
rrier Bag of Conversations
Explorelab - TU Delft
2025-2026
OUSE OF
IE MUSES
Linda Del Rosso
Sohn, Suzana Milinovic, Rufus Van den Ban

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Linda Del Rosso

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Linda Del Rosso

Tutors: Heidi Sohn, Suzana Milinovic, Rufus Van den Ban

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for our wholesome conversations.

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Conversation with artist Raziel Perin

About Raziel

"I am a Dominican-Italian artist whose practice encompasses drawing, installation and performance. My interests in the decolonial struggle, Afro-Caribbean identity and spirituality have been informed by my bi-racial and bi-cultural identity and are the result of growing up in Italy, where the social markings of racial and cultural difference were reinforced within the Italian educational institutions.
Through my artistic expression, I confront the mnemonic, philosophical, and cultural void inherited from a history marked by violence, colonization, and marginalization. My works serve as bridges to the fragmented roots that yearn for regeneration. To achieve this, I am driven to craft a new personal language - a language of self-affirmation, anti-colonial resistance, and transformation - by delving deep into introspection and engaging with the rich tapestry of the world around me. My artistic research is a constant search for the essential elements that comprise such a vocabulary and that define new reparative aesthetics."

[ENGLISH VERSION]

"Yes, you and I have different experiences, different pasts, But I see this as an alliance, so that we can make a difference together."

Linda: As you deal with topics of decoloniality in your art what is your relationship with the Western museum?

Raziel: Museums, in general, are not suitable spaces for a certain kind of artistic potential, and artworks are flattened in this sterile context. My works are connected to my African cultural heritage. They are not meant to be placed in a showcase but need to be activated and used within a community.
Art, for me, is something in continuous transition and transformation. The European museum, on the other hand, is focused on preservation. There are many examples of ancient African art that have been covered with toxic substances for conservation, such as ritual masks. This completely erases their functionality, intention, and essence. And even if they are returned to their original communities, they are now toxic and harmful to health.
At this point, I think that art museums are mostly frequented by people from the

field and artists, who see them as an opportunity for access, reputation, or career advancement. There are schools, but few private ones—art is a niche.

Linda: So what is the main drive for you to make art?

Raziel: I think that the world of art is getting very corrupted, it has become all about competition and money. So I realized that for me the biggest value of my art is the relationship with my audience. I believe that people go to art when they need something, for their own personal discovery and healing. So it is all about the relationship between the artist and the audience. They are both in a vulnerable position, and they both need to be protected [by the curator or the intermediary institution]. There should be a direct mediation that allows the viewer to fully experience the artwork [the artwork as a relational object].

Linda: What is for you, then, the role of the curator?

Raziel: I believe the curator plays a huge role. They are the mediator between the museum as an institution, bureaucracy, and the artist. For example, in one case, the museum was too lazy and didn't want to allow me to use water, and the curator stepped in. A good curator is someone who shields you from having to interact with the museum's authority.

Linda: What languages do you use in your art?

Raziel: I make art to respond to certain people's questions, to assemble a language that is not meant for everyone—the language of my ancestors. I use symbols of conversation and signs whose meaning I do not yet fully understand, linked to Caribbean spirituality and voodoo. Some people recognize them, contact me, and we open a conversation about what these symbols mean to them. For me, art is about creating dialogue between communities, serving the community with these objects. In a traditional museum, nothing gets activated. But if I place my sculptures in a Candomblé community garden, even though the language is different, it creates an exchange and a conversation.

Linda: What is the role of your collective drawing workshops?

Raziel: Aside from being a way to support myself financially, in my drawing workshops, my goal is to transmit art and creativity. Through storytelling and role-playing, people who are initially hesitant start to get involved, and at a certain point, they begin to create something of their own.
A good teacher is someone who knows how to serve, moderate, and guide, while it is the student who does everything. It's not about someone making you learn, but about facilitating your process of growing on your own.
I have realized that this project has a great social impact, promoting well-being and self-therapy. I see it as a community service, a dialogue. In these courses, I am not the one making art. The students discover that by working with their own bodies, unexpected and interesting

things emerge—things they didn't know before.

Linda: How was your experience moving from Italy to the Netherlands?

Raziel: I lost many friends who didn't understand my journey, and even my family doesn't support my choice. I asked them that if they cannot support me, the best thing they can do is say nothing.
I believe that as human beings, we are in continuous transformation, and I couldn't remain stuck like others in Italy. I came here in search of myself. Many languages and techniques originating from Africa have been forgotten and never had the chance to develop.

[ORIGINAL – ITALIAN VERSION]

"Si, io e te abbiamo esperienze e passati diversi.
Però io vedo la nostra come un'alleanza, per ridefinire e trovare un nuovo linguaggio."

Linda: Cosa ne pensi dell'attuale processo di decolonizzazione del museo d'arte?

Raziel: In questo processo, penso che il curatore abbia un grandissimo ruolo. E' lui il mediatore tra il museo come istituzione, la burocrazia e l'artista. Ad esempio, in un caso il museo era troppo pigro e non voleva permettermi di usare l'acqua, e il curatore è intervenuto. Un buon curatore è quello che ti evita di dover interagire con l'autorità del museo.
I musei, in generale, non sono spazi adatti per un certo tipo di potenzialità artistica, e l'opera d'arte viene appiattita da questo contesto sterile. I miei lavori sono legati alla mia eredità culturale africana. Non sono realizzati per essere messi in vetrina, ma devono essere attivati e usati all'interno di una comunità.
L'arte, per me, è qualcosa in continua transizione e mutamento. Il museo europeo, invece, è focalizzato sulla conservazione. Ci sono moltissimi esempi di arte africana antica che sono stati ricoperti di sostanze tossiche per la loro conservazione, come le maschere rituali. In questo modo la loro funzionalità, l'intenzione, l'essenza vengono completamente cancellate. E anche se vengono restituite alla comunità di origine, ormai sono tossiche e pericolose per la salute.
Ormai penso che nei musei d'arte ci siano soprattutto persone del settore e artisti, che li vedono come un'opportunità di accesso, per la reputazione o la carriera. Ci sono scuole, ma pochi privati, l'arte è una nicchia.

