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Press Release

Jeroen de Rijke / Willem de Rooij

Since the start of their collaboration in 1994 Dutch artists Jeroen de Rijke (1970 – 2006) and Willem de Rooij (b. 1969) have produced a select corpus of 35mm and 16mm films, photographs, objects, installations and texts. Their collaborative work analyses the conventions of presentation and representation, and explores the areas of tension between sociopolitical and autonomous image production.

This exhibition is conceived as the counterpart to a twin exhibition in K21, Düsseldorf, which took place from December 2007 to April 2008. Each of these two shows highlights a different selection of de Rijke / de Rooij's works from the last ten years, as well as documentation and source material.

De Rijke / de Rooij's exhibitions were always carefully staged and could be seen as autonomous installations. Through partial reconstruction within both exhibitions at K21 and MAMbo of previous presentations – such as Dutch Pavilion, Venice Biennale; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Magazin4, Bregenz – multiple conceptual and visual echoes make for a deeper understanding of de Rijke / de Rooij's artistic program.

The exhibition at K21 centered on films *Mandarin Ducks* (2005) and *The Point of Departure* (2002), the slide projection *Orange* (2004) and various photographic and installation pieces, as the new installation produced with the help of the Cineteca di Bologna and inspired by Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Il fiore delle mille e una notte* (1974). The exhibition at MAMbo centers on a hugely different selection of works: the film *Mandarin Ducks* – the only work shared by the two exhibitions – the 16mm film *I'm Coming Home in Forty Days* (1997), the 35mm film *Bantar Gebang* (2000), a number of different photographic works and the installation *Bouquet IV* (2005). *Mandarin Ducks* is a highly stylized conversation piece, in which ten characters negotiate physical and emotional space within a modernist domestic interior. *Bantar Gebang* juxtaposes the visual splendor of a tropical sunset over an Indonesian slum with the daily reality of that same location. *I'm Coming Home in Forty Days*, a circumnavigation of an iceberg in Greenland, oscillates between abstraction and realistic depiction of the landscape. *Bouquet IV* reflects on the photographic translation from color into black and white. In the show at MAMbo a part of the exhibition *Together* (Magazin4, Bregenz, 2005) is also reconstructed, and two creations of Dutch fashion designer Fong-Leng (b. 1938) are shown together for the first time: *Luipaard* and its modern replica *Luipaard II*. Originating from two different public collections in the Netherlands, this duo of extravagant golden dresses tells a self-reflexive tale about the liaison between exoticism and economy, society life and culture in 1970s Amsterdam. Both dresses also relate to two installations Willem de Rooij produced for Galerie Chantal Crousel in Paris (2006) and Galerie Daniel Buchholz in Cologne (2007).

Intersecting with the show at K21 and creating new or unexpected encounters that oscillate between expository and documentary framework, the peculiar selection of



de Rijke / de Rooij's works presented at MAMbo shapes a complex doppelganger entity, which avoid the features and the very idea of a survey show.

Jeroen de Rijke / Willem de Rooij is a joint project by K21 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen and MAMbo Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna. The two independent yet connected exhibitions present a comprehensive overview of the work of Jeroen de Rijke and Willem de Rooij, which is accompanied by a new exhibition catalogue (published by Snoeck, Köln) with new texts by Sabeth Buchmann, Willem de Rooij, Ann Goldstein, Julian Heynen, Gianfranco Maraniello and Andrea Viliani.

With the contribution of :



Ambassade van het
Koninkrijk der Nederlanden

The work *Bouquet IV* was realized with the contribution of :



Foreword

Gianfranco Maraniello

The de Rijke / de Rooij exhibition at the K21 and the MAMbo is neither anthological nor retrospective. Nor can it be considered 'itinerant' save in a non-conventional sense of the term, in perceiving the need for the two stages of the event to reflect each other and function in tandem in a dialectic that extends beyond a banal adaptation of a single project to be moved and replicated in different locations. This is the only approach for those who see art as a means of image psychogenesis, analyzing not only the internal statute of the work but the very conditions of how it happens. The films and photographs, as well as the layouts of de Rijke / de Rooij inevitably lead to a shift from the presence of the images displayed to their potential, obliging the observer towards an awareness that shifts from aesthetic appreciation towards the enhancement of awareness, from encountering what 'there is' before us to the transitory contingency of representation of which to acknowledge the hidden ideological premise.

If the critical production of the visual is the fulcrum of the work of de Rijke / de Rooij, the institutions which house or produce their works cannot ignore this aspect. By accepting to be not only the place but also the material of an analysis which transforms the container into contained, the museum becomes part of the work of the two artists by allowing the exhibition to present the need for a complement; for it to be accompanied by, or rather realize itself by its own absence in an impracticability which in this case referring to a 'twin museum' is highly suitable. In precise language, and perceiving a rhetorical tool in etymology for who is writing and intending to correspond to the deconstructionist logic of the artists, the project of this exhibition becomes "symbolic" offering itself even in a tragic manifestation of absence. Indeed, the origins of *symbolon* (from the verb *syμβallein*: keep together, place alongside) is nothing other than the name of a split coin or object, namely a broken unity. The two halves are to be used as a sign of recognition by virtue of the obvious and exclusive complementarity of one with the other. Despite the symbol promising an original unity, it only occurs in separation—the fracture that unites the two halves to produce the relationship between parts that refer to each other, 'to each other from each other.' I feel sure that Willem de Rooij has adopted the two museums as the two halves of a symbol because he alone has the faculty of keeping the partiality of this situation together and of transforming absence into a significant experience for all.

First and foremost, I wish to thank Julian Heynen and all the staff of K21 for sharing and interpreting these organizational requirements with extraordinary humanity and professionalism. We are deeply indebted to all the collectors, galleries, critics, and institutions that love, respect, and support the work of de Rijke / de Rooij and, above all, with all those who will continue to do so in the future. Heartfelt thanks to those who contributed to creating this catalogue—first of all the two authors and Martha Stutteregger—and the exhibitions in Düsseldorf and Bologna. This event would not



have been possible without the valuable contribution of the Mondriaan Stichting and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. In addition, and yet again, MAMbo was able to count on the availability of the Cineteca of the City of Bologna which, with the generosity of its Director Gian Luca Farinelli and the enthusiasm of its staff, has become much more than an institution with which to share projects. MAMbo would not exist without the contribution of the Emilia-Romagna Region, the support of Fondazione del Monte di Bologna e Ravenna and the determining action the Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio in Bologna.

A very special thanks to the artists for the exceptional commitment—not only professional—in preparing an exhibition that goes beyond the specificity of art to lead us into comprehending our time and the way we undergo experience.

The staff of MAMbo are not thanked here because it is in their name, and with them, that I wish to turn a last thought to Willem de Rooij for succeeding in keeping us in a sort of 'due vicinity', in a limit which enabled us to remain faithful to the project and respectful of the roles, beyond which we would find ourselves inexorably inadequate.

Foreword (The Politics of Colors)

Julian Heynen

For example, *Orange* (2004): The projector throws the calm, quiet rectangle of a slide onto the screen. The eye is plunged into a uniform, translucent color phenomenon that seems to be as manifest as it is ephemeral. After a while the image changes: a second shade of orange. To the steady beat of the slide projector, ever-new shades of the color come into view. Nowhere on the surface (or is it a space?) are there any reference points. We register the way that the one color fluctuates in this and that direction. Yet as soon as we attempt to recall the nuance we have just seen and describe how it differs from the one we are seeing now, consciousness slips back into the general field "orange." For the eye and the understanding that follows after it, what language purports to capture is a continuum of bewildering variations. Consciousness cannot catch up with the complexity of experience in this experiment that seems to be so simple.

A first, perhaps banal reaction might be: color is that aspect of the visible world that cannot be described but only experienced. 'Pure' color is something that – to an extreme and unique degree – can only be defined in a given context, indirectly at best and only with reference to its edges. Precisely this, however, makes it seem to be something extremely independent, indeed perhaps a summum of art in the modern sense. De Rijke / de Rooij sometimes make this painfully clear, because they exploit the full potential of colors, pushing them to the limits of their power to signify, to the point where they no longer mean, but merely are. Indeed, by doing so they deliberately evoke – both affirmatively and critically – the modern paradigm of autonomy, whose meaning has become uncertain.

However, color is also that element in all visual experience that awakens deeply rooted associations, which may be hidden from consciousness or may also be extremely explicit. For example, for an observer who does not just see the politics in the news images but critically connects its visual signals with the events, the eye-catching orange overalls worn by the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay can make such a strong impression that from this point on even the most abstract form of orange is linked to that place and its meaning, which cannot be banished from the perception of the color in general. Or to choose another example: for a native of the Netherlands, this color is inextricably linked to the real or asserted identity of his country – from the festive mood of soccer and the royal house to nationalistic, xenophobic proclamations. (All of these examples are given by the artists themselves in a text that forms part of the work.)

Thus, the viewer who, while watching *Orange*, glides through this color-filled emptiness may experience a peculiar inner conflict. The sheer force of color in its subtle variations appears to be a natural and uncomplicated demonstration of beauty, of (seemingly) pure beauty. It is a beauty that, for long stretches, modernity

has forgotten how to confront or has delegated to esoteric subcultures. Inevitably, however, consciousness wanders out of this experiential realm, pursuing vague chains of associations or concrete comparisons back to empirical reference points like the ones described above. Thus, even this most general form of beauty is not a space apart. On the contrary, reality, with all its unpredictable facets, can penetrate into it too at any moment. Moreover, de Rijke / de Rooij repeatedly show in their works that the reverse is also true and that there is no wall between ethics and aesthetics.

Perhaps it's like this: when one can no longer bear – or risks drowning in – the intensity, richness, complexity, and beauty of a particular color or form because they are pushed to their limit in a work of art, aren't a half-formed thought, a word or phrase, or a fleeting memory image that brush against a bit of the concrete world enough to act as a detonator, touching off an explosion of precisely that reality, an explosion far more powerful than any explicit reference to it could be? Provided of course that we know something about the world, about the circumstances.

It is strange and intractable thoughts like these that are provoked by de Rijke / de Rooij's works. They arise because the artists go beyond the examination (and evocation) of the messages and conventions of filmic aesthetics to focus our attention on the merely apparent paradox of artistic images in general: the unity of beauty and critical potential. The artists insist that there is no separation between these two essential possibilities of art, but that the goal is to fuse them. This has become a rarity, and that is why we are producing this exhibition and this catalogue.

My heartfelt thanks go to Willem de Rooij, who – after the sudden death of Jeroen de Rijke – spent a long time developing, with great care and intensity, a concept that does not encapsulate the joint work in a retrospective but combines important works into new constellations and supplements them with interpolations that place them in a broader context. With independent exhibitions slated to be held in succession at K21 and the Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna (MAMbo), which seem to be two aspects of a larger show, it made sense to bring them together in this joint catalogue. For this, many thanks to our colleagues there, Gianfranco Maraniello and Andrea Viliani. Thanks are also due to the three authors of the catalogue, Sabeth Buchmann, Ann Goldstein, and Andrea Viliani, who offer different perspectives on the artists' work, as well as to the book designer, Martha Stutteregger. Throughout the preparation of the exhibition and catalogue, we received the tried and tested support of the Galerie Daniel Buchholz – my heartfelt thanks go to it and to Christopher Müller. I would also like to thank everyone on the K21 team, especially the technical director, Bernd Schliephake, and my colleagues Stefanie Jansen and Isabelle Malz, for their careful work and perseverance. Finally, I am enormously grateful to the Mondriaan Stichting and the law firm of White & Case LLP, who financially supported the exhibition of these two Dutch artists in Düsseldorf.

