

## DIALOGUE

# Beyond Language: A Dialogue with Falke Pisano

Falke Pisano<sup>1</sup> and Lucy Cotter<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Artist, NL

<sup>2</sup> Independent writer and curator, NL

Corresponding author: Lucy Cotter ([lucy\\_cotter@yahoo.com](mailto:lucy_cotter@yahoo.com))

---

Dialogue between Falke Pisano and Lucy Cotter, reflecting on ways in which artistic research exceeds the limits of linguistic thinking.

---

**Lucy Cotter:** Artists often work with different registers of knowledge. You've dealt quite explicitly in your practice with the relationship between thinking, language and the making of physical objects. You deal with this question at a meta-level, but you also seem to work through it materially. Is it the case that in order to really think through something, you have to think through it in several ways, that are linguistic and discursive, but also object-based, visual, and sculptural?

**Falke Pisano:** Yes. From the beginning it was very clear to me that both language and making are two incomplete languages somehow. My starting point was, and still is, language, and how to define a problem to think through, in language. The aspect of art enters through bringing problems from a linguistic space into a space that is not necessarily formal or material at first, but that is at least not a space of pure language. There can be a certain poetry, but it should not be a space where the logic is always linguistic. This is where I try to realize the work, so that reading can take place on different levels.

**LC:** Do you find yourself getting into this possibility of operating outside of a linguistic logic because of the limitations of language in relation to thinking?

**FP:** Yes, I think so. When I work through language first, there's a point where, what I've come up with in my brain, often through other people's writings, cannot get beyond a certain limit. This is the moment when the spectator or viewer comes into the constellation. It is also the point where space enters. I start thinking through diagrams, through a diagrammaticization, or through a sculptural or spatial organization that asks something different from the viewer than language. That's the making part of my research. There is also the other making part, the making of how the research is activated in the exhibition. In the exhibition, the work is about bringing a viewer into a space in which he or she understands that language is only one part; that language is incomplete and that the visual or the formal making is also incomplete. This angle creates a certain sensitivity to reading on different levels.

**LC:** You have in fact used research quite explicitly as the basis of your practice, working in cycles that go on for several years, like *Figures of Speech* (2006–2010), *The Body in Crisis* (2011–2014) and most recently *The Value in Mathematics* (2015). Each cycle deals with a different subject area. *The Body in Crisis* looked at the repetitive occurrence of moments where bodies are thrown into a state of crisis through violent shifts in life conditions, while *The Value in Mathematics* looks at the notion of multiple mathematics and how culturally inscribed this apparently value-free discipline is. But there are distinct overlaps in how the results work in the exhibition space. Can you say how this reading on different levels you mentioned takes place in an exhibition?

**FP:** I think the body moves towards, relates to what is made, the textural things, but at the same time the viewer is very aware that it is not only the making that can be related to. Text is also present. I use the sculpture or installation as a kind of instrument to weave the language through. When I'm talking about repeti-

tion [in a text] for example, I see what it means for repetition to be something that the body also encounters all of the time. It's trying to lift up both the making and the experiencing of the work to something that operates more at an experiential level, so that experience comes in as feedback into the theoretical.

**LC:** When a viewer enters an exhibition of your current project, *The Value in Mathematics*, for example, it asks people to take in material at different levels—the linguistic, the physical, the haptic. It seems to trigger people to take in knowledge on different registers, which is something I have also experienced in your earlier series.

**FP:** Yes, although I think this constellation of the experiential in relation to cognitive knowledge is often made manifest in my practice in installation works. I assume it happens more with *The Body in Crisis* series than *The Value in Mathematics*, which is object-based. When I imagine someone entering the work from *The Body in Crisis*, I can imagine there is a certain language, when you're entering the space. In my mind, you then encounter works that are in the space, that are abstract or almost abstract. They become part of... I'm not sure I want to use the term "the production of knowledge." It's a term that has become so much part of the commercial world. Is there another way to think about it?

**LC:** Can we talk perhaps about the relationship between abstraction and the concrete? One of the things that the *Figures of Speech* and *The Value in Mathematics* works seem to have in common is their physical manifestation of abstract thinking. Through that manifestation, something else happens. I found it interesting when you say that there comes a point in the research process when you have to make to get further. Materiality seems to open different thinking possibilities.

