

# EN 1





**Sequence 1 -**  
*Dutch artist's books*  
*in international*  
*perspective*

Academie Minerva, March 2015

**Cover photo:**

Exhibition view 'The book as artwork', the former  
Groninger Museum, now Academie Minerva, 1978.

(Photo: John Stoel)

I KNOW AN  
ARTIST'S  
BOOK WHEN I  
SEE ONE

**I know an artist's book when I see one.**

This thought seems to be the result of a quest through two collections, on the search for a common denominator in all these artist's publications.

For this exhibition of artist's books, we drew from the collections of private collector Henk Woudsma and the Groninger Museum. Both have their own distinguished character and are by definition incomplete. Both collections agree in one key aspect:

their starting point is conceptual art from the 1960s and 70s. The collection of the Groninger Museum is limited to the period 1960-1980, an era in which the artist's book was reinvented and a foundation was laid for a new canon of the artist's book. Woudsma's collection is largely focused on the Dutch artist's book and runs until the present day.

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Many criteria have been applied to this fluid genre. A large edition or unique copies? A bound book or loose-leaf? Should it contain text written by others? This is what you get with the conjunction of artist and book. One has a foot in the art world, the other in the library. This exhibition shows that the artist's book is rather immune to definitions, however is very recognisable.

Many conceptual artists of the 1960s and 70s had their own agenda with the artist's book. It had to be withdrawn from established categories and a certain idiom. It had to be flexible, with an unpredictable status, thereby escaping commerce and a fixed-market rate. The latter ideal was untenable, though another one kept better: the many definitions standing in each other's way is proof of the continued influence of the artist's book's unfathomable status. This exhibition brings to the fore that artist's books keep protecting themselves against issues of definition.

6 Artist's books of the 1960s and 70s often stood diametrically opposed to the dominant conceptions of art of their time. No balanced series of images, but assembled according to apparent capriciousness and laws that before were not considered part of the domain of arts, as for example the structure of an archive. No high-quality photography but snapshots, often of trivial subject matter and poor quality. It's not the artistic maxim of 'the decisive moment' that is important, but sequences of images in which each moment is equal to the previous or the next image. "A collection of facts," said Edward Ruscha about the photos in his artist's book *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* (1963)

Although it is still marked by the acquired freedom of the 1960 and 70s, Woudsma's collection displays a more varied picture, more colourful, sometimes tastier, and of undeniably high quality in terms of photography, choice of papers and workmanship. In the descriptions in this catalogue, Woudsma throws extensive light on his choices.

There is much to say though, for the characteristics of the artist's book: it can lie around and find its way outside of the art world. Certainly, in a period in which the role of art in the world is being reconsidered, the artist's book will gain importance.

And at the moment at which the qualities of a book correspond with the concept, one can speak of an artist's book. The artist's book offers the unique possibility of looking and touching at the same time. It always requires an act, like holding the book or turning the pages. First and foremost, the artist's book refers to itself - she is not a carrier of images, but rather itself an image.

**7**

**Rein Jelle Terpstra**





Both collections gave impetus to arrange the artist's books in three chapters: the artist's book as a principal means of organising collections and stories; as a medium reflecting on language; and as a means for the interpretation or recreation of the world.

**The book itself (I):**

THE  
PROCESS  
OF  
DRAWING

The photographs of **Ed Ruscha** (1937) constitute a collection of facts. His publications are mass-produced objects. They needed to look ordinary. Thus, Ruscha clearly distances himself from the art world. Almost all of his books document typical aspects of the architecture and culture of Los Angeles. In *Dutch Details* (Stichting Octopus, 1971) this vision has been transposed to a setting of average Dutch housing conditions. The photographs are strictly functional, lacking of any specific point of view or aesthetic intervention. In his drawings, prints and paintings of the 1960s and 70s, Ruscha experimented with a variety of unorthodox materials, such as gunpowder, vinyl, blood, red wine, fruit and vegetable juices, Bolognese sauce, cherry cake, coffee, caviar, narcissi, tulips, and grasses. *Stains* (Heavy Industry Publications, 1969) is a portfolio of 76 coloured pieces of paper on which aforementioned materials have been applied. The final paper contains Ruscha's own blood.

*Xerox Book* (1968) by **Seth Siegel** (1941-2013) contains artist contributions by Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, and Lawrence Weiner. The idea for the book was to offer each participant 25 quarto pages, to be filled with works made with a photocopier. It triggered seriality. The most

important innovation of Xerox Book was that pages were offered for the creation of art to be determined and constrained by the limits of the page. At the same time, the catalogue provided the works for an exhibition.

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A number of conceptual artists were fascinated by index cards, used to systematise, organise and classify. The aim of a card index is to collect and to archive - to pursue ostensible completeness. Lucy R. Lippard: 955,000 (The Vancouver Art Gallery, 1970) was published on the occasion of an exhibition organized by Lucy R. Lippard (1937), art critic and advocate of conceptual art. The envelope containing 138 index cards (15 x 10 cm) forms a kind of catalogue of conceptual art, Process art, Land art, and so on. At Lippard's request, 71 North American and European artists each made an index card for the publication as well as a work for the exhibition.