Orange Is More than a Color¹

Sabeth Buchmann

A scenario opens up before our eyes that is as strange as it is familiar. We see a film in which a projected image of early morning mist changes into the milky twilight of daybreak. Although it is a frequently cited cliché, the motif of the sunrise has clearly lost nothing of the atmospheric aura that captivates us in Jeroen de Rijke's and Willem de Rooij's film *Bantar Gebang* (2000). Yet the brighter the sun becomes, the more we become aware that our gaze is identified with that of a camera focused on a place we recognize as a slum built on top of a garbage dump. Although the camera appears to be positioned on a hill some distance away, the shot, which seems to have been chosen with planimetric considerations in mind, suggests that it is inside the garbage dump that surrounds the collection of huts. The shot will remain unchanged throughout the entire 35mm color film. Thus for the ten minutes that it lasts all we will see is a few people going about their work—and in between, birds and chickens fluttering and flapping their wings, the barking of a dog, and the sound of someone clearing their throat, which seems to come from a person behind the camera. Documented by that camera, it is 'real' indications like these of a life that apparently feels itself unobserved that lend to the static filmic image an inner movement that remains external to it. However, the length of the film precisely coincides with the maximum possible length of a single take, and in this sense the unedited image does not present itself as a raw, unprocessed document but highlights its formally mediated relationship with the object of representation, a relationship that points to technical standards, as a composition of framing, lighting, and length of take. Indexicalized in this way, the relationship of camera and image thematizes the artistic intention as an act of differentiation between what is shown and what falls outside the selected frame. Thus it is up to the optical soundtrack to furnish a sensuously perceptible link to the invisible position of the camera and the space it constructs. While *Bantar Gebang* evokes the conventions of documentary film, its setting obscures them. The film, after all, consists of a 'single' frame, which is restricted to an exterior view of the slum, which is atmospherically suffused with the morning light. From an aesthetic perspective, then, the work is reminiscent of an art-historical slide presentation on (pre-)impressionist landscape painting. Hence the projected image does not appear as a *single* medium but rather as a montage, at once technical and referential, of multiple media, a montage combining contrary forms of temporal perception. The singularity of the 'frame' thus has its counterpart in the perception of a duration—at once extended and finite—of visual presence as the expression of a potentially infinite technical reproducibility of time. In *Bantar Gebang*, as in serial works of the 1960s, time becomes an action² with its own peculiar dynamic, without fulfilling the classical conventions of narration.

The very fact that time appears in this work as an immanent nexus of heterogeneous forms of production and perception recalls the influence of early photography and film on the avant-garde forms of montage and collage. As we know, these forms

¹ Advertising slogan of ZDF (Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen).

² Comp. for example David Lamela's series *Time as Activity*.

sought to break the illusionism of the pictorial space of central perspective by temporalizing the surface of the image, in order to place it in an objective relationship with the fragmentarily represented world. Previously, photography and later early film had entered into an almost scientifically motivated rivalry with painting. At issue was the ability to represent as authentically as possible worlds that were foreign to the consumers of the images. The same ambition is already at work in Dutch painting of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, where—as can be gleaned from that painting's subjects—it is linked to the role of the Netherlands as an imperial seafaring nation and colonial power. In the nineteenth century this tendency toward scientifically accurate representation enjoyed an unexpected boom. The pioneers of photography and film often brought back thousands of shots of 'exotic' landscapes and objects from the African, Asian, and Indian colonies to their Western European native countries—a phenomenon that had a decisive impact on the rise of the visual mass industry.³ The shortening of exposure time, which took place just a few years after the invention of photography, would hasten the spread of the new technologies and their products enormously. For the ever-increasing flexibility and nearness to the coveted objects made it possible to suggest a perfection of the same authenticity that had also been claimed by the advanced painting of an earlier time. Both technical and painterly images sought to use the available techniques to produce optical effects designed to involve the audience in their pictorial worlds as directly and immediately as possible. It hardly needs to be added that the ambitions at work here were not just aesthetic and scientific but also commercial.

From this perspective it would be possible, in the case of *Bantar Gebang*, to derive from a single shot a (media-)historical constellation that deals with the aesthetic revolt against the basic condition of (institutional) representation, which is taken here as the object of representation: the position of distance. By filming a place as antithetical to the White Cube as a slum, the artists refer this condition back to the question of the connection between art and politics, which has its roots in the historical avant-garde. Characteristically, de Rijke / de Rooij's work does not pose this question from the internal perspective of the represented 'place' but from the external perspective of the camera, which is immanent in the aesthetic perception of that place. Hence, it is precisely by refusing to suggest the nearness of the object that it addresses the distanced subject-object relationship as a problem of the aesthetic rules that constitute it. The tension could hardly be greater. For just as the pace of the sunrise—which is paradoxically increased by the use of fast motion and corresponds to the real length of time it takes to view the film—is obviously fictional and at the same time configures the visible 'information' in accord with technical and medial conditions of representation, so too the identification of the viewer's gaze with the position of the camera turns out to be a 'derealizing' effect of image technology. The viewer's position is not within the garbage dump from which the shantytown is seen, but within an institutional framework where we are situated as an audience of 'contemporary art'—a spatio-temporal structure designed to authenticate the construct of immediate visual presence that forms part of the basic understanding of modern art as well as the modern mass media.

³ Thomas Elsaesser, *Filmgeschichte und frühes Kino. Archäologie eines Medienwandels*, Edition text+kritik, Munich, 2002.

One need not have read the texts that have been published on the joint works of Jeroen de Rijke and Willem de Rooij—including the present essay—in order to notice the artists' decision (illustrated here by the example of *Bantar Gebang*) not to make their chosen aesthetic pictorial language a causal function of their subjects. Thus the distance that is here assumed between camera/viewer and object/image releases an aesthetic quality that can be motivated historically but whose passivity vis-à-vis the topos of the representation raises the question of its political legitimacy. For it may enhance the duo's reputation within the art market to highlight the aesthetic quality of *Bantar Gebang*—after all, the presence of that quality is valued far more highly than political 'credibility.' But this does not mean that quality is indispensable, especially when in the art critics' view there are political themes at stake. One catalogue author who writes about de Rijke / de Rooij's images goes so far as to speak of "obscene beauty" and "aestheticism."⁴ Yet as the authorized description of the work⁵ suggests, the artists deliberately risk arousing such a 'suspicion.' Moreover, it seems extremely unlikely that, given the nature of the subject they have chosen, de Rijke and de Rooij would *not* be aware that it is hardly an appropriate model for the production of 'pretty pictures.' Conversely, one might also argue that, if a markedly aesthetic brand of contemplation can hardly be 'adequate' to the depiction of social misery, it is just as misguided simply to identify "the beautiful of art"⁶ with 'good art.' Thus the 'most beautiful' French artists on display at the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin in Art Summer 07 were (true to the canon) those who—like Courbet, Manet, and Cézanne—broke with the prevailing conventions of beauty of their day. Alongside them there is much that is 'merely beautiful'—produced to satisfy the audience's taste or academic norms—that no longer seems worth mentioning today.

It is all the more unsettling that in this work the formal and aesthetic composition of a sunrise is combined with a so-called 'Third World' subject, one with which neither the two artists, who come from the so-called 'First World' and enjoy the privileges of institutional representation, nor we as their 'contemporaries' are seriously confronted. For in view of the not exactly inconsiderable power of the art market to decide what is shown at international exhibition halls and written about in catalogues, who would believe that political problems that lie beyond its reach could possibly be solved by means of aesthetic or theoretical reflections that ultimately aim at the symbolic and mercantile system of art? Yet bizarrely, it seems that the social misery of 'others' forms part of the

⁴ Sven Lütticken, "Abstraktionen," in: *Jeroen de Rijke / Willem de Rooij*, exh. cat., Kunsthalle Zürich, JRP/Ringier, Zurich, 2003, pp. 90–97, here p. 91.

⁵ Eva Meyer-Hermann: "Bantar Gebang", in: Meyer-Hermann, Eva, ed., *Jeroen de Rijke & Willem de Rooij, Spaces and Films 1998–2002*, exh. cat., Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven / Villa Arson Nizza, Rotterdam: Nai Publishers, 2003, pp. 80–83, here p. 81: "To what extent can a work of art make social, societal, politically critical statements? Is the cliché of images of slums from South East Asia to South America just one cliché amongst many?"

⁶ Comp. Juliane Rebentisch, "The Dialectic of Beauty: On the Work of Isa Genzken," in: Nicolaus Schafhausen, ed., *Isa Genzken: Oil*, exh. cat. of the German Pavilion at the 52nd Venice Biennale 2007, DuMont, Cologne, 2007), pp. 160–164, here p. 160.

indispensable thematic equipment of an institutional self-image that is permanently tuned to political criticality.

But if politics is apparently what art requires for its universal legitimation, within what frame of reference are we to situate *Bantar Gebang*? From this perspective it might be said that the work does nothing other than compel one to pose this question. It takes the starkest possible contrast to what 'we' experience as beautiful—a visibly stinking garbage dump on which people are living—and turns it precisely *not* into a representational problem for politics but into one of 'our' (aesthetic) image of (political) art. In this sense, the sunrise that unfolds before our eyes at a fictional tempo seems to illuminate that distant historical resonating chamber in which—as outlined above—the link between art and politics turns out to participate in the aestheticization of a world perceived as 'authentic.' That world has its counterpart in a 'promise of beauty' that—as pointed out most recently by the literary critic Winfried Menninghaus and the art historian Helmut Draxler⁷—even the most stubborn attempts on the part of anti-idealist aesthetics have been unable to do away with—or if they have then only at the cost of modernizing the very "aesthetic regime"⁸ that is felt to be obsolete. Yet it is just as undeniable, according to Menninghaus, that the experience of beauty has a role in the "configuration of sense perception," by which he means the interplay of "cognitive abilities, affective investments, and practical behavioral consequences."⁹ Menninghaus is aware of the 'Darwinian' implications of physiological and anthropological interpretations of 'beauty,' which—as shown by popular scientific articles on the subject—are played off all too eagerly against cultural-historical deconstructions of normative (patriarchal, Western, and white) categories of the beautiful, categories that become thematic in a different way in the works of de Rijke / de Rooij. Yet this does not prompt them to champion the less problematic essentialism of the 'anti-aesthetic' discourse that is associated, for example, with orthodox works of conceptual art.¹⁰ According to this view, "the beautiful of art"¹¹ is designed to mask the 'actual essence' of art beneath the pleasant and illusory form of the commodity.¹² Yet as the philosopher Juliane Rebentisch notes, "this gesture of negation testifies to an idea of the beautiful that neither modern art nor aesthetics can renounce, because it constitutes their dynamic center. . . ."¹³

⁷ Winfried Menninghaus, *Das Versprechen der Schönheit*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/Main: 2007, and Helmut Draxler, *Coercing Constellations: Space, Reference, and Representation in Fareed Armaly*, b_books, Berlin, 2007, pp. 110 ff.

⁸ A concept reintroduced by the philosopher Jacques Rancière, which recalls Friedrich Schiller's "aesthetic education."

⁹ Menninghaus, *Versprechen der Schönheit* (note 7), p.8.

¹⁰ Draxler, *Coercing Constellations* (note 7).

¹¹ Comp. Rebentisch, "The Dialectic of Beauty" (note 6).

¹² Comp. Draxler, *Coercing Constellations* (note 7) and Rebentisch, "The Dialectic of Beauty" (note 6).

¹³ Rebentisch, "The Dialectic of Beauty" (note 6), p. 160.

The resonant field of the contextual art of the 1980s and '90s—a field that was as vast as it was heterogeneous—insisted that art must always be seen as a social practice as well, rather than exclusively as an aesthetic one. Thus it sought to define the aesthetic idea of the beautiful as a function of categories, genres, and media that must be specified historically and socially. Against the view that aesthetic beauty is an transhistorical and universal intrinsic feature of art, artists incorporated the representational practices of photography, film, advertising, television, design, fashion, etc. into their works, practices that until then had been banished and repressed by formalistic pictorial languages. Thus the “configuration of sense perception” spoken of by Menninghaus came to include the ‘popular’ and ‘vulgar’ forms of modernity as well. “Get the feeling!”¹⁴ is what art and aesthetics have in common with the beauty of automobile and travel marketing.

