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Global Imaginations

Group Exhibition

Museum De Lakenhal

Oude Singel 28-32 , 2312 RA Leiden, Netherlands

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Turning the Tables on Global Self-Evidence

by Edo Dijksterhuis

Empty prisons, abandoned shipyards, derelict factories—in the past couple of decades these raw and unpolished places have become very popular as locations for art fairs, biennials, and temporary exhibitions. Often it's simply because of their atmospheric quality. Or to stress the fact that the art on show really is connected to the outside world and not only functions within the artificial ecosystem of the museum. But it works best if the location's identity and the exhibition's content are in synch. With *Global Imaginations* that's the case.

Global Imaginations takes place in **De Meelfabriek** in Leiden, an industrial complex harboring 13 robust buildings which together comprise a flour-processing factory. Its history goes back to 1884, when a local grain merchant and a miller teamed up to build one of the then largest food processing plants in Europe. During the 1950s the

company was responsible for one fifth of Dutch flour production. In 1988 the site closed and fell into disrepair until it received the status of industrial monument in 2000. In anticipation of its redevelopment into luxury lofts and state of the art office space, the factory now serves as an annex for Museum De Lakenhal while it's being renovated. During *Global Imaginations* this place that once fed the world has become a destination for artists from all continents feeding Leiden intellectually, artistically and politically. Thirty of them have been invited to reflect on contemporary global dynamics.



Mark Dion, *The Natural Sciences*, 2015. Courtesy the artist & Waldburger Wouters Brussel. Photo: Taco van der Eb

Quite a few participants focus specifically on Leiden, which in the early 17th century was home to the Pilgrim Fathers and thus has its stake in early globalization. Around that same time Leiden University was founded—its 440-year anniversary is the direct occasion for *Global Imaginations*—and the groundwork was laid for institutions of international repute and influence. Mark Dion's *The Natural Sciences*—a collection of black-lit casts of large insects, a human skull, a microscope and so forth—refers to

the [Naturalis Biodiversity Center](#). The heritage of the [Museum Volkenkunde](#) is echoed in the works of Andrea Stultiens and Brook Andrew. The first tries to reconstruct Ugandan history as documented by a 1930s local chief—a historically interesting installation but visually much less so. The latter criticizes the way Aboriginals have systematically been omitted from Australian history books and sarcastically invites those suffering from ethnic amnesia to come bounce in the *Jumping Castle War Memorial*.

Globalization as an abstract phenomenon inspired works dealing with symbols rather than specific locations and stories. The banner Meschac Gaba created for *Global Imaginations* unites all the national flags of the world. It's a radiant kaleidoscope that brings to mind images of space ships shifting into warp speed: true globalization is beyond our globe; it's out there, where the idea of separate nations stops making sense and we're all merely human.



Tintin Wulia, *Nous Ne Notons Pas Les Fleurs*, 2009–2015. Game performance and installation with flowers in painted terracotta pots, security cameras and screens.

