

ARTS TALK

Colour Supplement

Number 14

December 2023



ANSELM KIEFER
The greatest artist ever?

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This month the emphasis is very much on the amazing, not to be missed, Anselm Kiefer exhibition at Museum Voorlinden in Wassenaar near The Hague. We also cover two current exhibitions in Amsterdam, at NXT and STRAAT as well as the twice yearly Kunstkamer in Delft. We were at the opera to see *Das Wunder der Heliane* by Nederlandse Reisopera and *Der Schauspieldirektor* by OperaZuid. Souwie Buis has a piece on the place of traditional books in a digital age and we have some wonderful black and white rehearsal photographs by Sacha Grootjans of NDT's *Illuminate*.

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Portrait of Anselm Kiefer at Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar/Den Haag
by and © Anne Claire de Breija



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Giant flamingo at STRAAT Museum in Amsterdam

Urban Activism draws attention to climate change

This walking route, suitable for all ages, spans the entire museum and showcases 15 artworks from the STRAAT collection that raise awareness about climate change. The highlight of the exhibition is the massive 7-meter-high flamingo installation created by the famous Spanish street artist and 'artist,' Dulk, a new addition to the museum's permanent collection. With this artwork, Dulk brings attention to the endangered habitats of flamingos worldwide, particularly in the Albufera Nature Park near Valencia, Spain. *Urban Activism* is the second project realized by STRAAT under the sponsorship of ABN AMRO.

Dulk on his flamingo installation: "From a young age, I have been deeply concerned about the environment and consider nature our greatest treasure. Guided by the idea 'Protect what you love,' I see it as my mission to create art projects that raise awareness for ecosystem conservation. With this installation for the STRAAT Museum, I specifically draw attention to the endangered habitats of flamingos worldwide, particularly in the Albufera Nature Park near Valencia. The issue with 'wetlands' is that they have less water









every day due to drought caused by climate change. Increasing pollution makes it nearly impossible for these beautiful, wild creatures to survive. To highlight this issue, I confront visitors with two different worlds: one that we see (a pink flamingo with its head underwater searching for food) and one that we'd rather not see (the debris floating under the water)."

Climate change is also the central theme of the walking route, guiding visitors past 15 artworks aimed at creating environmental awareness. Painted symbols on the floor lead visitors on an exploration through the museum. A special audio tour provides information about the artists and various 'problematic' facts to enhance environmental consciousness. At the end of their visit, children can collect coloring pages created by Dulk from the museum shop. Information pillars in the museum further highlight various activist stories and important milestones in the history of graffiti and street art.

Dulk (real name Antonio Segura) born in 1983, is one of the most prominent street artists from Valencia, Spain. He began his career with street art and murals but continues to reinvent himself by constantly exploring new media, including drawing, sculpture, and photography. Dulk is known for his portraits of endangered species. Through sculpture, installations, and painting, we witness his unique version of a menagerie of creatures remarkably evolving to prevent the conquest or loss of their habitat, as environmental stressors caused by climate change are altering the evolution of many species.

Dulk has exhibited his work in various locations, including his hometown Valencia, as well as in Rome, Los Angeles, Chicago, Vancouver, and Honolulu. He has also created a large number of graffiti works in more than 20 different countries.

Urban Artivism is at STRAAT, NDSM-Plein 1 in Amsterdam until 28th January, 2024



ANSELM KIEFER

at Museum Voorlindin

Text by Michael HASTED

Photo of Anselm Kiefer by Anne Claire de Breija

I first became aware of Anselm Kiefer at the *A New Spirit in Painting* exhibition at the Royal Academy in London in 1981. Out of all the work on show it was his paintings that struck me most, for several reasons. Obviously the size of the paintings was impressive but so was the technique – thick paint, bits stuck on and scrawled cryptic words. But as interesting as any of that was the subject matter. The work often dealt with early to mid-twentieth century German history and the ancient mythology that in many ways inspired it. The Second World War was a subject that, even in the 1970s and 80s, was not widely discussed in Germany. So Kiefer rocked the fragile boat and was accused of glorifying the Nazis, but he denied this, saying his work was there so people did not forget. There is a series of early photographs from 1969 called *Heroic Symbols* of him giving the Nazi salute in various locations, so maybe one could understand how the problem arose. His mentor in Düsseldorf at the Academy was Joseph Beuys, an artist who knew a thing or two about the Nazis and the war first hand having been a gunner on a Stuka dive-bomber in the Luftwaffe.

I missed the major Kiefer show at the Royal Academy in London in 2014 so the prospect of seeing his work right on my doorstep was a fascinating and exciting one.





Photo Michael Hasted

Now, Voorlinden is a wonderful and important museum in a beautiful setting and it is always a joy to visit. But, with all due respect, it is not the Royal Academy or Tate Modern, nor is it the Pompidou or New York's MOMA so it must be considered a major coup to have secured such an important exhibition. Anselm Kiefer's work, in general is huge and demands a lot of air around it and this is what Museum Voorlinden is able to supply. While his work has got bigger and better over the years and his popularity increased some of his contemporaries – Immendorf, Chia, Lupertz, Baselitz, Schnabel *et al* who who took the art world by storm in the 1980s are not heard of so much.