In this sense we might take up an argument of the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, who is currently much on the minds of theorists and artists. According to this argument, the ‘sensible’ is not the exclusive domain of art, but also a dimension of politics. Rancière regards the “division of the sensible” as a process in space and time in which the boundaries between art and politics are flexible and dynamic.¹⁵ ‘Art,’ according to this view, is not ‘political primarily’ because it has a political subject but because it “configures a spatio-temporal sensorium that determines modes of being together or apart, inside or outside, across from or in the middle of...”¹⁶ Similar topographies are also present in Rancière’s theory of the image. When he differentiates between images on the basis of their specific ‘laws of production and reception’—which include those of cinema, photography, painting, television, and video—he does so in order to evaluate them in terms of their capacity for aesthetic and sensuous alterity, their ability to enter into a spatio-temporal relationship with the place of the “other.”¹⁷ In his catalogue essay on de Rijke / de Rooij’s contribution to the 2005 Venice Biennale, the cultural theorist Tom Holert refers to Rancière’s reflections on the interchange between art and the commercialization of social visual worlds in the commodity culture of the nineteenth century.¹⁸ He takes up this argument with reference to the division between artistic and non-artistic images, a division problematized by Willem de Rooij in an interview. This is significant, since what

¹⁴ Advertising slogan of an auto rental firm.

¹⁵ Comp. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill, Continuum, New York, 2004. [The subtitle of the English translation of Rancière’s work is *The Distribution of the Sensible*, but “division,” which is also a valid translation, more accurately captures the nuance stressed in this essay. It will be used without comment from this point forward.—The translator]

¹⁶ Jacques Rancière, “Politique de l’Art” (unpublished manuscript), 2. Published in German translation as “Die Politik der Kunst und ihre Paradoxien,” in: Rancière, *Die Aufteilung des Sinnlichen. Die Politik der Kunst und ihre Paradoxien*, trans. and ed. Maria Muhle, Berlin 2006, pp. 75–99, here p. 77.

¹⁷ Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliott, Verso, London, 2007.

¹⁸ Tom Holert, “Moving On in a Pavilion: Thinking with and around Jeroen de Rijke and Willem de Rooij,” in: *de Rijke / de Rooij*, exh. cat., Dutch Pavilion of the 51st Venice Biennale 2005, Revolver Books, Frankfurt/Main, 2005, pp. 31–44, here p. 32.

distinguishes (good) art from (bad) politics is certainly not that it alone is able to set the ugly shadow sides of life against the culture industry's aestheticizing strategies. As we know, the representation of "social structures, political conflicts, or social, ethnic, or sexual identities"¹⁹ that is called for by documentary 'mappings' and visual 'narratives'—and which is rightly problematized by Rancière—is no guarantee of a proper attitude but has long since entered the repertoire of issues of image and advertising campaigns. Thus de Rooij also sees no difference between artistic and non-artistic forms of the appropriation, adaptation, and contextualization of images except in their specific objectives and the formal, conceptual, and referential agendas that underlie them.²⁰

In terms of *Bantar Gebang*, then, we might return to the question posed earlier—within what frame reference are we to situate art and politics in this work? After all, Rancière's model suggests that the 'sensuous element of politics' should not be defined as a quality of the content of the image (the slum) but rather as a quality of the forms of representation and perception that constitute that image. As I suggested earlier with reference to de Rijke / de Rooij's appropriation of painterly, photographic, and cinematographic strategies of staging, in *Bantar Gebang* it is techniques of spatialization and temporalization that prevent an illusionistic nearness to the object of contemplation. Now, as regards the spatio-temporal connection between a 'political' subject and its presentation in a White Cube, there are useful indications in a catalogue essay by Sven Lütticken on works by de Rijke / de Rooij. In an essay entitled "Abstractions," Lütticken refers to the land art projects of Robert Smithson and to Smithson's distinction between 'sites' (which may be a wasteland or any other anonymous place) and 'non-sites' (which refer to spaces for representation, including the White Cube). Lütticken then applies this distinction to the filmic works of de Rijke / de Rooij. Connecting a place that is reserved for aesthetic perception qua institutional representation with a 'place' that is ostensibly external to it—something that is done by both Smithson and de Rijke / de Rooij—might be seen as an experiment of precisely the kind that Rancière has in mind when he calls for a "redivision of the sensible." Seen in this light, the ideal type of the White Cube would correspond to an abstract 'spatio-temporal sensorium' that—through Smithson's construction—would in turn appear as a sensuously experienceable (re)constellation of interior and exterior spaces. Since this cannot be done without transforming a former 'site' into an aesthetically defined object of representation or, as Lütticken puts it, into a "cinematographic non-site,"²¹ this raises the question of the underlying observer models. Are they—as in the classical White Cube—conceived in a relationship of separation vis-à-vis the object of representation? Or on the contrary, is that separation abolished, as envisioned when the White Cube is replaced by immersive Black Boxes?

When speaking of *Bantar Gebang*, the answer to this question is: neither one nor the other. For in this work the distance from the 'world outside' that is associated

¹⁹ Rancière, "Politique de l'Art" (note 16), p. 2.

²⁰ Cited in Holert, "Moving On in a Pavilion" (note 18), 31.

²¹ See Lütticken, "Abstraktionen" (note 4), 91.

with the White Cube is most definitely asserted, in order literally to cut off the affective function of the image—the viewers' involvement—from the represented subject. However, this does not mean that the affective impact of the image as such is negated. On the contrary, it is reinforced by the chosen techniques in a manner that opens the image to itself and hence to the spatio-temporal sensoriums it contains. Thus the experience of 'beauty' that may occur as one watches the sunrise is shown to be the effect of a montage of real and fictional, literal and referential spatial and temporal modes. In *Bantar Gebang*, then, aesthetic perception itself is addressed as a process of differentiation and division—indeed, this is already suggested by the very fact that this work synthesizes White Cube and movie theater. This is also the significance of de Rijke / de Rooij's decision to purge the White Cube, in its function as the primary venue for their films, of 'distracting' and 'extraneous' elements such as light fixtures and radiators. By doing so they intensify its quintessential function—the institutional authentication of art—in a manner reminiscent of Michael Asher's systemic dysfunctionalization of exhibition spaces. But the artists' spatial interventions are no mere 'formalistic' references to historical models of institutional critique—or if they are then only in the sense that they make the formalization of the White Cube available in turn to an authentication of the 'political-critical' function of art that is now purged of contradictions.

Like Smithson, who once explained that the 'non-sites' he chose for his projects already contained the reproductive gaze of the camera, de Rijke / de Rooij's works may also be said to project the fact of their perception under the conditions of the White Cube back onto the conditions of their production. As could be argued by pointing to the example of *Bantar Gebang*, the aesthetically coded space of representation is always already contaminated by the politics of the images produced in its name. Just as the subject of a sunrise marks (albeit allegorically) the assertion of a 'beginning' or 'first image' that is nonetheless also familiar as an industrially reproduced motif, so the principle of "synchronous montage"²² chosen by de Rijke / de Rooij hits on a central condition of contemporary art: the irreducible simultaneity of singularity/uniqueness and reproduction/seriality, in the sense in which artists of the historical avant-garde sought to introduce the politically understood tension between individual authorship, industrial production, and medial mass reception into their works. Thus the montage of a Southeast Asian slum and a Western European exhibition space turns out to be an encounter between two 'spatio-temporal sensoriums,' an encounter that, while improbable, is nonetheless grounded in the aesthetic and political history of visual mass culture: in light of this insight, the ten minutes' time it takes to watch this film in a semi-darkened White Cube casts doubt on the simultaneous 'contemporaneity' of the world inside and the world out there.

If the laws of production and reception associated with the White Cube are nevertheless applied to the relationship of distance—between the camera and the represented place or between the viewer and the image—this implies the existence of an immanent external perspective. And because this is the case, it is

²² See Lütticken, "Abstraktionen" (note 4).

possible to speak of reality only to the extent that the latter is released by the necessarily fictional montage of represented time and the space of representation. The resulting perception of a 'difference' within seeing itself seems to touch on the "division of the sensible" that is spoken of by Rancière with respect to the connections between art and politics. Thus the technique of 'synchronous montage' is capable of incorporating the distinction between the 'First' and 'Third Worlds'—which reflects colonialist chronology—into the relationship in which we are placed as 'contemporaries' of art (and of the politics it brings to representation). To notice this, one does not even have to have a moral or political consciousness of the fact that Indonesia was formerly a Dutch colony or that there is a connection between global media culture and (post-)colonial politics. For as Willem de Rooij explains to Maria Hlavajova in an interview, that is not why *Bantar Gebang* was made. According to de Rooij, a much more fundamental factor was the artists' desire to know what constitutes a 'political image' and what the first image was that they themselves perceived as political: "Interestingly, we both remembered the same image, probably from a 1970s primary school textbook. It was an image that combined a slum area and a corporate tower in the same frame, an illustration that taught children how the wealth of the world is divided."²³

Thus, *Bantar Gebang* aims less at the socio-geographical specificity of the represented place or at the politicization of the (aesthetic) image, but rather at the fact that the 'political image' presents itself as a relationship of form and meaning that precedes the artistic intention, a relationship that in this case is institutionalized. The division of the world into countable units—First and Third Worlds—thus presents itself as a form of the spatio-temporal conditioning of a gaze under the conditions of ethical and pedagogical image production within the First World.

De Rijke / de Rooij's 2001 film *Untitled* shows an Islamic cemetery on the outskirts of Jakarta, overgrown with grass and with the architectural symbols of modern urbanity in the background. In this film the 'first political image' recalled by the artists seems literally to be mortified. From this perspective, one might argue, the principle of 'synchronous montage' constitutes a hallmark of the "allegorical image,"²⁴ hence of a type of image that incorporates the non-visible presence of other images that precede it as their "undead spirits."²⁵ In the same way, the allegorization of montage and collage by the aesthetics of mass production stands in a spatial and temporal relationship to that colonialist '(re)division of the sensible' that was supposed to take place with the (re)mapping of the political

²³ Cited in Maria Hlavajova: "The 'Droste Effect' or What Comes after Being Critical? A Conversation with Willem de Rooij," in: Rosi Braidotti, Charles Esche, and Maria Hlavajova, eds., *Citizens and Subjects: The Netherlands, For Example*, Mondriaan Foundation Amsterdam, 2007, pp. 271–283, here pp. 275 ff.

²⁴ Walter Benjamin speaks of the technique of mortification with reference to the allegorical image.

²⁵ Comp. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Allegorische Verfahren: Über Appropriation und Montage in der Gegenwartskunst," in: Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann, eds., *Art After Conceptual Art*, Walther König, Cologne, 2006, pp. 31–58.

world. Thus the impression of aesthetic perception that in *Bantar Gebang* is clouded by its subject turns out to be the 'framing' of an 'aesthetic image' that emerges in the sunrise. While that image only makes visible what appears as an image within it, it also opens the 'framework' from which it is clipped to the sensuousness of a historicity that has frozen in the form of politics.

Art critics sometimes have a way of painting as negative a picture of things as possible, since it allows them to emphasize all the more strongly the accomplishments of the artists they consider to be 'good.' And indeed, for the reasons I have described above I might easily be tempted to write an unnecessary appreciation of the works of de Rijke / de Rooij—unnecessary because it has already been done sufficiently. For example, when the artist Christopher Williams—in his obituary for Jeroen de Rijke, who passed away in summer 2006—speaks of the "subject-driven, pictorial practice" of the two artists, which is "based on a deep understanding of the conventions and modes of address associated with more traditional pictorial practices," he hits on the core of their artistic project: for in contrast to the production of social spaces, for them the activity of "looking at pictures was more than sufficient."²⁶ If I now attempt to discuss this activity using Rancière's model, I do so because essential essays and articles that have decisively shaped the reception of de Rijke / de Rooij's joint work (which was begun in 1994) highlight the important role played in it by the reflection of space and time.