The three-volume work Sonsbeek '72 by Paul Bonger (1949) and Rick Vermeulen (1950) is based on a data collection from a project they had executed between November 1971 and June 1972. The temporariness of the 1971 art manifestation Sonsbeek buiten de perken induced Bonger and Vermeulen to examine what would remain of the exhibited projects after the event's closure. The compilation of the

approximately 360 cards influenced the shape of the publication, the front side of which contains the data, the back a photograph.

Since the early 1960s, **Gerhard Richter** (1932) collected about 4,000 photographs. The irregular, kaleidoscopic collection - better known under the title *Atlas* - mirrors the oeuvre of the artist like a diary. Richter employs the newspaper scraps, photos, photo series, sketches, color studies, landscapes, portraits and still lifes as a groundwork for his paintings. He sometimes presents the photos from his collection, together with the sketches, at exhibitions or in books. The book *Gerhard Richter: atlas van de foto's en schetsen* (Hedendaagse Kunst Utrecht, 1972) is the first in a series of Atlas publications.

**Annette Messager** (1943) presents herself under the monikers 'Annette Messager collector' and 'Annette Messager artist', among others. Messager the collector compiles albums that describe her experiences of 'being woman'. Up to 1975 she had built up 56 collections, the so-called 'Albums collection', in which she revealed conflicting aspects of her (fictive) personality. One of these collections, a parody on 'typical female' labor, comprises a set of handkerchiefs with embroidered proverbs and a series of 'secret drawings', in which Messager fantasises

about sexual violence. In Les Approches (Hossmann, 1973), she imagines a series of attempts at seducing a man by using insinuating compliments. The female body got promoted to the status of art in Les Approches (Ecart Publications, 1974).

- 14 **Hans de Vries** studied and recorded processes and phenomena that happen in nature and the everyday surroundings. Contrary to the Land art-artists, De Vries wants to raise the audience's consciousness of the relationship of man with his natural environments. De Vries's work is founded upon documentation, from recordings of simple acts up to complicated projects like 't Dooie Beestenboek (De Harmonie, 1972) and De geschiedenis van de citroengeranium (Art Animation, 1973).

During his travels in Morocco, among other destinations, **herman de vries** (1931) collected so-called 'mind-moving' plants for his project natural relations. Sometimes he released intermediate reports in the form of publications, such as natural-relations I – die marokkanische sammlung (Galerie D+C Mueller-Roth, 1984). This project advances some sort of ecological argument with which de vries points towards our dependence on nature and the influence that plants bear on our well-being, our thinking and our culture. For 16 dm2 - an essay (Edition

Lydia Megert, 1979), de vries collected and dried each individual piece of vegetation which he found at a (randomly chosen) plot of pasture measuring 40 x 40 cm. He then made photocopies of each of the species that he found and provided coordinates at a selfmade map of this piece of land. The only naming of the plants exists in their position on the map. Based on the visual qualities of only a piece of pasture, de vries invites us to imagine its richness. For *1 dm<sup>2</sup> uit "16 dm<sup>2</sup>" - een essay* (Galerie Magazijn, 1976), a square decimeter was subsequently lifted from the aforementioned plot of 40 x 40 cm.

Like his contemporary herman de vries, **Paul-Armand Gette** (1927) dedicates himself to experimental poetry, visual arts, and also to publishing zines and books, of which *Du Rhin à la prairie alpine* (AQ-Editions, 1974) is an example. References to the world of insects and a fascination for collecting botanical data form a constant in Gette's poetical and expressive practice, which is a play on nomenclature and systems of knowledge, by shifting the boundaries between art and science and by collecting plants as if it were a highbrow art.

**Anne and Patrick Poirier** (1942) are concerned with architecture and classical mythology. By using simple materials like sand and paper they reconstruct,

in miniature or at scale 1:1, archaeological findings, locations and ruins. For the book *Les paysages révolus : notes et croquis de voyage, Sélinunte, août 1974* (Sonnabend, 1975), they studied monuments, made photographs, collected fragments and searched for documents in archives.

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The irony of a ban on the taking of photographs becomes clear when one discovers that *Défense De Photographier / No Photographs Allowed / Photographieren Verboten* (Berliner Künstlerprogramm / DAAD, 1975) by **Marcel Broodthaers** (1924-1976) consists almost entirely of image reproductions. The booklet begins with four photos referring to a mechanical means of reproduction. Was it meant to be ironic that Broodthaers printed photos of photos, in spite of the ban? Moreover, one of the photos features a natural way of reproduction: trees mirrored in the water surface. Equally ironic is the trilingual explanation, next to a reproduction of an image of a film box, of the ideal circumstances under which to take photographs.

**Richard Long** (1945) makes books while walking, as it were: during his long walks he collects identical images or uses words to sketch out the subjective and concrete map of a landscape. With *John Barleycorn* (Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam,



1973) and *Countless Stones* (Van Abbemuseum / Openbaar kunstbezit, 1983), Long proves that the book is a better suited medium than the museum wall to record the advance of time. For an artist like Long, for whom the journey is the material of his work, the book doesn't merely serve as a vehicle to salvage memories, it rather places them in a narrative structure: the history of a systematic quest or an accidental discovery. Or perhaps the book is a means to organise memories durationally, like the length of the road, which in *John Barleycorn* is indicated by the collected signs (Long's interventions in the landscape, such as stones arranged in lines or patterns).

