

**RETRO-
SPECTIVE
HARMEN
DE
HOOP**

1987 - 2018

How do you show
temporary, site-specific art
years later in a 'retrospective'?

Harmen de Hoop
re-created works in Rotterdam
that were made anonymously
and without permission
in other cities.

The question is:
in what way does a new location
and a different context
change the meaning of the work?



LADIES & GENTS – BERLIN – 1993



LADIES & GENTS – ROTTERDAM – 2017

Executed 24 years later and in another city. What are the significant shifts in meaning? In Berlin, the work hinted at the post-war guilt about the division of people into groups. And it raised the question of how law-abiding the 'Ossies' and 'Wessies' were in 1993. Re-created in 2017 in Rotterdam-South, one might think it has to do with an Islamic division of men and women. Or is it symbolic that this time the women are mentioned first, and not the men? Is feminism doing well in our globalized world? Perhaps we should also take the discussion about gender-neutral toilets into consideration. Are these gender-neutral benches in public space a positive thing or will the sexual harassment of women decline if we install more gender-specific benches?



WATERING DEAD TREES - WALVIS BAY - 2001



WATERING A PALM - ROTTERDAM - 2017

Broad-leaf trees at Walvis Bay, Namibia. Planted by the white citizens. Was it a custom that they, either consciously or not, took with them from their home countries? The black citizens had no gardens; they understood that almost nothing grows on desert soil. It reminded me of something I saw in Israel. There, on similar desert-like soil, patches of grass were planted between most roads. Grass that had to be watered constantly, while at the same time the Palestinian territories were going through a water-shortage. Was making the environment look European the only way they could feel at home?

There are three palm trees on the Rijnhoutplein in Rotterdam. Who put them there? The municipality? Was it a clumsy, but well-meaning attempt to make immigrants from southern countries feel more at home? Or is it simply a result of globalization, where we copy anything from anywhere, making everything look alike? But isn't it too wet in the Netherlands for these palm trees? What are the odds of their survival?



FOR SALE - PARAMARIBO - 2005



FOR SALE - ROTTERDAM - 2017

What is the most important thing in life? Money? In a scene I staged in Surinam, a man tried to sell a rusty, overgrown car. That was not as absurd as it seems. Everywhere in Paramaribo cars much like this one were put up for sale. Probably as a valuable source of spare parts. But when does something stop being a sellable commodity? Do we give up too easily in Holland? I try to make some money myself by selling a house in Rotterdam in the Wielewaal neighbourhood. Built in 1949 to reduce the housing shortage after the Second World War and meant to last for just 25 years, now the residents and the housing association argue about preservation or demolition. In the meantime I put a house (I do not own) up for sale. I have to make a living too, don't I? Any takers?



HAIRDRESSER - AMSTERDAM - 1987



HAIRDRESSER - ROTTERDAM - 2017

Once again, 'rays of light' were placed above the mirrors of a ladies' hairdresser. What is the difference between Amsterdam in 1987 and Rotterdam in 2017? At Dameskapsalon Elise in Amsterdam, the clientele consisted of white women of a certain age, who had their hair done almost every week. Not because it was necessary, but because they liked the attention, the fingers running through their hair. Angel Cuts in Rotterdam is also a salon for ladies only. But the differences could not be greater: here young, colored women are taken care of by top stylists (according to their website). The aim is to be glamorous, night and day. Who needs to be 'crowned with radiance' most? The old ladies in Amsterdam or the young women in Rotterdam? Age or skin color, does it matter? Do we not all crave attention?



RESTORING - DEN HAAG - 2007



RESTORING - ROTTERDAM – 2018

Should art be useful? Are we tired of beautiful paintings and do we think that artists should contribute more directly to a better world? Does holding up a mirror to society no longer suffice? Is decisive action needed? If you see a worn out pedestrian crossing, is the right course of action to take up a brush? Should we fight not only material, but also societal deterioration? It is said that graffiti, economic instability and social discontent are intricately connected, and that keeping the environment clean and removing graffiti will prevent further decay. But isn't that merely treating the symptoms, while the underlying causes are not addressed? Whose side is the artist on anyway?