In addition to Lütticken's, another interpretation that is instructive in this regard is proposed by the curator and author Vanessa Joan Müller. In her catalogue essay "Realistic Abstraction," she analyzes the 1997 film *I'm Coming Home in Forty Days* as a dialectical image of the tensions that exist within the combination of idealist and phenomenological conceptions of time in modern art. The film consists of three shots of different lengths that document a ship as it sails around an iceberg in Greenland. As Müller shows, the film exposes the dependence of the differing perceptual contents on the representational forms of time and space. When the scene shifts from muddy, grayish morning light to the opaque white light of an overcast day, the dividing line between sky and icy water also almost literally seems to erode. Because in this work a single motif is varied by conflicting movements of the image motif and the camera, seeing is presented as a differential process in time and space. Just as in *Sailboat* (1967/68) by the Canadian artist Joyce Wieland, which consists of ten repetitions of seemingly identical sequences of a moving sailboat—sequences that are actually shot and edited differently²⁷—here too the principle of 'non-identical

²⁶ Christopher Williams, "'Hey Guys...': Jeroen de Rijke 1970–2006," in: *springerin. Hefte für Gegenwartskunst*, 3/06, Vienna, pp. 58 ff, p. 58 (the homepage for this issue can be found at <http://www.springerin.at/dyn/heft.php?id=48&pos=0&textid=0&lang=en>, Williams's text at http://www.springerin.at/dyn/heft_text.php?textid=1817&lang=en).

²⁷ See Tabea Metzel, "Joy and Repetition. Wiederholung und Rhythmus im Werk der kanadischen Künstlerin Joyce Wieland (1931–98)," in: Sabeth Buchmann, Alexander Mayer, Karolin Meunier et al., eds., *Wenn sonst nichts klappt: Wiederholung wiederholen in Kunst, Popkultur, Film, Musik, Alltag, Theorie und Praxis*, b_books and materialverlag Berlin and Hamburg, 2005, pp. 230–50, here p. 233.

repetition' makes it clear that (cinematographic) seeing is a montage of fictional units of space and time.

[...]

This possibility was also recognized by film directors such as Jean-Luc Godard, who—in contrast to the 1968 generation with its hostility to images²⁸—made color an explicit discourse of their works. But color also has another meaning here, and it is significant for the works of de Rijke / de Rooij. Just as they mobilized Godard's technique of synchronous montage against diachronic narration, they also use a montage of references to painterly modes of representing light and cinematographic color temperatures to create transitional zones between the two-dimensional picture plane and three-dimensional pictorial space, techniques, then, that deal with the irreconcilable tension between the picture plane as pure visual presence and its necessarily spatio-temporal representation. Similarly, in de Rijke / de Rooij's film *Mandarin Ducks* (2005), which differs from the above-mentioned works in that here one can speak of narration in the broadest sense of the term, such 'spaces (between)' and transitional zones are shown to be a montage of light and color. This becomes especially apparent in shots that use mirror effects to produce a kaleidoscopic multiplication of the decors (which are always chromatically marked) or that take place at the transition between indoor and outdoor space, for example on a balcony. Such montages of light and color recall the tradition of light painting as well as the (always somewhat too tastefully staged) studio spaces and backgrounds of television shows. Tom Holert speaks in this connection of "mood boards,"²⁹ techniques for creating atmospheric environments that are designed to draw the audience in emotionally. Yet because de Rijke / de Rooij use film stock containing orange for *Mandarin Ducks*, close-ups on the protagonists' faces, which normally generate affect, involve a moment of alienation, since their skin looks like an unrealistic, psychedelic field of color.

With extremely simple gestures and means, de Rijke / de Rooij are able to generate and delineate complex aesthetic semantics, in which formal, abstract pictorial languages—languages that have irreversibly shaped the image of modern art—are placed in relation to avant-garde film and commercial movies, television, fashion, interior decoration, and architecture. With *Orange*, the dialectics that appear in these realms—dialectics of singularity and seriality, expression and function, abstraction and objectivity, which pervade the entire history of modern painting (from light to color field painting) and film (from Victor Fleming to Jean-Luc Godard³⁰)—are set vibrating by a single work. In this sense *Orange* also implicitly reflects the liberation of color from its local expressive value and its perception as an autonomous object, the quintessential embodiment of "modernism's fetish of visuality."³¹ Yet precisely because *Orange* is based on a literally transparent technique, there is nothing in it to suggest that it reproduces and/or negates the fetish of visuality. Hence in my view it

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Holert, "Moving On in a Pavilion" (note 18), p. 35.

³⁰ See Silke Egner, *Bilder der Farbe*, Serie moderner Film, VDG-Verlag, Weimar, 2003.

³¹ Crow, "Unwritten Histories of Conceptual Art" (note 29).

is also a mistake to read it, as one might be inclined to do, through the concept of the “obsolete medium.”³² There can be no question here of situating the (commodity-)cultural logic of visibility within a history of decline. Such a perspective would imply a causally conceived understanding of history, which would be impossible to reconcile with the multiple and heterogeneous spatio-temporal constructions that are characteristic of the works of de Rijke / de Rooij. Instead, what is in play here—as I argued above with reference to *Bantar Gebang*—is a correspondence of affect and distance that turns the viewer’s captivation by images into an opportunity to catch sight of the material characteristics that affect the naturalization of aesthetic perception. It was recently reported in *Spiegel Online* magazine that color influences and deceives our perception of form to a much greater extent than was previously realized.³³ If this is the case, then what—one might ask with respect to *Orange*—are the effects of its *absence* from the color spectrum of photographic and cinematic film stock? Thus, in Stanley Kubrick’s *Clockwork Orange*, the protagonist, Alex, is driven to the brink of insanity by a brainwashing that takes the form of a kind of nonstop movie of the crimes he has committed; the worst part about it, he says, is that colors have never seemed as real to him as they do on screen.³⁴ Hence the greater the degree of technical manipulation, the more perfect the semblance of naturalness and authenticity becomes.

In this sense there would seem to be an interesting commonality between the formalistic discourse of sublime seeing (*Who Is Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue?*)³⁵—which is always thematized in the works of de Rijke / de Rooij—and psycho films such as *Clockwork Orange*. Both involve a recognition that colors alone are sufficient to trigger fear, violence, and submission. In the case of *Orange* a simple declarative gesture—the projection of eighty-one different shades of orange—causes Newman’s ironic commentary on the terrors of pure visuality and Kubrick’s allegory of the totalitarianism of the culture of fun to appear as a ‘semantic mapping’ of aesthetic and political phenomena. Thus, in the accompanying text the two artists explain that they had originally intended to produce the color of the non-fluorescent overalls worn by prisoners at Guantanamo Bay. The media images of de-individualized bodies almost literally imprisoned within their uniforms may well recall Kubrick’s brutal vision of a liberal-democratic system of total control. According to the philosopher Giorgio Agamben, the political state of exception, of which Guantanamo Bay is a paradigmatic representation, may be regarded as constitutive of what, from the

³² Comp. Rosalind E. Krauss’s concept of medium-specificity, which is based on Walter Benjamin. It refers to the use of antiquated media, discarded by technological progress, to recreate irreducible differences between artistic genres. Krauss sees it as a countermodel against the commodifying abolition of the boundaries of and between aesthetic media within a postmodern perceptual regime. See Rosalind E. Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea. Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, New York, 1999.

³³ John S. Werner, Biagio Pinna, and Lothar Spillmann, “Farbe foppt das Formsehen,” <http://www.spiegel.de/wissenschaft/mensch/0,1518,497212,00.html>, August 5, 2007.

³⁴ Egner points out that color was used even in early black-and-white film, for example through the process of tinting.

³⁵ A series of works by Barnett Newman, 1966–70.

vantage point of Western democracies, we perceive as politically established rights—rights, then, that aim at a realm external to democracy and public space.³⁶

From the perspective of political theory, one might also associate de Rijke / de Rooij's repeated references to the state-ordered mass expulsion of immigrants from "post-populist neo-conservative Holland"³⁷—where the royal house ("Oranje") enjoys growing popularity—with the popularity touched off in the Western media by the movement of anti-Russian resistance in Ukraine known as the 'Orange Revolution.' In terms of Rancière's interest in the spatio-temporal sensoriums in their constitutive function for the formation of political communities, *Orange* turns out to be the symbol of a politics that deals with both nationalistic, ideological paradigms and the forms of stigmatization and exclusion that are executed in their name. If—as is my impression—the fragmentation of *Orange* into eighty-one shades has as much to do with the color theory of a Barnett Newman³⁸ as with the palette of popular culture, then it follows that standards of Western art history are under discussion in it as well.

As viewers of *Orange*, we thus become aware of an aesthetic operation derived from explicitly political intentions that causes us to recognize that our standpoint as viewers is caught up in structures of power and domination. Yet such abstractions always remain linked to the viewers' perceptual reality. This is ensured, for example, by the fact that de Rijke / de Rooij's films are not presented in Black Boxes but in slightly darkened rooms in museums and galleries. Because of this, the lighting, which generally tends to be passively perceived by viewers, does not appear as a 'natural' environment or a 'pure' function but as an independent spatially and temporally determined element. De Rijke / de Rooij's fondness for mixed lighting and mixed colors has its counterpart in their treatment of architectonic spaces. It is not clarity, purity, and absence of ambiguity but blurred contours, gradual transitions, and multiplicity of meanings that make possible a precise and differentiating type of seeing, hence a 'redivision of the sensible.'

Techniques like these are present in *Mandarin Ducks* in the form of hybrid characters and interiors. Figures that recall Joan Collins, Joe Dallesandro, and Man Ray and resemble synthetic reincarnations of incompatible lifestyles are almost literally inserted into the multilayered references to Gerrit Rietveld, Frank Lloyd Wright, Eileen Gray, Jan Graatsma and William Slothouber, and others. The collage of historical and popular aesthetics and subjects—which points to cubism, dadaism, and constructivism both in its methods and its motifs—is distinguished from works like *Bantar Gebang* by the fact that it does not pin down the world it presents in the same way. To a substantially greater extent than in *Bantar Gebang*, its methods themselves become a conceptual object of that reflexive self-contemplation that makes the world 'as it is' seem alien to and unlike itself. Such a construction of immanent alterity would make it possible to relativize Benjamin's polarization of social-revolutionary photomontage and an

³⁶ Comp. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1998.

³⁷ De Rijke / de Rooij, Text on *Orange* (note 44).

³⁸ By their own admission de Rijke / de Rooij have engaged with Newman's work.

“ever more nuanced, ever more modern” photography³⁹ whose “result” it is “that it can no longer record a tenement block or a refuse heap without transfiguring it,”⁴⁰ because the sensuousness of politics cannot be separated from that of art nor therefore from aesthetics. Precisely this condition is played out on every level in *Mandarin Ducks*. Every detail, no matter how small, stands in a diverse and multivalent relationship with the whole.

The fact that in *Mandarin Ducks* the nexus of light and color, space and time becomes a basis for role-playing, dialogues, and actions is related to the fact that that it was produced for de Rijke / de Rooij's participation in the 2005 Venice Biennale. Shown for the first time in Gerrit Rietveld's Dutch Pavilion, which is famous for its staging of light, air, and space, it took the pavilion's modernist and functionalistic architecture as the starting point for a reflection on the historical conditions of the (re)presentation of art in modern media culture. Thus the pavilion was used as a movie theater⁴¹ but remained visible as a White Cube, a 'symbolic' montage that broke with the fragmentary images of a film that deals with topics such as 'appearance,' 'aging,' 'sex,' 'alcohol,' 'fundraising,' and 'group therapy for the underprivileged.' With its affected and outrageous characterizations, *Mandarin Ducks* rolls out an oppressive scenario in which queer and patriarchal, bohemian and upper-class, progressive and conservative attitudes all come together in the shared desire for money, happiness, beauty, youth, and recognition. In every detail—be it finely woven fabrics or suggestions of intimate encounters, sparkling wine glasses or exoticized decors—we seem to encounter archetypes of a sociality that could come from the hand of a style-savvy image designer.⁴² Yet at no point do these images completely coincide with their intentions. The primarily older actors, who are familiar from Dutch TV series, are explicitly reflected as national exports, as fashion addicts, outsiders, racists, etc. Thus, monologues and dialogues have the same function here as the text samples do in *Bouquet* and *Orange*. At the same time, the 'dramatization' of language does not produce narration but rather symbolic fragments of figures that recall both James Ensor's grotesque, claustrophobic caricatures and the melodramas of Rainer Werner Fassbinder.