Contrary to Richard Long, **Hamish Fulton** (1946) doesn't work with 'impressions' by nature, he is 'impressed' by it instead. In line with this, Fulton is fascinated by traditional ways of life of native Americans, whose belief is that culture is in harmony with nature. Fulton's religious attitude towards nature turns his walks into rituals, of which photography is a part, as can be seen in *Camp Fire* (Van Abbemuseum, 1985).

The works of **David Tremlett** (1945) arise from signs he encounters during his walking trips. The book is meant as a holder of few important memories. In plain drawings. accompanied by writings about

visited locations, *On the Border* (Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1979) records Tremlett's impressions of his journeys to Malawi, Mozambique, Botswana and Tanzania.

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**Sol LeWitt** (1928-2007) uses the medium of the book as a means of organising his collected images, as well as to emphasise the seriality of the systems of his non-figurative work, in which series of happenings succeed each other according to certain patterns. In *From Monteluco to Spoleto/December 1976* (Van Abbemuseum, 1984), LeWitt arranges the apparent incoherence of the Italian landscape. For *Autobiography* (Multiples Inc. ; Lois and Michael K. Torf, 1980) he photographed all the objects in his New York studio, in an attempt to control the chaos of his environment through a systematic survey.

**Chohreh Feyzjdjou** (1955-1996) collected objects drawn from her everyday social life. She then painted the objects black using tar, fat or ashes. Thus, Feyzjdjou removed them from a world in which objects play a dominant role. She catalogued the treated objects and kept them in a quasi storage space (the 'Boutique'). Feyzjdjou was in the habit of packing up traces of her past as a 'memory'. All objects underwent a transformation into 'Products of Chohreh Feyzjdjou'. A great deal of her work deals

with alienation, homelessness and uprootedness. It is an ironic take at consumer society. The artist's book *Product of Chohreh Feyzdjou* (Peninsula Foundation, 1993) was published as a catalogue accompanying the presentation in 1993 of one of Feyzdjou's installations at De Fabriek in Eindhoven. In a characteristic manner, the book was designed by **Peter Foolen** and **Tjeu Teeuwen**; even the clasp that keeps the book together has been treated, with nitric acid.

*Splendid Isolation* (Artists Books, 1992) by **Frans Baake** (1958) contains a collection of photos he made on some of his travels. The photos show notable colour marks. The colours isolated within the images are easily discernible. Opposite the photographic 'sources', Baake placed colourful compositions. The colours of these woodcuts are harmonious with the colours in the photographs.

In *Familiarity* (Uitgeverij PlaatsMaken, 1992) by **Jeroen van Westen** (1955) one finds a series of photos of rock paintings, juxtaposed with photographs of the animals these paintings depict. Van Westen photographed the animals in Botswana and Zimbabwe, at approximately the same locations at which the makers of the rock paintings must have spotted the animals in a past long gone.

The kingfisher proved a major source of inspiration for **Hans Waanders** (1951-2001). Waanders organised the world according to available material about the kingfisher. We can talk here of an in-depth research into nearly all data known about the kingfisher, like in the book *Wat vliegt daar?* (1995). It is a well-known fact that the kingfisher can be found all day long at his favourite branch over the river, functioning as a diving board on the hunt for fish. To help the animal survive, Waanders sometimes stuck a branch into the river bank. The photographs he took there form the basis for the book *Perches* (October Foundation / Morning Star, 2001).

**Mark Manders** (1968) is continuously working on 'Self-portrait as a building', a gesamtkunstwerk parts of which he regularly exhibits. The building functions as a metaphor for the analysis and organisation of experiences, memories, desires, and also for the distinction between fact and fiction, as can be seen in *Slide Projections (Two Interconnected Houses/ Documented Assignment)* (Roma Publications, 2010). In *Newspaper with Fives* (1999; 2001), a variety of 'fives' has been collected: five pods nailed to the wall, five dead animals, five balls. It thus shows a world seemingly controlled by chance and improvisation, a 'There, I Fixed It' mentality. In this world, logic is absent. One wonders why things have

been assembled and organised in this way. However, it all seems to make sense.

‘If I were a bird, how would I look at the world?’ This question is central to **Martin Brandsma**’s work, which for many years was sustained by one specific source, the great grey shrike (*Lanius excubitor*). As if he were a real scientist-artist in the vein of Linnaeus, Brandsma collected data by observing the shrike in the wild, drawing maps of the tail feathers, by climbing trees, and by following the bird’s travels throughout the European continent via picture postcards. In *Systema mutatis* (2012) the ‘evolution’ of the name *Lanius excubitor* has been mapped. In *auf hoher warte* (2013), Brandsma combined images he collected with his own photos of trees and nice look-outs. The book gives an impression of observation posts from which the great grey shrike may be studied.