Linda: Qual è la motivazione principale che ti spinge a fare arte?

Raziel: Penso che il mondo dell'arte stia diventando molto corrotto, tutto è diventato legato alla competizione e al denaro. Così ho capito che per me il valore più grande della mia arte è il rapporto con il mio pubblico. Credo che le persone vadano a guardare l'arte quando hanno bisogno di qualcosa, per la loro scoperta personale e la loro guarigione. Quindi si tratta soprattutto della relazione tra l'artista e il pubblico. Entrambi sono in posizioni vulnerabili e hanno bisogno di essere protetti [dal curatore o dall'istituzione intermedia]. Dovreb-

be esserci una mediazione diretta, che permetta allo spettatore di sperimentare pienamente l'opera d'arte [l'opera d'arte come oggetto relazionale].

Linda: Quale linguaggi usi nella tua arte?

Raziel: Io faccio arte per rispondere alle domande di alcune persone, per assemblare un linguaggio che non è fatto per tutti, la lingua dei miei antenati. Uso simboli di conversazione e segni ai quali non so ancora dare un significato, legati alla spiritualità caraibica e al vudù. Alcune persone li riconoscono, mi contattano e apriamo una conversazione su ciò che questi simboli significano per loro.
Per me l'arte è mettere in dialogo alcune comunità, servire la comunità con questi oggetti. Nel museo tradizionale, invece, non si attiva nulla. Se invece metto le mie sculture in un giardino della comunità Candomblé, anche se il linguaggio è diverso, si crea un confronto e una conversazione.

Linda: Qual è il ruolo dei tuoi workshop collettivi di disegno?

Raziel: A parte essere un modo per supportarmi finanziariamente, nei miei workshop di disegno il mio intento è trasmettere l'arte e la creatività. Tramite il racconto di storie e giochi di ruolo, le persone che inizialmente non si fidano iniziano a coinvolgersi e, a un certo punto, iniziano a creare qualcosa di loro.
Un bravo insegnante è colui che sa servire, moderare, accompagnare, mentre è l'allievo che fa tutto. Non è qualcuno che ti fa imparare, ma agevola il tuo processo di crescita.

Ho realizzato che questo progetto ha un grande impatto sociale, di benessere e auto-terapia. Lo vedo come un servizio per la comunità, un dialogo. In questi corsi, chi fa arte non sono io. Gli allievi scoprono che lavorando con il proprio corpo emergono cose interessanti che prima non conoscevano.

Linda: Com'è stata la tua esperienza di trasferirti in Olanda dall'Italia?

Raziel: Ho perso molti amici che non capivano il mio percorso e anche la mia famiglia non condivide la mia scelta. Ho chiesto loro che, se non possono supportarmi, la cosa migliore è non dire niente.
Penso che, come esseri umani, siamo in trasformazione continua, e non potevo rimanere bloccato come altri in Italia.
Sono venuto qui alla ricerca di me stesso.
Molti linguaggi e tecniche provenienti dall'Africa sono stati dimenticati e non hanno potuto svilupparsi.

Conversation with feminist architect Fran Bradshaw

About Fran

Fran Bradshaw studied architecture and trained as a bricklayer in the UK. In 1980, she was a founding member of Matrix, the feminist design collective, and co-authored Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment (1984, reprinted 2022).Since 1995, Fran has been a partner at Anne Thorne Architects, where she has focused on how women's lives shape and are shaped by buildings and cities. Her work includes participatory design, regeneration, community projects, and low-energy, ecological building design, including adhering to the Passivhaus standard.
Fran has contributed to advancing sustainable design and construction through practice-based research, lectures, articles, and seminars. She has been a Trustee of the Association for Environment Conscious Building since 2012.

Linda: Dear Fran, I contacted you regarding my graduation thesis in architecture at Delft. I decided to approach it from a feminist perspective because I believe that, even though your generation has already made significant strides in addressing patriarchy in architecture and society, there is still much work to be done. The more I dive into it, the more I realize that feminism is not just about men and women, but encompasses concepts like solidarity, anti-colonial approaches, and ecology, all of which are incredibly important.
Starting with these ideas of solidarity and care, I wanted to have a conversation with you about how architecture can embrace such concepts, with a particular focus on museums and community-building architecture. The reason I chose to focus on museums is that I believe cultural institutions, like schools and museums, have the potential to transform how people perceive certain topics. Despite being controversial entities of power, if we reimagine them, they can change the way people engage with these issues.

Fran: Yes, it was very nice when we met at the Van Eesteren Museum, because it really felt like a place that was trying to do that.

Linda: Definitely. I wanted to ask you about your feminist practice and what the most challenging aspects are of putting these concepts into practice. Theorizing is easier, but applying them in practice is a different story.

Fran: It's really coincidental because yesterday, Anne and I were talking to Ruth, who used to work with us and is now writing a little book about Anne Thorne Architects. It was fascinating to hear her perspective. She's in her 40s, so she belongs to the generation between ours and yours. She was reflecting on the weight of our practice and, in particular, the way we worked in a more sharing, cooperative manner. She said it had a big impact on the atmosphere in the office and the way the work was done.
We also talked about how solidarity is often formed by the fact that the world outside can be quite hostile. That sense of support among us became crucial.
One of the fundamental principles she mentioned was that we always made sure two people attended every meeting, not just one. It wasn't only about supporting each other but also about listening better. If you're running a meeting and taking notes at the same time, it's impossible to catch everything people are saying.
She also talked about how we approached consulting with people—not just expecting everyone to come to a formal meeting but instead finding out how they preferred to engage with us. That meant going to their homes, holding meetings at different times of the day, and providing tools to help them understand the process. I think this idea is particularly relevant to museums. One of the exercises we used to do was getting a smaller group to measure and draw the room they were in. This helped them understand architectural plans, which are often just handed to people with the expectation that they'll immediately grasp them. Women in particular tend to feel less confident in those situations, so they often don't speak up. But even just a few hours of working on understanding drawings made people much more confident to contribute.
Ultimately, these are fundamental principles of care. I was thinking about this in relation to the state of the world—the hostility of Trump, the crisis, Palestine—how much our politics should come down to caring for each other, truly listening, and giving people time. I completely agree with you that feminism is about that. It's not just about enabling women to become architects, though that's important too.
In relation to museums, it's particularly interesting because museums tend to be either intimidating cultural institutions or places that present something "special" made by so-called special people, reinforcing hierarchies. Historically, that "specialness" has always been about kings, emperors, and men. So, museums are a real crunch point for these ideas.
Recently, I went to a fascinating exhibition at the British Museum called What Have We Here? It featured Hew Locke, an artist who had been invited to work with people over three years. His work pulled out a lot of history around slavery, but he also created these wonderful figures called The Watchers—figures that seemed to observe and reflect on what it means to see. His way of engaging with

anti-colonial critique in a very creative way was so thought-provoking.