**FP:** Yes, I have tried very hard to speak about abstraction in language and make it as concrete as possible, especially in the *Figures of Speech* series, which was the result of a long-term examination of processes that occur, when 'objects' start shifting their form, materiality, meaning, description, understanding, role, agency etc. I was thinking about an internal logic that is coherent, so that a text-object became almost as concrete for me as an abstract sculpture, for instance. I felt that the materiality of the text and the materiality of matter and form became quite similar, although they might function differently in the work. In *The Body in Crisis*, text is less material. In *Figures of Speech*, it seemed for me that for the work to have a life that can be experienced in an object-way, there needed to be an abstract layer, a made abstract layer of material. This was one thing.

When you talk about the abstract and the concrete there are so many different positions this takes within the work. When I started writing, there was the abstract/concrete idea, and the question of how I could write in a way that would bring these things together, so that I can genuinely talk about concrete abstractions. At a certain moment, I started to re-enact or reconstruct the early working process of Hélio Oiticica, going from the flat surface, to something that is unfolding, to something that is more relational. This shifted something. It led me to want to get rid of the object, which at that point only existed in language. At that point of the process, I needed to make the object disappear, to dissolve or break it up. Because the object only existed in language, I needed to do this in a performative way. The performance, which was the exploration of how this disappearance could happen, was the research.

I still call it "performative research," rather than research. Every step in the research is making as well. In fact I did not call my work research-based for a long time, because I could not recognize the research *in* the making. Even while I was writing texts, I was trying to make the knowledge I needed for myself to enable me to make the steps I wanted to make in the making. Even if I was writing a text, there was no superfluous knowledge, no steps that could become a composition in itself. It was not even a text, as such. It was more like learning to walk. I was reading philosophy or theory or research to take the steps in the making, in the writing of the texts and in the formulating of the language, in the understanding of the relationship between the works. It was the same with *The Body in Crisis* series. Whatever I learn goes into the work as a brick, a building block. So this knowledge is not only translated or narrated through the spectator. It is used to build this construction of the cycles of works. I learn along the way, by going into the work.

**LC:** Is this also why you work on a work for several years? This process of construction is a brick-by-brick process.

**FP:** Yes, the three cycles are very much based on self-learning, on what I want to learn. I have tried to find a certain basis of thinking about making, of thinking about speech, about translating, about object-subject relations. Then at a certain point, I thought, “I cannot work abstractly my whole life, there is a limit.” So I very programmatically decided that I wanted to learn to deal with concrete events in history. This was partly because I wanted to problematize the “use” of interesting, “marginal”, forgotten events, people and places as, not only the subject or starting point of the work, but basically *as* the work. Besides wanting to say something about the situation of [bodily] crisis that is constantly repeating, I wanted to learn and to comment on the situation I was making work in.

My research is not necessarily motivated by my interests in a particular subject. It’s more a commitment to showing how I think we need to deal with the world. My research is very much based on questioning. It has more to do with the process of making than with interests as such. It has to do with a problematizing or questioning of a fixed idea of myself and of my relationship with the spectator. There is a performative impulse. Maybe this relationship is also translated in objects or sculptures somehow.

**LC:** I also see performativity coming in with the video works that form part of your overall installations. It seems to me that your choice of having these different elements in the space has a lot to do with performativity. Neither the physically made works nor texts are left to stand alone. The presence of text also reminds us of the language-like quality in the sculptural works. We can feel the process behind the work more directly because the texts you include show certain aspects of the thinking, while the sculptures show another and the video somehow, brings you back in as a maker and shows a more explicitly performative relationship. You somehow re-enter the work through the video. You perform the making of the knowledge—or what I would prefer to call non-knowledge as it relates to plural and overshadowed knowledge or knowledge that would not usually be defined as knowledge.

