



Acquisitions

A Modern View of the Rijksmuseum

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Projects and Installations as Part of the Visual Arts Percentage Scheme

Since 2005, seven art projects have been undertaken in and around the Rijksmuseum under the umbrella concept of *A Modern View of the Rijksmuseum*. This art programme was commissioned by the Office of the Chief Government Architect (Atelier Rijksbouwmeester) as part of the Visual Arts Percentage Scheme (Percentageregeling beeldende kunst), which makes it obligatory to devote a percentage of the building costs of all government premises to art in the public domain. Artists added temporary interventions and permanent works of art to the national treasure house while it was in the throes of renovation. The aim was to initiate a dialogue between contemporary art and the art of the past in order to foster the development of new insights and points of departure for the interaction with the Netherlands' cultural heritage. All the projects consequently revolved around increasing the visibility of processes and problems that normally occur within the museum's walls.

Four of the projects produced permanent works of art. Three have been taken into the collection and are discussed below; the fourth – ceiling paintings by Richard Wright in the Cuypers building – is described elsewhere in this issue. The first three projects were temporary interventions whose inherently fleeting nature meant that they could not be preserved in

perpetuity. Germaine Kruijff illuminated the building from inside out, Lara Almarcegui used a camera to record the demolition of a museum floor and artistic duo Bik Van der Pol gave people a glimpse into the holy of holies by running a spiral staircase up to a tower where a most unusual piece from the collection had been placed. The documentation of these projects is the only physical evidence that gives access to these past events; it can even be seen as part of the actual work of art. In that sense, this issue of the *Bulletin* is also part of the art projects. Visibility, after all, is key to these bygone events. In other words these 'finished' projects did not come to an end with the artist's last act. It is the viewer who completes them by experiencing them through the medium of word or image. The effect that the projects had – a fresh look at the *New Rijksmuseum* – is even more valuable than the documentation.

The programme was developed by art consultant and curator Theo Tegelaers, who now works for the TAAK cooperative: 'Until now the Rijksmuseum has concentrated primarily on the preservation and conservation of art that has been around for a long time. It seems as if this is a totally different world compared with modern art, so it is important to show that there really is an element of continuity – that themes continue to exist even though the form and the language and the way of thinking have changed dramatically.'

1 GERMAINE KRUIP (b. 1970)

Rehearsal, 5 November 2005 to 6 January 2006

Light installation from sunset to sunrise

Light is a theme that continually recurs throughout art history and in the Rijksmuseum's collection. Rembrandt's *Night Watch*, a world-famous icon in the collection, is renowned for its innovative use of light. The painting is built up of areas that glow against dark passages – a technique known as *chiaroscuro*. Germaine Kruijff used computer-controlled lamps to create what Rembrandt achieved with pigment. She literally showed the building in another light.

Between sunset and sunrise the windows stood out starkly against the darkened skeleton of the Neo-Gothic building. 'The light pulsed like a slow heartbeat or quiet breathing,' said Kruijff. She brought the building to life for random passers-by. A night owl or taxi driver who looked at the building on the way past, saw – consciously or not – a different image on the way back. The installation focused the attention on the housing of an impressive collection in an un compelling way. Kruijff describes the building as the art work of art works – as a work of art that she made visible in a democratic way by presenting it to outsiders who were not necessarily museum visitors. Her intervention meant that the stained-glass windows were seen again after years, albeit in mirror image. Stained glass can usually only be seen during the daytime and from inside – Kruijff works with opposites like day and night and inside and outside.

Although her work is so accessible, Kruijff does demand some attentiveness on the part of the viewer. The artist deliberately chose subtle illumination that hung like a veil over the building. In that respect the play of light in *The Night Watch* is a great deal more exuberant and more dramatic. 'Drama' or, more accurately, 'theatre' is a concept that relates to both works of art.

Kruijff operates at the interface between theatre and art. Perception is key. The project's title also comes from that related world. 'Rehearsal' refers to the period before the performance when changes can still be made and opinions can still be revised – highly appropriate for the phase in which the museum found itself at the time. Before the stage (the building) can be entered again and the spectacle (the new layout)

can start, the scenery (the art) had to be shifted and the script (labels and wall boards) had to be finalized.