Courtesy the artist and Kaap/Stichting Storm. Photo: Hidde van Greuningen

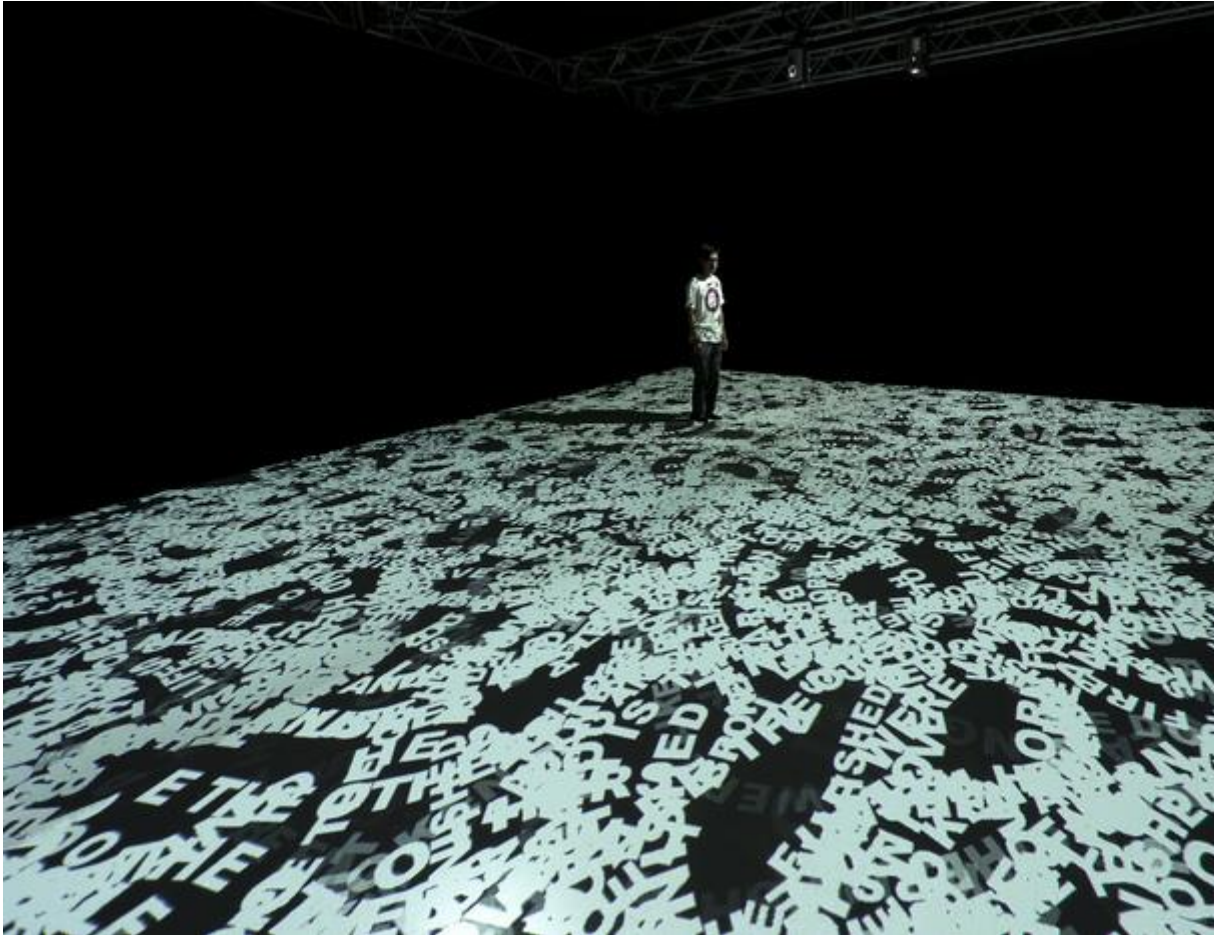


Rivane Neuenschwander, *Pangaea's Diaries*, 2008, Digital photography on 16 mm-film projection, 00:01:00, 1,85 x 2,5 m. Photo: © Rivane Neuenschwander. Courtesy Stephen Friedman Gallery (London), Galeria Fortes Vilaça (São Paulo) and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery (New York)

Rivane Neuenschwander and Tintin Wulia both work with transforming world maps. In Wulia's case the map consists of flowerpots that are moved around to illustrate the changing shape of continents over time. The shifting is done by visitors following the artist's instructions. In Neuenschwander's video *Pangaea's Diaries* it's an ant colony mimicking tectonic activity. The insects drag slabs of beef carpaccio back and forth on a plate making South America, Africa, and Asia collide and melt together into the primordial continent.



Pascale Marthine Tayou, *Plastic Bags*, 2001–2015, Metal, nylon, plastic, Ø 3.5-2.5 × 12.5 m. Photo: Marc de Haan



Tsang Kin-Wah, *The Fourth Seal – He Is to No Purpose and He Wants to Die for the Second Time*, 2010–2015, Digital video projection with sound, 6 min 25 sec, appr. 10 x 12 m. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Marc de Haan

These works represent a rather neutral perspective on globalization but a morally critical stance is present in Leiden as well. Pascale Marthine Tayou constructed a massive installation consisting of thousands of colorful plastic bags. This monument to consumerism and pollution is boisterously cheerful and a bit scary at the same time. Tsang Kin-Wah takes it a few steps further. His moving light sculpture is downright haunting. It's part of his ongoing film project based on the Book of Revelations and in this fourth chapter the focus is on the world's destruction by plague, famine, and war. Using original texts from the Scripture and historical sources from the Far East and the West, the artist projects on the floor a tangle of phrases—"A time to kill again," "The desirable opposite of life." "The non-mortal you"—that crawl around like snakes gone mad. But it's not all doom and wagging fingers. *Global Imaginations* is big on constructive creativity as well. Eco-veterans Lucy and Jorge Orta show how water from the nearby canal can easily be purified,

using only reclaimed wood, glass, water tanks, and pipes.

Ghana ThinkTank publicizes that problem solving is not a Western prerogative. Prior to *Global Imaginations* this international think tank did a survey in Leiden, asking the local population what it thought the city's biggest problem is today. It turned out to be intolerance and the growing divide between Muslims and non-Muslims. On video we see Sudanese inhabitants of an Israeli refugee camp and Indonesian youngsters discussing this First World problem and trying to come up with solutions.



Romuald Hazoumè, *NGO SBOP*, 2011, Plastic parts, paper clippings, two monitors, furniture of jerrycans, bicycle. Courtesy Magnin-A Gallery, Paris

But the most impressive example of reversing the traditional North-South dynamic—and the paternalism it's often accompanied by—is Romuald Hazoumè's installation *NGO SBOP*. It revolves around the fictional development aid organization Solidarité Béninoise pour Occidentaux en Péril, an NGO for helping poor whites in the West. In a film Hazoumè goes out into the streets of Cotonou collecting money for the organization. At first passersby are surprised, outraged even: “they should be

giving us money!” But when the aid worker explains that poor Europeans lack not only funds but also a social network and brotherly love, almost all of them produce some coins for the collection box.

—Edo Dijksterhuis

(Image at top: Romuald Hazoumè, *NGO SBOP*, 2011, Plastic parts, paper clippings, two monitors, furniture of jerrycans, bicycle. Courtesy Magnin-A Gallery, Paris)

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