

In cartography, a legend provides tools for interpreting symbols on a map. Analogously, this micro-publication can be considered an additional resource for reading the exhibition *Transborder Networks*, complementing the mapping exercises carried out by the curators. It presents fragments of a research conducted by Hilde Borgermans and Alicja Melzacka over five months in various locations within Belgium and the Netherlands. In an attempt to ‘map the invisible’, they investigated the dynamics governing the emergence and the disappearance—or the assembly and the dispersal—of contemporary art scenes. From the very beginning, the notions of ‘contemporary art scene’ and ‘mapping’ posed a terminological and methodological challenge. During the research process, it became clear that they required more reflection. This issue became the driving force behind a series of field trips, interviews and online correspondence with various professionals, working in—or in conjunction with—the art field. Parts of this material are presented in the zine, as an archive of the never-fully-completed, or yet emerging research. They have been arranged according to the following questions: what is the contemporary, what is an (art) scene/network, and what is mapping.

In the thesaurus, the first synonym suggested for the word ‘contemporary’ is the adjective ‘new’. In this sense, ‘contemporary’ seems to be used in both temporal and qualitative contexts, on a par with ‘new’, ‘modern’ and ‘emerging’. Niekolaas Johannes Lekkerkerk chose an eponymous essay by Giorgio Agamben, *What is the Contemporary*, as a starting point for our conversation. Together with Samuel Saelemakers we discussed how our understanding of these notions is indebted to modernism and how they could be revisited.

NOTES FROM A CONVERSATION WITH  
NIEKOLAAS JOHANNES LEKKERKERK

*Contemporariness is, then, a singular relationship with one’s time, which adheres to it and at the same time, keeps a distance from it. More precisely, it is that relationship with the time that adheres to it through a disjunction and an anachronism. Those who coincide too well with the epoch, who are perfectly tied to it in every respect, are not contemporaries, precisely because they do not manage to see it; they are not able to firmly hold their gaze on it.*

(Giorgio Agamben, *What is the Apparatus and Other Essays*, 2009).

What I find interesting about Agamben’s essay is his claim that in wanting to take a contemporary position, one should not necessarily, or especially, be located at the centre of it all, or in the middle of the acceleration of information; but that the true contemporary would be at the margin, in the shadows and darkness, actively taking a distance from the debate to have the clearest view. This statement is especially relevant, curatorially speaking, as it proposes a way of finding one’s inscription into contemporaneity by means of going outside of the arts by means of art (outward perspectives and concentric movements informing an internal logic or mode of operation). Or what Deleuze describes in his ABCdarium about the letter he received from a surfer which inspired him to theoreticise further on the notion of the fold; to go outside of philosophy by means of philosophy.

This movement of an external perspective, an outside stance that informs an internal logic could be said to represent a certain ecology of curating, trying to incorporate different positions. An exhibition can be regarded as a cultural field of inter-human energy exchange, through and by means of objects, actions and processes encompassing more than just the human position at the centre of it all.

I am quite a keen reader of Alfred North Whitehead and the distinction he makes between substance and subsistence is of interest to me. Whereas substance is seen as that which lasts, which is stable, is there, subsistence is precisely that which does not last. It needs to be maintained in order to last. I like to transpose that idea of substance versus subsistence on the institutional realm, where you could say that institutions last precisely through things which do not last. No institution without transformation; no institutional inheritance without subsistence.

I think that the exhibition is a very interesting form of subsistence, precisely because of the fact that an exhibition is an ephemeral entity and movement by definition, and we need the small passages that exhibitions provide in order to make institutions move from A to B, to transform, to subsist. That is perhaps part of the ecology, of how the exhibition functions vis-a-vis an institution. Also looking on a more in-depth level, on the level of content, art fuels the idea of ecology and is the field in which we have the great bridge builders, and where the sensitivity and consciousness for different types of perception is being raised. There is so much outside of the human sensorium that can be made palpable through the arts.