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**Laurence Aëgter** (1972) personifies existing systems. She investigates, rearranges and provides these systems of new contexts. The systems originate in the public as well as the private realm. Some of the public sources consist of encyclopaediae, catalogues, newspapers, phone books or literary publications. Aëgter even used an existing 1976 Louvre catalogue for the presentation of her own works: *Catalogue des Chefs-d’œuvre du Musée du Louvre* (2009).

The original catalogue shows the highlights of the collection of the Louvre museum in Paris, that emanated from the booty or otherwise obtained property of the French monarchs: antiquities, artefacts, medieval objects, and paintings and sculptures from diverse eras.

**Kasper Andreasen** (1979) is interested in the ordinary, such as ephemeral printed matter, language, objects and maps. His work mostly consists of drawings, writings and printed matter, with an emphasis on mapping, indexing and archiving. In 2013 he published a self-drawn atlas under the title *Writing Over* (Roma Publications, 2013). The drawings are partly based on personal, partly on collective history. They are represented as a variety of landscapes and maps.

**Tim Hollander** collected a variety of images with which he then compiled nine chapters about the history of cinema: *The history of film in 9 chapters* (Reader's Finest, 2013). However, there isn't any chronology, which makes the book personal, mixed up and rather unsuitable for educational applications. The fictive publisher is *Reader's Finest*, a parody on the very well-known *Reader's Digest*.

**Chantal Rens** (1981) collects enormous amounts of images and reanimates them in new compositions, such as *BEING in SHAPE* (1st ed. 2009; 2nd ed. 2013), *Carolina had weliswaar geen aids maar ze dacht er wel vaak aan* (1st ed. 2009; 2nd ed. 2013) and *Kanada* (2013). By showing images within the collection in a variety of ensembles, Rens liberates the individual images from their original functions, after which they gained a different and more autonomous status, with their own merit.

**Ruth van Beek** (1977) collects capricious series of snapshots, diapositives and family albums. She cuts photos from papers and old books, and combines these with techniques of painting, cutting or folding. Thus, Van Beek turns over the original contexts. Photos are joined together, covered with painted units, and sometimes parts are folded away. In *Dancing Figures (The Manuals #2)* (Centerfold Editions, 2014), Van Beek uses photos from an old-fashioned dance manual. Photos crossing the fold of the book's spine, animate unexpected and impossible dance movements.

**Stephan Keppel** (1973) is a true collector, with a keen eye focused on finding things. It doesn't matter whether he finds places to photograph or objects (images, pieces of paper and so on), that can be taken

and made into something, or rather, shown anew and in different constellations. For his latest book Entre Entre (Fw: Books, 2014), Keppel rummaged the neighbourhoods adjoining the Parisian Boulevard Périphérique. He could have undertaken this journey in whichever Western European city. Most importantly, it's about gathering visual material within these semi-anonymous city limits.

By isolating and collecting certain aspects from supplements, Robin Waart (1978) shifts their original meaning. This can be seen in Would you... (2012), a folder of 16 postcards in which Waart shows film stills bearing variations of sentences beginning with "Would you ...". In Part one (2011), Waart presents 101 opening sentences from 101 English novels in particular, out of which he tore pages showing the words 'Part 1', 'Part One' or 'Part I'. 101 times a new beginning. In this collection, the meaning of the words is enhanced, but also obtain a slightly absurd edge.





The book itself (II):

HOLDER  
OF A  
STORY

The publication *What makes me so pure, almost holy? And more + What does it mean? Cheep cheep*

(1967) gives insight into the early work of

**Bas Jan Ader** (1942-1975). The booklet contains two stories with drawings, including many autobiographic references combined with surrealist dream visions. The first story is about his breakaway from his homeland, the land of the ‘bicyclefathers’, and at the same time about his isolation as a young artist in California.

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Because he is suspicious of the authenticity of memories, **Christian Boltanski** (1944) reconstructs his own past or other people’s pasts, as in *Inventaire des objets ayant appartenu à une femme de Bois-Colombes* (CNAC, 1974). It contains an inventory of objects, randomly chosen by Boltanski, that belonged to a woman from Bois-Colombes (a municipality on the outskirts of Paris). It is a summary of a life by means of personal belongings. Boltanski’s main tool of expression is the photograph, sometimes accompanied by text. He constructs photographic works in which he follows the life stories of others, or he reconstructs his own youth, as in *L’Album photographique de Christian Boltanski 1948-1956* (Sonnabend Press, 1972). Boltanski described it as “an attempt at finding a part of myself that died off, an archaeological research into the deepest depths of my memory.”

**Jean Le Gac** (1936) makes use of an unsettling way of storytelling that is associative, negating the distinction between fact and fiction, leaping across time and space, and mixing up cause and effect. All of this is at work in *The Painter* (Galerie 't Venster, 1974). As an artist, Le Gac continuously asks questions about his artistic calling, and does so by playing the role of a reporter.

In the 1970s the usual designation for photography combined with text was 'narrative art'. **Robert Cumming** (1943) works with photography and text of equal value: text doesn't function as caption or explanation, photography doesn't illustrate text. They complement each other. The mostly handwritten texts are personal descriptions of true or made up events, or consist of strings of thoughts, as in *A Training in the Arts* (Coach House Press, 1973).