Many successful artists, after they have made it seem to lose their impetus. They become repetitive or go off on fruitless tangents. Kiefer has got bigger (literally) and better. It is amazing that one man can produce such a huge volume of work, much of it monumental in scale. Both are made possible by his working environment. He doesn't work in studios, his work is produced in huge factories with fork-lift trucks whizzing around, molten metal being carried, cranes hovering above and numerous assistants. Kiefer moves around his domain on a bicycle. For a better insight as to how he works and his huge factory studios, see *Anselm*, the film by celebrated German Wim Wenders which is currently in cinemas.

But what of the Voorlinden exhibition? This is not a retrospective in the true sense of the word. Most of the works are new(ish), from the last ten years, and many of them were produced this year. The show is divided into a number of themed rooms.

Some of the first works of Kiefer that I remember were books whose pages were made of lead - two things that dominate his work even today. The first room of this exhibition, *Leitmotifs*, contains a giant steel bookcase containing chained lead books. The accompanying painting reveals two other sources of the artist's inspiration – architecture and the Romanian poet Paul Celan.

There are rooms of giant paper books of swiftly executed watercolours, vitrines of mysterious objects like a chastity belt suspended above a squat palm tree or the handful of leaves outweighing a huge rock at the other end of heavy duty scales. There are two rooms dominated by the humble bicycle. The rusty bikes could easily have been dredged from the canals in Holland but each one has been transformed into a magic object – one straining under a load of bricks, another with wings and yet another, a tandem belonging to Samson and Delilah.

One of the most interesting pieces is hidden away in the corner so you could easily miss it. *Winterreise*, inspired by Schubert's song cycle, is essentially a stage set with cut-out wings, overhead drapes and various props. A snowy landscape as a back-drop represents a forest, something that has always been an important symbol in German history and mythology. A dusty old machine gun on an old hospital bed takes centre stage. *Winterreise* brings together writers, poets and philosophers that have shared Kiefer's quest.

But it is two giant works which have rooms to themselves that dominate the exhibition. The Morgenthau Plan which was dreamt up in 1944 by the US Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau Jr. who proposed that, after Germany had lost the war, cities and factories would be flattened and destroyed and the whole country turned into farmland. Kiefer's *Der Morgenthau Plan* is a room full of rotting corn sagging in parched earth while snakes lurk in the shadows between the drooping stalks.

Of the paintings it is probably the magnificent *Aus Herzen und Hirnen sprießen die Halme der Nacht* (*From Hearts and Brains the Stalks of Night are Sprouting*) that dominates. Measuring 4.70 meter high by 8.40 meters long it has the museum's largest room almost to itself. On a base of gold a path winds its way through a field while six giant scythes stare down like harbingers of death. Above is scrawled the line by Paul Celan from which the title is taken.

der Morgenthau - Plan





Der Morganthau Plan (detail)
Photo Michael Hasted

WOLFSBOHNE ihr Blüten von Deutschland
an dem das Licht sich zerüflet, wenn Beüts
den Häusern der Jüden (zum Andenken des künnersten Jerusalem
es sind sieben Rosen im Kaiser, unser Kind weiß es und schlüßet
was blühte dort? welche Blünne, Mütter, tal die dort welch
ihrem Namen

für Paul Celan



WOLFSBOHNE - für Paul Celan, 2020, Studio Anselm Kiefer

and o mein Herz wird untrügbar Kristall
chland Kolderlin vom Abgrund nämlich wie an
us) immer etwas unvollendet gelassen werden muß.
in der Ukraine mit ¹⁰⁰ sie mit Mütter und Vater erschlagen



Art is longing. You never arrive, but you keep going in the hope that you will.

Anselm Kiefer



Winterreise 2015-2020
Photo Michael Hasted





But there is much much more to this imposing exhibition and it will take time to ruminate over and digest its potent pageant. There is a richness and depth to Anselm Kiefer's work which stirs the soul and awakens shared memories. His work excites and astounds, and often overwhelms. He must be considered the most important living artist. His towering work – both metaphorically and literally - is beyond compare and for us, in this area of Holland, to be able to see such a breath-taking exhibition is a rare privilege and one that should not be missed □

Anselm Kiefer's *Bilderstreit* continues at Museum Voorlinden in Wassenaar/The Hague until 25th February 2024