Kruijff had to move heaven and earth to 'rehabilitate' the building; the city council's floodlights had to go and the Rijksmuseum's banners had to be removed. 'Nuisances,' she called them. Tegelaers explained, 'The protective film had to be removed and countless objects had to be shifted to create maximum visibility for the windows. That is why this project was the largest by far.'

Kruijff's work was the only one of the three temporary projects that was not really documentary in nature. The influence on the perception of the building was what mattered. In a way her intervention has a permanence, albeit not materially. 'Reality is not fixed; it is subject to our own view and projection,' says Kruijff. Even though the lights have long been extinguished, the project has left its mark. The spectacle may well have lodged in the visual memory of passers-by for good.

LITERATURE:

M. de Vries, 'Rehabilitatie van een reus', *de Volkskrant*,

3 November 2005

Exh. cat. Almere (De Paviljoens), *Germaine Kruijff. Only the Title Remains*, Almere 2009



2 LARA ALMARCEGUI (b. 1972)

Removal of the Floor of Room D4 in the Rijksmuseum, February 2005 to ?

Documentary photographs can be seen after the reopening

Identifying undeveloped building sites and documenting them over a period of time is a recurring theme in Lara Almarcegui's oeuvre. She is interested in areas that are awaiting new developments. She spotted a suitable empty room in the Rijksmuseum.

Removal of the Floor of Room D4 took place at the same time as Germaine Kruip's *Rehearsal*. The choice of subject – the building and its visibility, or lack of it – is what links the two projects. But unlike Kruip's light installation, Almarcegui's intervention is purely documentary. She recorded the process of chipping away concrete in one of the Rijksmuseum's rooms without an audience and so the intervention was transient. She used a camera to record the various steps it took to dismantle the floor and expose the structure below. Her 'unfinished symphony' will not justify its existence until it is presented. It is the contrast between the room in a chaotic condition and the

renovated and newly arranged space that gives the project its meaning, so the recording will be seen at a time to be decided after the reopening.

The Rotterdam-based Spanish artist's first idea was literally far more 'weighty'. It consisted of removing debris and rubble from the bowels of the museum and displaying it in the square in front of the museum so that the multi-million euro renovation would be tangible. She wanted to create a base line from which anything was possible, while the pile of rubble gradually created scope for imagination. The ambitious plan proved to be unfeasible. The floor project, however, is based on the same principles: the passage of time, transformation and the reduction of a building to its material constituents. Her initial idea of increasing visibility acquired an even greater impact in this project. Documents have a longer lifespan and are easier to distribute than tons of building material.





3 BIK VAN DER POL (LIESBETH BIK, b. 1959 and JOS VAN DER POL, b. 1961)
Fly Me to the Moon, 6 October to 19 November 2006
 Exhibition and catalogue

Whereas Almarcegui and Kruip concentrated on the building, the artistic duo Bik Van der Pol took the Rijksmuseum as an institution as the starting point for an exhibition. In 2006 Liesbeth Bik and Jos van der Pol embarked on a project to explore the feasibility of the virtual purchase of a plot of land on the moon as an extension to the museum. The plot was purchased from planet broker Dennis Hope. An area the size of nine football pitches would be needed to accommodate a

duplicate of the Rijksmuseum on our satellite. The half field now 'officially' owned by the museum is clearly very far from enough.

Bik and Van der Pol came up with the idea after they stumbled across the oldest object in the collection while browsing through the Rijksmuseum's extensive database. It is also the only piece not made by human hands. This red object – a piece of moon rock – was brought back by the Apollo 11 mission in 1969 and presented



to the Dutch statesman Willem Drees by the American ambassador during the astronauts' visit to the Netherlands. Drees kept the rock in his desk drawer for years. In 1991 his heir finally gave it to the Rijksmuseum. In 2006 there were only a few people in the museum who were aware of its existence. The exhibition *Fly Me to the Moon* featured the lunar rock and the title deed to the extra-terrestrial territory.

Although the idea seems absurd at first sight, it does raise relevant issues. Bik and Van der Pol wanted to confront visitors with questions that are normally only asked behind the scenes in a museum. How do we relate to an object? What is the relationship between an object and its

documentation? Every object exists both physically and virtually in a collection database. Without the serendipitous digital discovery, it is likely that no one would ever have looked at the little piece of history hidden away in a repository again. It also raises the questions of provenance and right of ownership. The moon is neutral territory that belongs to nobody. It is very easy to make the connection with colonialism, which is inextricably linked to Dutch history and consequently to many of the items in the collection.