The artist duo **Gilbert & George** (1943/1942) lives in East London, as some kind of wealthy hermits. They use their environment and the people living there as a source of inspiration. All that happens in the world is to be found in East London, according to the duo. Using a great deal of symbols, they lace up a fascinating, critical and universal story, like in *Dark Shadow* (Nigel Greenwood Inc., 1976). With fervour and humour, Gilbert & George are the protagonists in the visually

complex dramas they created for themselves.

By arranging and editing images, **John Baldessari** (1931) constructs new and layered 'stories', in which truth and fiction are indistinguishable, like in *The Telephone Book (with Pearls)* (Imschoot, 1988). Apparently coincidental relations between images, incite reflection on image production and reception. *The textless Four Events and Reactions* (Centro Di / Galerie Sonnabend, 1976) merely illustrates a woman's responses to four events. Here again, by employing assemblage and editing, Baldessari constructs a new and ambiguous 'story'.

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Memory is an important theme in the works of **Anselm Kiefer** (1945). The photos in *Hoffmann von Fallersleben auf Helgoland* (Groninger Museum, 1980) of empty rooms and abandoned objects are visualisations of memory. In a quiet and painful manner, these photos narrate of many aspects of the past at which we can only guess. Kiefer is interested in Germany's recent history and keeps reflecting on issues of its dramatic past that remain unsolved.

**Jan Voss** (1936) is undeniably a narrative artist. An artist of words. Voss makes art of a solid style: his many artist's books show transparent stories, followed by events, like *Detour* (Walther König, 1989). Through

a succession of images (a sequence) the book is a container for a story. The book as codex epitomises a continuous and reflective series of images with or without text. Because of the order of events, we understand that a story is being told.

- 30** Poetry, an ordinary deed, and self-portraits from a stage of life of Luuk Wilmering (1957) meet in the book *I'd rather be with you* (2003), a visual poem. In this book, Wilmering collected photographs of his then wife, creating an image of a love life before it brought forth children. At the same time, Wilmering published *Promise me something* (2002), in which he collected images of his eldest daughter. *The man who never experienced anything* (Roma Publications, 2010) consists of black-and-white photos and some quotations. It describes a day in the life of a character, 'artist', who is also the narrator.

The publication *I just arrived this morning* (BASBOEK, 2009) by Bas Fontein (1978) is a little anthology of photos that his brother took during his holidays. Fontein saved the images from a dustbin after they had ended up there as considered 'failed'. Fontein's brother used to cut up his holiday photos before he pasted them into his albums. Fontein only used remainders and snippets with which he reconstructed the journey and turned it into a new

one. The new travelogue begins at night at an airport and ends with the homecoming.

In *Queen Ann. P.S. Belly cut off* (Alauda Publications, 2010), a melancholic story unfolds about a woman whose life seems dominated by her obesity.

**Mariken Wessels** (1963) used a found private photo archive, maps and letters. The resulting book is a heavy-hearted photo-novel about a distorted woman's life, visualised through aggressive collages and Queen Ann's frenetic efforts to improve her self-image by means of photography. *Who* (2012) is a reconstruction following the loss of a dear one. Wessels discovered she had no pictures of him, only her memories. In order to materialise these memories, she made this little book. Wessels looked for photos online that she deemed most fitting to her memories of him.

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In his books, **Erik van der Weijde** (1977) processes ordinary images from everyday life and his own environment: his home, street lights, tourist habits, family portraits, and other popular subjects. However, he doesn't tell stories with these images. Each photographic series must be interpreted by the viewer himself. *Siedlung* (Roma Publications, 2008) consists of a collection of photographs that Van der Weijde made of southern German houses built during the Nazi era (1933-1945), under the terms of the so-

called 'Siedlungspolitik'.

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For **Anouk Kruithof** (1981), images form a starting point for the telling of picture stories. The function of photos is to serve an idea and to model the creative execution of concepts. Thus, she used photos that she once made of a man in a park in Berlin, for *A head with wings* (Little Brown Mushroom, 2011). There seemed something wrong with the man. He looked at and talked to things that weren't there, in the meantime wildly gesticulating. Kruithof is interested in the kind of inner worlds that sometimes suddenly appear. She cut out the photos, combined them with materials from her archive, rearranged the images and pasted them onto cardboard, in the end photographing the collages. The result is a fictive, alienating story of a barely visible depth.

**Elisabeth Tonnard** (1973) finds photos everywhere: in archives and albums up to the mother of all trivialities: the internet. *The Gospel of the Photographer* (2013) shows photographs that could have been made by Jesus, were he to have had a camera. Next to hand-coloured lantern slides (a predecessor of the diapositive) from the Middle-East of the late 1900s, Tonnard included an English version of the Gospel of Mark, in which she replaced keywords with terms referring to photography.