Photo Michael Hasted

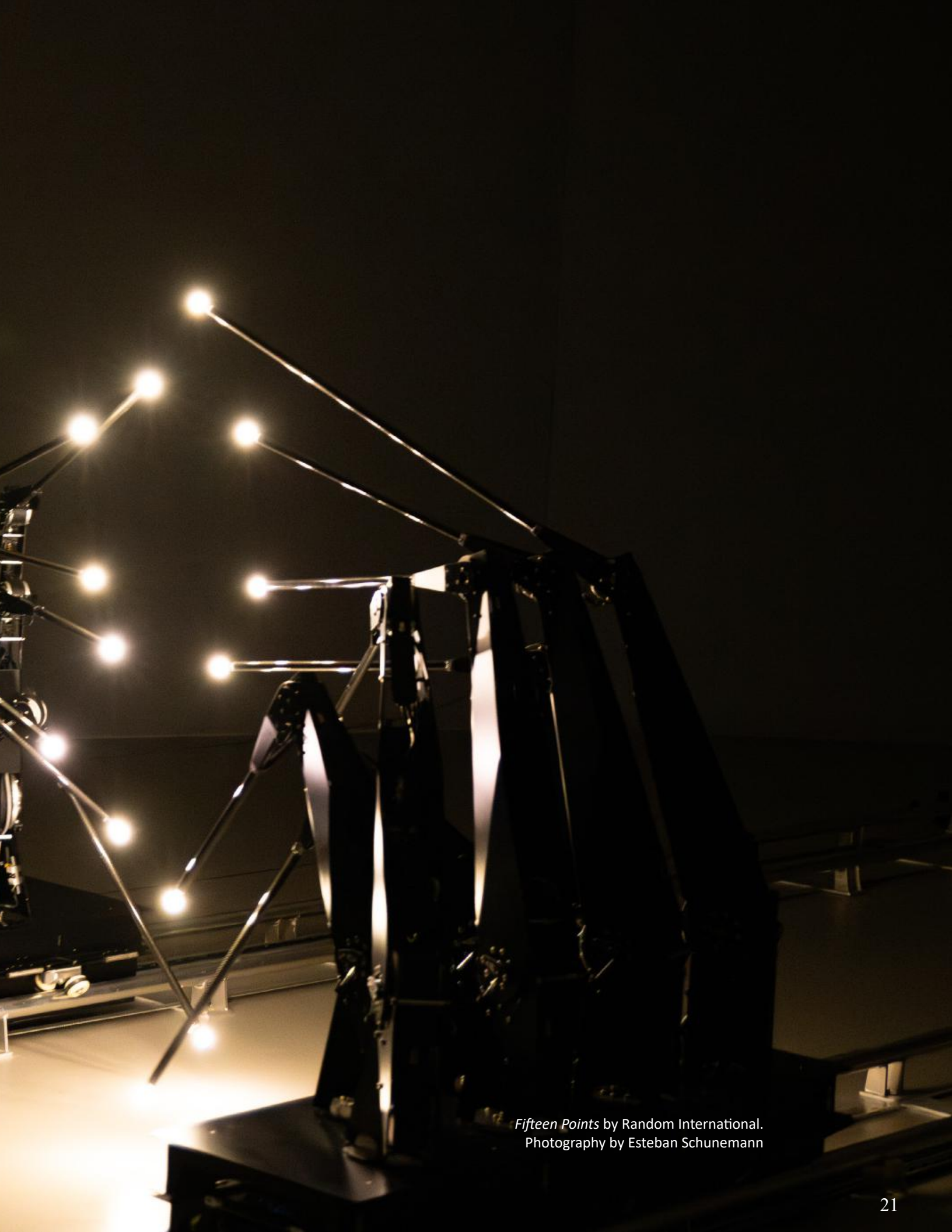
Random International's LIFE IN A DIFFERENT RESOLUTION

at Nxt Museum in Amsterdam

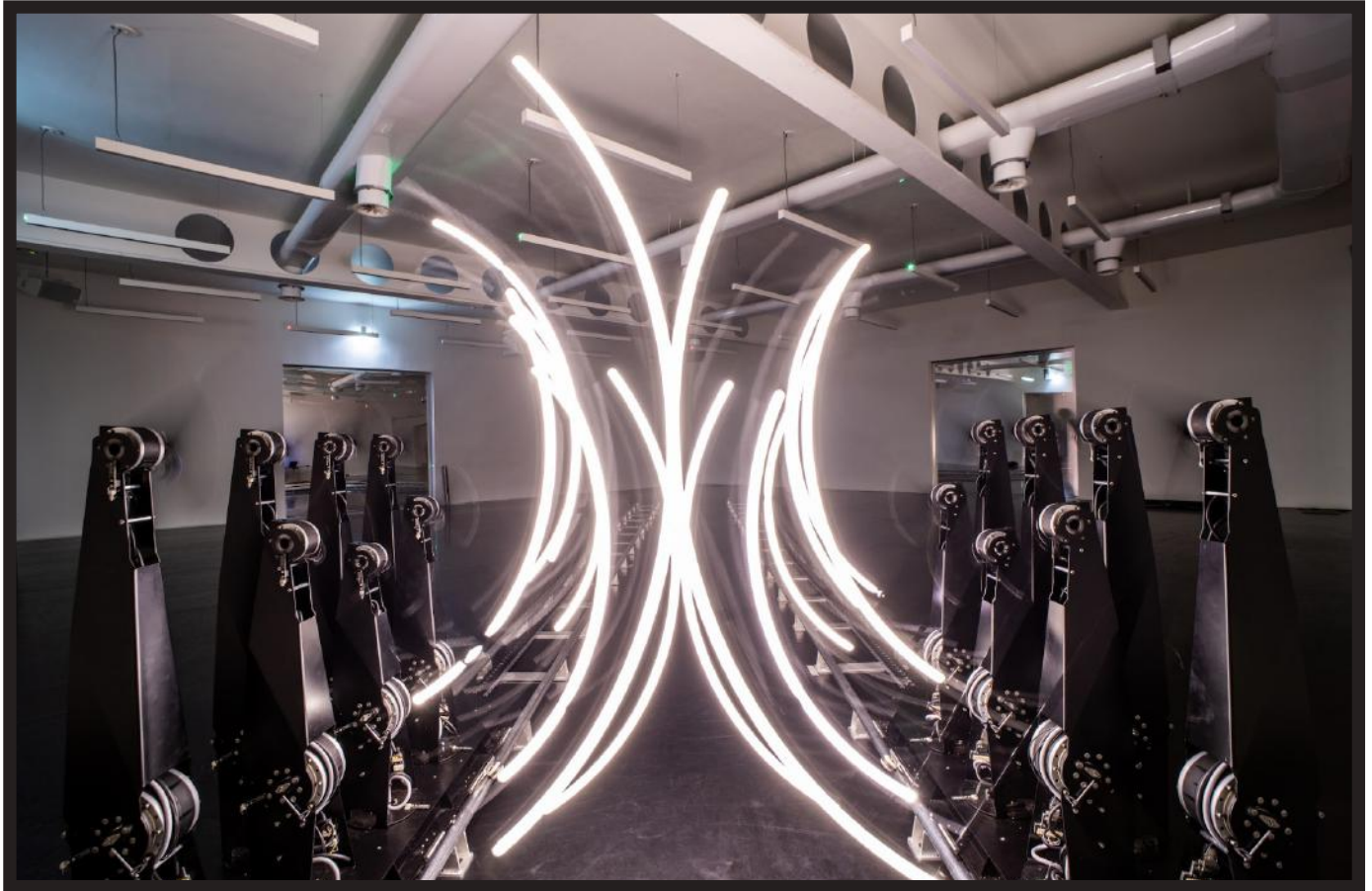
Amsterdam's Nxt Museum is hosting British-based art collective Random International's *Life in a Different Resolution* - a retrospective looking back on two decades of their remarkable creations. Including the first-ever European presentation of Random International's monumental *Living Room* in addition to other newly completed works, this will be Nxt Museum's first ever solo exhibition and is curated by Bogomir Doringer.