The moon has traditionally been the subject of speculation about the exploitation of its raw materials and a new living environment. Our nearest celestial body offers immense scope for projection and reverie, prompting the artists to compile a number of fantastic future scenarios for the museum in the accompanying catalogue *NG-1991-4-25. Fly Me to the Moon*. The code refers to the number of the piece of moon rock in the database. In one of the stories, the scorching heat of the sun forces people to stay indoors permanently and to work at night by moonlight. In the museum, 'The Great Digital Inventory' becomes more important than the objects themselves. Curators are fired if they dare to look at the objects and it is absolutely forbidden to touch them. In other words the documentation of an object becomes the point of departure, whereas the actual object is only a derivative of itself. In the end a 'digitist' scans the lunar rock and identifies it as twentieth-century piece of Plymouth Rock. A hypothesis that is close to the truth that came to light a couple of years after the exhibition.

Research in 2009 revealed that the moon rock was in fact a lump of petrified wood. The provenance had seemed so irreproachable that the red colour and the strange shape never rang any alarm bells. As a result the object numbered *NG-1991-4-25* has been reduced to a relic that holds its value simply because of the tale it has to tell – and so it still fits into the artists' concept. Behind every object there is always a world of stories extending far beyond its physical boundaries.

LITERATURE:

Bik Van der Pol (eds.), *NG-1991-4-25. Fly Me to the Moon*, New York 2006



4 WIJNANDA DEROO (b. 1955)

Set of 25 photographs of the dismantled Rijksmuseum, 2004

C-prints, approx. 76 x 101 cm (RP-F-2005-108 to 118) and approx. 41 x 51 cm (RP-F-2005-119 to 132)

Recto, in pen: *Wijnanda Deroo '04 1/10*

Since the Rijksmuseum building in the Stadhouderskade opened its doors in 1885 it has been photographed countless times. It seems that it is one of the most photographed buildings in Amsterdam. The Rijksmuseum's impressive size, by Dutch standards, and the remarkable architecture and decoration (initially controversial as it was considered to be too Catholic) certainly make it one of the most striking and monumental buildings in the Netherlands.

The interior of the Rijksmuseum has likewise often been photographed, but it lends itself far less readily than the exterior to shots that have a monumental effect. The Gallery of Honour is the only space long, high and empty enough to be able to make an impressive vista, with *The Night Watch* in the distance. Usually, however, it is the details, the views and the nooks and crannies that we see in interior photographs of the Rijksmuseum building.

In 2004 the Dutch photographer Wijnanda Deroo was commissioned by the Office of the Chief Government Architect (Atelier Rijksbouwmeester) to take photographs of the Rijksmuseum shortly after it was vacated for radical renovation work. Although Deroo has also captured still lifes and landscapes, she is known above all for the hushed interiors she has photographed in different countries, working variously in black-and-white and colour. Some of her sets consist exclusively of colour or black-and-white photographs, others feature both.

The interiors she photographs in colour are usually characterized by exuberant colours and colour combinations and by the presence of an abundance of colourful furniture, objects and bric-a-brac, and she certainly does not shun kitsch.

Wijnanda Deroo much prefers deserted interiors. Occupants, users and customers are almost always absent, so that all the attention is focused on the rooms themselves and their furnishings. Deroo has photographed everything from dwellings, hotel rooms and mobile homes to restaurants and bunkers – and since 2004 the Rijksmuseum too. Some of the buildings and rooms are still in use, others are abandoned and deserted.

In the twenty-five photographs she took of the Rijksmuseum in 2004 the building had just been vacated. All kinds of display cases are still there and the underground passage is still as dark as many Amsterdam residents will always remember it, but the first walls have already been broken through. The original colours of the walls and the display cases – lots of pastel shades – have since disappeared and will not return. Many of the rooms that Deroo photographed are now also things of the past: many of the dividing walls and floors have been removed to make way for larger galleries.

Some of the photographs of the Rijksmuseum convey a sense of mystery because there is not a soul to be seen and the rooms are being renovated. Many of the rooms and pieces of furniture are no longer in use but not yet dismantled, so it is not obvious what function they once fulfilled. In several photographs in the set the floors and walls are almost empty, and consequently express a certain abstraction and alienation. In the bare rooms the textures of the architecture and the furnishings stand out much more than when they were still full of works of art, books and files.