#### NOTES FROM A CONVERSATION WITH SAMUEL SAELEMAKERS

From where we are sitting now —this centre for contemporary art that does not have a collection—I think it is particularly important to reflect on how we are often caught in this expectation of the ‘new’. We have to show ‘emerging artists’ or ‘new works’, while sometimes the innovative part may also lay in the return, or in the revisit of things that might have been already recognised at other moments in time or by other fields besides contemporary art. It is important to unmask some of the concepts such as ‘innovation’ or ‘progress’ as being quantitative in nature and think what kind of *qualitative* terms could be used instead. Maybe those terms have become emptied out; imagine being an artists revisiting your work some years later—is that moving ‘forward’? You could say it’s regressive, but I think in this very personal process, of your own development in any domain, one keeps returning to similar things because there is an amount of qualities in there that we care for. We all move in time and space, but it is more about transformation than progress. And I think in arts it is just the same.

Speaking of the ‘new’, there is an implied break, there is always

a conflict. The term ‘avant garde’ comes from the military; that’s not a coincidence—especially the historical avant garde, such as Italian futurism was a very aggressive movement. And in this sense maybe postmodernism tried to define itself as an end to that, as a failure of modernism. Accompanied by the victory of consumerism, postmodernism seemed innocent; much the way consumerism seems innocent at first glance, because who doesn’t enjoy a brand new dishwasher? I think the formations such as new sincerity or metamodernism are the proof that postmodernism was not an end phase and that these concepts have to always be in motion.

What I am sensing in the art world, or at least here for example, is the sort of renewed interest, or even need for a more historical foundation, or working on multiple tracks—when the historical does not exclude the contemporary one (literally ‘contemporary’ as ‘of now’). As curators, a lot of what we do is bringing things together and finding new connections in existing material. I think, in the society nowadays where there is so little place for nuance, we should especially address where this nuance and ambiguity may lie. This is precisely a problem of showing how things relate to one another beyond the direct connection. I think it is an important curatorial task because it touches upon the relation between ethics and aesthetics. It is again

a process of *furthering* and not progressing. Time does not move forward – time just *moves* and it happens to move in the direction we have defined as ahead of us. While I was working with a French artist Mark Geffriaud, he told me about the Aymara people, an indigenous Andes community, who have a notion of time where the future lies behind us and the past lies ahead of us. This is an anthropological correlation with the *Angelus Novus* of Paul Klee, where this new angel looks into the past with horror in his eyes, walking backwards into the future. Because we know the past, it must be in front of us where we can see it. The future, the yet unknown, lies behind us, we must face it blindly.



Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*, 1920.

The notion of ‘art scene’ seems to be often used unreflectively, disregarding how globalisation and advances in technology have influenced and, to a certain extent, deterritorialised such formations. The two speakers included in this double chapter discuss two different ends to what could be considered a scene. Marie-Claire Krell focuses on the ways in which art policy and, less obviously, housing policy influence the formation and disintegration of local art communities. In our email exchange with Eline Kersten, we talked about collectives, networking and being in-between embodied and digital practices.

A CONVERSATION WITH  
MARIE-CLAIRE KRELL

*As an artist, educator and organiser active in Euregio Maas-Rhein, you have been affected by and have participated in many policy changes. When was the idea of supporting artistic communities through affordable housing articulated?*

Art policy and production has been always tight together in a more or less fortunate ways. The Dutch policy has undergone many changes since my graduation from the Academy in 2008. During the first cabinet Rutte, cultural funding in the Netherlands has been radically cut down, starting with the withdrawal of the WWIK (*Wet werken inkomen kunstenaars*) in 2012 —an opportunity for artists to receive a

supplement to their own income for a maximum period of four years, to set up their own business. The bottom line of the argument in favor of the cuts has been that artists will always find a way to survive because they strive to create new work anyway.

Cities then looked for possibilities to ‘re-integrate’ artists into society. Instead of supporting different forms of self-organisation and entrepreneurship among artists, this sustained the model of artists having to deal with all kinds of side jobs in order to get by, being supported by friends and family—or go into welfare. While living in Caberg, the idea arose to lobby for supporting artists through affordable housing.

*Could you tell us something about the artists’ ‘colony’ that developed around that time in Caberg, Maastricht?*

There were several factors which influenced the development of tightly-knit art community in Caberg. Firstly, the whole neighborhood had first been transformed into an anti-squatting complex (*antikraak*) taken over many times by different companies. From the beginning artists, designers and musicians moved there; young people who rather focused on their artistic practices and easily agreed on living in those precarious conditions. Secondly, in this system new ‘users’ (*gebruikers*) had to be proposed to the company by current ‘users’. Naturally, the artists

who have already been living in Caberg were recommending their friends and colleagues; in this way, the art community has organically expanded. Eventually, the system of temporary rental (*tijdelijke verhuur*) was established in place of anti-squatting, which offered more stability and rights—users became tenants.