A public programme will feature performances by renowned dancer and choreographer Sedrig Verwoert and commissioned musical compositions created by Mamiko Motto as a means to explore the projects through the interactive mental and physical experiences that each work provokes.





Fifteen Points by Random International.
Photography by Esteban Schunemann



Fifteen Points by Random International

The title *Life in A Different Resolution* stems from a series of informal dinners hosted by Random International in 2011. With guests coming from a range of fields from navigation, animation to psychology, the aim was to cultivate knowledge-sharing via a series of existential questions, spanning the nature of behaviour to the future of humanity. This project gave rise to a new methodology for the studio as a whole, with each meeting shaping the conceptual course of future works.

Each artwork is a living study, translating complex ideas into immersive experiences and encouraging deep thinking on human consciousness. Nxt Museum will open up the craftsmanship and intellectual

and contextual backgrounds to these seminal works, allowing a deeper understanding of Random International's vision and endeavour.

In addition to sculptures and studies from across their oeuvre - and marking the first time that Nxt Museum highlights an artists' entire career within an exhibition - highlights from *Life in a Different Resolution* include:

Living Room: first shown during Art Basel Miami last year in the studio's inaugural collaboration with Aorist, is a monumental artwork that explores the idea of space as a living being. Visitors are invited to enter a fluctuating architectural domain, which is itself a sentient organism embodied in light and fog interacting with those who inhabit it. Continually altering its form in



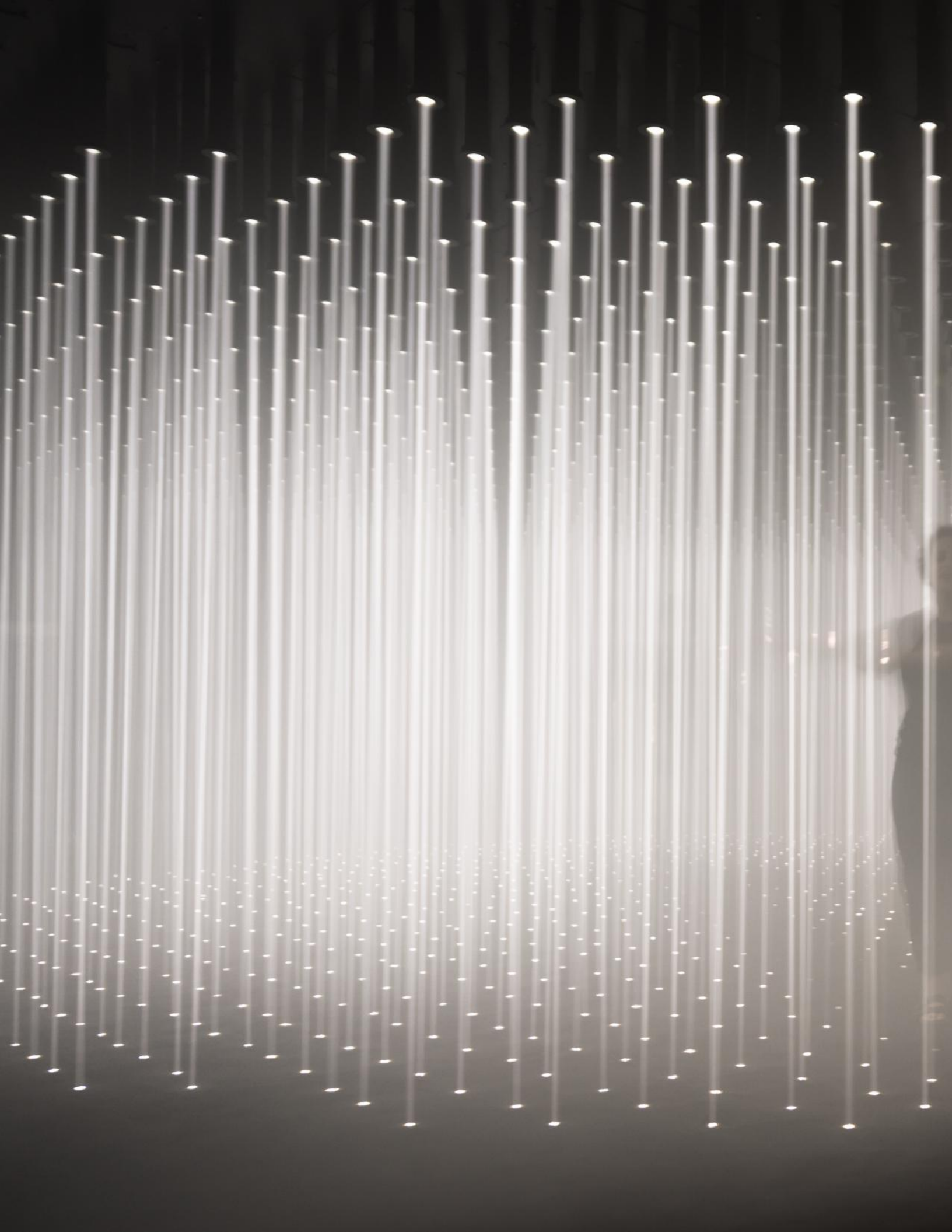
Fifteen Points by Random International. Photography by Esteban Schunemann