Linda: It's definitely interesting. I've also been moving away from the idea of designing a museum in the traditional sense. I started with a critique of the conventional museum model and realized that there are already so many museums in the city. So I began thinking: what if I proposed an alternative? A space that isn't a museum in the usual sense, where people go to look at art as passive spectators, but rather a place where art is collectively produced?
I've also been questioning the definition of art itself. For example, cooking together could be considered a form of art. But yes, what you're saying is very interesting. I find it a bit difficult, though, because I'm trying to approach this as you did with your collective designs.
I recently read a quote by Piet Oudolf, the landscape architect, where he says that architecture is at its best the moment it is completed—when it's brand new. In contrast, landscape design only truly begins when the designer has finished their work. But I want to challenge that idea. I believe architecture can also evolve over time, shaped by the people who inhabit and engage with it.

Fran: I completely agree. Buildings absorb the experiences of the people who live in them, don't they? There's a beautiful Japanese tradition that embraces the passage of time—how cracks and signs of aging can actually enhance an object's beauty. I think that's a much better way of looking at buildings: they gain meaning through the lives of the people who inhabit them.

Linda: And how do you translate that into architecture? Because, in the end, you still need to design a building—you have to create a structure that provides a foundation for these activities to take place.

Fran: I can talk about designing community buildings, which we've been involved in quite a lot. No matter how you start—by responding to what people think they need—it will always change. Buildings change. People's needs change. This is true for houses, workplaces, and all kinds of spaces. So, having the mindset that things will evolve over time is really important.

Linda: Do you have an example of a project where you've seen this kind of evolution?

Fran: Even just my own family house, actually. Needs change over time—teenagers, for example, want a room where they can shut the door and have good sound insulation, while young children want to be near the kitchen, where they can be part of everything. I remember when we were building our house in London, I lived in a temporary flat where the kitchen was separate from the living room. At first, I thought it would be great—no cooking mess on display, no reminders about the washing up. But once I actually lived there, I realized we spent all our time in the kitchen. The living room felt redundant because, when you have young children, you want to be together in one big space where you can

see everyone.
Then, when we built the house I'm in now, it was just me and my partner, so we designed a simple, open space with a bedroom upstairs. But then the grandchildren came along, and suddenly I thought "Oh no, I should have planned for more sound-insulated spaces!" So we ended up building a little room outside in the garden where older family members could go for quiet. That's a small-scale example, but in community spaces, the same principles apply. In the 1970s, Dutch architect Herman Hertzberger did a lot of work on flexible design, which was really interesting. But in reality, people don't move parts of a building around as much as architects might imagine. Instead, they adapt spaces in different ways over time.
One example that comes to mind is a project in Chile—a self-built housing initiative where families were given a small core structure with space to expand as their needs grew. That kind of planned flexibility can be really powerful.
And then, of course, there's the "Tate Modern" in London. It was originally a power station—when it was built, no one could have imagined it would become an art museum. But now, it's one of the most dynamic and successful museums in the country. That just shows you can't always predict how a building will be used in the future.

Linda: Repurposing buildings is a big and important topic now, especially when it comes to artist spaces. There aren't many spaces dedicated to artists in the city, and when they do exist, they're often on the outskirts or in old industrial buildings. But I struggle with the fact that these spaces can sometimes lack diversity. Even if there is diversity, it's often limited to the specific community living around the area—if they even feel welcomed. Otherwise, it can become just another isolated artistic bubble.
From your experience, how did you ensure that your projects included a diverse mix of people rather than just a closed creative circle?

Fran: The projects we worked on were mostly funded by local authorities or housing associations, so the client groups were already somewhat established. But if I think about community-led projects, one that stands out is a building in a park where the community group was very skilled at involving different local communities. The area was quite diverse, and they actively reached out to those around them.
For part of the project, we built a straw-bale structure, and that hands-on process became a way for people from different backgrounds to come together. The act of building something collectively helped foster relationships and a sense of ownership over the space. And because people felt that connection, the building was never vandalized, even though it's in a fairly tough part of London. I think it really comes down to working closely with the community and ensuring they feel genuinely included.

Linda: That's really interesting to me. I haven't yet decided on a specific location for my project, but this gives me a good starting point to think about how I want to approach it.

Fran: The idea of museums without buildings is really fascinating, isn't it? It raises the question of how much physical space is actually needed.
I remember attending a big demonstration years ago. Instead of ending in a park, as protests often do, it concluded in a large concert hall on the South Bank. Because of that, everyone could hear the speeches clearly, and a wheelchair user was able to get onto the stage easily—something I had never seen happen at a demonstration before. It made me realize how important buildings are in shaping public participation. The way spaces are designed directly affects accessibility and inclusion.
And then there's the issue of power structures in space. There's a statistic—I don't know if it's still accurate—that at any given moment, 80% of the people in public spaces are men. Women are still largely confined indoors, and that's tied to deeper societal structures. It makes you think about who feels entitled to occupy space and how architecture influences that.

Linda: That's so true. When working with different communities in participatory projects, how do you navigate the feeling of being an outsider? Personally, as a white woman, I used to feel hesitant about addressing topics like colonialism and racism because I thought, Who am I to speak on this? I don't know enough. But now I've come to realize that I need to "stay with the Trouble": these conversations are necessary and that collaboration is key. Have you ever experienced that sense of uncertainty when working with communities different from your own?