**FP:** Yes, I think so.

**LC:** With *The Value in Mathematics* I was quite surprised by the video work, in which the camera shows you interacting with the object-works on display, while in the voiceover we hear a discussion about ethno-mathematics by two academics, or individuals working on the fringes of academia — Mariana Leal Ferreira and Michael Lachney. I found it interesting that you put this exchange of thinking to the foreground. You mentioned something earlier about your decision to show your processes, but this seems to be another step.

**FP:** Yes, it was another step. It was about letting go of control.

**LC:** It’s still quite controlled! (*laughs...*)

**FP:** (*Laughs*) Well, letting go a little bit! For me this was already quite an exercise. The whole work, *The Value in Mathematics*, is quite constructed. It’s again a form of self-education, a research about what it means to change a point of view. I wanted this research to be more open and accessible. I wanted to both give the space to others, and to also show that the space I make through my work is made by others. It was important to me to let different voices exist, to not push it into art. To go from research to art is quite a process for me. Something needs to be pushed.

**LC:** Can you explain what you mean by that?

**FP:** The idea of these two languages, these incomplete systems I mentioned at the beginning of our talk is very important. When research exists *as* research, it is just research. In my practice it’s really about moving into another place where the demands on the material shift. What was good research at one point is now incomplete, because the demands have shifted. There is another part, which brings you towards meeting these demands.

**LC:** Do you mean that there is research, which is “good research”, but at a certain point, it stops and has to become something else to become art?

**FP:** I don’t think that research is art, basically.

**LC:** No! Me neither.

**FP:** Something that can be a good start to produce knowledge or non-knowledge—like an attempt to bring together or analyse a series of images and information—this needs to be put under a different demand. A different demand needs to be made on it that shows the nature of that demand.

**LC:** I'm imagining this as a road. At a certain point in the research process, there's a fork in the road. One lane leads to art. If you take that lane, you will work with the research material to make the best artwork that you can. There is knowledge emerging out of that moment, which, if it wasn't put under the demand to become art, could become something else that is also of interest and that might be given a different name. This might be another lane.

**FP:** Yes, but I don't think that the demand that is being put on this material is the demand of becoming art. Rather it is something that you [as an artist] want from the material. It's very abstract. It's not about being art or not art. Maybe it has to do with intuition. Intuition understands what is lacking or what is not there or what should be lacking. It's really about what *should* be lacking. The information that's there is fine, it's interesting, it's useful for the world maybe. So what is lacking? I think this is the interesting thing. I don't know how to explain it. But it's about acknowledging this lack that moves it; it's a displacement. It's not by a voice... not by pushing, but seeing that this is not enough.

**LC:** Can we think about this moment of 'not being enough' and of art's possibility to embrace what *should* be lacking, as you put it. It's my experience that art is rather unique in this conceptual freedom. I find that in other fields, there is a greater push or pull to resolve something or to name it or categorize it or cut it off in a certain way. There's something in art that allows permission for performativity of not knowing. This letting be of that questioning is valuable. There's a freedom in art—and maybe we don't stay there enough—to stay with the not knowing, that intuitive state that there is something there which hasn't emerged. A sense of "I'm not going to pretend that it has emerged, but I cannot make it emerge."

**FP:** Yeah, definitely.

**LC:** If I'm interested in a relationship between artists and academics, it's partly about leaving that space intact somehow and maybe staying there together.

**FP:** I've also been thinking about this. Sometimes it feels strange that there are academics—in the humanities, but also in other fields—spending their working lives radically rethinking the given frameworks of all aspects of human experience and thought. They spend decades learning, researching, teaching, discussing, writing—this is what it takes to create a shift in academia. In art there are many artists dealing with a little bit of this and that, who are quite ambitious in talking about paradigm shifts, even if they are not directly seeking to make them happen. As artists, we can make works related to academic fields that we don't in fact know anything about. It's as if academics have written ten books and we, as artists, have written a four-page essay. So then what is it in artists' knowledge or intuition or ability to frame or translate that is valuable, that we find valuable, that I find valuable? I think you are right that this has something to do with this state of not knowing or a place for intuition. Of course it's the same in science, there is intuition in play but what is the specific intuition that we appreciate in art or in artworks? I think that this probably has something to do with a comfort with incompleteness, with not knowing but being aware that not-knowing can be valuable or present somehow. I think that these gaps, this not knowing plays a big role in the specificity of artistic research. How to research when you're not knowing, when you're not going to know, when you are going to know a little bit, or when you know just enough to make a work. So the research is not so much about the information or the material that's coming up, but probably more about this other presence that is emerging with the other information. It's something like a shadow, the negative or an inversion of this other information, which is the real research.