response to visitors in varying and unpredictable ways, *Living Room* creates a living labyrinth in real time and in real space, a machine that allows us to choreograph a precise dynamic and sentient architecture around the audiences. The aim is to create a living space, accompanied by the sounds of the composer Signe Lykke, that invites to instinctively connect with fellow visitors and the environment. The installation marks an evolution from Random International's famous *Rain Room* (2012), an immersive artwork of perpetually falling water that pauses wherever a human body is detected;

Random International presents a virtual flock of paper-like 'bird-oid objects as an exploration of digital

collectibles and Blockchain technology titled *Life in Our Minds: Motherflock*. This newly created work is an interactive sculpture immersing the visitor within the flock: the sculpture casts a digital shadow, prompting a real-time response, establishing an interplay between the digital and physical realms, thus pioneering a method for communal ownership of public art that bridges the gap between the two worlds. The installation will be accompanied by the music of the composer Masahiro Hiramoto.

Fifteen Points: an artwork developed, tested and prototyped during a research residency at Harvard's Biomimetic Robotics Division. Random International represents the form of a walking figure using rail-





mounted robotic arms, each of which holds a point of light. . The moving sculpture explores the brain's ability to decipher identity from only minimal data, as the human-like figure emerges from its mechanical apparatus. The installation will be accompanied by the music of the composer Chihei Hatakeyama;

Throughout the exhibition the lines between human and artificial intelligence are deliberately blurred, whilst the merging of physical and digital realms reflect various contemporary anxieties. The exhibition asks: what makes us recognise something as sentient – capable of feeling or perceiving – regardless of whether it is? And why do we find human-like consciousness where rational thinking reveals its very absence?

The Public Programme, developed to run in line with the exhibition, will focus on giving a platform to trailblazing talents: Mamiko Motto – currently in residence at Wiels in Brussels – is a composer, sound artist and music director from Lithuania achieving worldwide recognition. She has been commissioned to produce the sound for different spaces and rooms for this exhibition.

For the opening evening, there will be two performances choreographed by Sedrig Verwoert, a prominent dancer and guest choreographer of the Dutch National Ballet. The evening will be accompanied by a DJ set by Mamiko Motto

□

Life in a Different Resolution continues until 30th June 2024

A large, abstract, colorful projection of a human figure, possibly a woman, is displayed on a curved wall in a modern architectural space. The projection is rendered in shades of purple, blue, and green, with a soft, ethereal glow. The background shows the ceiling and other architectural elements, suggesting a gallery or museum setting.

DAS WUNDER DER HELIANE

**Nederlandse Reisopera presents
Korngold's magnificent opera**

Photos by Marco BORGGREVE Text by Michael HASTED





I always look forward to Nederlandse Reisopera's productions. They are innovative and not afraid to take risks and raise eyebrows. They have occasionally failed but their new show, Erich Wolfgang Korngold's *Das Wunder der Heliane* (*The Miracle of Heliane*), is a hugely ambitious and original project which, by and large, is *ein Wunder* in its own right.

The opera, although acclaimed after its première in Hamburg in 1927 and its popularity in the following few years, was then largely forgotten until its revival and subsequent performances in the past twenty years. Billed as being about "the redemptive power of love over injustice and adversity" Heliane is a lot more than that.

Very much of its time - the strange interwar years, a mixture of decadence, hope and despair - the opera unknowingly gives a glimpse into the Germany of the following two decades.