Fran: Definitely. As a team, we were predominantly white, and we were aware of that. At Matrix and Anne Thorne Architects, we had a lot of discussions—sometimes difficult ones—about that reality.It was not only about race: as architects, we often come into projects with a certain level of privilege—education, professional status, middle-class backgrounds—so we're already in a more entitled position than the communities we work with. That's why listening is so important. It's about recognizing people as experts in their own lived environments and making sure they feel heard.
Sometimes architects can be very scared of these collaborative meetings and I've seen situations where architects organize large public meetings, and they don't go well—people get frustrated, there's shouting, and it can feel unproductive. But that anger often comes from a real place. People have valid reasons to be upset. The key is to set up discussions in a way that allows for meaningful engagement. The size of the room, whether there's tea or coffee, the level of comfort—these small details can make a huge difference in how people participate and share their experiences.

Linda: That's such a beautiful approach. I haven't started engaging with people yet because I still don't know where my project will be based, but I've been interviewing artists who work with these themes. Those conversations have been incredibly valuable because they bring out perspectives I might not get just from speaking with designers.

Fran: That's great. For your project, I

think grounding it in reality is crucial. Rather than speculating about what people might say, try to connect with real communities and contribute to an ongoing process that's genuinely useful to them. It's important that when people share their time and insights, it leads to something meaningful rather than just another conversation that goes nowhere. By the way, is the Van Eesteren Museum where we met interested in your project? You could propose a small roundtable discussion—it could be a great way to get input and spark ideas.

Linda: That's a really good idea. Sometimes we take our resources for granted and don't think about how we could use them more effectively. I'll definitely reach out to them.

Fran: Yes! And you could even turn it into a game or an exercise to engage people.

Linda: That sounds great. Thank you so much for this conversation. It's been incredibly insightful. I still have all my notes from your lecture, so I didn't want to repeat too much, but I'll definitely be using all of this for my thesis.
Fran: I'm happy to talk again as your project develops. How long is it running for?

Linda: A year in total—six months of research and six months of design.

Fran: Then let's talk again when you move into the design phase. I think your project has so much potential, and I'd love to see where it goes.

Linda: That would be amazing. Thank you!

Conversation with artist Emma Steenma

About Emma

Emma Steensma is a contemporary Dutch artist known for her thought-provoking explorations of human emotion and experience. Trained as a painter, Steensma has expanded her practice to include sculpture and installation, allowing her to address complex themes through a variety of media.
In May 2023, Steensma had her first solo exhibition in New York City, entitled 'Dream Bleeds', featuring 19 prints and one sculpture reflecting her solo travels throughout the Northwest. The works delved into personal experiences of dreams, sleep paralysis and the unsettling presence of monsters, inviting viewers on a visually stunning and emotionally charged journey of self-discovery. Steensma's Giants series explores the suffocating dimension of care. After returning to the Netherlands, she felt trapped, a feeling she expressed in this series by depicting figures with disproportionately large hands and feet. These exaggerated features symbolise the overwhelming nature of care, highlighting how caring can become suffocating. Through 'Giants', Steensma invites viewers to reflect on the complexities of caregiving, highlighting its potential to both support and suffocate individuals.

[During our chat, Emma is making a collage on her desk. She shows it to me during our online conversation. It's a view of the front of a car from the back seat.]

Linda: How do you like to exhibit and how do you like people to see your art?

Emma: I really like to make art that speaks to people immediately, and even though I have a lot of thoughts behind it, I don't like to present it with a lot of words, because then people think they need to be scientists to be able to look at my art. However, you should know that I still need to improve my writing and presentation skills in order to promote my art, even though I do not like to work in this way. I create my creatures, my sculptures, and I want people to experience them subjectively, as they are.

Linda: Why did you choose the mediums of drawing and sculpture?

Emma: For me, drawing is the manifestation of how I experience the outside world, while sculpture is what happens inside me.

Linda: That is such a beautiful way of explaining it.

Emma: Yeah, I still don't like to talk too much about my art.

Linda: I can see that you are at home now, do you usually work there or do you have a studio?

Emma: I have a studio in Amsterdam Noord but I am thinking of moving because there are so many things wrong with the building and I end up spending a lot of time at home because it is a very hostile place.
The company is called Urban Resort and they have different artist studio buildings around Amsterdam.

Linda: What don't you like about it?

Emma: It is very separate and you have a staircase to get to a corridor to your studio that you share with only six people. There are other buildings around you, but you never get to meet other people. I only have contact with two of my neighbours, and the others are workshops, like ceramics workshops for housewives going through a mid-life crisis. I'm sorry, that sounds mean, but it's not a very motivating environment to be together and share with other artists and feel inspired. It is also quite far away, as I have to cycle all the way through an empty industrial area with no supermarket or life, and then cross the longest and windiest bridge in Amsterdam. And yes, of course I would like to have a bigger studio, but that would be too expensive.

Linda: Is it an old repurposed building?

Emma: No, it is a new building, which is crazy because it was built for creatives, but they did a really bad job. They wanted to regenerate the area but it's so in the middle of nowhere and it really doesn't feel natural, it doesn't flow, it feels very forced. They also advertised it as being close to the green, which is not true. You can see the green from the studio, but you can't get into the park because it's full of fences.

Linda: Can you imagine sharing a space with others?

Emma: Yeah, it would be great to have my own private studio, but also to have a space to store the artwork that maybe is shared with other like-minded people, like a big hall to let your work rest. Because, you know, I think artworks get really sad when they are abandoned and all alone. They would rather be happy to have some company at night or when I am not there.

Linda: Do you have a nice example of a studio you would like to work in?

Emma: The NDSM studio for example. I think it is a great example, but it is so hard to apply for a studio in Amsterdam!

Linda: What do you think of museums and exhibition spaces?

Emma: I love museums. I go there a lot. I like the Rijksmuseum very much because it is not a white box, but you can feel the atmosphere of the place and the art. When it comes to exhibiting my art, it is always very difficult because I do not like to deal with people who only want to

make money out of my art. I'm at a point in my life where I'm asking myself if I really want to make a living out of it and be part of that. I don't think this money-making system suits me and I try not to be dependent on it. Because I make art for myself, and I really like to share it with others, but it loses a lot when it becomes just about money. Art and the financial system are two completely different things.
Art is about the soul and expression and feeling better. Marketing people don't really understand that and make it very difficult to deal with.