In this work, modern architecture, symbolist painting, postclassical genre cinema, and popular modern design combine to produce a collage that deals with the cultural-industrial mingling of art and media culture, hence with the (growing) “difficulty of figuring political reality in serious art.”⁴³ Yet here too it is the heterogeneous and multiplied form of the representation and perception of space and time that distinguishes it from products of the culture industry, without at the same time falling in with the culturally pessimistic equation that casts art as the 'other' (of commerce and the moral value system held up against it). For example, when the family patriarch indulges in racist lapses on the subject of immigrant taxi drivers, who in his

³⁹ As suggested above, Benjamin was referring to the photography of New Objectivity.

⁴⁰ Benjamin, “Author as Producer” (note 36), p. 775.

⁴¹ The film ran at fixed times, not as an endless loop.

⁴² Comp. Holert, “Moving On in a Pavilion” (note 18), pp. 31–44.

⁴³ Crow, “Unwritten Histories of Conceptual Art” (note 29).

view are incapable of doing their job because they don't even know the names of the streets, he is met with the protests of the people around him, who are schooled in political correctness and well-versed in art, but those protests hardly seem designed to endanger the cohesion of a socially privileged milieu.

If we accept at a fundamental level that what links the 'reality of art' with the 'reality of politics' can be described as a 'spatio-temporal sensorium,' then it may be said in conclusion that what de Rijke / de Rijke open up to their images is precisely such a sensorium. The 'visual presence' of their works casts the "modes of being together or apart, inside or outside, across from or in the middle of" (Rancière) that come to light in them and are active in and between them as the effect of 'sensory divisions' of a before and after, a here and beyond under the temporal and spatial conditions of the process of viewing them. Seen in this way, the joint work of Jeroen de Rijke and Willem de Rooij constitutes an archive (of images) that can never be completed and that fundamentally contradicts the character and meaning of a retrospective.

Separate and Together

Ann Goldstein

In a half-dark conventional white gallery space, spectators sit on benches and watch a ten-minute film projected onto a wall from a 35mm film projector enclosed in a soundproof white box. Shot with a stationary camera, the film presents in one continuous take the subtle dawn of a new day, the moments between darkness and light as the quiet progression of sunlight delicately reveals an image out of the night. People and animals stir in the early morning, in what emerges clearly as a shanty town. The minutes pass, further illuminating the setting and revealing that this settlement is built on top of a garbage dump. The film concludes, and the room remains half-dark. There are two benches, two speakers, and the projector box. All of these elements of the exhibition architecture and presentation are also integral parts of the work.

Titled *Bantar Gebang* (2000), this film by Jeroen de Rijke and Willem de Rooij presents a startlingly beautiful and uncomfortably decorous image of poverty and squalor through its representation of the routines of everyday life and the gentle beginning of a new day in a poor neighborhood in Jakarta, Indonesia. What does the image of a shanty town in Jakarta have to do with a clean white gallery room thousands of miles away? This question may be considered based on our awareness of our own spatial and temporal context as spectators in this half-dark room, which is at once a screening space and a sculpture. At the beginning of the film, the blackness of the pre-dawn scene is also the blackness of the room. The shanty town, like the exhibition space, is gently revealed through light. Self-referentiality and self-examination bridge the gap between the subject of the film and the context of its presentation. It is, however, not solely the contrast between the phenomenological and the contextual that characterizes this work, but also the collage that the artists construct when they place a complex pictorial representation next to a sculptural form. In *Bantar Gebang*, we are aware that we are looking at a locality in a developing nation within the context of global capitalist culture. We experience the contrast between 'here' and 'there,' and specifically what it is like to look at 'there' from 'here.'

The relationship between film and architectural space is at the core of de Rijke / de Rooij's project, and so, too, is the process of designing and producing exhibitions. Their works extend far beyond the borders of the presentation of one piece. Working with existing or constructed gallery or museum spaces, they articulate the relationships between human beings and objects. Presenting projected film and video in gallery spaces, rather than in cinemas, is common among contemporary artists. What distinguishes de Rijke / de Rooij's work, however, is what happens when the film is not being screened, when the space—quiet, half-dark, still, and empty—is solely what the spectator encounters.

For de Rijke / de Rooij, film projection is only one element in their work. The room is another key element of the work—not only inextricable from it, but also self-referential and autonomous. In the 2003 publication that accompanied their companion exhibitions at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven and the Villa Arson in Nice, the illustrations consisted of black-and-white photographs of the spaces in which the works had been presented over the years.⁴⁴ Those spaces, showing the benches, speakers, and projection booths, are empty, yet sculpturally present. They are illuminated as they would be if used for a screening. They are only apparently empty—all of the elements of film presentation are on display.

The relationship between the represented cinematic space and that of an empty white room is both phenomenological and concretely sculptural. Traditional cinematic experience is half-dark and half-light, as constituted through the movement of the film through the projector at 24 frames per second. De Rijke / de Rooij re-form that cinematic experience into a sculptural idea, as they described in a 2000 interview with Nicolaus Schafhausen:

We make our installations with a great deal of concentration. In an assigned or self-chosen space, we try to create an atmospheric mix between cinema and exhibition space. The films we make have a specific beginning and end, and should be watched in their entirety. Viewings take place, for instance, twice every hour. A timetable on the wall informs a viewer of the projection times. There are some benches for viewers to sit on. The space is clean, empty, half-dark, so its dimensions are still perceptible. All disturbing elements, such as lights, reflections, or noises are reduced as much as possible. We take special care to provide the peripheral vision of people sitting on the benches. The projector is placed in a soundproof box. This box, and all other elements placed in the room (speakers, benches) are purely functional. The way they are placed in the room is important, because during an exhibition the room is usually not filled with film. We perceive this room as a minimal sculpture.⁴⁵

The comparison of the room to Minimal sculpture is significant. It points to Minimal art's historic and fundamental reconsideration of the art object—and its renegotiation into a self-referential object situated within physical and temporal space that engages a self-reflexive spectator. The phenomenological impact of Minimal art on the identity of the object, the strategies of the artist, and the role of the spectator is at the root of de Rijke / de Rooij's project, as they have described: "So these spaces are more than rooms in which you experience things. They are developed especially for showing the films we make, and they're also supposed to function even when no film is projected in them. In our films, emptiness is as important as it is in the projection spaces we design."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ See Eva-Meyer Hermann, ed., *Jeroen de Rijke & Willem de Rooij: Spaces and Films 1998–2002* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum and Nice: Villa Arson, 2003).

⁴⁵ Jeroen de Rijke and Willem de Rooij, "If Only Rooms Would So Clearly Fulfill Their Purpose..." (interview with Nicolaus Schafhausen), in Jeroen de Rijke/Willem de Rooij, *After the Hunt* (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2000): 20.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

The relationship of their installations to Minimal sculpture is situated in the renegotiation of the viewing experience and the position of the spectator. Minimal sculpture renegotiated the relationship between spectator and object within an architectural space, producing a more self-conscious spectator. The strategies of Conceptual art of the 1960s and 70s, expanded this investigation into self-examination of the presentation, function, and reception of a work of art, including the use of media associated with the work's documentation, distribution, and publicity—language, photography, film, and video—as well as into a critique of the institutions that function as the points for its presentation and reception, specifically museums and galleries. Employing many of these strategies, de Rijke / de Rooij expand upon Minimal and Conceptual art through their use of both self-referentiality and self-examination, as they challenge traditional divisions between the object, the viewer, and the surroundings. Their project's roots are located within the practices of artists such as Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, Stanley Brouwn, Daniel Buren, Maria Nordman, and Jeff Wall, among others associated with the first generation of Conceptual artists, who developed their works in relation to the historical, architectural, social, economic, and cultural context of a specific site.

De Rijke / de Rooij's interest in the relationship between cinema and architecture can be traced to Wall's work. Since the 1970s, Wall has produced photographic transparencies on light boxes that illuminate the rooms in which they are viewed. The photographic representation of partially constructed locations in his images, including those set up in his studio or shot on locations in Vancouver, where he lives and works, embrace a larger historical, aesthetic, cultural, and social context that also lays a key foundation for the complex issues of 'here' and 'there' that de Rijke / de Rooij consider.

Similarly, de Rijke / de Rooij's interest in institutional critique is informed by Asher's work. Asher's early interventions employed subtle strategies of alteration and removal applied to the given architecture. The container for the work of art becomes the material for a sculpture that is not only inextricable from its architectural site, but inextricable from its cultural context. For example, Asher's incorporation of the architectural container, visual perception, and the conditions of context can be seen as an antecedent to the half-dark/half-light spaces of the younger artists. For his contribution to Documenta V, at the Museum Fridericianum in Kassel in 1972, Asher conceived of a wood-frame construction within the gallery space. In this space, he visually divided the interior of a long hallway—including the floor, end walls, and ceiling—lengthwise by painting one half white and one half black. In the white side, he cut two light wells from the construction at its ceiling at the point of its intersection with the wall, allowing light to enter from the gallery space above. Spectators entered and exited the space through a light-tight door in the black half.⁴⁷ In a description of the work, he discussed the planes of this space as constituting a sculpture—not a conventional object to walk around, but “the sum of . . . six planes [constituting] a volumetric, rectangular body, forming an enclosure around the viewer. The entire sculptural volume was viewed from within, was walked through, over and upon. By being an enclosure or housing, the assembled planes were simultaneously experienced as an architectural container.”⁴⁸ He expanded the work's meaning beyond its formal characteristics, likening the space to a stage that functions within the greater context of the international exhibition of which it was a part:

By formalizing its own purpose within the exhibition, this installation—as a stage—reflected the cultural stage that “Documenta”—as an exhibition—occupied. As a spatial enclosure, it occupied an autonomous position; yet the enclosure did not define the more general conditions of the viewer's experience at the exhibition. The implied autonomy of the work could only be seen within the context of most of the other works, each of which operated within their own separate framework. The work seemed to seclude itself from the rest of the exhibition, while it was actually subject to and receptive of its conditions.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ For a full description, see Michael Asher, *Writings 1973–1983 on Works 1969–1979*, edited by and written in collaboration with Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design / Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1983, 57–63.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Black and white, dark and light, the spaces of de Rijke / de Rooij, like those of Asher, correlate the specific character of the architectural container, the strategies of self-referentiality, and the process of illumination as a means of social, economic, and cultural disclosure. Whereas that disclosure unfolds in a half-dark space through the slow illumination of an Indonesian shanty town in Bantar Gebang, the relationship between the image depicted in the film and the architectural space of its presentation is more direct in *Mandarin Ducks* (2005). The artists' contribution to the 2005 Venice Biennale as representatives of The Netherlands, this film is set in a domestic interior loosely modeled on Gerrit Rietveld's architecture for the Biennale's Dutch Pavilion, where the exhibition itself took place. A visually ravishing and brutal picture of social relations, it presents the encounters between ten people in this space through dialogues and monologues. Propelled by the current state of nationalism and xenophobia in The Netherlands, it is a mirror that can be held to any culture. A stunning, provocative, and contested work, it is carefully situated within the specific context of a national pavilion and draws on the cultural, aesthetic and architectural history embodied in that space.

As a film and as an installation, *Mandarin Ducks* is a complex construction, employing elements of melodrama and filmic self-referentiality. The overriding presence of light, which illuminates the set, just as it lights up the skin of the actors, is treated as a discrete, autonomous material. The colored light that occupies the spaces in the film also constructs the atmosphere and enhances the contradictions between the beauty of the film, the unabashed cruelty of how the characters treat each other, and the restrained, minimal set. This set embraces the structure of modularity that characterizes the Pavilion's design and contains within a few key props, including a Chinese folding screen, a mirrored vanity, a zebra skin rug, and a distinctively zippered, modular sofa designed by the team of Slothouber & Graatsma—not coincidentally, the last duo to participate in the Biennale before de Rijke / de Rooij (in 1970). The Rietveld-designed ceiling shutters of the Pavilion, adapted by de Rijke / de Rooij so that they could fully open between screenings, were the models for the acoustical panels that were designed for the space. In addition, they designed black benches for the spectators, based on a conventional notion of a museum bench. Their attention to the design of the space was every bit as carefully conceived as was the set, turning the Pavilion's setting into a parallel stage for the spectators. In this presentation, de Rijke / de Rooij engaged the architectural and programmatic history of the Pavilion within a larger art historical, cultural, and political context. *Mandarin Ducks* couples the notion of national representation with a powerful reflection on xenophobia.