Set in an authoritarian state where joy and laughter are forbidden, a young stranger arrives in town advocating both and is promptly locked up and

sentenced to death by the cruel king. The opera opens with him in the condemned cell. The queen, Heliane, takes pity on him and shows herself to him naked by way of consolation. It is the subsequent events that form the crux of the story.

This nakedness is, if you like, the *raison d'être* of the whole piece so I think it was a bit cowardly of the production not to show it. It could have been done discretely, unsensationally in the shadows but they copped out and the most we got was bit of bare shoulder. While I'm at it I'll mention my only other gripe about the show. On stage virtually the whole time was a strange, all-in-grey female dancer. I wasn't sure what she represented or if she added anything to the proceedings but there were times when her presence was very distracting. But apart from those two things it was hard to fault this production.

Visually the whole production was stunning and this was particularly effective in the second act which takes place in the courtroom where Heliane is being tried for adultery by six lawyers and a blind judge who turns out to be her father.



Although thought of as a “modern” composer, Korngold’s third act of *Heliane* is a strange mixture. It starts off with quite a long, very romantic prelude which, in this case, is performed as a solo ballet by the ubiquitous grey clad lone female dancer of Jakob Peters-Messer’s production. It is followed by some fairly aggressive choral work and another romantic, lyrical aria by the prison guard. But it is the chorus to

which the third acts belongs. The Consensus Vocalis portrayed the baying crowd eager for blood, many of them carry strip lights which were then placed around a central rostrum to create a fire.

The singing and the music were outstanding, with Dutch soprano Annemarie Kremer giving a virtuoso performance with her *Ich ging zu ihm* being one of the high-spots of the evening. I also liked Hilman Unger as



The Stranger and Darren Jeffery as the dastardly ruler. The new orchestral arrangements by Fergus McAlpine were beautifully performed by the Noord Nederlands Orkest under the baton of Jac van Steen.

As I said before, visually the production was exceptionally good, one of the best I have seen in a long time. Basically, the set was a huge triangular room with plain white walls and a reflective ceiling. But onto

those walls were projected images which at times seemed almost to overpower the singers. Designed and lit by Guido Petzold I think it is the visuals I will remember from this production.

Nederlandse Reisopera's *Das Wunder der Heliane* is an unequivocal success and one which will long linger in the memory for some time to come □



Painting of left by Ed van der Kooy and on the right by Hans Lemmen

Delft's

KUNSTKAMER

For two weekends each year Ramon and Marc's house in Oude Delft becomes a fine art gallery

Photos by Michael HASTED



Ramon Dykgraaf

“As soon as we see visitors leave with a smile on their faces, our mission has been accomplished . . . “

One of the high-spots of the social and artistic calendar in Delft has become the twice yearly KunstKamer held in a wonderful five-hundred-year-old private house on the city’s grand Oude Delft canal. The house has beautiful historical details, hand-painted wallpaper, marble floors, mantelpieces and an old kitchen, complete with old white tiles.

Each May and November Ramon Dykgraaf and his partner Marc Cals throw open the doors of their rather eccentric, sixteenth century house to the public to show the work of five or six diverse artists. The shows are organised along with Joke Doedens and Simone Haak who run Terra, a ceramics gallery in the city. Not surprisingly there is always a heavy bias in Kunstkamer, towards sculpture, especially of the ceramic type.

The November exhibition showed the work of painter Ed van der Kooy, Bernard Heeson who works in glass, ceramicists Koos Busster and Paul-Robin Sjöström and sculptor Hans Leemen who also showed drawings.

As we have come to expect, the standard with this show, as with previous ones, is incredibly high but there is always a certain quirkiness to the work on show. A bit eccentric, a bit surreal often a bit humorous but always very good quality.

The ground floor of Ramon and Marc’s house, along with the walled garden to the rear, provide the perfect exhibition venue. Many of the original features are still in place, including two early plaster chimney breasts and a kitchen containing an ancient brick solid fuel stove.

KunstKamer started when Joke and Simone celebrated the thirty-year anniversary of their gallery by creating a chambre d’amis which took place in several houses including the one in the Oude Delft house and from that KunstKamer was born.

The fact that art exhibited in a homely atmosphere appeals to the imagination is evident from the large number of visitors. As a visitor you are treated to a total experience. Art can suddenly be experienced



visually in a home and not in a stand at an art fair or in a gallery. This gives art an extra dimension and brings it more to life and makes it easier for many visitors to imagine how a work of art could fit into their home. Visitors are encouraged to look around anonymously and casually during their visit while having a drink and/or snack. Whether you visit the KunstKamer to look at the art, to clear your mind, to stimulate your senses, to purchase a work of art or to view the house, it doesn't matter ☐