GARDENING TOOLS - ST. LAURENT - 1997



GARDENING TOOLS - ROTTERDAM - 2017

On the outskirts of Saint-Laurent-de-Neste I spotted a bulletin board used by the residents to communicate to each other. The garden tools I added seem to call for a joint maintenance of the public green areas. Did anyone respond? And did they return the tools afterwards? I do not know what the social norms and values were in 1997 in this 900-year-old village. And I also do not know whether they have changed since then.

In 2017 I added a similar set of garden tools to a billboard in front of an empty office complex in Rotterdam. Which potential user is being addressed here? The dismissed employee who is advised to take up a new hobby? Or is the focus a new employer who can offer his employees the benefit of some relaxing gardening? Or maybe these offices are no longer necessary and the city can decide to extend that small piece of greenery to a fully-fledged park after the demolition of the buildings? Options enough. Now we just have to wait and see what happens to the garden tools...



FIRE EXTINGUISHER #14 - DEN HAAG - 1995

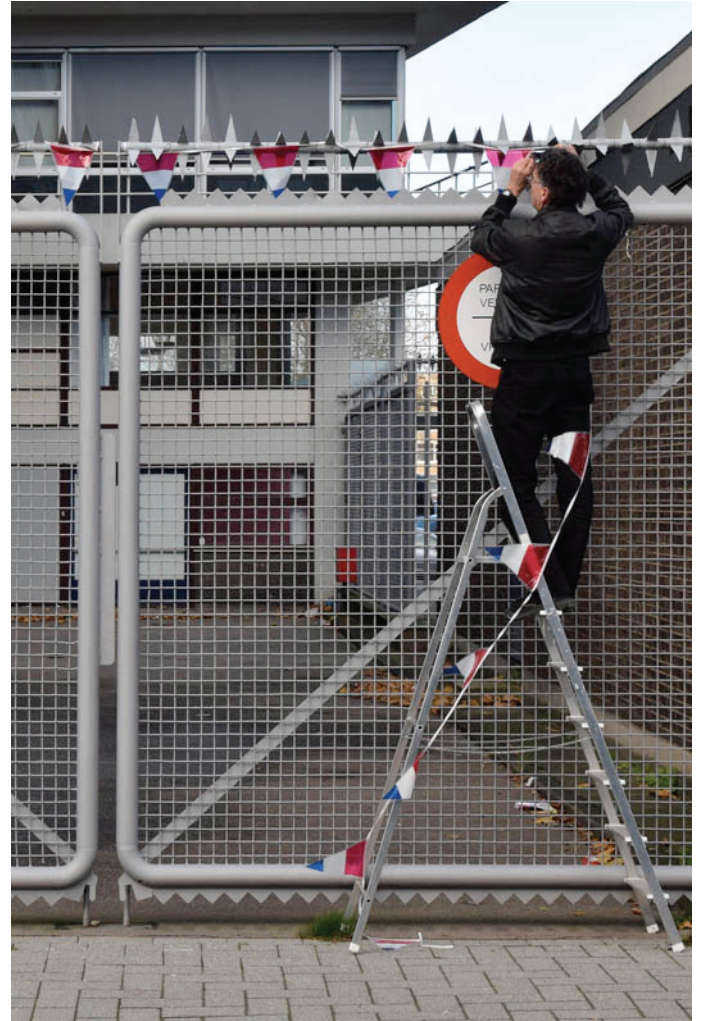


FIRE EXTINGUISHER - ROTTERDAM - 2017

Have things changed since 1995? We are still scared of house fires, burglary, violence. We still have countless insurance policies. Despite that, disaster can still strike at any time. So perhaps placing fire extinguishers in public space is a good idea after all. In 1995 I tried to make it seem like an extra security measure. A passer-by might think that the city council put it there. Even though it was attached so firmly that in the event of an actual fire you'd need to have a set of tools handy. In the year 2018 it seems unlikely that anybody would expect the government to place fire extinguishers in public space. So who placed this fire extinguisher in the playground? Worried parents? Is the fire extinguisher a symbol for the tendency to safeguard us against any risk? It is unclear if in this case it will evoke a feeling of safety, or heighten people's fears.