Living by turn in Amsterdam and New York, after taking the set of photographs in 2004 – transferred to the Rijksmuseum by the Government Architect's Office a year later – Wijnanda Deroo returned at regular intervals to photograph the interior of the building in the different stages of dismantling and construction. The more the renovation progressed and many of the rooms were restored to their original size, the more the interior of the building began to lend itself to impressive, monumental views.

LITERATURE:

W. Deroo, *Rijksmuseum*, Amsterdam 2013

PROVENANCE:

Transferred from the Atelier Rijksbouwmeester, 2005
(inv. nos. RP-F-2005-108 to 132).



5 SIMON STARLING (b. 1967)
Drop Sculpture (Atlas), 2006-08
 Terracotta, wooden plinths, h. approx. 170, 204 and 240 cm

A carefully controlled fall was the tipping point in the *Drop Sculpture (Atlas)* project which the British conceptual artist and Turner Prize winner Simon Starling carried out to mark the building of the Ateliergebouw, in which the Rijksmuseum shares its restoration workshops with the research department of the Cultural Heritage Agency and the University of Amsterdam's restoration academy. A smashed work of art is every museum's nightmare, but on Friday 18 April 2008 Starling dropped and smashed a masterpiece from the museum collection three times amid great interest from Rijksmuseum staff and in front of many cameras. The victim was the seventeenth-century terracotta model of *Atlas*, which for years had borne the world on its shoulders on the roof of the former Amsterdam town hall, nowadays the Royal Palace on the Dam. Since 1887 this model has been on loan from the city of Amsterdam (inv. no. BK-AM-51-7), as part of a larger group of models of the decorations that Artus Quellinus the Elder (1609-1668) made for the town hall.

Obviously there was no question of allowing the original to be dropped. The project consequently began with the making of replicas of the *Atlas*, which were to be painstakingly reconstructed immediately after they were destroyed. Three restored Atlases would then be placed in the foyer of the Ateliergebouw. An act of deliberate iconoclasm would thus lead to a work of art, conceptually linked to the building in which it is housed, that would express everything that goes on in that building – the repair of works of art and the fight against their physical deterioration. Starling won over the art committee of the New Rijksmuseum with this plan.

The first phase of the project – the replication – was carried out by a team of experts from the Conservation Technologies Department of the National Museums Liverpool, which mapped the surface of the original statue with a laser scanner without physically touching it. A virtual model was constructed on the basis of this scan, and this was used to make a mould with a 3-D printer. Four casts were made from this mould, three of which were coloured to match the original as closely as

possible. The fourth, untreated version was to serve as a test piece to investigate how smashed terracotta behaves and which materials and techniques could be used to put the statue back together again.

Starling's idea of dropping and smashing three replicas of the *Atlas* from plinths of different heights (92, 126 and 162 cm) and then have them restored in the Rijksmuseum's restoration workshops caused a great deal of controversy among the museum staff. Was it actually fitting to drop and smash a work of art, albeit a replica, in an institution that makes an all-out effort to preserve the national heritage? And should time that could possibly be better spent restoring the permanent collection so that it could be shown again in its full glory in a few years be invested in it? At the same time Starling's project also presented an opportunity to acquire new knowledge and insights that could help in the restoration of objects of this kind. Either way, it made people think about various ethical and aesthetic considerations that play a role in restoration practice.

A way out of this impasse, as fundamental as it was practical, was found by involving an outside restorer in the project, who both carried out the reconstruction and issued a report on it. After Starling had pushed the first *Atlas* off its plinth at 12.27 p.m. on 18 April 2008, Mandy Slager and her team began to document the drop pattern and number and collect the countless fragments. The other two replicas were then subjected to gravity. After the necessary preparatory research, Slager began to reconstruct the three statues in her workshop in Leiden. She reported the deliberations and decisions during this process on her website www.conservering.nl/atlas.

The restoration was carried out independently, without guidance from Starling but based on three criteria he had formulated: firstly that all three statues would be treated in the same way, secondly that the approach taken would be a twenty-first-century Northern European one, and thirdly that the entire process would be legible. The criteria left leeway for interpretation and gradually Slager realized that she herself was

making a substantial creative contribution to the end result. Every decision and intervention impacted on the final appearance of the Atlases. What began as a process of painstaking replication had become a transformation by way of destruction and reconstruction. The project was concluded by replacing each statue on the plinth from which it had been pushed, in exactly the same spot in the foyer of the Ateliergebouw.