The formal and conceptual construction of an exhibition as a work has taken on increasing complexity in de Rijke / de Rooij's later *œuvre*, which extending their integration of cinema and architectural space to the incorporation of reference materials, ephemera, objects, and documentation. These exhibitions/installations address not only the conditions of display and reception within the institutional framework, but also the means of distribution. The intervention of this 'backmatter' into the content and presentation of the work underscores the artists' interest in how a work of art functions within a broader historical and cultural context.

In three exhibitions in 2005, in Amsterdam, Bregenz, and Vienna, their work was integrated with that of others, an experience that offered insights into their working methods. At the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in December 2005, the exhibition focused on the sources and references for *Mandarin Ducks* and its presentation in the Dutch Pavilion in Venice earlier that year. Drawn from the museum's collection were modular constructions by Slothouber & Graatsma, whose zippered sofa was a key prop in *Mandarin Ducks*. Also on show were images of their 1970 exhibition in the Dutch Pavilion, featuring that same sofa. The printed matter and graphic branding (announcement, poster, catalogue) for the Venice presentation, conceived by the renowned Dutch graphic designer Wim Crouwel, were displayed on tables designed by de Rijke / de Rooij. A larger sequence of catalogue pages featured light studies for the film set, while another table featured single pages of the script and production stills. Also included in the exhibition were four lithographs by Kurt Schwitters, two paintings by James Ensor and a monitor showing a 1970s Dutch television comedy, *Hey, Can I Have My Wife Back?* Composed as an exhibition, the work's discrete elements retain their individuality. Without being didactic, the artists sought to locate their own work within a cultural and historical context.

In the exhibition *Together*, held at the Magazin4 in Bregenz, Austria, de Rijke / de Rooij designed an installation for the presentation of three different 'image banks.' This exhibition offered insight into their cooperative working method by including their respective image archives that each artist produced alongside of their collaboration. The exhibition also represented how the artists embraced the broader discursive frame around their work, including its representation in the posters, announcement cards, publications, press releases, etc., that they carefully conceived and designed as integral, primary elements of their work. These were not considered secondary materials or 'ephemera' occupying a supporting role, but rather as autonomous works that were as important to de Rijke / de Rooij's overall practice as the film installations.

The first image bank consisted of a group of collages that de Rooij assembled in 2002 from his archive of found images dating from January 2000 to July 2002. The eighteen framed panels, collectively titled *Index: Riots, Protest, Mourning and Commemoration* (as presented in newspapers, January 2000–July 2002), consisted of images originally published in newspapers of people gathered together in protests and silent marches. On each panel, a number of images, clipped from their original sources, were organized in a composition under one large glass. The original captions were compiled in a separate booklet. These panels represented the role of found images as a resource for their artistic practice.

The second image bank consisted of a projection of 162 slides from de Rijke's archive of photographs he shot in Thailand, Indonesia, Japan, and Australia. He used some of these images in his collaborative work with de Rooij, while he reserved others for his independent practice. The slide projection demonstrated how he approached each image individually, sequencing them, not by geography or chronology, but by their constituent elements: light, color, and composition.

The third image bank consisted of images of de Rijke / de Rooij's work published in catalogues and magazines, as well as announcements, posters, and other ephemera that they had designed for their exhibitions over the years. These images were presented on black tables. One table featured a blue monochromatic production still from *I'm Coming Home in Forty Days* (1997), as reproduced in nine different publications. Each reproduction is different, creating a visual echo to their 2004 work, *Orange*. It is in the images on these tables where the two individual positions of these artists come together.

In these installations that appear as exhibitions, de Rijke / de Rooij examine the broader context of their artistic output—its conception, production, evolution, reproduction, and distribution. It is their way of sharing their working process, not to reveal who did what in their collaboration, for that process remains untold, but to subject their own practice to critique and disclosure, much like the strategy of institutional critique that has influenced their practice.

A third exhibition in late 2005 at the Secession in Vienna, a joint effort between de Rijke / de Rooij and Christopher Williams, incorporates the self-referentiality of these exhibitions/installations into a collaborative curatorial project with another artist. Invited to present their exhibitions independently at the same time, the three artists decided to collaborate on the exhibition's design, literally integrating the two shows together. The sculptural and pictorial strategies and self-referentiality that characterize their respective practices were emphasized in the integration of the work and in their design of the posters and individual volumes of the exhibition catalogue, which were designed in collaboration with Austrian artist Mathias Poledna. This also included the strategy of insertion, with the inclusion of an image of one other's work in the seemingly identical volumes of the catalogue, the relocation of a large panel containing institutional signage from the wall to the floor, and in the space constructed for the screening of de Rijke / de Rooij's film, *The Point of Departure* (2002), where Williams placed his black-and-white photograph of the Secession's distinctive modular wall system while it was under construction for the exhibition.

De Rijke / de Rooij's work articulates the complex relationship between an object and a human being, within an architectural space. The illumination that produces the film image reveals the architectural container and heightens our own awareness as spectators of our position within the half-dark/half-light architectural space, which bears a history, a function, and a cultural context. Whereas the films are produced in a fixed moment in time, their presentations differ in each circumstance. Every time a work is presented, it is presented anew. Each exhibition offers a distinct opportunity to position and reconsider the work within a specific architectural, historical and cultural context. That dynamic is at the core of the projects in Düsseldorf and Bologna, which are conceived and executed as two distinct yet related exhibitions. At once separate and together, these exhibitions, like the working method of the artists, remain discrete yet connected, a most fitting way to represent de Rijke / de Rooij's remarkable collaboration.

Il fiore delle mille e una notte (Arabian Nights)

Andrea Viliani

“Directly after having made *I'm Coming Home in Forty Days*, Jeroen and I had the plan to project the film in a room in which an oriental rug would cover the floor. This was long before we decided to film a carpet. We felt that the cool blue of the film would combine beautifully with the warm carpet colors, but we also felt that the abstract quality of the floral motifs would fit the crystalline structure of the ice. We never made this projection, but it was a dream.”⁵⁰

It was Willem de Rooij himself who mentioned this exhibition layout—never realized as he says—in his email indicating the final selection of 13 photographs taken between March 2 and May 3, 1973 by the photographer Angelo Pennoni on the set of Pier

⁵⁰ Willem de Rooij, in an email to the author, September 17, 2007.

Paolo Pasolini's film *Il fiore delle mille e una notte*, which is on show in the exhibition *Jeroen de Rijke / Willem de Rooij* at K21.

Even though the idea of doing a specific work on Pasolini was discussed for the first time only in 2005 during a meeting between Jeroen de Rijke, Willem de Rooij, Christopher Williams and the author on the occasion of the opening of their solo shows at the Wiener Secession⁵¹—an idea that was then brought to fruition by de Rooij during the preparation of the exhibition at MAMbo—the viewing of some of Pasolini's films, in particular *Teorema*, *Appunti per un'Orestiade africana* and *Il fiore delle mille e una notte*, was one of the multiple sources around which the two artists conceived and made their 16mm film *I'm Coming Home in Forty Days* (1997). In this film viewers see the image of an iceberg filmed from a ship during a circumnavigation.

Despite the absence of any explicit narrative element, the structuring of the film into three parts as in a triptych⁵² and the title of the film itself—which evokes the temporal dimension of the journey, the past of the departure, the present of the journey and the future of the return⁵³—are such that some subtle suggestions of narrative do persist.

In the first part of the film, the sight of the iceberg, which continually blends in with and is confused with the sky and the ocean, gives 'body' to images that are apparently depthless, almost monochrome, apparently avulsed from any relation with the sphere of the natural, physical world: the image 'embodies' the aesthetic value culturally associated with the monochrome, the idea of a spirituality expressed through pure, aniconic, abstract forms. Subsequently, given the impossibility of establishing a point of view or defined space,⁵⁴ we are forced to ask where the observed movements are coming from (from the iceberg? the ship? the camera?) and what we are seeing exactly. Even if at first glance the film seems to reproduce an essentially unitary image, as the film runs one begins to note continual, though virtually imperceptible, shades of light and color, variations of substance between the foreground and the background, and the emergence of relations between different masses in constant movement. If it is initially difficult even to *understand* what kind of image we are observing, during time the image assumes an identity, albeit multifaceted and unstable.

In *I'm Coming Home in Forty Days* the experience of the viewer coincides with the exploration of an intermediate zone that lies between narration and observation, in which the normal criteria for the evaluation of images are replaced by the "discovery" of the potential inherent to the image itself, that is its capacity to convey multiple

⁵¹ Both shows Wiener Secession, Vienna, November 25, 2005–January 15, 2006. This project devoted to Pier Paolo Pasolini should be regarded as one of the last projects developed jointly by Jeroen de Rijke and subsequently by Willem de Rooij and specifically realized by de Rooij for this exhibition.

⁵² Vanessa Joan Müller, "Realistic Abstraction," in: *Jeroen de Rijke / Willem de Rooij. After the Hunt*, Lucas & Sternberg, New York, 2000, p. 55.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

references and meanings. In this perceptual and cognitive splintering—which is gradually transmitted from the object to the subject of vision—the difference between what ‘seems’ abstract but proves ‘to be’ concrete, between what ‘seems’ monochrome but in ‘reality’ is not, fades away, generating a constant oscillation between what we see and what we believe we see, what we think we know and what we really know.

If in this regard the artists cite artistic representations such as Barnett Newman “zips,”⁵⁵ which try to convey this extreme latitude of representation within the confines of the canvas, it is in the specific context of the screen, and more in general the means for presenting and viewing the film image, that de Rijke / de Rooij try to verify this possibility.

However, seeing a film like *Teorema* (1968) did not prompt the artists to conduct a specific analysis of the content and forms of Pasolini’s film work, but rather to examine the fascination aroused by a specific series of images. These are the abstract—or rather ‘abstracting’ with respect to filmic narration—images introduced into the film by Pasolini with a symbolic and alienating function. I am referring here to the images of the windswept desert traversed by smoke and clouds that appear before the opening credits; these images then recur systematically throughout the story in association with each of the five main characters and also seal the finale of the film, in which a man, the character played by Massimo Girotti, walks through them completely naked.

Leaving to one side the function of these images in Pasolini’s film, the artists noted an analogous treatment of the image in other films by the same director. In fact, in Pasolini’s subsequent ‘exotic films’—ranging from the uncompleted *Appunti per un’Orestiade africana* (1970) to *Il fiore delle mille e una notte* (1974)—certain images acquire an almost abstract quality, even if this is emphasized less than in *Teorema*: the faces in the crowd in *Appunti*, the relation between certain architectural structures and the characters in *Il fiore*.

An important component in the preparation of this section was the analysis of the iconographic material housed in the Centro Studi Pier Paolo Pasolini at the Cineteca di Bologna, which consists chiefly of location stills taken for documentary purposes on the sets of various films by Pasolini.

Since these documentary images are not directly linked to the filmic narration, they are isolated from the film sequence, amplifying the abstracting effect of the original image, which, although all its components (set design, costumes, cast) are documented, no longer has any narrative support, making interpretation more ambiguous.

From the systematic analysis of the images one might be able to piece together the fantastic and syncretic architecture resulting from the careful collage activity carried out by Pasolini through his search for different locations—Sana’a and Hodeida (North

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 61–62.

