

Talk by Mark Kremer about 'Rock Garden' by Wineke Gartz

We are standing here amid streams of images: recordings of Amsterdam, the constant movement in the city, and the simultaneity of events. We are part of the artwork. It is called *Rock Garden* and was made by Wineke Gartz. She started thinking about and designing the work about a year ago, and in the last few days, she was here aligning all its elements. Crucially, the artist composed the artwork specifically for this place.

Rock Garden has many components: several video projections are screened onto the walls, some slides too, and a few of her drawings are hanging. On the floor are some objects, such as two bales that glow silver and gold in the changing light. This type of artwork has many names: multi-media installation, immersive environment, site-specific (or site-sensitive) installation. I call it an artwork-as-environment. I find the alignment of its components remarkable, how different images and 'worlds' hinge upon one another, the arrangement of different flows – things find each other.

This work is poetic (a bit wild too, somewhat psychedelic and trippy). Wineke Gartz's image combinations are 'incongruous', creating exciting effects. For example, the enlarged handwriting influences the way you look at the images of a building. In 1953 Octavio Paz wrote the poem *El río* (The River) when he was chargé d'affaires of the Mexican embassy in Geneva. This poem is probably a portrait of that city. Here are the first ten of the poem's 48 lines:

The restless city circles in my blood like a bee.
And the plane that traces a querulous moan in a long S, the trams
that break down on remote corners,
that tree weighted with affronts that someone shakes at midnight in
the plaza,
the noises that rise and shatter and those that fade away and
whisper a secret that wriggles in the ear,
they open the darkness, precipices of *a*'s and *o*'s, tunnels of taciturn
vowels,
galleries I run down blindfolded, the drowsy alphabet falls in the pit
like a river of ink,
and the city goes and comes and its stone body shatters as it arrives
at my temple,
all night, one by one, statue by statue, fountain by fountain, stone by
stone, the whole night long
its shards seek one another in my forehead, all night long the city
talks in its sleep through my mouth,
a gasping discourse, a stammering of waters and arguing stone, its
story.

Wineke Gartz's artwork shares similarities with Paz's poem. In both works, the city is 'rolled out' as a landscape. Images immerse us in a polyphony of impressions and experiences: scenes of daily life in Amsterdam alternate with exterior shots of De Nederlandse Bank, its park-like perimeter punctuated with a parade of rocks. Everything takes place around some kind of 'consciousness': there is no all determining 'I figure', but instead a very receptive receiver of sensations (compare with Lucebert): someone who stands in the eye of the storm.

The bank building has been opened up by the artist, as it were, and the surroundings flow in with full force. This artwork therefore enacts a gesture: it embodies a deed that seems to tell of the bank's near future when the gold supply will be removed; when the institute can assume an open character and have an exhibition space for the public.

Rock Garden is an artwork that exorcises this place. It throws desire 'into battle' – for vistas that appear nearby. The title refers to rock or Zen gardens, such as the Ryōan-ji (The Temple of the Dragon at Peace) in Kyoto. This garden consists of a bed of fine pebbles upon which rest fifteen sturdy rocks, arranged in such a way that one can only see fourteen from any one position. Zen tradition says that upon enlightenment, one is also able to see the fifteenth rock.

Wineke Gartz sees this artwork as a form for meditation: to face the swirling stream of your thoughts, to become the silence in the storm yourself. This is one of the challenges of her *Rock Garden*; another is seeing or experiencing the city as a landscape. When do we caress the rock, listen quietly to city noise, look carefully, and are touched by a cyclist waiting at the traffic light? Gartz intertwines restless cityscapes with rural scenes. A reed swaying in the wind reveals immeasurable grace. A string of dark smoke comes from a factory chimney, taking the form of a cloud nearby – the scene's beauty almost makes us overlook the pollution it depicts.

Three black bags on the ground. Iron bars and fencing stand against the wall. Are they symbols of threat, protection, or defence? Marianne Moore's strong characterisation of poetry also seems to apply to art: '[Art] is about imaginary gardens with real toads in them.' Wineke Gartz describes the imagery in *Rock Garden* as simple vignettes that can, however, arouse heartfelt attention as they concern life, things that are real, things we can love. In her remark and observation, we sense a utopian creed of a better world. Her upbringing in a family firmly rooted in the 1960s instilled her with that period's ideals, which she continues to embrace.

Around 1997, Wineke Gartz began making spatial, multi-media installations, often depicting an entire 'world'. Her work reminds me of artists such as Douglas Huebler, Fischli & Weiss, and Diana Thater – all outspoken analogue artists, in my opinion. Huebler, for example, once wanted to photograph all newborn babies around the world.

The journeys would have taken him everywhere, but he was specifically interested in contact, the encounter. This artistic ambition to embrace the world emanates an underground-like élan. The idea or design is as unrealisable as it is communicable.

By representing the city as a landscape, the artist creates opportunities for daydreaming. Thus, we can train another awareness and connect to images already inhabiting the subconscious. For example, here hangs a copied 'dream map' of the Chukchi people. 'Maps show the way and reduce the risk of getting lost. Here the paths run to the worlds of the dawn, the evening, and the darkness, through the pole star, the axis of the world, while the sun, moon, and stars all shine at once.' This is about the inner journey, the internal and spiritual compass, and specifically the experiences of a shaman.

We see light images and shadow images. Realities permeate one another, the artist merges two projections, and the reed sways above a rock. A vessel form (echoing the column in this space) – in fact, this form is generated using VJ software – functions as an incubator for changing realities. The vessel is steadily filled with new content: inside, different scenes always play. It is like the creation of a demiurge.

The low bright sun instils the urban imagery with a trippy, daydream-like quality. It reminds me of Photorealist paintings: the fronts of bars in New York painted by Richard Estes in the 1970s, where a glass door leads the eye inside to an array of shiny surfaces that generate an incredibly intense light. Those works vibrate with electricity. But here it is different. Wineke Gartz's images invite you on an inner passage – a mystical journey: one of introspection.

In turbulence is stillness – in the most unexpected places. Here hangs another drawing. It depicts a kindly man and is based on a photograph of a statue, somewhere in Ethiopia, honouring a great warrior who killed many enemies. It's as if the warrior is reborn. Perhaps what we experience here – and, en passant, in secret – is Wineke Gartz's motive and what she is aiming for, namely the process of change. Interaction is central to this work, how one thing affects the other; a symbolic image of how one person can touch another.

This talk was given at the art space of De Nederlandse Bank, 15 November 2018.