Speculative gains

Bring on the new *installation by Coralie Vogelaar*

Once a year the prestigious Rijksakademie opens its doors to the public. *Catherine Somzé* gives us a sneak peek

Talent spotting is the greatest of all sports in the world of contemporary art. Gamblers and collectors, avid gallery owners and aspiring artists all play the game for money, fame and the pure pleasure of discovery. And nowhere in the Dutch contemporary art scene is there a talent-spotting paradise as fertile as the Rijksakademie.

During the last weekend of November, the highly esteemed – in fact, nearly sacred – international residency programme opens its ateliers to the public. As part of the aptly named annual RijksakademieOPEN, each of the 50 artists-in-residence will present at least one project or work. Although the open days are in no way designed as an art market, the young artists-in-residence are often hard-pressed for cash and they'll be most appreciative if you show interest in buying.

Situated in what used to be cavalry barracks built in the 19th century on the Sarphatistraat, the Rijksakademie looks like a well-guarded fortress during most of the year. Protected by heavy metal bars and an electronic gate, it's *the* Mecca for artists who compete every year to get one of its coveted two-year residencies.

Some 2,000 artists from all over the world apply and only 25 are accepted. The Rijksakademie provides a basic stipend, studio space, facilities, help with finding an apartment and the advice of prestigious mentors. The artists have only one required task: to open their studios to the public once a year. There are no classes; everybody at the Rijks insists on the fact that this is not a school but a time to focus on creating. 'It's all about experimentation, conceptual thinking and personal development,' says Martijntje Hallmann, the head of the ateliers.

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As Gino Saccone, an Italian-British artist who makes conceptual work using found objects to create enigmatic sculptures, installations and 'number paintings' puts it, 'Where I'm from, the Rijksakademie is this unattainable, prestigious place everyone wants to get into.'

The resulting work is varied and not necessarily what you might expect to hang on a wall. This year, expect to be enticed to buy ice collected in Greenland by Dutch artist Coralie Vogelaar and to watch a spectacular videotaped car crash staged by Dutch video and performance artist Feiko Beckers. Resident Harald den Breejen, who studied in the Netherlands to become an art teacher and now makes work that explores 'how knowledge is acquired', will be presenting a musical.

Anna Franceschini, an Italian artist who is now in the second year of her residency, will present short films that she calls 'visual scores', which she suggests one should view as though listening to music. 'I used to be a narrative filmmaker,' she explains. 'The Rijksakademie gave me the opportunity to explore the use of film as an autonomous medium.'

The RijksakademieOPEN is an opportunity for Amsterdam gallery owners to preview the work of emerging international talents without the inconvenience of having to travel abroad. Local dealers Fons Welters and Juliëtte Jongma, who both own galleries under their own names, and Nieck de Bruijn from Upstream Gallery are but a few Dutch gallery owners that will be walking around during the private preview on Friday evening. 'We have the luck of having one of the most prestigious post-graduate art institutes here in Amsterdam,' says De Bruijn. 'This is an opportunity to have access to artists very early in their careers.'

Dealers will be looking to sign artists pretty much on the spot. As for international gallery owners, the RijksakademieOPEN is a platform to get acquainted with the latest trends in the fine arts.

'The RijksakademieOPEN is comparable to biennials and art fairs,' says Stephane Simoens, owner of a gallery for contemporary art in Knokke, Belgium. 'They give a sense of what's going on in the art world.'

As for the rest of us art aficionados, it's also an opportunity to buy the work of a future art star, on the cheap. After all, the Rijksakademie is but the antichamber to the halls of fame.

RijksakademieOPEN 2010 takes place Sat 27 & Sun 28 at the Rijksakademie, Sarphatistraat 470 (527 0300/rijksakademie.nl). Open 11.00-19.00; €5 for a day or €6 for a weekend pass.