**LC:** As well as this comfort with staying with this unknowing space, I have often thought about the scientific fact that only about 4% of knowledge comes through our conscious mind. There are ways of knowing available to us as artists that make us comfortable with the other 96%. The artist's contribution might be a four-page essay, but there are perhaps another 96 pages which have not been said, but which are being felt

bodily, in the writing or in the experiencing of the work. There is a relationship that I cannot fully articulate that is not only about that openness, but also about the intuition that knowledge has to come through on all of these different levels that you spoke about at the beginning. The moment that you cannot think further without bringing in some other way.

**FP:** For me it always had a lot to do with the diagram, with how I imagine diagrams to work...

**LC:** Yes, for me too! Can you say something about what that means to you?

**FP:** One definition of the diagram that I relate to is this Deleuzian idea of abstract machines, which are not formed matter.<sup>1</sup> A diagram is something that is not concerned with form, but with function, but even so, it creates a certain dynamic that can be seen as a form. It is not something that follows. It is a machine that is producing something different than itself as part of itself, something that is different each time a repetition occurs. It also has the same incompleteness. It can only be made complete by this action and this input.

**LC:** Jean Luc Nancy talks about drawing in a similar way. 'Drawing' is a noun, but it is also a verb. In the first line of his book, *The Pleasure in Drawing*, he describes drawing as 'the opening of form.' This 'opening' is a starting point, a gesture of incompleteness, a certain dynamic that has a capacity for something inexhaustible. For me all of your works feel like that. They have this quality of opening.

**FP:** For me, they are definitely like that; all of the sculptures are diagrams as well.

**LC:** Yes, I was picturing the sculptures as I said that. Maybe they use the same language.

**FP:** Yes, for one thing, it's the sculptures' imagined function. There's a kind of formal diagrammatic aspect, but I think that I also really consider them as something you can activate by going through. Every time you're going through them, with a piece of thought or with the body, it puts you in a different direction or it picks up on something. For me, it has a lot to do with connecting a research about something, a problem/concept/or two different terms that I want to bring together which are not working and then the way to achieve what I want to do is to create something that has the function of a diagram but has the presence of a sculpture.

**LC:** It is important that your works do not illustrate your research; the diagram does something different than an illustration. There is an activation in a diagram, it's somehow a working drawing that involves you. Your sculptures are like working objects that involve you as a viewer, without being a literal object.

**FP:** Yes, a working object is a nice way of putting it. Maybe the objects in *The Value in Mathematics* are less working objects than in the other series. They are perhaps more illustrative somehow. For me they were really ways of thinking, but maybe it's not like that for the spectator because they are more object-like and they are less about the bodily experience; in the end the making has a lot to do with the body.

**LC:** Because then we're not allowed to forget that you approach the material through the body?

**FP:** Yes, when the work has a sculptural installation presence it's not possible to *read* it. That's the main thing. When it's text, you read it. It's also about blocking a kind of objective, more distant perception of the

---

<sup>1</sup> "A true abstract machine has no way of making a distinction within itself between a plane of expression and a plane of content because it draws a single plane of consistency, which in turn formalizes contents and expressions according to strata and reterritorializations. The abstract machine in itself is destratified, deterritorialized; it has no form of its own (much less substance) and makes no distinction within itself between content and expression, even though outside itself it presides over that distinction and distributes it in strata, domains, and territories. An abstract machine in itself is not physical or corporeal, any more than it is semiotic; it is diagrammatic (it knows nothing of the distinction between the artificial and the natural either). It operates by matter, not by substance; by function, not by form. Substances and forms are of expression "or" of content. But functions are not yet "semiotically" formed, and matters are not yet "physically" formed. The abstract machine is pure Matter-Function — a diagram independent of the forms and substances, expressions and contents it will distribute." Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 1980.

work. In *The Body in Crisis* in particular, a lot of the work is about preventing the natural tendency to read, to read an event as something that happened a long time ago far away, and to instead create a presence of it.