'Concrete poetry' is a term used since the early 1950s, specifying the experimental art of poetry in which poetry and typography go closely hand in hand. An example of early 'concrete poetry' in the Netherlands is *futura 23 (permutierbarer text)* (1967) by **herman de vries** (1931). It marks his first linguistic work. Permutation, a characteristic feature of concrete poetry, is the transpositioning of letters and words within the space a page has to offer. Later, attention for nature prevails, de vries then starts to use leaves, twigs and seeds, among others, sometimes combined with language. In *vijf manifesten over taal - en een gedicht = fünf manifeste über sprache - und ein gedicht = five language manifests - and a poem* (Artists Press, 1975) de vries included the three-part manifest 'my poetry is the world'. It comes down to the world writing the poem instead of the poet. A poet is not a poet because he writes in a certain style, but because he is part of the world. Poetry is taken from life and part of nature, like the blade of grass in the artist's book. It is an extract of the poetical works of the world, a natural 'poem', hence a living poem.

The poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898) is generally regarded as the writer who for the first time liberated the poem (i.e. text) from the monolithic type page, and let the words Hoover over the pages.

**Marcel Broodthaers** (1924-1976) took twelve pages

from Mallarmé's poem 'Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard' (1914) as a starting point for his book *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (Wide White Space Gallery / Galerie Michael Werner, 1969). Broodthaers had the pages printed on plates and replaced the words with black strips. Thus, he created space and facilitated a perfect crossing from literature to visual art. By transforming Mallarmé's words into unreadable forms, Broodthaers expanded the gap between word and space. He explored its discrepancy as a productive space.

In Seth Siegelau's New York gallery a special exhibition was held in late 1968. 'Statements' consisted only of the book *Statements* (The Louis Kellner Foundation / Seth Siegelau, 1968), in which **Lawrence Weiner** (1942) pronounced 28 general and specific statements about feasible situations. Weiner made suggestions for certain projects and actions that could be realised or left a fantasy just the same. As opposed to the 'visual poets' who start with language, Weiner based his 'tectonic' text-pieces on the arts of sculpting and painting.

For conceptual artist **Mel Bochner** (1940) ideas are key. In his works, he examines the relations between thinking and seeing. Titles as *Theory of Painting* (1970) and *Misunderstandings (A Theory*

*of Photography*) (Multiples Inc., 1967-70) suggest theoretical positions or even indisputable truths. The latter book consists of index cards with quotations on photography, scribbled thereon by Bochner (some quotes being of his own fabrication), by well-known writers and thinkers.

*Notebook on Water* (Multiples Inc., 1970) by **Joseph Kosuth** (1945) consists of an envelope containing fifteen documents and is itself part of the box 'Artists & Photographs'. For Kosuth, form is to be found in language. He for example reflected on the term 'water' (water having neither colour nor form). A sketch shows an installation in which a melting ice cube sits on the floor, two definitions of ice and water are written on the wall. In this manner, Kosuth wants to dematerialise art, thereby choosing the transparency of the idea over the fullness of the material. Furthermore, the envelope contains dictionary definitions of ice, water and steam.

For **Michael Gibbs** (1949-2009), language is a fascinating field of research. In many different ways he unravelled the functions of language, the meaning of meaning, and possible transformations. A good example is *Connotations* (Second Aeon Publications, 1973), which contains concrete poetry. Later, Gibbs increasingly fell under the spell of the interaction

between language and image. He continuously confronts the audience with things referring to anything but themselves. The one medium constantly shapes the other, image shapes language and the other way around, like in *Selected Pages* (Kontexts Publications, 1978). Here, Gibbs plays with letter compositions and selfwritten texts, alternated with photographs.

The artist's books of Hetty Huisman (1941) are full of references to the discipline and the world of ceramics. Language and Huisman's personal life perform both essential roles in her work. Her books, cryptic and abstract at first sight, are layered with language and sound. The system of binary mixture, used in research into glazing (to test the workings of raw materials in a glaze) has been applied in *Ter bezinking* (VOID, 1982). The basic image, the photograph, is as black in the beginning as it is in the end. In between, a lot of pondering and puzzling takes place. Two other works in the series are *In betrachting* (VOID, 1979) and *In verhouding* (Cultureel Centrum de Beijerd, 1984).

A binding factor between artists and poets from England and Scotland is their interest in the interaction between object and language. Furthermore, they are preoccupied with nature and

the 'objet trouvé' (found object). Concrete poetry is a play with language on multiple levels, as typographical research eroding or enhancing the meaning of words, but also as a strategic means using humour, poetry and beauty. **Ian Hamilton Finlay** (1925-2006) makes poems from materials like marble, stone, ceramics and neon. His garden is a picaresque ambience of 'poem-objects', columns, and obelisks bearing quotes and monograms of artists and philosophers, as we can see in *Selected Ponds* (West Coast Poetry Review, 1977). The ocean and shipping are leitmotifs in Finlay's rich plastic and poetic oeuvre. In *Affinity* (Coracle and Peter Foolen Editions, 2011) by **Simon Cutts** (1944), images of all Everard Line ships whose names start with the letter A, are combined with a letter written by Finlay in 1963, addressed to Pierre Garnier, about concrete poetry.

**Elisabeth Tonnard** (1973) reduces texts and empties them of their noise. She turns them into lines of poetry, arranges words into stanzas. For example, she uses English words which somehow enter into Dutch poetry. She subtly unmasks rhetoric and at the same time recognises its value. The technique of disappearance has been applied to her first book *Let us go then, you and I - T.S. tipp-exed* (2003). The concept for the volume is based on the erasure process as explained in the subtitle: 'T.S. tipp-exed'.