It is important to understand that people working in the so called ‘art field’ have very different needs—and not everyone is in need of an atelier or a studio, what seems to be the first solution when cities think about supporting artists. A great strength of affordable housing projects is that they do not focus on a specific target group but cater to one of the universal, basic human needs.

*Speaking of local cultural initiatives, could you tell us more about the Caberg Biennale?*

We organized the Caberg Biennale with B32 and other initiatives and entrepreneurs located in our neighborhood, like Atelier Haven and SmeetsTekst, in collaboration with Trajekt, Servatius Wonen & Vastgoed and the Buurtplatform Caberg in July 2015. Through this project, we tried to manifest how important our community was and communicate to policy-makers that by supporting artists on this very basic level, they contribute to the sustainable development of the art sector

and the city by letting a vivid cultural scene develop out of itself.

It was also a good moment to create publicity on that issue; strikingly later this year the Assemble collective won the Turner Prize for a similar affordable housing project developed in Liverpool. The Biennale was much more than an art exhibition, the ‘Caberg Collection’ opened their houses and invited visitors into their living rooms. There was also an outdoor project of Stef van den Dungen, *The Collection*, for which he painted the houses in the neighbourhood according to the colour scheme of the interior of the Bonnefanten Museum.



Stef van den Dungen, *The Collection*, 2015.  
Photo: Charlotte Lagro. Image courtesy of the artist.

We wanted to make a long lasting impact, so we commenced negotiations with the municipality of Maastricht, the housing corporation Servatius, Maastricht University and the Hogeschool Zuyd. With the help of those institutional partners, we, as a neighbourhood, wanted to renovate the houses in a sustainable way, as a pilot project,



developed together with the University's researchers of ICIS. A similar project has been already done in Amsterdam (Stichting Broedstraten), but what distinguished us was the fact that we proposed this project from within a strong community, as a small-scale and grassroots initiative. Our proposal has been rejected; the demolishing is about to start, a part of the new housing project is sold to external developers. As a result, there will probably be around 60 out of 110 houses left for social housing in 'our' three streets of Caberg.

*What then happened with the art community in Caberg?*

The community of the Caberg Collection has gradually dispersed. Following the transfer between housing corporations, most people have been evicted. Some of them moved back in temporarily, just a few houses down the street, downgraded again to the precarious conditions of anti-squatting. Many others, including me, have finally left the city. This problem of accommodation in gentrifying cities has affected not only individuals but also initiatives and institutions: many initiatives have dispersed with the people moving away, several local art spaces were forced to shut down because of accommodation problems.

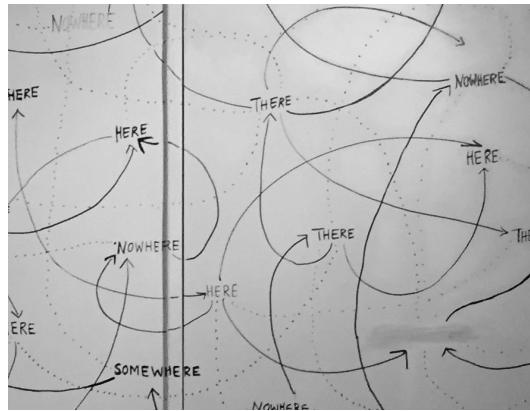
A CONVERSATION  
WITH ELINE KERSTEN

Dear Eline,

In many conversations that fuelled our research, the notions of ‘art scene’ but also of ‘network’ have been recurring. It made me consider the similarities and differences between the two and also made me think about our collective, *Nowhere*, and how we position ourselves in relation to those terms. A great deal of what we are doing happens online through our website, social media and, of course, our zine. We count only five members, but strikingly we have never managed to meet all in one place at the same time! We are trying, however, to not only create a digital meeting place, but also proliferate new—and sustain existing relationships in the ‘real’ world. These embodied experiences are scattered between different locations and different actors connected with one another through the ever-expanding online network. At the same time, we all remain strongly embedded in our respective localities or, if you will, ‘scenes’. What can the advantages and disadvantages resulting from such a decentralised or rhizomatic approach be? How did the idea of the collective evolve since the founding of *Nowhere* and where do you, as a co-founder, see it going?