**LC:** In *The Body in Crisis* texts, diagrams and video works were contained or separated from each other in a large wooden and fabric structure, which seemed to be a sculpture in its own right as well as being a kind of architecture for display. Was the primary role of that structure one of obstruction?

**FP:** Yes, that sculpture, which was called *Structure For Repetition (not Representation)* (2011), was firstly about blocking a certain kind of reading. To instil in the body a certain sense of being blocked all the time. Then if you read something, it reads differently because you have already incorporated a sense of being blocked. I was asking myself, “How can you work on the body in a way to twist something in the way of reading?” But for a large part, it had to do with not being able to read the work as a distant object, to read coldly and not let it touch you. For me the making is really important in that sense. In *The Body in Crisis*, it was really about the ethics. How do you present these issues? What effect does that have on the spectator?

I was seeing art practices around me bring in little known events from anywhere in the world to make a work about, but it seemed to me that the event was being used *as* the art work. It's too easy to just show something and call it a conceptual work. I felt I needed to try to problematize this process of taking material from somewhere and putting it in the art context. In order to be critical of the art context, I think it's important to make, although that might sound contradictory.

**LC:** Perhaps it *should* sound contradictory, but it doesn't. I also notice that work which addresses particular issues that can be named or referred to, and in particular work that is socially or politically engaged, tends to be neglected in terms of formal analysis when it is critically received. Because questions of content are often dissolved into questions of form, those conversations need to be simultaneous, but somehow they aren't. All of those things are working parallel and in dynamic relation to each other in the work and in the viewers' experience of the work. But it's almost impossible to articulate, even when it's one of the successes of the artwork. We seem to lack the vocabulary or the tools to discuss this content as one conversation. I see it as both a social and a theoretical problem that those discourses have developed as parallel lines.

**FP:** If we want to bring things together, how can we talk about it in such a way that one is not in service of the other? How can we talk about it in a way that the formal is not in service of a particular subject or something social or political oriented? Otherwise it's a kind of exploitation. How can we talk about these things so that they are reciprocal? I think it's also about how we feel about ourselves as makers. I don't think it's a situation that's impossible to happen, there's just a kind of discomfort about it.

**LC:** This is one of the reasons why I remain attracted to artistic research, as a potentially constructive discourse. I almost don't know an artist who has moved beyond this level of discomfort. Maybe it will take another twenty or thirty years to move beyond discomfort—not into a position of comfort, but just enough to allow the full potential of art to emerge.

**FP:** How do you imagine that? Who comes close to this?

**LC:** I don't think that one artist can do this or has done this. It's more that, with the emergence of artistic research as a named phenomenon, there's an accumulation of a certain critical mass, even though the term has created all kind of problems. To open that forum, to say, “Let's stand here and say that there is something here” is a very uncomfortable place. Yet, I think this moment has already happened. Let's say, for now, that most of the beginning problems have already happened through artistic research discourse, the awkward worst-case scenarios, the misunderstood well-meaning things have already happened. Maybe having gone through this, it may be possible—I have titled this book “Reclaiming Artistic Research” because I realize that it's about reclaiming this space. It's there, all of these things have happened which are not comfortable, but maybe if we reclaim it and recognize that, despite all of this, there is a certain critical mass emerging which maybe creates better conditions to stay in this space until we are slightly more comfortable. Through being less uncomfortable the exchange can somehow go deeper and further...

**FP:** You are talking about exchange, which I think is important to point out, because it is not a given that artistic research is going to be an exchange. If we are talking about the position of artists in relation to other

fields, it would be interesting if we would come to a point where this exchange happens, where the good things of this exchange are both going to art and to the research. But probably that also asks for academics to feel comfortable with art. Everyone needs to somehow feel comfortable. And then there is of course the question of to what extent art should have an applied function.

**LC:** I saw an interview in *Metropolis M* magazine, where you talked to Margaret Gaida. You were talking about ethnomathematics, but almost exclusively, so you weren't any longer talking about art.