Yemen), Hadramaut (South Yemen), Isfahan (Iran), Asmara (Ethiopia). These differences between the locations are hard to trace in the images themselves, thanks also to the patient shading and fantastic reconstruction carried out by the director and his assistants. In other words, the essential differences between Yemeni, Iranian, and Ethiopian architecture make it possible to set the story in a strictly 'fairytale-like' frame,⁵⁶ as their simple combination blurs those differences into an inexistent narrative architecture, into the hypothesis of a fantastic exoticized pan-Arabic city. This consideration is also reflected in the particular exhibition mode adopted by de Rooij to install the photographic material: drawing once again on the principles underpinning the exhibition of documentary material at Magazin4 in Bregenz,⁵⁷ the artist presents the 13 photographs on a table. The original prints of these stills that are shown in the exhibition form a 'sequence' that, while respecting the documentary status of the images, retains, thanks to the succession and the relations between the individual images on the table, a memory trace of the filmic narration to which they refer.

By re-installing one of the tables of the installation at K21, which was originally conceived for the above mentioned exhibition at Magazin4—while the rest is reconstructed at the MAMbo, where *I'm Coming Home in Forty Days* is also on display—de Rooij amplifies the effect of unfamiliarity and at the same time enables the images to become part of a further discourse. On this particular table, the artists brought together a number of reproductions of a blue monochrome production still of *I'm Coming Home in Forty Days*, an image neither drawn 'from' nor directly linked 'to' it. In the exhibition in Düsseldorf this table provides another layer in the kaleidoscopic exploration of a single color (in this case blue, just as it is in *I'm Coming Home in Forty Days*). In this sense, the table containing the compilation of blue printed matters and the one on which the selection of 13 location stills taken on the set of *Il fiore* have been arranged, suggest the exploration of the furthest latitudes of the image that is also pursued, with different means, in *I'm Coming Home in Forty Days*—thanks to their straightforward juxtaposition next to each other in the exhibition space and maintaining an ambiguous status between work and documentation.

Furthermore, as indicated by de Rooij's mention of the idea of presenting *I'm Coming Home in Forty Days* in a room with an oriental rug on the floor, the reference to Islamic iconography—transposed here with a reference to Islamic architecture and urban planning, in turn blurred by the filmic origin of the reference itself—was another of the sources of inspiration around which their film was conceived. Even if it was only later that de Rooij / de Rooij actually thought of making a film in which an oriental rug is the explicit subject,⁵⁸ in the following year they shot the film *Of Three Men* (1998) in the Fatih mosque of Amsterdam (which, moreover, had previously been a Catholic church). Moreover, the artists had already started reading Keith Critchlow's *Islamic*

⁵⁶ As in the other films in the so-called 'trilogy of life' of which *Il fiore* is, after *Il Decamerone* (1971) and *I racconti di Canterbury* (1972), the third and final part.

⁵⁷ *Together*, Magazin4, Bregenz, January 30–March 13, 2005. The exhibition has in part been reconstructed in the show at MAMbo.

⁵⁸ The 19th-century Caucasian rug with Afshar motifs is part of the Rijksmuseum's collection in Amsterdam and is being filmed in *The Point of Departure* (2002).

Patterns. An Analytical and Cosmological Approach during the making of *I'm Coming Home in Forty Days*.⁵⁹

The ban in the Islamic tradition on the depiction of human or natural forms, insofar as these are considered to be idolatrous, results in an anti-naturalistic fashion by means of the abstract image. In architecture, decoration, and oriental rugs abstract form is loaded with meaning, becoming the expression of a "formal" spirituality: "Islamic art has maintained its singular integrity and inner content with the least diversion from its aim, that of the affirmation of unity as expressed in diversity."⁶⁰ The primary function of abstract forms in Islamic art is therefore "to lead the mind from the literal and mundane world towards its underlying reality."⁶¹

As with the iceberg in *I'm Coming Home in Forty Days*, in the motifs of an oriental rug de Rijke / de Rooij saw the possibility for the representation of a concrete object through an abstract form or, conversely, for every abstract form to evoke the possibility of a concrete object.

This constant ascertaining of the iconographic and signifying potential of the image acquires special importance in the light of the recurrent and particular use made of exhibition spaces by de Rijke / de Rooij. The films of the two artists are generally exhibited in ways that recall the presentation of a film in a cinema: they are screened at set hours so visitors can see them from beginning to end and so the space of the "white cube" can be perceived as such between one screening and the next, both in terms of its volumes and its principal architectural features; the latter remain untouched and clearly visible after the artists' minimal intervention (a projection cabin to separate the equipment from the room, as in the cinema, speakers, and some benches). In this way the films of de Rijke / de Rooij, a cross between artist's films for the museum and cinematographic films, break down the boundaries of the museum itself, which becomes an ambiguous area for comparison between different layouts and experiences. The very images of their films—sometimes seemingly still images—enable these works to definitively oscillate between film, sculpture, and painting.

Paradoxically, the iconoclasm of Islamic art appears in this way to be recoverable in the absolute neutrality of the "white cube": in what is the space par excellence for (modernist) aesthetic experience, de Rijke / de Rooij discover a code of representation and signification based on the potential of the image and the value of its sensible and imaginative experience (partially echoed in the iconographic tradition of Dutch painting, for example in the bare Christian churches painted by Pieter Jansz Saenredam). Yet it is precisely at this point that their approach tends to become ambiguous: de Rijke / de Rooij appear to participate in the adventures,

⁵⁹ Keith Critchlow, *Islamic Patterns. An Analytical and Cosmological Approach*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1976. The title of the 35mm film *The Point of Departure* by de Rijke / de Rooij is taken from the title of the first chapter of this book.

⁶⁰ Ibid, back cover.

⁶¹ Ibid.

which have so far been reconstructed by them analytically, with a certain levity, a deliberately romantic and naive stance, a 'fairytale-like' approach (i.e. 'potential') to conceptual practice, so as to preserve the 'adventurous' and exciting potential of this line of enquiry, to launch it in unexpected directions, and to put it back into circulation towards untried interpretations and forms of expression and representation. It is no accident that Willem de Rooij talks in terms of "idealized patterns, which are images of love, and sometimes caricatures."⁶² In any case—if we think of the corresponding section of the exhibition—the film *Il fiore delle mille e una notte* is also, like its much older source *One Thousand and One Nights*, a 'love story'... and so it appears entirely even if amazingly plausible to combine an iceberg with a (flying?) rug.

Luipaard

Andrea Viliani

The Floating Feather is the title of a group exhibition organized by Willem de Rooij at the Galerie Chantal Crousel in Paris (2006/07). Another group show organized by de Rooij at the Galerie Daniel Buchholz in Cologne (2007) was called *Birds in a Park*. De Rooij conceived these two exhibitions in all their various aspects—the titles, the invitation cards, the press releases, the choice of artists, and the conceptual approach—as counterparts of one another. The invitation cards for both shows feature reproductions of two paintings by Dutch painter Melchior d'Hondecoeter (1636–95), the respective titles of which were used as titles for the shows. Both exhibitions display works by the same three artists (Keren Cytter, Isa Genzken, Fong-

⁶² Telephone conversation with the author during the preparation of this text, September 2007.

Leng). De Rooij played the part of 'curator' in both shows, which were presented in the two galleries usually representing Jeroen de Rijke and Willem de Rooij as artists.

"The painting and what it represents—rather than its title—could be seen as an emblem for the exhibition."⁶³ Melchior d'Hondecoeter's paintings are remarkable for their recurrent theme: pictures of birds of many kinds and from different places—some were common in northern Europe, while others were rare and exotic—that were often commissioned by seventeenth-century royals and nouveau riche. Some of these birds recur in almost identical poses in several of his paintings, as if they were part of a project of cataloging and collage. In terms of their formal structure and social reception these paintings "reinforce as well as comment on the prevailing tastes and power-structures of their time."⁶⁴

The formal language of these works is at the same time metaphorical and documentary, and its programmatic aim appears to be to reconstruct in detail forms of social organization and aesthetic meaning in themselves extremely composite and complex. It could well be precisely this formal language that is at the root of de Rooij's interest in an artist such as d'Hondecoeter, as well as at the core of what he means when he defines d'Hondecoeter's paintings and what they represent as an *emblem* of the two exhibitions.

A similar approach, poised between the recording and the interpretation of contemporary society, also unites the three artists and the works included in the show, marked by the systematic displacement of their object of analysis and affection and by the constant re-definition of the means and solutions adopted to represent it: seven respectively three *robes-manteaux*⁶⁵ by the fashion designer Fong-Leng (b. 1938), the narrative films and videos by the Israeli artist Keren Cytter (b. 1977)⁶⁶ (respectively *The Victim* (2006) and *The Dates Series* (2004) in Paris; *Tal and Namaah* (2001), *French Film* (2002), and *Nothing* (2003) in Cologne), and two sculptural installations by German artist Isa Genzken (b. 1948).⁶⁷ On show in Paris were two mural components entitled *Gay* (2006), composed of various layers of plastic, mirror foil, paint, fabric—a fragment of a rainbow flag—and various images including a photograph taken by American soldiers in the prison of Abu Ghraib, showing a naked man whose stretched out arms render his body in the shape of a cross. On display in Cologne were two identical blown-up copies of huge reproductions—both printed on paper, a portrait of Franz Kafka as a young man, and the other a drawing made by

⁶³ Willem de Rooij, excerpt from the original press release of both shows.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ The following clothes, dating from 1974–81, were shown in Paris: *Gaudí* (1974), *Mandenjapon* (1974), *Marsipulami* (1976), *Azuri Fiori* (1977), *Paradijsvogel* (1977), *Parasol* (1979), *Anniversario* (1981). In Cologne *Marsipulami*, *Parasol* and *Anniversario*.

⁶⁶ Keren Cytter attended Willem de Rooij's course at De Ateliers Stichting 63 in Amsterdam from 2002 to 2004.

⁶⁷ Willem de Rooij contributed an essay to the catalogue published on the occasion of Isa Genzken's participation in the 52nd Venice Biennale: "Jump. Movement and Moving Image in Three Recent Installations by Isa Genzken", in *Isa Genzken. Oil. German Pavilion, 2007*, DuMont Literatur und Kunst Verlag, Cologne, 2007, pp. 168–174. In his essay on Genzken de Rooij analyses, among other works, the installation *Gay*, which he presented at the Paris exhibition.

Kafka at the time the photograph was taken showing a carriage on a winding road—and an overturned wheelchair with a convex strip of golden mirror foil resting on its seat.

For the exhibition at MAMbo, de Rooij reconstructs and further develops the premises of the two former shows he curated, basing it on a particular dress designed by Fong-Leng: *Luipaard* (1975).

In displaying the singular creations of Fong-Leng within the 'white cube' of Galerie Chantal Crousel respectively Galerie Daniel Buchholz, de Rooij arranged them according to a precise scheme with respect to the other works and the stance adopted by the viewer. They were placed on mannequins in such a way that the viewer could walk round them, making the clothes visible from 360°. In the Paris show the mannequins themselves were mounted on revolving platforms. In this way each dress was not simply displayed as a singular artifact but set in a context of references, as we might find in a museum or fashion archive, by means of a reconstruction of the artifact's use and of its original environment. In particular de Rooij hints at her exclusive and notorious presentations—held at her boutique, in hotels, as well as in artists' and commercial photographers' studios—for which Fong-Leng, often modeling her own creations, became widely celebrated in the 1970s and early '80s. Hence, in the show at Galerie Daniel Buchholz de Rooij chose to present the video documentation of Fong-Leng's 1983 collection at the Hilton Hotel in Amsterdam on a monitor. The video shows Fong-Leng wearing *Anniversario*, a leather garment decorated with *appliqués* reproducing birthday cakes and candles, which was displayed in the same room.

Fong-Leng's style was affiliated to the work of contemporaries Ossie Clarke and Zandra Rhodes. Her works have a strong formal or representative character, reminiscent of traditional oriental ceremonial clothing. In these garments—'constructed' on the body as performable sculptures rather than worn as clothing, in which various sources of inspiration are superimposed with a playful sense of disproportion and simplification—the need to communicate themselves in a *certain* way and to a *certain* predominant social milieu is the crucial element. We can look at a circuit which goes from the dress to the performance of its social presentation and from there to further occasions of social interaction and self-representation. Fong-Leng, born 1938 in Rotterdam to a Chinese father and a Dutch mother, commercially instrumentalized the ambiguous status her exotic background provided her with. Moving at the limits of mainstream and its commercial strategies of communication, her creations acquired a vast reputation in Dutch society in the 1970s, and documented the references as well as the working mechanisms of a certain social and cultural system which, with its lifestyle and customs, played a part in the transition from Flower Power to Punk.

