 1 to Subject 23: the higher the number, the more complex the character gets. The current exhibition, *A Series of Characters*, is about a specific kind of characters: alter ego's. Here the artist investigates how alter ego's come into existence and which function they fulfill in the artistic practice of a visual artist, for example. Four characters appear: Arno M. Feld, Elle Peril, Subject 13 and Subject 23. Arno explores the role of a rather shallow art coach while Elle is a nude model, dealing with the trauma of revenge porn. Both are existing alter ego's of other persons. Subject 13 and Subject 23 De Mont invented herself to cope with a personal artistic problem.

Subject 23, the main character of the exhibition, is a female artist. Her artistic practice deals with the inability to grasp or understand our environment or the objects surrounding us. In a way, Subject 23's approach reminds De Mont of 'Object-oriented ontology', a 21st century philosophical movement, according to which objects exist independently of human perception. In the artist's opinion, "this makes clear that our perception is rather limited and that we will never have full access to our surroundings, since we can not think from the perspective of an object or matter". And so the research of Subject 23 reflects that of De Mont. She created the alter ego because she needed somebody else to paint. Painting was only possible when Alice was completely disconnected from herself. Far out of her comfort zone, she now makes artistic decisions that in fact are not hers. Subject 23 is present in the exhibition in two ways: by some of her works as well as by a narrative. It's a narrative told by others. You never hear the story by herself. You never see her. This is reminiscent of Jacques Derrida's (1930-2004) conception of language as an utterable trace, a mark remaining after the moment of its inscription, a trail indicating something or somebody has passed. However it's possible that the significance of the trace may fail to be read. Moreover there is nothing outside the context, there is nothing outside the text. A photo of Subject 23's grandfather together with some texts by Richard Pettifer, Oscar van den Boogaard and Jeanne Ontheedge (Subject 13, her assistant), must allow the viewer to (re)construct her identity. "Which is more revealing: the narrative or Subject 23's own artistic work?", De Mont wonders. And "how does an (constructed) identity determine the kind of works one makes?"

At the beginning of the exhibition, in the corridor, four movies are screened in a loop: *Miroslav Novak, Subject One* (2016, monologues about the reality in which Subject One exists), *Subject 23 & Jeanne Ontheedge* (2018), *Chenelle* (2018, about the life and death of Elle Peril) and *Erfolg durch Kunst* (2018, a video lecture on art and success by Arno M Feld). Entering the room, on a tablet at your right, you see a film about Subject 13, also known as Jeanne Ontheedge, a discharged journalist who embodies the problem of being an artist assistant. On your left two double sided paintings, oil on hardboard, lean against the wall. A drawing of a sprinkler, a metaphor for the relation between man and soil, raises the question what is still nourishing for man and nature these days. This is an important issue in Subject 23's artistic practice. Climate change, pollution, deforestation and many other industrial and agrarian interventions have damaged our soil beyond repair. Having lost its original, natural state, the soil is no longer a source of food and life. On a table in the same room, *Space Investigations* (2016) is the most absorbent animation movie about space-time bending. Time is woven into a grid in space. Being interlinked, when space bends, the time around it also bends. The grid can be seen as a metaphor for the raster the artist is trying to work around by using an alter ego. Because in the course of her artistic development, De Mont got somewhat stuck in her own work, trapped in a kind of linear thinking, a fixed schematic of methods and systems. Furthermore the exhibition contains two sculptures from the series *Paintings for Sculptures*, as well as an intriguing still life with clay blob, empty vessels, stones and other objects that shed some light on Subject 23's research. The series *Paintings for Sculptures* is a collaboration between Subject 23 and Alice De Mont. The latter used Subject 23's paintings in oil on hardboard as a kind of mold for plaster sculptures. Both being wet, the plaster absorbed the paint, leaving an imprint in the sculpture.

The identity of Alice De Mont's characters, being complex, is never fixed. The ever changing trail of the alter ego is impossible to grasp and the significance of it may never be fully understood. In order to not get stuck (again) in the suffocating grid of systems, the artist is willing to except changes made by others in the identity construction and thus to alter the artistic work. As with space-time bending, when the identity bends, the artistic work bends as well. The story of Subject 23 may alter during the exhibition. Since she has no name yet, suggestions can be dropped in the 'name box'.