Linda: How would you like your work to be exhibited, like the "Giants"?

Emma: The message I want to convey with the Giants is my experience of coming back to the Netherlands and feeling this suffocating environment and too much care. These creatures have too big hands and feet to express this feeling.
I think the sculptures are already quite strong, I do not believe in this forced interaction, just looking at them and sharing them with others is enough.

Conversation with fashion designer Quiana Cronie

About Quiana

Quiana Cronie is a Dutch-Aruban artist and designer renowned for her dedication to preserving and celebrating Aruba's cultural heritage through sustainable fashion and storytelling. Her work emphasizes reviving forgotten narratives, particularly those of fishermen and farmers, by transforming these tales into upcycled fashion pieces.
In her recent collection, Cronie combines durable fashion with visual storytelling, reflecting her commitment to ensuring Aruba's traditions thrive for future generations. She has also undertaken projects where she sewed traditional Aruban clothing using discarded fabrics, such as bed sheets and tablecloths, highlighting her innovative approach to sustainability. Through her art and design, Quiana Cronie continues to bridge the gap between traditional Aruban culture and contemporary fashion, ensuring that the island's rich heritage remains vibrant and relevant.

Linda: I thought of you because of your work—especially your fashion design project with the traditional Aruban clothing. It was such a beautiful project, and I found it very relevant to my research. I'm really interested in craftsmanship and materials, not just as physical resources, but in their cultural connections and meanings.
So, I wanted to ask you: How do you see your work being exhibited? Do you think museums are capable of expressing your methods, or would you prefer a different type of space for exhibition?

Quiana: Yeah, that's a really interesting question. So, when I was graduating, I went back to Aruba for research and came across the traditional clothing. But I was already questioning it—just like our language, Papiamento, which has been heavily influenced by the colonization of the island.
Aruba has been colonized five times. The Indigenous people came from Venezuela first, then the Spanish arrived, followed by the French, the British, and finally the Dutch. Even our trade relations with Cuba influenced our language. It's a mix of five different influences.
I realized that clothing is similar. Our traditional workwear, for example, has elements of British workwear, but it was

adapted by locals. Fishermen and farmers, who didn't have much money, made their clothing from flour sacks imported from Venezuela. In my project, I brought that tradition into a modern context by using tablecloths from the hotel industry—the biggest economic sector in Aruba today.
Tourism is our main source of income, but it comes with a lot of issues. Right now, there are protests on the island because the government is selling protected lands to developers. Hotels are placing sunbeds and palapas on the beaches, effectively privatizing spaces that should be public. Even though, by law, beaches should be free for everyone, this is a new form of colonization.
For decades, land has been claimed by outsiders, and locals have always come second. My work highlights these issues through visuals, photography, and video. It leans towards activism, which is a new step for me, but it feels important.

Linda: That's so powerful. Have you spoken to locals—like people who used to wear this type of clothing—or to people in the hotel industry?

Quiana: The fishermen and farmers who wore this clothing lived in the 1800s and early 1900s, but some older generations still remember it. I also talked to activists on the island because I wanted to take a more political approach. They told me that my work already functions as a form of activism—by reclaiming waste materials and bringing these hidden histories back into public discussion.
But I struggle with funding. The Aruba Tourism Authority is one of the biggest funders of projects on the island, yet they are also the ones pushing the expansion of hotels. Their funding requires projects to be tied to tourism, with little regard for preserving land or Indigenous histories. A lot of unstudied Indigenous land is being sold off, and as more of it is privatized, we risk losing our own cultural ownership. Wealthy foreigners are buying out properties and capitalizing on tourism, while all-inclusive resorts do nothing for the local community.

Linda: That connects a lot to my concerns about museums. If you could choose any space to exhibit your work, what would it look like?

Quiana: I've never deeply considered museums as a space for my work, but I do see a conflict, not just in museums but also in galleries. There's always tension between being independent and dealing with commissions.
Ideally, I'd want an inclusive, free space—maybe something in a public area or integrated into the community. I wouldn't want it to be locked inside an institution where only certain people feel welcome.

Linda: I remember seeing your work at MAMA on Witte de Withstraat—the Otham. I really liked how that exhibition was curated, with other works that also focused on Aruba and the hotel industry. Did that exhibition feel like the right approach?

Quiana: Yes! That was curated by Caithlin Courtney Chong and she did an incredible job. She transformed the space

in a way that connected all the works and made the theme clear. She also created a reflection area with recommended books, and the space was really open and welcoming to everyone. I can send you her number. She might have some insights for your research as well.

Linda: That would be really helpful! I also loved the exhibition, but you never know how the artists themselves feel about it. Did you already know the other artists you exhibited with?

Quiana: I knew Nigel—he's an activist I look up to, and one of my photo shoots was inspired by his work on the hotel crisis. The other artist, I knew from Instagram, but we had never met in person before. Now, we've become good friends. You should watch this documentary I saw about Marcella. He's a fashion designer—one of those iconic ones—but he never wanted to be famous. He really tried to avoid it, and it was just before the internet era. I have the documentary; I can send it to you. He was very much against the mainstream fashion world, yet he was making fashion. When planning his fashion shows, he didn't want to hold them in places like the Louvre or other typical venues. Instead, he would organize exhibitions in neighborhoods where he wouldn't invite any magazines or press—just the local community. He wanted them to be part of the show. The press got really angry about it, but that was the whole point: it wasn't about fame; it was about including the neighborhood and the community.

Linda: That's really interesting. When you made your pieces, did you work in the Netherlands, or did you work in Aruba?

Quiana: I went back last year for three months to do research. I interviewed locals and visited museums. Each piece I created was based on a specific story. Then I returned to the Netherlands, but I went back again later for the photo shoots and videos.

Linda: And what kind of stories did you focus on?

Quiana: Mainly stories related to workwear—clothing worn by fishermen and farmers. One of them was about Nigel, an activist, and the ongoing problems on the island. The clothing pieces are all made from tablecloths, and one specific set has a print of the island's map.
Your project sounds really interesting. So now, are you questioning whether you want to present your work in a museum or somewhere else?