I think the equivocal title *Somewhere in Between* reflects quite well the format of our activity—suspended between the embodied and the digital. The question is whether such a format may function in the long-run or maybe we should take a leap towards one of the sides.

Looking forward to reading your thoughts,  
 Alicja



Rana Ashraf, *The Air and the Worlds II: an Illustrated Diary*, 2017–2018. Image courtesy of the artist.

Dear Alicja,

I came up with the idea of starting a collective while studying in London; at that time my artistic practice was basically non-existent because of the lack of infrastructure. Together with my friend and artist Miriam Sentler, we shared the need for a platform to show our work that would not be bound to money or location. I absolutely believe in self-organisation, in cooperation that creates open possibilities. In the following weeks, we gradually built on this idea and approached like-minded people. The collective as it functions now—focusing mostly on the online zine—is not how we had imagined it in the first place. To me, that only shows that the members who joined over time have all left their footprint in one way or another. This is another example of how self-organisation and cooperation works.

I think the main issue that our collective faces right now is that the intangible character makes it hard to find. It's not easy to promote an online collective, especially as a young platform, still exploring how to position itself within an already existing world of blogs and other online platforms. How do you find ways to introduce yourself to new audiences; how do you apply for funding? I suppose not being based anywhere makes it difficult for people to understand our identity and, as a result, also to invest in something as intangible as that. On the other hand, I do think

that working online brings great benefits to art practitioners. To operate in this grey area between embodiment or presence and digital or absence allows us to work internationally, on a number of projects at the same time. We can turn this ephemeral quality around, flip it over, and use it to our advantage.

I think *Nowhere* should materialise in a variety of forms; not only via our zine, but also in physical meetings, speed-dates, studio visits, exhibitions, lectures, film screenings. A future challenge is to build up a sustainable network of artists, curators and writers and to actually create long-term relationships. To me, a network can be seen as a constellation of people connected through their common intellectual good; it is not defined by the physical encounter but through the active exchange of knowledge. *Nowhere* wants to facilitate this exchange and establish dialogues, which could then also lead to assuming a temporary location and creating local visibility. I think being somewhere in between, to refer to the exhibition title, is the only way to do it.

With very best wishes,  
Eline

During a meeting in Herstal,

on the working site of Dear Hunter, we discussed how complex the processes of map-making and reading may be. Marlies Vermeulen and Remy Kroese, running the spatial-anthropological research practice, shared with us some insights about working across both disciplinary and geographical borders.

A CONVERSATION WITH MARLIES  
VERMEULEN AND REMY KROESE,  
DEAR HUNTER

We are independent entrepreneurs, researchers, educators and map-makers, working on broader and more specific questions regarding urban planning. We normally are not concerned with design solutions but we want the commissioners, mostly municipalities, to draw their own conclusions. We are delivering the insights necessary to come up with a design that suits theirs as well as inhabitants' needs.

Importantly, both of us were trained in architecture. What gave a beginning to our practice was a certain frustration with the methods applied by most architects, who tend to visit the project location only once or twice before starting the design process. To us, it is a great oversight because there is an enormous amount of information and expertise in the location that is not taken into account. This more anthropological and narrative side of the space that comes with experience and perception cannot be expressed in the standardised

language of architectural plans. We believe that within our field we should be able to make plans that reveal that sort of knowledge as well, by being on site and mapping what is really happening on location. This map should function as another sort of design parameters—just as orientation or morphology—used by architects, municipalities etc.

We called our office Dear Hunter not because we sympathise with this profession, but because of the way a hunter operates on site, goes to a hunting cabin to observe animals and their environment. Once you are in there, it seems that you start to see and hear better. This activation of senses is necessary for grasping the hidden knowledge of a certain location; so we build our own 'hunting cabin', consisting of shipping containers, on site. For the duration of the research, that is around one to three months, we really do live in there and try to become a part of the local community. We are especially interested in border regions and, so called, 'B-cities' that are much more capable of self-reflection than big urban centres because they have to reposition themselves.