DECORATING - DEN HAAG – 2003



DECORATING - ROTTERDAM - 2017

Do we live in a culture of fear? And what can we do about it ourselves? In 2003 I asked a woman to decorate the fence of a children's playground with colorful flags. What message do we want to give our children: that life is a party or that we should be afraid of other people?

In Rotterdam, too, a fence was used to close off a private area. To make it less aggressive, I decorated it with red-white-blue flags. Is this an improvement or is nationalism just as much a symbol of fear, a fear of others?



CHESSBOARD - AMSTERDAM - 1996



CHESSBOARD - ROTTERDAM - 2017

Thinking or doing, which do you prefer? The municipality of Rotterdam built a skatepark between a tennis court and a football pitch. In doing so they attempted to promote physical exercise. Mental exercise, however, lost out a little. To make up for that I added a chess board to the skatepark. Was chess more popular in 1996 than it is nowadays? There were a lot of chess cafes in Amsterdam back then. As an invitation to play a game of chess outside, I glued a chess board to a bollard. You had to bring your own chess pieces. And you had to be careful not to drop them in the sewer. A year after that intervention, chess computer Deep Blue defeated world champion Kasparov. Now, countless skate games are available for every computer. Neither skating nor playing chess require us to leave the house anymore.



BEER - VALKENSWAARD - 1997



BEER - ROTTERDAM – 2017

Four crates of Heineken beer on a small sports ground in Rotterdam. Sports and sponsorship: an uncomfortable combination. The government has been trying to reduce violence in amateur football by banning all alcohol advertising along the fields since 2009. Not that people drink any less in the canteens. Most sports clubs depend financially on earnings from the bar. This, however, is an ordinary playground in a residential area. So is it guerrilla marketing or did some local kids put the crates there? In 1997 the Heineken crates were yellow, now they are green. Why? Is Heineken trying to create an ecologically responsible image? Do they want to emphasize that beer is a natural product and therefore very healthy (also for athletes)? Who are they trying to fool?

In Valkenswaard the beer crates were placed behind an apartment block. It dealt with another question: when is something theft? Imagine: you come home and there is a crate of beer at the back entrance you share with your neighbours. 'My neighbour is throwing a party' you might think when you see the crate. But if it is still there the next day, what do you do? Would you leave the crate of beer out of principle or would you be tempted to take it? Are those yellow crates still there? Then the beer is far past its expiry date. My advice: do not drink it. If you are thirsty you'd better go and see how many bottles still remain in Rotterdam.



BENCH VICES - BODEGRAVEN - 1996



BENCH VICES - ROTTERDAM - 2017

For real men: in 1996 I added bench vices to a picnic table in a rest area. Handy if your car breaks down and you need to repair something. But the days that a car was constructed simply enough for us to be able to carry out the necessary repairs ourselves were already gone. Now, 21 years later, the media are discussing 'the elimination of masculinity', complaining about our 'feminized society'. When I was young I liked to climb trees, now (for a fee) boys can safely use the climbing tracks created by 'Fun Forest' in the woods near Rotterdam. Is that enough to make them 'real men' again? To support that cause I changed a nearby picnic table into a workbench. Will that be enough to make the tough guys put down their smartphones and work with their hands? Or is it once again a nostalgic and unrealistic addition to a recreational area?



BIRD TABLE - AMSTERDAM - 1997



BIRD TABLE - ROTTERDAM - 2018

In Crooswijk whole neighbourhoods were demolished so they could be replaced by fancier housing. The municipality of Rotterdam claimed that the buildings were in a poor state. The real reason was probably that the area, inhabited by lower-income households, was near the Kralingse forest. The new houses can only be afforded by people with high incomes. It's clear that not just Amsterdam, but also Rotterdam, is undergoing a process of gentrification. But why should we limit ourselves to human housing? Maybe if we 'upgrade' trees, we will attract a 'higher class' of birds. If the municipality improves the Kralingse forest this way, they can increase the real estate prizes even more!