Linda: Yeah, I think I'm leaning more toward creating an artistic commons. Not just a community space, but a place with an exhibition area, studios, and maybe artist residencies. I'm still figuring out exactly what functions it should have. I really liked what you said about including neighborhoods more, because I think that's important. I don't want it to be just another museum where people passively look at art. I want something interactive, where people feel truly welcome.

Quiana: That makes a lot of sense. What does decolonization mean to you?

Linda: For me, I started looking at it from a feminist perspective. At first, I thought feminism was just about gender equality, but I realized it's so much more than that. It's about care, about fighting for social issues. Decolonization is still a bit outside my comfort zone, which is why I appreciate talking to you and other artists working from an anti-colonial perspective. I want to understand the best way to approach it because I don't know everything myself. To me, decolonization means amplifying the voices that have been ignored in history and trying to make a difference now. That's also why I started questioning whether a museum is the right place for my work. Museums are problematic institutions—just the way things are displayed is very Eurocentric. The best approach is to give space to people directly involved in these issues, whether they're artists or curators, and let them take the lead. But what about architecture? It's such a white, male-dominated field. Even in school, we never talk about these issues. That's why I wanted to bring it up—if other disciplines are addressing decolonization, then architecture needs to as well.

Quiana: That's really important. I think there's this stereotype that museums have to be white walls and podiums, but that's just a constructed idea. It could be interesting to create an exhibition that directly asks: "What is decolonization?" A space where visitors can reflect, discuss, and interact.

Linda: Oh, that's a great idea.

Quiana: Yeah, and it could cover so many topics. It could be about literal colonial history, but also about the decolonization of feminism or even clothing. Indigenous people were forced to wear the colonizers' clothing. Their traditional dress was stripped away, along with their culture and beliefs, and they were forced to convert to Christianity. It could also be about everyday objects—like the top hats British working men had to wear, or jeans, or other garments with colonial histories. There could be a space for reflection, where people can engage with these histories in a meaningful way.

Linda: Wow, I love that idea. And what I really appreciate about your work is that it's not just about the past—it also addresses the present. Some people still believe that colonialism is over and that the problems have been solved, which is completely untrue. Your work is so powerful because it highlights both the past and the present realities of colonialism. Some people think colonialism ended and everything is fine now, but they don't realize there's still so much injustice happening today. And that's why I think an exhibition exploring what decolonization really means would be so valuable—because people take the term for granted, but they might not fully understand it.

Quiana: Yeah, for me, when starting a project, it always helps to have certain questions, make a list of keywords, and then explore and experiment with ideas. For example, this could be another inspiring story for an exhibition. My great-grandmother on my dad's side was Indigenous, Synamese. She was taken away from the jungle where she was

living her Indigenous life. The Christians came, took her away, and forced her to learn Christianity. They even gave her a European name—Dina Indian. It's so strange because even the word 'Indian' itself is a colonized term. It originally just meant someone from India, but when European explorers arrived in the Americas, they mistakenly thought they had reached India and started calling Indigenous people 'Indians.' That word alone could be an interesting element to explore in an exhibition.

Linda: That's such a strong story. Thank you for sharing it with me. And I'd like to ask you one last question. Where do you usually work? Do you have a dedicated atelier, or is it a shared space?

Quiana: I usually work from an extra room in my house—it's my workspace, where I make my alga and create. But ideally, I like to meet up with creative friends and work in a café when possible.

Linda: Wow, that's really nice. Having your own space must be great.

Quiana: Yeah, I was lucky to find an extra space. Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to afford a separate studio.

Linda: Do you enjoy working so close to where you live?

Quiana: Some days, it's amazing. On other days, I need feedback from people or a change of environment, so I go to a café to focus. At home, it's easy to get distracted—take a nap, do laundry, or just procrastinate.

Linda: Yeah, I get that. But it's cool. I also like the idea of going into the city to meet someone, but then returning to your own space.

Quiana: Exactly. And it's important to have these kinds of conversations, to bounce off ideas, question things, or just talk. It really helps.

Linda: Definitely. I've gotten so many insights from our conversation. I'll use them.

Quiana: I'm happy to help! I'll ask my friend to share her contact, and if I think of any questions that might help your process, I'll send them your way.

Linda: Thank you!

Conversation with artist Clara Aramburo

About Clara

Clara Aramburo is a contemporary Mexican artist, based in Amsterdam, whose work explores the intersection of identity, memory, and place. She engages with a variety of media, including installation, sculpture, performance, and video. Aramburo often draws on her own personal history and the cultural context of Mexico, particularly its rich traditions and complex social and political issues. Her practice is deeply influenced by the idea of reinterpreting cultural narratives, questioning the materiality of everyday objects, and exploring how personal and collective histories are shaped and transformed. Aramburo's works reflect a nuanced understanding of memory and how it is intertwined with physical spaces and objects. Through her art, she seeks to make visible the often invisible histories that shape individual and collective identities. In addition to her studio practice, Aramburo is also involved in community-oriented projects, workshops, and collaborations that allow her to extend the impact of her work beyond the traditional gallery space. Her work often invites the audience to engage, question, and reconsider the role of art in daily life and its potential to enact social change.

Linda: Hi Clara, thank you for taking the time to speak with me. I reached out because I'm working on my graduation project in architecture. I believe your work is really relevant to my thesis. Initially, I approached it from a feminist perspective, but the more I explored it, the more I realized that feminism is deeply connected to anti-colonialism. It's about care, representation, and giving space to stories and people that have historically been marginalized.
I also believe that architecture should engage with these topics more carefully, but unfortunately, this isn't something we're really taught in architecture school. My project initially started with the idea of designing a museum, but the more I reflected on it, the more I became aware of the problematic nature of museums as institutions. Now, I'm trying to envision a different kind of building—one that hosts various functions, including exhibition spaces, but also serves as a community space for collective sharing and artistic creation.
This is why I wanted to speak with you. I know you work across different media, from video to other artistic formats, and I'd love to hear more about how your work engages with an anti-colonial framework and how you translate that into your art.

