

**Pieter Lemmens: Quality, Politics & Society**  
by Nicola Bozzi

**Quality Politics & Society**

Nieuw Dakota

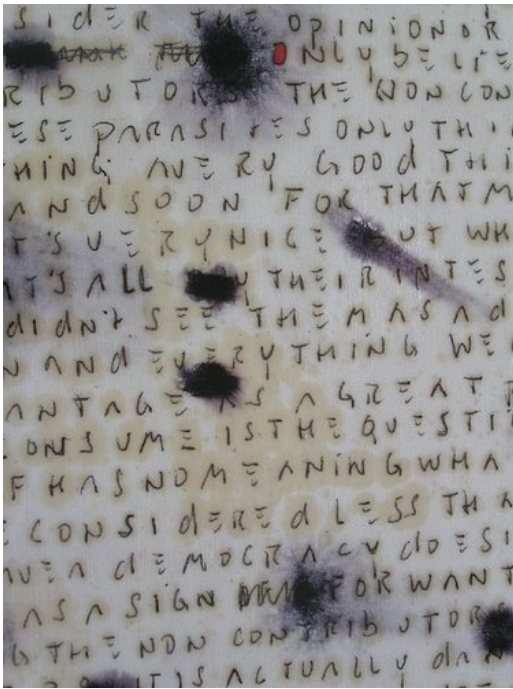
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Before visiting his solo show at Nieuw Dakota, tucked away from the fancy city center in the postindustrial NDSM area in the Noord, I had heard Pieter Lemmens' name more than once. In the past few years, the Dutch artist has been targeting local art institutions like the Stedelijk with guerrilla actions and counter exhibitions, namely his 2007 campaign advertising a fake solo show at the famous contemporary art museum and the more recent institution of an alternative personal museum – the PIMA - in the historic Hirschgebouw building in ultra-central Leidseplein.

As you might have guessed, Lemmens' work is quite concerned with the art system he's struggling with, but his obsessions go beyond that. The pieces exhibited at Nieuw Dakota let the public know other things the artist is worried about, through an obsessive compulsive torrent of words and nervous sketches.



Using a fictional corporate character – the QP&S company – as the pivot of the whole show, Lemmens employs his distinctly ironic style to narrate the ways of the world on the layered surfaces of fourteen canvases. His “Masterpieces” (that’s how he titled them) are completely covered in text, regularly arranged in a tight grid and covered with further painterly disturbances, such as sporadic black brush strokes radiating from the center. The resulting wisdom is thus impossible to read, unless one is ready to endure a sharp headache. While a close inspection is tiresome, from a few meters the pieces look like massive blocks of text, hovering upon the stylized depiction of an exploding Big Bang. The images suggest a vertiginous peek on unintelligible knowledge, between corporate babble and mysterious philosophy.



As an integration to the Masterpieces, the artist has been producing daily works, live at the gallery. This new series – the Ultimate Masterpieces – are simplified translations of the concepts explained in the others, with a kid-on-Ritalin style somewhere inbetween a math class blackboard and Cy Twombly's wall-sized sketches.



While the interest of contemporary artists in issues of politics, economics, and philosophy is a well established aspect of the practice, Lemmens' tongue-in-cheek take on such transdisciplinary concerns is both a confirmation of the trend and an ambiguous inside job, a satirical parody of the artist's own pursuit of knowledge. The Nieuw Dakota show stages the studio of a madman, an OCD-afflicted graphomaniac trying to break down the systems that bind him to a constrained role in society – and in the art world too, considering the ironic and self-assigned “masterpiece” status of Lemmens' works. The artist's monumental hieroglyphic treatises, and his confused schemes on the gallery's floor, have an important lesson to teach, echoing a well-known motto by Friedrich Nietzsche: if you try to understand the world, the risk is you'll wind up understanding yourself – maybe even a bit too much.

[~Nicola Bozzi](#), a writer living in the Netherlands

(Images: **Pieter Lemmens**, *Masterpiece*, 2010, painting, 190 x 175 cm; *Detail from the Masterpiece series*; *View of some pieces from the Ultimate Masterpiece series*; *View of the exhibition*; Photo courtesy of Nieuw Dakota)

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