**FP:** Well, Margaret does not have an art background.

**LC:** Yes, but I found it interesting that you made the specific choice to publish this conversation with someone who does not have an art background. Can we go back to the question that came up earlier about the comfort of academics? It seems to me that one of the most under-addressed questions in artistic research is the general discomfort of academics with art. It is important to acknowledge that work needs to be done to make that a more comfortable or at least workable relationship—not only on the part of artists, but also of academics.

**FP:** Yes, but why does someone do work for something to become comfortable? It's because they understand already that there is something there that would be good for the field, for them. So the question is, what can that be? I think that in the end, if you talk to scientists—when you really speak to them about how art works or what is being done with the information—most of them are interested in art. It's because it comes together a little bit—through experimentation, the idea of invention, or translation or discovery. I think it can be a natural conversation. But it's not something that happens very often, maybe because it's not known. I don't know.

**LC:** Do you not think this has to do with the social perception of art? Because if art is presented as it is, with a lot of the processes behind it and the thinking around it, isolated from it, it's a rather uninviting conversation. Or at least it's a conversation that only invites on certain levels, which even artists find too limited.

**FP:** Yes, that's true, but what do you think should then happen?

**LC:** I think it's possible to reframe art. For example, I personally found DOCUMENTA13 very interesting in terms of how viewers were talking about the work in the space. It was a very un-silent space. Conversations were being had and they weren't the usual embarrassed conversations around art. I felt that came from a presentation of the work in a way that showed more of this artistic research process. The presentation of the work invited the viewer to sometimes forget that they were looking at art, without compromising the work, without compromising the medium-specificity of the work as art. That maybe sounds like a contradiction, but it is not. It is very difficult to get it right, but it can be done.

**FP:** I think so too. Part of the reason my work is the way it is, has to do with believing that there needs to be broad access somehow, even if it is not easy. On the one hand, my work is quite art-related. It talks a lot about art, but at the same time, I think the processes that I try to have present, in a not too art-coded way, are processes that are interesting for everyone. Like for example this rethinking or questioning or speaking about things....

**LC:** Maybe it's polemic, but can we pause for a minute and talk about aesthetics? With regards to your work in *The Body in Crisis*, you mentioned that you created structures partly to make viewers conscious of the body approaching the material, also to block something. But your work is also aesthetic, it is aesthetically extremely pleasing work. This is also an invitation. There is an invitation to enter something that one may not want to enter usually, partly through an aesthetic appeal.

I have been trying to work out the role of the aesthetic in *The Value in Mathematics*. I was thinking about the conversation in the video work, like when Mariana Leala Ferreira tells of her experiences working with Brazilian tribes, how for example they use a different language to talk about weaving, how in a gift economy giving might not equal subtraction and thus lead to a different conception of mathematics. The installation includes weavings, stick sculptures and objects of exchange that clearly use these so-called ethnomathematical moments as a departure point. But I was imagining what it would mean to put those living examples in the exhibition space as a literal representation. Would it do what your work does? In fact, your

work translates those wider social and cultural experiences into a particular aesthetic language, which leads the viewer to really recognize their conceptual value. We are not allowed to look at these moments as an ethnographic or anthropological phenomenon. The opening text in your video from *The Value in Mathematics* addresses democracy and its relationship to mathematics. In your sculptures you force democracy on the material by making different mathematics speak the same aesthetic language. You impose democracy on what would otherwise be perceived as ethnographic, as anthropological—as African fractals, and therefore not just fractals but something African. There's a democracy of language that comes in through the making. It's like a mangle; all of the material goes through a mangle and it is translated into a particular aesthetic language that makes things able to sit together in a way that they could not if they were literal sources.