The drawings of Marc Nagtzaam (1968) range from hard-edge abstraction to the reproduction of the written word, originating from texts collected from art magazines, as can be seen in his books *Surplus* (Roma Publications, 2006) and *Two* (Roma Publications, 2007). Nagtzaam's drawing practice is marked by a certain tension, as we can see in his drawings of the written word. Between the language of abstraction and the abstraction of language, interaction arises frame by frame, with which Nagtzaam succeeds to present the impersonal, codified, nearly abstract jargon of art journalism as explicit personal imagery on the one hand, and as a process of abstraction on the other.

*Contemporary poems* (2014) by Tim Hollander was realised during the deconstruction of one of his installations, the remnants of which he coupled with the rich history of visual poetry. After attempts to remove a textual piece from his studio wall with tape, about half of the texts remained. The surviving letters, words and figures could be read as a form of contemporary poetry. The deconstruction process has been meticulously documented.

The book *Words On Paper Works In Books* (KNUST / Extrapool, 2015) by Koen Taselaar (1986), is a play on words and images in which typography leads its own life. The starting point often is a text. Taselaar hears,



reads or invents a text, which he subsequently treats typographically. Language as a reason for a drawing, in other words: there is an image hidden in a text. A sentence calls for an image, which is then realised. The content of the text evokes the image.

The artist's book as a means

FOR THE  
INTERSECTION  
OR REFLECTION  
OF THE WORLD

With his ‘happenings’, **Allan Kaprow** (1927-2006) searched for the boundaries of art and life and challenged the institutional framework caging the arts. For Kaprow, art did not frame life, but life framed the arts. His publication *Words* (Smolin Gallery, 1962) contains a collection of his ‘happenings’ combined with words from our everyday environment. Kaprow initiated a kind of textual ‘action painting’. He laid the foundation for an art form in which audience participation would be crucial. The exhibition that gave occasion to the publication of *Words*, consisted of a space in which the walls were covered with rolls to which the public could add, change or remove words. In this way, the audience pulled the strings and determined as to what the space would eventually look like.

**Ad Gerritsen** (1940) takes as a subject for his books the registration and identification systems that are applied to criminals. Via his work at a psychiatric ward, Gerritsen came to know convicts. He was interested not only in their, according to the outside world, inordinate behaviour, but also in humane aspects. Emotions translated by Gerritsen into images, seem to answer to patterns and norms dictated by society. The spontaneous nature of emotions is channeled and manipulated. A person’s features are not visualised as to bear close resemblance, but because of general

characteristics of a certain temper or expected patterns of behaviour. Gerritsen's book *Criminals* (Exp/Press, 1972) results from these experiences.

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The work of **Vito Acconci** (1940) is generally marked by social or political messages. A direct and intense confrontation with the public is often a central feature of his performances. Most famous are the performances in which Acconci explored the (pain) thresholds of his own body, by biting himself, falling to the ground, or manually removing a square decimeter of body hair. *Notes on the development of a show* (Sonnabend, New York; January 15-29, 1972) contains recordings of his performances.

With their performance-act **Reindeer Werk**, **Thom Puckey** (1948) and **Dirk Larsen** (1951) employed the therapeutic and pedagogic power of performance art toward the encouragement of change in society. Widespread interest in mind-expanding drugs in the 1970s, is reflected in Reindeer Werk's focus on the subject of alchemy. Puckey and Larsen see energy transformation as a process of mental awakening. They pull the audience into psychosis and they seemingly want to prove that each moment we can choose from a variety of realities. Next to video recordings, their performances were often transformed into the book format, of which *Soft eggs dread* (Brummense

uitgeverij, 1976) and M. Yeck N. Krid at today's place (1978) are examples.

The works of **Abramovic & Ulay** (1946/1943) reveal an attitude of mind from which they seek to unite oppositions, such as male/female, dark/light and subject/object. It is about redefining self-image and identity, from a feministic orientation on social power structures. This happens in the form of gruelling confrontations, which they initially called 'relation works'. Video recordings exist of their performances, but they are often cemented in book form too, such as Relation / Works 3 performances (Osterreichischer Kunstverein, 1978) and 30 November (Harlekin Art, 1979).

45

Since 1971, **Hans Eijkelboom** (1949) realises photo projects in which a central question is as to what makes him an individual in comparison to his fellow human beings. The projects comprise dry recordings of relationships between clothing, appearance and personality, not unlike the work of sociologists or anthropologists, as for example 96 Alternatives (1978). In 1976, Eijkelboom had managed to appear on photos in newspapers for ten consecutive days, sometimes at the center of action, sometimes in the background. The publication In de Krant (Gamma, 1978), reproducing the newspaper pages in question,

resulted from these actions. For *New York 8y Num8ers* (2011), Eijkelboom took pictures over a three-week period of people whose clothing shows numbers. The goal was to reveal a rigorous pattern in our apparently chaotic, daily lives.