Sculpture by Hans Lemmen

Glass by Bernard Heesen



ILLUMINATE

by NDT2 on tour

Rehearsal photos by Sacha GROOTJANS

Text by Michael HASTED



Codes Of Conduct Dancer - Omani Ormskirk

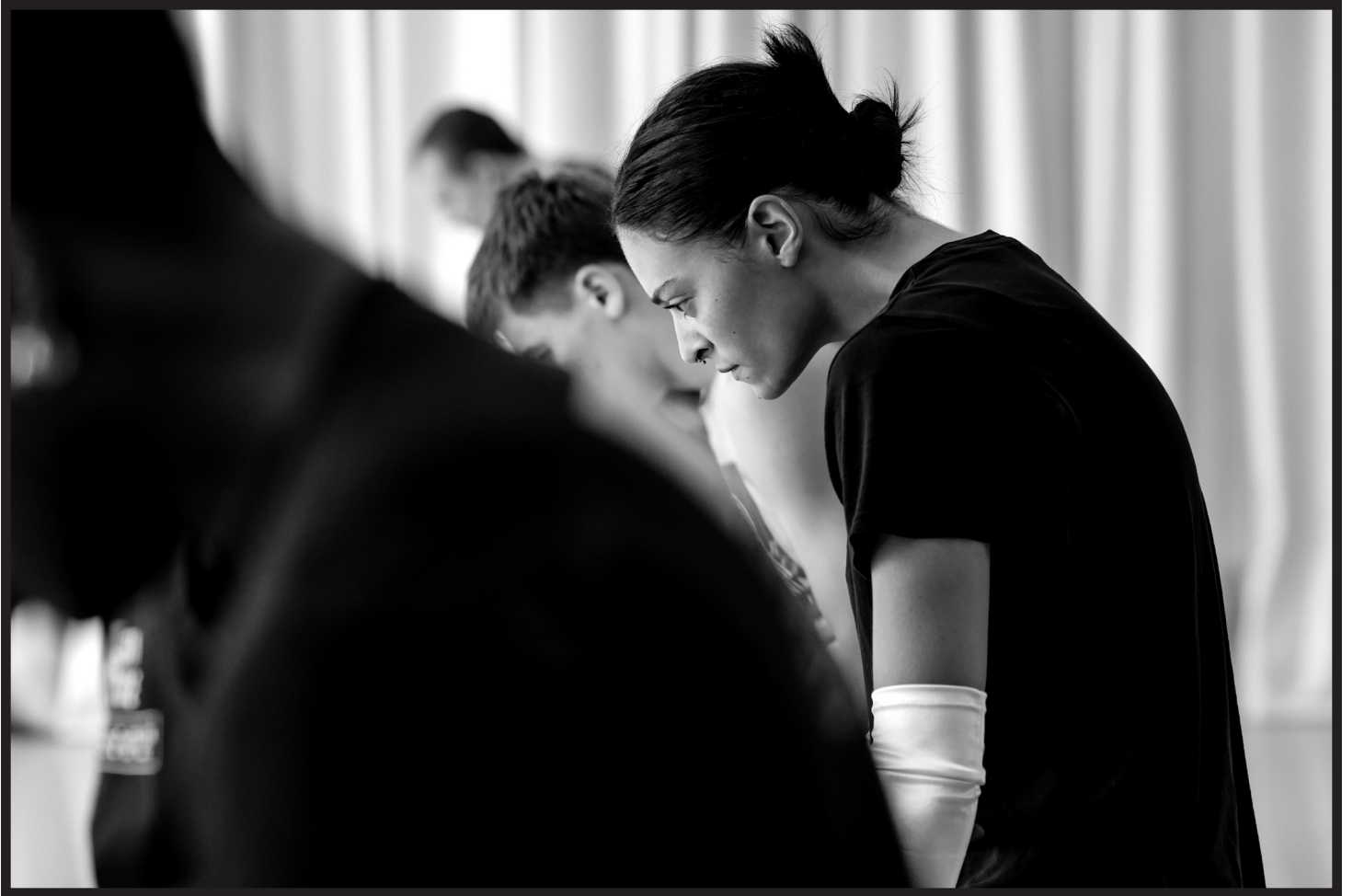


Codes Of Conduct Dancers - Rebecca Speroni & Gabriele Rolle

Last night saw the season's first show at the Amare from NDT2 with two brand new pieces and the reprise of one that perhaps did not realize its true potential due to the pandemic. Each of the pieces highlighted the talents of three emerging choreographers under the banner of Illuminate.

First up was the première of *Lights, Camera,*

Dismantled which was, as the name implies, about the illusional aspects of the entertainment industry. Choreographer Micaela Taylor, being from Hollywood, is clearly aware that all that glitters is not gold. It all started with a lot of razzmatazz with the dancers moving in sync with a drum machine and a call from one of them to start the show right now. The dancers were



Lights, Camera, Dismantled Dancer - Úrsula Urgeles Gonzales

all dressed in white shirts, black trousers and white socks and looked like waiters from a 1950s American diner. Their faces were all painted like circus clowns or latter-day Ziggy Stardusts and some sequences put me in mind of Marcel Marceau. The crisp drumbeat soon gave way to radio static and the glitter wore a bit thin as reality struck home. I loved Lisette van der Linden's

lighting. Lit almost entirely from above with a few spotlights, the black box stage became a space where no one could hide.

Codes of Conduct was the evening's second première in which Jermaine Spivey, to his own soundscape, created a world of individuals where each dancer had their own little space and developed their own little



Codes Of Conduct Dancers - artists of NDT 2

choreography. Almost like automata the dancers' jerky movements to the sounds of a synthetic voice described a world of isolation. Attempts later in the piece, to virtual silence, to form relationships did not really work out for them.