Clara: That's a really interesting question. I don't think I approach anti-colonialism in a direct or explicit way in my work. Instead, I think it naturally emerges because of who I am—being from Mexico and now living and working in the Netherlands. This gives me a different perspective that might not always be obvious to people here.
In some ways, I used to feel constrained by the label of "anti-colonialism" because it can be limiting, almost as if it dictates a very specific way of engaging with the topic. But over time, I've come to realize that this perspective is simply inherent to my work. It's something that naturally shapes the way I see and engage with the world.
A lot of my work is inspired by my upbringing and my cultural background in Mexico. I see it as an opportunity to share knowledge and perspectives that can enrich conversations, particularly in a place like the Netherlands, which has such a deep colonial history. There's still a prevailing mentality of control here—the idea that anything can be mastered or reshaped to fit a purpose, even something as fundamental as the ocean. This mindset extends to cultural narratives as well, and I think it's important to introduce different ways of seeing and experiencing the world.

Linda: That makes a lot of sense. I like how you describe it as something that comes naturally rather than being a strict framework you impose on your work. Could you tell me more about how this manifests in your practice?

Clara: Sure. My practice is quite broad—I have many different interests, and I see that as both a strength and a challenge. At times, it makes it difficult to focus, but ultimately, everything I do is connected.
For instance, I explore these ideas a lot in my cooking activations and my plant-growing practices. Cooking, in particular, is a very bodily and intuitive way of understanding culture. When I cook with people, it becomes a shared experience where we reflect on what we eat, where our food comes from, and the methods we use to prepare it. These acts of gathering, eating, and exchanging knowledge are deeply connected to my cultural background, but they also serve as a response to my intellectual and emotional experiences in different places.
So in that sense, my work isn't always about making an explicit statement on colonialism, but rather about creating moments of connection, care, and reflection.

Linda: Yeah, I think it's still the very beginning of my research, so it was really helpful that you made me reflect on the meaning of anti-colonialism. It's a big term, but what does it actually mean? Do we need to use it explicitly, or is it more about addressing diversity? And not in a way that just exoticizes the non-West, like, "Oh, this is fascinating because it's different," but rather in a way that recognizes that we are living in the same country with many cultures. How do we place everything on the same level, without reinforcing a hierarchy where European perspectives dominate? I really appreciate what you said. And of course, since this is your background, it's part

of you, but I find it beautiful how you continue to bring it into your art. That really manifests in your work, from what I've seen, and I think that's amazing.
I also wanted to talk to you about your collective cooking projects. When we last spoke, you told me that when you were going through a stressful time, you started growing the marygold flower. That was something you did for yourself. But how did you make the connection between that personal experience and sharing it with others? How did you come up with the idea of involving other people in this process?

Clara: I think it comes from the fact that, at least in my work and in the way I navigate my life here, I have these two approaches. One is about remembering and practicing things that I already know—like growing the flowers because they have a cultural significance in Mexico and because I was going through a difficult time with my visa. But then there's also another approach, which is about engaging with the place I'm currently in and finding ways to connect with others. I think that's where the desire to share comes in. It's also about listening to other people's experiences.
When I started growing the flowers, it was actually the first time I had grown plants from scratch. I went through the whole process—planting the seeds, having hope, researching how to take care of them. It was something I felt culturally connected to, but at the same time, I had never actually grown these flowers myself. This happens a lot in Mexico—we have such a rich cultural and culinary heritage, but many people haven't directly engaged with it. For example, traditional food is everywhere in street markets or cooked at home by older generations, but younger generations, especially women who don't want to be confined to traditional gender roles, often don't learn how to cook these dishes.
So, as I was learning how to grow the flowers and thinking about making pigments from them, I started talking to friends and people who knew more about natural pigments and dyes. That's when I realized how much I enjoy collective learning—sharing knowledge not just through words but through practice. It became about care: taking care of myself, taking care of plants, and also taking care of relationships and the values I believe in. It naturally evolved from something personal into something shared, because that's what made sense to me—creating moments of connection and learning together.

Linda: Yeah, that's super beautiful. When you work on pigments, do you do it at home, or do you have a studio?

Clara: I have a studio, but most of my work—at least this past year—I've been doing from home. Personally, I'm going through a moment where I'm questioning whether a studio practice really fits me. I feel like I need a truly safe space to work, and since I don't yet have the money to afford a studio for myself, I have to share it with many people, which hasn't really worked for me. So, I do most of my work from home. Also, the kitchen is a creative space I love—whether it's making pigments, preparing textiles, or

cooking. Being at home feels right for me.

Linda: I'm trying to imagine a museum that gives more space to artists and their stories, rather than just displaying objects without context. I wanted to ask what you think about museums—whether you think there's something that needs to change, if you love them as they are, or if you have an ideal setting where you'd like to display your work or hold workshops.

Clara: I only have one experience working in a museum, and that was related to school. I participated in a group exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum with the Rietveld Academy. But even then, our engagement with the museum felt more like a collaboration with students rather than with artists.
Something that Müge Yilmaz and I were discussing is how museums might need to change, especially as more artists start working with natural materials. Museums tend to have strict rules about exhibiting food and organic materials because they can attract pests or cause damage to collections. For example, in my exhibition at the Stedelijk, I wanted to display tortillas—like the ones we were making on Sunday—but there were rules against food in the museum due to concerns about pests and contamination.
Similarly, there are strict regulations about bringing soil into museums because it might introduce insects or create issues with preservation. But if more and more artists are working with natural materials and exploring urgent themes around ecology, then museums will need to adapt their spaces and policies to accommodate these practices.
Beyond that, there's also increasing discussion about inclusivity in museums. It's becoming more prominent, but there's still a lot of work to be done. Inclusivity isn't just about the artists and people museums invite but also about who directs these institutions and how decisions are made. It's a complicated topic, but it's essential to think about.
I also think that in terms of architecture, a museum, or at least the building itself, is not a place where you feel comfortable. Maybe it works for the art itself, but as a visitor, the design isn't really meant for your body to feel welcome or comfortable. Of course, I know museums are changing, but I still don't feel that shift. Many of these new art forms that deal with community, happenings, and workshops always seem to happen outside the museum. It's difficult to host these types of events inside because the museum doesn't have the right facilities.

Linda: Yeah, I know what you mean.
I've also spoken to others about works dealing with embodiment and the body itself. And the museum, as a space, feels difficult for this.