To us, mapping is not merely collecting and arranging information in a sort of a structure, but it is using the map in order to structure. We are using the mapping process as a tool to reflect on what we are really doing. We begin

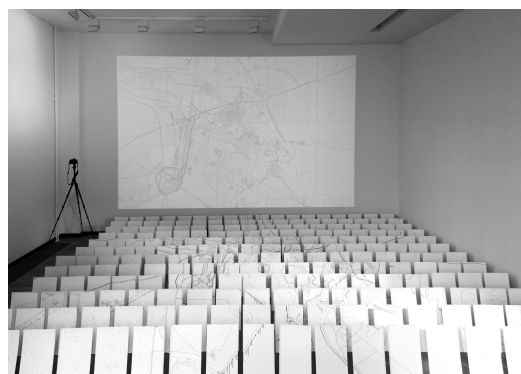
to map already on the first day of the project and continue accumulating different layers throughout this creative process of structuring. So, one does not only produce a map, but talks to it and lets it talk back.

Another important aspect is the ability to read a map, which many people nowadays seem to lack. It is maybe a slight exaggeration, but we seem to be only capable of reading a standard textual format—starting at the top left and ending at the bottom right. This is how we are used to absorb knowledge. On the contrary, with a map you can begin wherever you want, it unfolds in a non-chronological, unrestricted way. If you ask people to read a map, you ask them to interpret, to reflect, to make choices, so it immediately becomes a dialogue. This is why now, during the research process, we organise meetings with commissioners and other people involved to discuss mapping in progress and share yet unfinished work, which puts us in a quite vulnerable position.

Actually, we did not found Dear Hunter with the ambition to become mapmakers, we kind of grew into it. We tried to make a living from what we love to do and develop a sustainable, commercial practice. Over the years, we developed a way of *mapping the invisible* and we constantly work on bettering it. Our approach is pluri- or, if you will, trans-disciplinary; it connects

to different fields: architecture, art, cartography and anthropology. We even created our own field called ‘cartophology’ to unite all those things under one name and be able to work with it.

As it has been said many times before us, a good map should bridge both science and art. We aim for this combination of applied and autonomous work by creating something that can be used by a municipality but also become a part of an art collection (e.g. IKOB, Eupen) or an art exhibition (e.g. *Mapping Scene* at the Jan van Eyck Academy, Maastricht). It is a reciprocal relation; collaborating with us draws cultural institutions outside of the ‘art scene’. It can be also interesting for scientists because it presents a shift from theory into the field of practice. Being on all those borders—somewhere in between art, science and entrepreneurship—is fascinating and we feel comfortable if we don’t fit any of them completely.



Dear Hunter, *Mapping Scene*, 2018, exhibition view.  
Photo: Petra Vroomen. Image courtesy of Dear Hunter & Petra Vroomen.

Hilde Borgermans & Alicja Melzacka, the research and editorial team of *Mapping the invisible: a legend*, are participants of Curatorial Studies, KASK, coming from different fields: Hilde holding an MA degree in Fine Arts and Alicja having background in art history, linguistics and heritage studies.

Michelle Daniëlse is a graphic designer and a student of MA Graphic Design at KASK, Gent.

