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stanley brouwn, Remy Jungerman and Iris Kensmil selected for the Dutch Pavilion



*Remy Jungerman, image in front: FODU. HOLDER, 2015; image at the back: INITIANDS, 2015
Iris Kensmil, Rhythm of Dutch spoken Words, 2015. Photo: Gert Jan van Rooij*

Work of visual artists stanley brouwn (1935-2017), Remy Jungerman (1959) and Iris Kensmil (1970), brought together by Benno Tempel for a joint presentation, has been selected as the Dutch contribution to the 58th edition of the Venice Biennale, that is to take place in 2019. The selection of this exhibition, entitled 'The Measurement of Presence: Body, Spirit, History' has been made public by the Mondriaan Fund, that was advised in that regard by an international jury.

The jury has chosen a clear and conscientious plan, which centres around the art in a presentation that offers new perspectives on the notion of national identity. Curator Benno Tempel (director of the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague) brings together the work of these three artists because they let us look at the world in a different way, each from their own artistic practice. stanley brouwn did this with a measurement system based on the body (Body), Remy Jungerman is partly nourished by what the spirits tell him (Spirit), and Iris Kensmil gives meaning to an ignored history (History). What these artists have in common besides their Surinamese descent, is the inspiration they find in the modernism and avant-garde of the previous century, which they combine in their work with elements from other traditions and positions. Together with Jungerman and Kensmil, Tempel has developed a plan in which three generations of artists present us with different visions of the notion of identity, in a presentation that offers room to reflect on our relation to the other. The jury appreciates the way in which the three artists relate to these valuable themes and considers the exhibition in the Dutch Pavilion as an appropriate recognition of their work.

Central to the exhibition are a number of conceptual works of the recently deceased artist stanley brouwn. Among the artworks on display will be a sculpture that is based on the Venetian unit of length, Cavezzo. brouwn's oeuvre is based on measures and distances, for example by archiving obsolete measurement units, by introducing a new measurement system based on his own body, or by buying a square meter of land in various countries. His work is an inspiration to new generations of artists, including Kensmil and Jungerman. The context of the presentation in Venice is not just a tribute to brouwn; it particularly gives meaning to his ideas about displacement, ownership and exploring. In his work, Remy Jungerman combines references to the modernism of De Stijl with patterns from the Maroons of Surinam, and with rituals from the Winti religion. For the Pavilion in Venice he will make a new installation in which he aims to bring together the power of the ancestors of the greater Dutch world – from The Netherlands to Surinam, Indonesia and elsewhere – in order to connect the various cultures and to start a future-oriented, open conversation. His installation will consist of a 'kabra tafra', a table that may serve as an altar to enter into a dialogue with ancestors. A second spatial work refers both to De Stijl and to the history of the plantations in Suriname.

Jungerman about the presentation: "I am looking forward to enter the holy ground of the Dutch Pavilion in Venice to leave a mark behind that will rewrite and enrich Dutch culture and history."

For her presentation in Venice, Iris Kensmil will make an installation of portraits on a mural painting, which will be inspired by the work of modernist artists like Mondriaan and Malevich. By the portraits of Black utopians the installation acts as a counterpart of what she considers one-sided modernist utopias. In cooperation with The Black Archives, an archive that records the history of Black Dutch people, she will research about Black women who dedicate themselves as writers, activists or artists to their ideals for a better world. By drawing attention in this way to the range of ideas of these women, Kensmil aims to open up an ignored part of history. About her contribution to this presentation she says: “.. the way in which Stanley Brouwn’s work stages the trust that everyone can determine his own position in the world, is strong in itself, but demands a follow-up. This exposition provides various openings for this.”

The architecture of the Pavilion, built by Rietveld, will play an important role in the design of this exhibition that will not include any architectural intervention. Curator Benno Tempel wants the Pavilion to function as a meeting point where people reflect on the present and the past. Tempel: “The three artists that will be presented have adopted an alternative approach towards identity and what binds us.(...) They embrace being in flux. This seems not only a fruitful attitude for artists but also an example for a new approach to the discussions that currently dominates our society.”

The jury selected the proposal of Benno Tempel from among seventy proposals that were submitted at the beginning of this year after an open call from the Mondriaan Fund. After a first selection round based on criteria such as the quality of the work, the layered nature of the plan, the demonstration of a relevant development in contemporary visual arts in The Netherlands, and the connection with the status of a state-level manifestation, a shortlist of plans remained; at the invitation of the Mondriaan Fund, these plans were further elaborated. The jury was impressed with the well-developed plans, the level of the presentations and the artistic wealth. All plans on the shortlist, each in their own way, were committed to relevant themes and offered alternatives to the status-quo. The shortlist will not be made public.

The jury of the Dutch entry of 2019 consists of: Carlos Amorales (artist and participant in the Dutch Pavilion in 2003 and solo-participant in the Mexican Pavilion in 2017), Zippora Elders (freelance curator and artistic director of Kunstfort Vijfhuizen), Xander Karskens (artistic director of the Cobra Museum of Modern Art in Amstelveen and curator of the Finnish Pavilion in 2017), Mirjam Westen (conservator contemporary art in Museum Arnhem and part of the jury in 2017) and Birgit Donker (director Mondriaan Fund) as chair.

The Mondriaan Fund, a publicly financed foundation for visual arts and cultural heritage, is responsible for the organization and financing of the Dutch entry to the Venice Biennale. The Dutch Pavilion functions as an important podium which embraces the occasion of national representation as an opportunity to reflect on the Netherlands’ (inter)national image vis-à-vis the current rapid transformations in Dutch society.

The 58th Venice Biennale will run from 11 May to 24 November 2019.