**FP:** Yes, this was very conscious. Especially in *The Value in Mathematics*, I was aware that there was a risk of exoticisation, a risk of using the aesthetics of the anthropological, of presenting funny strange stories and the other... I tried to make the work present on my own terms, not on the terms of a tribe in the Amazon or an African tribe. It was also a protection against any easy use. I want to take responsibility; I didn't want to delegate the responsibility for the aesthetics and for the content to others. I still find this work a little bit too much in that direction. So I will make a new film that has to do with Lewis Carroll and Ludwig Wittgenstein to show that there are other sources... I don't want to look for wondrous stories in faraway places and not see what is happening or has happened close by. I am trying to use my aesthetic strategies for specific ethical reasons. I use them on the level of artistic content as well, but for me, what you say about the mangle is what I trust in most. I want to tone down the spectacle, to not exhaust or to exploit or to make the most of the stories. I want the stories to be present, but in a gentle way, not in an exoticising way. The aesthetics of the work is just my natural aesthetics; it's a very one-to-one aesthetics. If I need to make a diagram it's this, these colours...

**LC:** I thought you made a very interesting choice by including these small ceramic hand-made objects, along with the large more minimal sculptures. There is a touch of an anthropologic aesthetic to them, but then owned by you. And you also made the larger minimal sculptures which, let's say, use a scientific rational language. The fact that you have made both supports the overall understanding in *The Value in Mathematics* that mathematics and ethno-mathematics are the same mathematics, spoken through different aesthetic and conceptual languages.

**FP:** Yes, I think this is the part of the work that works well. When I talk about *The Body in Crisis* and the way the installation comes together with the research, this is exactly what I am talking about. Also in relation to the sciences, to create a space that is not anthropological, that is not "other art," is something that can only be made by all of these different kinds of works.

**LC:** What about play? The objects are also playful. When you see the works in *The Value in Mathematics*, it brings out a childlike playfulness in the viewer. In the video you touch the things; you play with them. You do what the viewer wants to do...

**FP:** And then they cannot do it! (*laughs*) I don't want people to touch them. I'm not into interactive art.

**LC:** Me neither, I like the interaction in the mind, thank you very much!

**FP:** Exactly! (*laughs*) I think I was also trying to think of working objects. I like objects when they have several functions, preferably three different reasons for being there. The joy is in making the objects... I really have a hard time with my work most of the time. But making these objects is fun. I also try to think about them in an uncomplicated way instead of thinking about the whole system all of the time. It lets some air into the work.

**LC:** Yes, also for the viewer.

**FP:** Yes, it would be horrible if it wasn't there.

**LC:** Not horrible, but maybe hard work!

**FP:** Yes!

**Falke Pisano** studied/was a researcher at the Jan van Eyck Academy, Maastricht and the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds. Recent solo exhibitions include *The Value in Mathematics – how do we learn?* at C3 A, Córdoba, Spain and Badischer Kunstverein (both 2016). She has previously held solo exhibitions at Redcat, Los Angeles (2015), Praxes, Berlin (2014), The Showroom, London (2013), Ellen de Bruijne Projects, Amsterdam (2007, 2011), Hollybush Gardens (2009, 2012), De Vleeshal, Middelburg (2012), CAC, Vilnius (with Benoît Maire) (2011), Transmission Gallery (Glasgow, 2010) and Extra City, Antwerp (2010). Pisano has participated in such international exhibitions as the Shanghai Biennial (2012), Venice Biennale (2009) and Manifesta (2008) and performed at Museo Reina Sofia (2012), the 5th Berlin Biennale (2008) and Lisson Gallery, London (2007). She was awarded the prestigious Prix de Rome prize (NL) in 2013. Pisano has also published her work in *Figures of Speech* (designed and co-edited by Will Holder, published by JRP-Ringier, 2010). Pisano lives and works in Amsterdam and Sao Paulo.

**Lucy Cotter** is an independent writer and curator whose practice explores contemporary art's relationship with aesthetics, politics and the unknown. She was curator of the Dutch pavilion of the 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale 2017, presenting *Cinema Olanda* with artist Wendelien van Oldenborgh. [www.lucycotter.org/](http://www.lucycotter.org/).

### Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

**How to cite this article:** Pisano, F and Cotter, L 2017 Beyond Language: A Dialogue with Falke Pisano. *MaHKUscript: Journal of Fine Art Research*, 2(1): 3, pp. 1–9, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/mjfar.25>

**Published:** 14 December 2017

**Copyright:** © 2017 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

]u[ *MaHKUscript: Journal of Fine Art Research* is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Ubiquity Press.

OPEN ACCESS 