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The aim of **Lothar Baumgarten** (1944) is to evoke associative images about geographical space, the experience of nature, and the cultural and social histories of 'the Other'. Baumgarten achieves his goal by using names and maps, by arranging objects, and to let them all coincide with the here and now of the audience. The artist Baumgarten became well-known as of 1979, after he had spent more than a year living with Yanomami tribes in the Amazon forest of Venezuela. *Die Namen der Bäume* (Van Abbemuseum, 1982) is a report on this experience. It begins with an inventory of tree species and ends with the systematical listing of their Latin names. In the main part of the book, Baumgarten combines his detailed stories with those of former ethnologists and indigenous South American myths in which trees take centre stage.

In *Interview* (2004), **Luuk Wilmering** (1957) shows self-portraits made during a fictitious interview. The contents of the conversation are left out. The photos clearly show Wilmering's temper. He wanted to shed

a different light on the phenomenon of interviewing: how important is posture, body language or facial expression? In his work, Wilmering questions his own position as a human being and an artist. The artist does not provide us with answers, but meanwhile the work behaves like a template in which the viewer can recognise himself and is challenged to reflect on his own life.

**Petra Stavast** (1977) is fascinated by the southern Italian region of Calabria, which has an ageing population. Memory is an important theme in Stavast's work. Her book *Liberio* (Roma Publications, 2009) contains an extensive series of images from the first twenty years of the lives of *Liberio* and Valeria Greco. *Liberio* is about the consequences of ageing and emigration, but also about the distance between memory and reality. Stavast consistently focused on the story of one family, which is exemplary of a much larger phenomenon.

*Becoming Blue* (Revolver Publishing, 2009) by **Anouk Kruithof** (1981) consists of a series of portraits of people photographed under moments of stress. The photographer scared her subjects through surprise acts and unexpected interventions. For Kruithof, the colour blue of the attire is a metaphor for the stage in which one finds rest again, trying to regain one's identity.

Becoming Blue is a quest for modes of visualising the current mental state of (Western) mankind, which according to Kruithof is predominantly marked by stress, the pressure to perform, and the continuous feeling of 'being lived'.

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*Tristes Tropiques: Illustrations hors texte* (2011) by **Laurence Aëgerter** (1972) and **Ronald van Tienhoven** (1956), is inspired by photographs from 'Tristes Tropiques' (1955), a famous study by French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009). On his travels in Brazil, Lévi-Strauss lived as a stranger among the indigenous indians, studying their way of life and testing Western ideas of 'I' and 'the Other'. Based on his experiences in Brazil, he came to the conclusion that no such thing exists as 'primitive' culture. In 2010, Aëgerter and Van Tienhoven made portraits of the inhabitants of the Frisian village of Beetsterzwaag, staged as a re-enactment of Lévi-Strauss's photos from the 1930s.

Leaving flowers, cuddly toys and candles at crime scenes has become a popular ritual, a new 'tradition' expressing collective grief. These transient monuments in public space stand symbol for a feeling halfway between helplessness and acceptance. Helplessness because we are mad with grief, acceptance because we are leaving flowers instead of revolting against



violence and injustice. The publication *Keepsake/ Monument* (Kunstvereniging Diepenheim, 2011) by **Mariken Wessels** (1963) is a reflection on this recent social phenomenon.

*Censorship Daily* (2012) is a publication by **Jan-Dirk van der Burg** (1978). It shows some examples of Iranian censorship, which then NRC Handelsblad-correspondent Thomas Erdbrink found in his Tehran mailbox on a daily basis. The local censorship department purified the newspaper and, using blue tape, filtered out all the, in their eyes, political and moral indecencies. Van der Burg's 'newspaper' is the result of emptying his friend's wastepaper bin for a while. It is limited to examples of censorship applied to the NRC.

With her performances, wherein she celebrates and records her connection to nature, **Melanie Bonajo** (1978) proposes new rituals. *Modern Life of the Soul* (2007) suggests that humans descend from plants. Bonajo focuses on the opposition that arose between nature and human action. A culture of exclusion came into being, offering no solution to the current ecological crisis. By conceiving of trees, plants and animals as beings that possess their own will and creativity, Bonajo wants to redesign the relationship between man and nature. In *One Question, Nine*

*Possible Answers, Three Rooms* (Spheres, 2012), published on the occasion of the exhibition *Afterlife, An Unexplored Continent* (2012), Bonajo explores the ways in which irrationality and spirituality develop into a manual for the survival of an alienated mankind.

- 50 *Retracing* (post editions, 2013) is the result of a long-term research, initiated by **Rein Jelle Terpstra** (1960), into perception, memory and photography. For his project, Terpstra collaborated with people who know that they will lose their sight. He photographed their most-treasured situations or objects, using Kodachrome diapositive film, with the promise to later read out loud precise descriptions, in the hope these images will then be retraced in their memories. *Retracing* is about farewell and loss. Perception has lost its casualness and photography gets the ambivalent role of salvaging images. *Retracing* consists of a book and a slideshow-installation in which images slowly fade into each other. In the book, this process is evoked through semi-transparent pages. In turning the page, light shines through allowing for the next image to become visible.

**Henk Woudsma**



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