

KW W

Willem de Rooij

Whiteout

14 September –

17 December 17

Willem de Rooij

Whiteout

14 September – 17 December 17

Opening: 13 September 17, 7 pm

Willem de Rooij (born 1969 in Beverwijk, NL) investigates the production, contextualization and interpretation of images. His multifaceted practice includes photography, films, videos, sculpture, sound-recordings, and writing. Appropriated materials, such as found images, objects borrowed from art historical or ethnographic collections, or works by other artists play an important role. De Rooij's works take the form of installations or temporary groupings that reflect on the physical and contextual qualities of the space they occupy. Willem de Rooij has been Professor at the Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main since 2006. In 2015, he founded BPA // Berlin Program for Artists together with Angela Bulloch and Simon Denny, and since 2016 he is a Visiting Advisor at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam.

This fall, KW Institute for Contemporary Art presents *Whiteout*—a selection of de Rooij's production from the last twenty years. The exhibition connects recent work with seminal pieces made together with Jeroen de Rijke (1970–2006), with whom de Rooij collaborated from 1994 to 2006 under the name de Rijke/de Rooij.

Central to the selection of works that de Rooij installed at KW is the remote town Ilulissat, which is located 300 km north of the Arctic Circle in the Qaasuitsup municipality in western Greenland. Ilulissat (the Kalaallisut word for “icebergs”) borders the Ilulissat icefjord, one of the most productive glaciers in the northern hemisphere.

In 1997, Jeroen de Rijke and Willem de Rooij travelled to Greenland to produce the 16mm film *I'm Coming Home in Forty Days*, which depicts the circumnavigation of an iceberg in the bay of Ilulissat. The films of de Rijke/de Rooij center on the notion of “time.” Images are often shot from a fixed perspective and are pared down in number. Concentrating on



Willem de Rooij, *Ilulissat*, 2014, (production still)

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne/New York, Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York, Regen Projects, Los Angeles

culturally driven readings of phenomena and their affects and on formal parameters questioning the medium itself, these works allow for an immediate aesthetic experience. This performative investigation into light, space, time, scale, and movement is particularly evident in *I'm Coming Home in Forty Days*. The calm, slight pan across the landscape results in what at times appears to be a frozen image. When in the final minutes the focus shifts onto the deep blue surface of the water, a monochrome plane is revealed. Like all of de Rijke/de Rooij's films, *I'm Coming Home in Forty Days* is screened at fixed times in a dedicated room. Since the film does not loop, the absence of the image in between screenings becomes an integral element of the installation. Along with the projected image, the exhibition space itself is on display. This analytical approach to image production and consumption is representative for the work of de Rijke/de Rooij, in which the experience is defined by the presence of the body.

In 2014, Willem de Rooij returned to Ilulissat to record the howling of the thousands of sled dogs that inhabit the town. During his first visit in 1997, the artist was struck by the intense level of communication taking place between the dogs at night. In a collective dialogue, these daily "briefings" connect different communities of dogs over distance and time. Recordings of their voices form the twelve-speaker sound installation *Ilulissat* are presented in the main exhibition hall of KW. Similar to *I'm Coming Home in Forty Days*, the information in this work is reduced to a minimum, focusing the experience only on vital elements. Whereas *I'm Coming Home in Forty Days* concentrates on the image, *Ilulissat* is centered on sound. The two works each have a duration of fifteen minutes. They are installed so that the spectator can experience one installation at a time.

By presenting these two works together, de Rooij deliberately focuses on time, or more specifically on the presence of absence. In the seventeen-year gap between both productions, the iceberg depicted disappeared, and de Rooij's long-time collaborator Jeroen de Rijke passed away. In 2009, Greenland gained greater autonomy from Denmark, after centuries of colonial rule. The remote location of Ilulissat thus could be seen as a metaphor for withdrawal and contemplation but also as a mirror of the disintegration that is caused by global warming.

When *Ilulissat* was first installed at the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague, de Rooij included one of Piet Mondrian's studies of the lighthouse in Westkappelle in the southern Netherlands' province of Zeeland. Mondrian painted this motif in various stages of abstraction. Shortly after, the artist left the Netherlands for Paris and, in the final stages of his life, New York. In the Gemeentemuseum installation, Mondrian's painting thus provided a historical example



Piet Mondrian, *Vuurtoren bij Westkappelle*, 1909–1910, Courtesy Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, NL

of the relationship between abstraction, (be)longing, distance, and departure.

Whiteout presents three further works by de Rijke/de Rooij, all derived from *I'm Coming Home in Forty Days*. *Dead Seal* (1996–99) is a close-up portrait of a seal, moments after it was shot by a hunter. Its gruesomeness is overcome by its aesthetic representation. *I'm Coming Home in Forty Days* (2001) is a monochrome photograph. Originally a production still of the film, this image was used by de Rijke/de Rooij to represent the film in print media. The work *Blue Table* (2004) combines a number of reproductions of the same image from magazines and catalogues, each "incarnation" succinctly different in tone and grain. *Blue Table* thus exemplifies de Rijke/de Rooij's questions concerning the (still) representation of moving image and the acceleration of reproduction in contemporary image culture.

Presented alongside these works is a weaving made by de Rooij in 2012. *Blue to Blue* (2012) was hand-woven at Handweberei Henni Jaensch-Zeymer in Geltow. In the same way that the collective song of sled dogs unites individual voices, this weaving merges threads in ten different shades of blue into an unstable unity of colors. De Rooij's weavings appear differently from various angles, encouraging viewers to move around the work and to become

aware of their physical presence in the space.
Reminiscent of the movement of water, these surfaces seem to be in constant flux.

By presenting works that span decades, *Whiteout* addresses subjects related to climate change and geopolitical shifts as seen through a subtle personal lens. The reduction of representation enables the spectator to concentrate on its core substance.

KW Institute for Contemporary Art
KUNST-WERKE BERLIN e. V.
Auguststraße 69
10117 Berlin
Tel. +49 30 243459-0
info@kw-berlin.de
kw-berlin.de

Opening Hours

Wednesday–Monday 11 am–7 pm
Thursday 11 am–9 pm
Closed on Tuesday

Admission

8 €, reduced 6 €
Annual Ticket – KW Lover* 50 €, reduced 35 €
Combined Day Ticket KW / me Collectors Room Berlin
10 €, reduced 8 €
Admission free on Thursday evening from 6–9 pm

Guided Tours

KW offers free guided tours through the exhibitions during regular opening hours. For further information on tours for large groups (over 10 people), please contact Katja Zeidler at kaz@kw-berlin.de or +49 30 243459-41.

Colophon

Curator: Krist Gruijthuisen
Assistant Curator and Project Management:
Maurin Dietrich
Head of Production: Claire Spilker
Technical Management: Wilken Schade
Head of Installation, Media Technology: Markus Krieger
Installation Team: Kartenrecht
Interns: Sabrina Herrmann, Antonio Pereira Rodriguez
Texts and Editing: Maurin Dietrich, Krist Gruijthuisen,
Willem de Rooij, Katja Zeidler

© KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin.
All rights reserved

Senate Department
for Culture and Europe

be  Berlin



Königreich der Niederlande

M
mondriaan
fund

Willem de Rooij and Lucy Skaer is funded by the Senate Department for Culture and Europe, Berlin. The exhibition by Willem de Rooij is kindly supported by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Berlin and the Mondriaan Fund.

KW Institute for Contemporary Art is institutionally supported by the Senate Department for Culture and Europe.