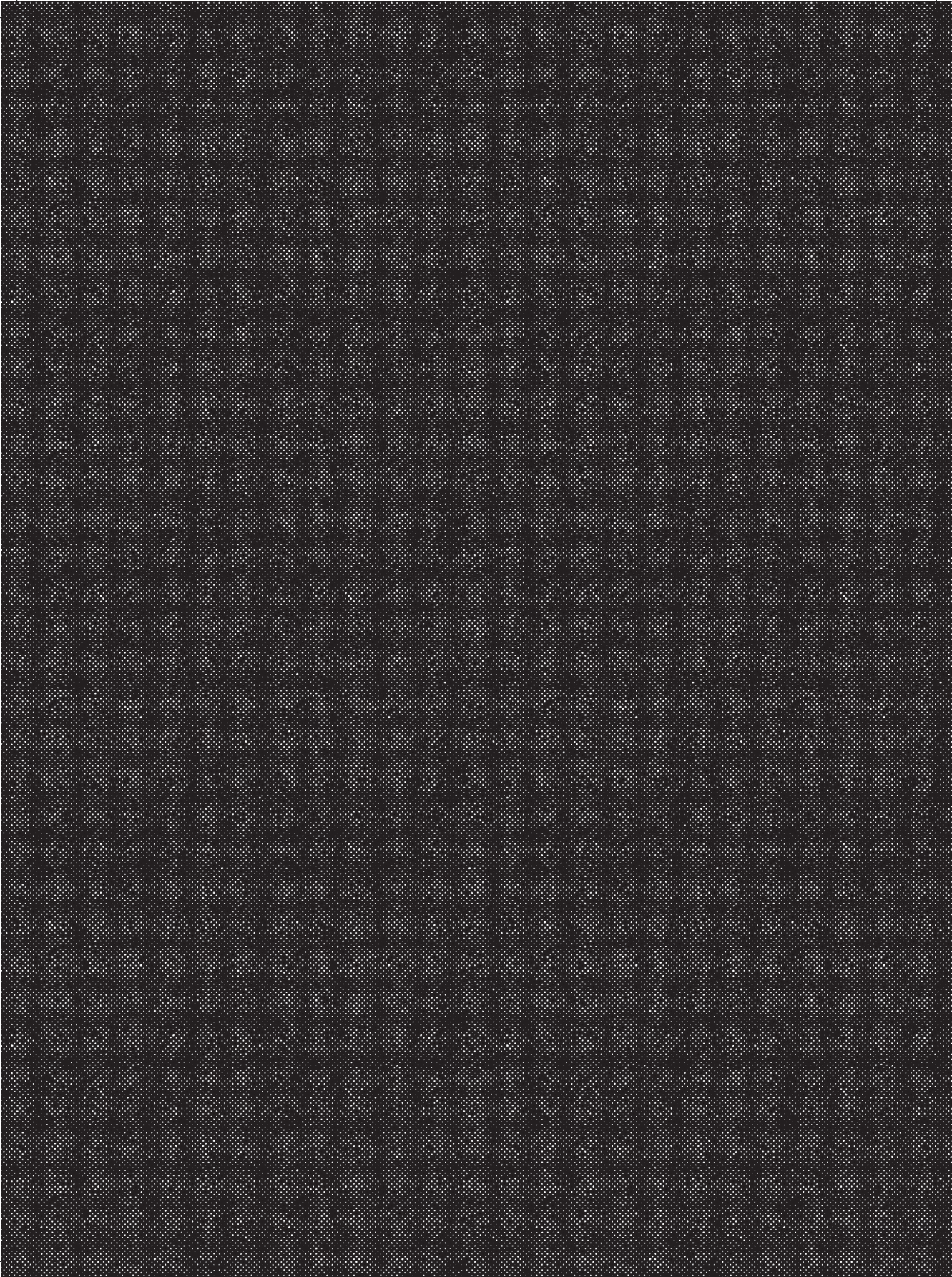
Marlies Vermeulen and Remy Kroese are a spatial-anthropological research practice and produce alternative maps and atlases through qualitative fieldwork. Being a 'Dear Hunter', referring to the behaviour and methods of hunters, means that they thoroughly immerse themselves in situations in order to understand them completely, mostly by living and working on-site for relatively long periods of time.

Eline Kersten completed a Bachelor's degree at the Maastricht Academy of Fine Art in 2015, followed by an MFA in Curating at Goldsmiths University in London. Since then she has been working internationally, pursuing a kaleidoscopic view in both her artistic and curatorial practice. Eline's interest centres on ecology, landscape, and the friction between humanity and the Earth.

Marie-Claire Krell is a multidisciplinary artist, interdisciplinary curator and educator. She is a graduate of the Maastricht Academy of Fine Arts; her thesis revolved around the question of dedication as a basis for a new positioning of art and art education. She has been involved in many not-for-profit art initiatives in Meuse-Rhine Euregion and is currently working as project manager of the Very Contemporary network.

Niekolaas Johannes Lekkerkerk works as a curator and writer for The Office for Curating in Rotterdam and is artistic director of Poppositions in Brussels. Central to Lekkerkerk's work are social and political discourses revolving around daily living and working practices, cultural norms, and ideologies. He particularly focuses on debates concerning the Anthropocene, ecology and climate, posthumanism, and the entanglements of nature and culture.

Samuel Saelemakers has been a Curator at Witte de With since 2012. He holds an MA in Art Philosophy and Aesthetics from the Université Paris IV-Sorbonne and a Master's degree in Philosophy from the University of Antwerp. Saelemakers is a regular visiting lecturer at the Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht, and is a faculty member of the 2018-2019 Curatorial Studies program at KASK, Ghent.



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