If, in the public's experience of the work re-installed in the gallery and in the interpretation that may be ascribed to it, Fong-Leng's dresses are to a large extent restored by de Rooij to their original context, they are at the same time decontextualized, or better, inserted into a transversal and confrontational context,

by being presented side by side with the works of Isa Genzken and Keren Cytter. These works in turn, while they represent the complex, stratified socio-cultural *imagerie* contemporary to them (as for example in the presence of the rainbow flag or the photo of Abu Ghraib in Isa Genzken's *Gay*, or the analysis of the relationship between media and private life, involving contemporary media symbols and expressions of inner feelings in the videos and films of Keren Cytter), superimposing it on that of Fong-Leng are reciprocally detached and de-contextualized from the former. What emerges—the exhibition, in short—is presented as a platform on which works and their own *defining* rules—display strategies and layouts, documentary materials, etc—coexist despite their intrinsic and chronological differences, their diverse socio-cultural contexts, and the media employed by them. An operative platform which, by means of these confrontations and over and above the differences between the final works and their 'preparatory' or 'contextual' material, generates meaning and visually documents this process.

By presenting Fong-Leng's creations in the exhibition at the MAMbo, it is as if de Rooij is substituting the artists Keren Cytter and Isa Genzken with the de Rijke / de Rooij duo: in other words, by analyzing the way in which Fong-Leng's clothes are inserted into the *Jeroen de Rijke / Willem de Rooij* show, it is possible to affirm that the critical and aesthetic approach pursued by de Rooij as an artist is analogous to the one adopted by him as curator in the exhibitions at the Galerie Chantal Crousel and the Galerie Daniel Buchholz.

Luipaard is a dress created by Fong-Leng in 1975, made of gilded chamois leather with *appliqués* on the neck and sleeves, while on the skirt a number of leopards in the African steppe are depicted. The original dress was made for Mathilde Willink (1938–77), a famous socialite in 1970s Amsterdam and wife of the magical realist painter Carel Willink (1900–83). Mathilde Willink appears wearing this dress in a painting produced by her husband in that same year, under the title *Afscheid van Mathilde*. The painting is now in the Scheringa Museum for Realist Art in Spanbroek, the Netherlands, together with a photograph by the famous fashion and publicity photographer Paul Huf (1924–2002) showing the painter and his wife in the studio while the picture was being painted. The original dress is on display in the Amsterdam Historical Museum. In 1997 the Scheringa Museum whose collections include other originals of Fong-Leng's produced a replica of *Luipaard* named *Luipaardmantel II*, to accompany Willink's painting. In 1998 fashion photographer Venus Veldhoen made a portrait of Fong-Leng, wearing this replica in the rhino enclosure at Burgers Zoo in Arnhem.

Fong-Leng, Paul Huf and Carel Willink were involved in the cultural and society life of their time, and played a significant part in defining the ways, in which it was represented. The work of Jeroen de Rijke and Willem de Rooij is always concerned with the analysis of various means of representation and their origins, by examining historical and cultural objects. This analysis spans a broad range of imagery, from artistic production to mass media, in their respective relationships to contemporary political and social frameworks. In Willink's paintings, in Fong-Leng's dresses, in Huf's photographs (which at first shared common ground as status symbols, worn at

society events, published in popular magazines and volumes of photos and soon collected by public museums) de Rooij in fact evokes and examines the genesis of and connections between the specific representations, which result from these relationships and interactions. An example for this approach can be seen in the interweaving between the individual works and their authors: Mathilde is wearing Fong-Leng's dress in Willink's portrait, she is photographed with her husband by Huf, who in turn (and in other photographs) portrays Fong-Leng and Mathilde. These relations—which bring to mind the cataloging and collage operation in the paintings of de Hondecoeter—are reconstructed by means of the selection and presentation of a single article —*Luipaard*—which appears in different guises in all four of the works. More than the *mise en abyme* of the same subject, we are here on the contrary presented with variations of it on specific iconographic and connotative planes, indicated within a given context which, thanks to this operation—at the same time objective and interpretative—reverberates in all its semantic and aesthetic complexity.

Leaving out of account the specific content of these artifacts, de Rooij concentrates on reconstructing the scenario which they depict and the manner in which this reconstruction is obtained in the context of a museum. That is to say, he makes use of the dynamic connections between these objects and exploits the reciprocal implications between the critical and documentary approach (collection and analysis of the objects) and the aesthetic approach (the staging and *mise-en-scène* as the revitalization of an experience), thus placing himself outside the supposed divide between the presentation of the original object, its dislocation, its appropriation, the invention (creation) of an independent new work from the original one.

The section devoted to the work of Fong-Leng in the exhibition at MAMbo reveals the stratified method of the work of Jeroen de Rijke and Willem de Rooij, that is the multiple status of their critical and aesthetic praxis. Thanks to the careful balance between the premises and the further possibilities that might spring from these premises in his own current artistic research, it also confirms de Rooij's interest in the analysis of exhibition strategies related to 'documentary' material, that was already pursued by de Rijke / de Rooij in their previous collaborative work.⁶⁸ Furthermore, this section confirms that the presentation (in the exhibition spaces) of the themes, the formal and compositional components and the meaning structures, that lie at the very basis of their works as a means of analytical exploration, plays a significant role in this analysis. At the same time this mode of presentation provides a synthetic experience of the works themselves.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ See their decision to present the archives showing the sources of their collaboration at the Magazin4 in Bregenz: "The presentation of these archives is a formal means to explore collective sources of creativity and our common use of imagery." (Exhibition press release, *Together*, Magazin4, Bregenz, January 30–March 13, 2005) This show is reproduced in part in the MAMbo exhibition.

⁶⁹ See their exhibition *Mandarin Ducks* at the Stedelijk Museum CS in Amsterdam (December 16, 2005–February 12, 2006) in which works from the museum's collection were incorporated by de Rijke / de Rooij. They connected up and showed to the public a number of possible sources for the film *Mandarin Ducks*. This show is reproduced in part in the K21 exhibition.

Works in exhibitions:

I'm Coming Home in Forty Days, 1997
16mm color film, optical sound
15 min.
Courtesy Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Köln

Bantar Gebang, 2000
35mm color film, optical sound
10 min.
Courtesy Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Köln

I'm Coming Home in Forty Days, 2001
C-print framed
124 x 183 cm
Collection Ringier

The Point of Departure, 2002

C-print framed
127,5 x 187 cm
Private collection, Köln

Caucasian Rug, Shirwan, Baku, ca. 1800, 2002

C-print
328 x 163 cm
Private collection, Köln

Lotto Carpet, probably Ushak, Western Anatolia, 17th century, 2003

C-print
222 x 137 cm
Private collection

Bergama, West Anatolia, ca. 1850, 2003

C-print
212 x 184,5 cm
Private collection, Zürich

Persian Rug, Isfahan, Polonaise, early 17th Century, 2003

C-print
233 x 148 x 5 cm
Collection Ringier

Anatolian Rug, Kemerihisar, late 19th Century, 2003

C-print
344 x 144 cm
Collection DekaBank

Bouquet IV, 2005

Flower bouquet, b/w photograph
122,5 x 122,6 x 2,4 cm
written description
MKK Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main
Acquired with funding by the Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds from the Knecht-Drenth Fonds,
Amsterdam

Mandarin Ducks, 2005

16mm color film, optical sound
36 min.

Courtesy Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Köln

Partial reconstruction of the exhibition
Together – Jeroen de Rijke / Willem de Rooij
Magazin4, Bregenz, January 30 – March 13, 2005

Together, 2005
Reprint of the original exhibition poster
167,5 x 118 cm
Courtesy Magazin4, Bregenz
Archive Willem de Rooij

Selected Publications, 1994-2004, 2005
Printed matter
Archive Willem de Rooij

Elaboration of the two exhibitions
***The Floating Feather* (Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, December 2006)**
***Birds in a Park* (Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Köln, April 2007)**

Fong-Leng
Luipaard, 1973
Leather, silk, suede
h. 155 cm
Amsterdams Historisch Museum, Amsterdam

Paul Huf
Matilde posing for "Afscheid van Matilde", 1975
C-print
58,5 x 58,5 cm
Scheringa Museum voor Realisme, Spanbroek

Fong-Leng
Luipaardmantel II, 1997
Leather, suede
h. 155cm
Scheringa Museum voor Realisme, Spanbroek



Jeroen de Rijke / Willem de Rooij

Curators:	Gianfranco Maraniello, Andrea Viliani
Venue:	MAMbo – Museum of Modern Art of Bologna via Don Minzoni 14 – Bologna
Exhibition dates:	April, 20 th – June 8 th 2008
Opening hours:	Tuesday – Sunday 10 am – 6 pm Thursday 10 am – 10 pm Monday closed
Prices:	full price € 6 reduced price € 4
Information:	tel. +39 051 6496611 fax +39 051 6496600



	<p>info@mambo-bologna.org www.mambo-bologna.org</p>
Guided Tours:	<p>reservation needed for schools and groups tel. +39 051 6496626 – 628 mamboedu@comune.bologna.it groups (max 30 persons): 80 euros translation service: 100 euros schools: 50 euros audioguides (per group): 20 euros</p>
Sunday at MAMbo:	<p>An appointment dedicated to art for parents and Children, the price is 5 euros per person For information and reservation (needed): tel. +39 051 6496626 – 628 mamboedu@comune.bologna.it</p>
Catalogue:	<p>SNOECK</p>
Communication office:	<p>Giulia Pezzoli MAMbo communication office and marketing development tel. +39 051 6496654 – giulia.pezzoli@comune.bologna.it</p>
MAMbo is supported by:	<p>Regione Emilia-Romagna Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio in Bologna Fondazione del Monte di Bologna e Ravenna</p>

The exhibition *Jeroen de Rijke/Willem de Rooij* is a joint project by K21 Kunstsammlung NRW and MAMbo – Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna. The two independent yet connected exhibitions present a comprehensive overview about Jeroen de Rijke/Willem de Rooij's work, accompanied by a new exhibition catalogue:

K21

KUNSTSAMMLUNG NORDRHEIN-WESTFALEN

With the contribution of :

MAMbo
Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna



Ambassade van het
Koninkrijk der Nederlanden



The work *Bouquet IV* was realized with the contribution of :



Info

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www.mambo-bologna.org

Opening Times

Tuesday – Sunday 10.00 am – 6.00 pm
Thursday 10.00 am – 10.00 pm
closed on Monday

Tickets

Full price 6 €
Reduced price 4 €



Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna

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reservations required for groups and school visits
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Archives

by appointment
tel. +39 051 6496629
archivioGAM@comune.bologna.it

Services

Cloakroom, information point, disabled access and services. Backpacks and bags exceeding the permitted size are not allowed in the exhibition rooms.

Bookshop Skira

Tuesday – Sunday : 10.00 am – 18.00 pm
Thursday: 10.00 am – 22.00 pm
closed on Monday
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Bar Ristorante EX FORNO

Tuesday – Sunday : 10.00 am – 2.00 pm
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Take the exit number 5 (Lame)
Follow the signs to via Zanardi, direction “Center”
After the underpassage turn right in via Tanari
Park your car in Tanari Parking (suggested)

Take shuttle A, direction “Center”, get off in Don Minzioni bus stop

Or

From the parking proceed towards the town center on foot till Piazza VII Novembre



Turn left in viale Pietro Pietramellara
Turn right in via Don Minzoni
Highway A13
Take the exit Bologna Arcoveggio
Proceed on Bologna main ring road
Take the exit number 5 (Lame)
Proceed as above

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By plane - bus

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From Railway Station take the bus number 35, direction "Ospedale Maggiore"
Get off in Don Minzoni bus stop
For more information please visit ATC web site (Bologna public transport)
For detailed information about trains from / to Bologna please visit FS web site (Italian railways)

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