In heritage circles, art vandalism is a dreaded phenomenon that is always accompanied by great moral indignation. Artists, on the other hand, are able to recognize a new creative meaning in

an act of destruction, deliberate or otherwise. To paraphrase the poet Lucebert, the cracks that are still easy to see in Starling's *Drop Sculpture (Atlas)* highlight the defencelessness of everything that is of value.

LITERATURE:

N. Zonnenberg (ed.), *Simon Starling. Drop Sculpture (Atlas)*, Amsterdam 2008

PROVENANCE:

Transferred from the Rijksgebouwendienst, 2008
(inv. no. BK-2012-37).



PHOTO: Stefanie Crätz

6 FIONA TAN (b. 1966)

Provenance, 2008

Digital installation (six Eizo LCD monitors, six Mac mini-computers, cables, power supply, supports) with accompanying publication

Provenance cannot be seen and goes unnoticed. At least, that usually applies to objects in a museum's collection. Provenance is the story of the journey that the object took before it arrived in the collection, from its creation by way of successive owners and locations. That story only comes to life when it is told – provenance is the immaterial side of material heritage. It is different with people: everyone reveals a little of their 'provenance', in their name, appearance, language, behaviour, by what they wear and in their health and wealth. Something of this provenance is always visible and noticeable.

In her installation, *Provenance*, Fiona Tan makes a link between provenance as an art-historical term and as an indication of human origins. The groundwork for this installation was her search through the Rijksmuseum's repositories in Lelystad, where she became acquainted with seventeenth-century Dutch portraiture. Unknown territory for Tan, who begins her account of her journey of discovery in the accompanying publication of the same name with her own provenance, which is far removed from the Netherlands. 'I was born in Indonesia and grew up in Australia. In 1998 I moved to the Netherlands to continue my art studies. Since then I have lived and worked in Amsterdam, which is now essentially my home base ...' Looking at one of those portraits from the Golden Age, the rather formal *Portrait of Margaretha de Geer* by Jacob Gerritz Cuyp of 1661 (inv. no. SK-A-611), Tan realized 'why it seemed so familiar. ... Although the painting is more than three hundred and fifty years old, Margaretha's features are ordinary and recognizable. Her face looks exactly like the faces I see every day at the Albert Cuyp market or at the greengrocer's.' It is a readable provenance, linked to place and not to time.

It was not the masterpieces that attracted Tan's attention but the ordinary portraits, painted with smooth brushstrokes and rather clichéd lighting coming from the left. The painting does not impose itself on you – as Rembrandt's *Portrait of Margaretha de Geer* (National Gallery, London) does – and this is precisely why she can look at

the person. This is what makes these well-to-do, seventeenth-century Dutch burghers come to life for Tan. The experience of recognition and proximity to the past leads her to look at the present with the same eye, to look at the people she knows in Amsterdam who live in exactly the same environment as the people portrayed by Cuyp, Van Mierevelt, Verspronck and Van der Helst.

Tan filmed her mother-in-law Marry Knol, her little son Niels Dijkstal, her mentor and colleague Kees Hin, the cabaret artist Sanne Wallis de Vries, greengrocer Najet Olmez and his son Tunahan and prospective art academy student Tessel Schole (presented as Cornelia van Rijn, Rembrandt's illegitimate daughter). Her camera glides slowly across faces and figures and zooms in on objects in their everyday surroundings. They are moving portraits lasting a few minutes, in black and white and chiaroscuro and also in high resolution, so that they hold their own with the detailed realism of the portraits from the Golden Age. Played on monitors of different sizes, in the classical arrangement of a group of paintings, these portraits sketched an intimate picture of the Dutch at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

LITERATURE:

J. Lamoree, 'Een echo van de zeventiende eeuw', *Het Parool*, 27 August 2008

F. Tan, *Provenance*, Amsterdam 2008

M. de Vries, 'Liever geen meesterwerken', *de Volkskrant*, 21 August 2008

PROVENANCE:

On loan from the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment and the Office of the Chief Government Architect (Atelier Rijksbouwmeester)

(inv. no. BK-C-2008-1).