Last up was Nadav Zelner's *Bedtime Story* which was originally produced during the pandemic and therefore was not seen by a lot of people. Exploiting his belief that, "The small, secret moment between sleep and consciousness is the moment in which I make my dreams come true", this was a helter-skelter of a piece. It moved so fast that the audience and surely the dancers hardly had time to catch their breath. This never ending kaleidoscope was a frenetic sequence of very short dramatic moments where each individual or group had its own designated space defined by the lighting. After a minute or two they disappeared into the darkness as another area of the stage was lit and another sequence started.

I once saw Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey's three-ring circus at Madison Square Gardens in New York and *Bedtime Story* was bit like that – there was so much going on and everything changing so quickly that it was sometimes difficult to keep up. The tempo was maintained by some incredible, relentless music mainly, it seemed, of North African/Arab origin. At the end the audience was on its feet but I really needed to stay seated for a little rest. Brilliant, really exciting stuff. □



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Text by S

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TAIL TO THE DUMBLE BOOK

's its fate in today's digitized world?

Souwie BUIS Photos by Michael HASTED





A recent move meant that I found myself sorting through my collection of books and paying a visit to my nearest mini bieb to make a donation.

There is something immensely satisfying about adding to a growing collection of books – neatly tucked away behind a sturdy pane of glass. Mini biebs are small street libraries, peculiar to Holland, set up on the outside of private homes. They facilitate the free exchange of paper books, a growing trend in an era when their electronic counter-parts are becoming ever more popular.

So how will the humble book, our faithful companion for so many centuries now, fare in the digitized world of the 21st century? Is it on its way out or will there always be a place for the glossy covers and crisp printed pages of an honest to goodness paper book? From the wood-bound codices of Ancient Rome to the ornate manuscripts of the Medieval monasteries and the first printed offerings of Guttenburg's press, books have been treasured, banned and burnt for the learning that lies within their covers.

Book banning is apparently on the rise again in the United States but this is certainly not the only country in the world where they are censored. People have died and been made martyrs for books. Yet in the Caliphates of Moorish Spain, special rights were enjoyed by what were known as 'people of the book' – these were Christians, Jews and Muslims. The Bible, Torah and the Koran guaranteed a legitimacy that other bookless religions simply could not claim.

Yet today, it is not uncommon to read of the crisis in which books and traditional reading find themselves. A quick internet survey suggests that adults across many developed countries are reading less, certainly less literature. Ebooks and interactive digital books are on the rise however. Libraries still house books but they

too are embracing other multimedia forms of knowledge sharing.

"I've always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library" wrote Argentinian literary giant, Jose Luis Borges.

But what kind of library? The days of towering book-lined walls filled with dust-covered volumes of ancient lore, Hogwarts-style, are becoming a rarity. Many modern libraries still soothe with their gentle silence and softly-spoken librarians, yet many lend mainly CDs and videos and now house cafés, rows of computers and even small shops.

Perhaps it is the large number of what I think of as homeless books

that suggests they are less valued, less cherished than in past times.

"When I have a little money, I buy books; and if I have any left, I buy food and clothes" said Desiderius Erasmus.

But in many wealthy countries of the 21st century, books are frequently viewed as cumbersome relics of the past. Monuments perhaps to deforestation and climate change.

Yet still I maintain there are few things as satisfying as pulling a slightly dog-eared copy of a favourite book out of a rucksack on a beach or a rainy bus stop and losing yourself in another world □





Mozart's

DER SCHAUSPIELDIREKTOR

on tour with OperaZuid

Photos by Joost MILDE Text by Michael HASTED





There was a very successful and hilarious play in London a few years back by Michael Frayn, one of England's leading playwrights. *Noises Off*, a play within a play, followed a company of actors presenting a show that turned out to be a disaster where everything went wrong. The action took place on the stage set, but we saw what was happening backstage as well. OperaZuid's *Der Schauspieldirektor* was a bit like that. It told the story of a director putting together a production of an undisclosed Mozart opera, rehearsing and auditioning singers. The similarity is that both were comedies, the difference was that *Noises Off* was clever and funny, *Der Schauspieldirektor* was neither.

It was billed as an opera starring Sir Thomas Allen, in his day one of the world's leading baritones and a stalwart of Covent Garden, so we had high hopes. As it turned out, *Der Schauspieldirektor* was not an opera at all but a play, and not a very good one, which included some Mozart arias and duets. The thankfully short piece contained much less singing than spoken word (in English to accommodate its star performer, I imagine) and to everyone's surprise and disappointment, Sir Thomas, as the director, didn't sing at all.

There has been a trend recently for companies to create 'new' operas stitching together existing songs from a particular composer and they usually work quite well, so there is nothing wrong with the principal. However, it has to work and the whole has to be greater than the sum of its parts. With *Der Schauspieldirektor* the sums did not add up and the only part that offered any sort of redemption was the fine singing by the two sopranos, Kristina Bitenc and Chelsea Bonagura. Apart from that . . .

OperaZuid's two previous productions, *Orphée aux Enfers* and Kurt Weill's *Lady in the Dark* were brilliant and beautifully done. Sadly *Der Schauspieldirektor* was not □

MICHEL DE KLERK

17 NOV
2023
—
1 SEP
2024

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SCHOOL

AMSTERDAMSE SCHOOL MUSEUM
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