Clara: Yes, and even though some exhibitions include spaces where you can lie down or relax, it's not the standard. You have to make an effort to make the space cozy, like adding carpets and textiles, but that's not something that's already there. It's not naturally inviting.

Linda: That's true. I never thought about it that way, but it is a very rigid environment.

Clara: Exactly, and you feel like you need to behave. I think it's because museums carry a lot of heritage and old ways of thinking about art—something untouchable, glorious. But now, art is becoming more approachable, interactive, something you can engage with. Of course, the situation might be different in contemporary museums versus historical ones that require special care for their artifacts.

Linda: Regarding the workshops you organize, is there a specific thing in mind for the space where you hold them?

Clara: Yes, the kitchen space is important. One of the biggest challenges is having the right facilities, like water or a toilet nearby. Ideally, you want people to feel cozy and safe in the environment. But it's interesting to see how each workshop changes depending on where it's held.

Linda: I can imagine how nice it must be to have an outdoor space.

Clara: Yes, the workshops I enjoy most are always outdoors, especially when the weather is nice. The Four Siblings project is such a beautiful initiative.

Linda: Oh, I'd love to visit and see any events.

Clara: Yes, we're still in the planning stage since winter's not quite over yet. But we'll be active from spring and into the summer.

Linda: That sounds super cool! Is this a full-time thing, or more part-time?

Clara: It's part-time because we're still working with funding. We can pay ourselves a small fee, but it's not enough to sustain full-time work. So, I balance it with other projects in the meantime.

Conversation with curator Britte Sloothaak

About Britte

Britte Sloothaak is an art historian and collection curator specialising in modern and contemporary art. She has experience in art collections within large public institutions and curatorial projects in the context of architectural renovation. Her projects prioritise a critical evaluation of the construction of knowledge and 'value' in art collections from a feminist and decolonial perspective. She developed this interest while conducting archival research, writing acquisition proposals and curating exhibitions for the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam for more than ten years.
Her educational background is in art and cultural studies (Erasmus University Rotterdam), modern and contemporary art (VU University Amsterdam) and museum curating (VU University and University of Amsterdam). In Rotterdam she has produced exhibitions at the Netherlands Architecture Institute and the International Architecture Biennale.

Britte: Hi Linda, great to meet again. Could you give me a short overview about your project?

Linda: Sure! I'm at the beginning of my research process. Right now, I'm in the research phase, and later, I will move on to the design stage. Since I studied museum studies in Leiden, I gained a strong critical perspective on museums. This led me to the realization that museums are, at their core, elitist, patriarchal, and colonial institutions—of course, a vast and complex topic. However, this issue is also deeply embedded in the architecture of museums.
My main concern is that while discussions about these issues are emerging in other fields, they are still largely absent in architecture. There's still so much work to do in this area. In my research, I want to highlight the patriarchal and traditional structures within museums and explore alternatives. I'm searching for a museum model that engages more with collective practices, embraces subjectivity rather than objectivity, and incorporates multiple perspectives and multivocal storytelling.
Additionally, I'm interested in values such as care, repair, and reparation, as well as anti-colonial perspectives. I know this is a broad scope, but I was

wondering—since you were also at the beginning of your journey—how you approached the intersection of architecture and these critical perspectives.

Britte: I think the intersection between architecture and decolonial approaches is really interesting. However, I was wondering whether you need to incorporate both a feminist and decolonial approach simultaneously. Perhaps it could be beneficial to separate them in your methodology and later intertwine them in your final thesis.
One thing that really stood out to me was your initial statement—that museums are elitist, patriarchal, and colonial institutions. This is a strong position to take. But it also raises three fundamental questions: What is non-elitist? What is feminist? And what is anti-colonial? These are already significant questions individually, so if you're addressing all three, it's important to give each the depth it deserves.
For instance, what exactly is feminist architecture? That is something I would be very interested in exploring. The themes of collective practices and multi-perspectivity are also compelling, and I'd be happy to share my thoughts on those based on my experience working within an institution.
What I particularly liked in your approach is how you frame these concepts in oppositional terms—the non-elitist, the communal, the non-patriarchal, the feminist, the non-colonial, and the decolonial. I'm looking forward to seeing how you define these terms in your work. Establishing a clear and strong position from the beginning on what these terms mean will be really valuable.

Linda: That makes a lot of sense. If I can add something about how I arrived at these three key themes—feminism, anti-colonialism, and elitism—it started from a very personal perspective. Initially, I was focusing on feminism-related narratives, which felt like staying in my comfort zone. I have always been interested and engaged with this perspective: I've written about feminist artists, and feminism felt familiar to me. But the more I learned about feminism, the more I realized that it is not just about gender; it extends into caring for other minorities that have been underrepresented, in terms of race and social background, and therefore is tightly connected with anti-colonialism and anti-capitalism.
A feminist perspective requires staying with discomfort, engaging with histories of identities with whom I share my daily life but positions that I haven't personally experienced. Coming from Italy, a country that largely ignores its colonial history, I was never confronted with these issues until I moved to the Netherlands. Even here, I feel like the conversation is still not happening enough. That's why I find it so important to bring these discussions into my architectural research and work. I feel like I can't truly call myself a feminist if I don't engage with the topic of colonial history—especially in a place where it is so present yet often hidden. If I want to design a museum, I can't ignore this reality. At the same time, I understand your concern about the scope of my research—it is a lot to take on.

Britte: I think you are right to point

out that, from my personal and feminist perspective, I also acknowledge that the issue is not just patriarchal but also colonial. And in my case, since I am focusing on art museums, these structures are particularly embedded in their institutions. I have always known that defining these concepts—feminism, anti-colonialism, non-elitism—was important. Perhaps it is important to clearly articulate these definitions in a few sentences early in your thesis before you start interweaving them.

Linda: The reason I reached out to you is because of our insightful conversation during my Masters in Leiden. I see that your professional practice embraces the very concepts I'm researching—decolonial ways of engaging with both contemporary and historical art. You also have access to archival materials, which makes your perspective invaluable. So, I'd like to start with a big question: What do you see as the biggest challenge in bringing these theoretical frameworks into practice?

Britte: I think the biggest challenge is understanding the reality of what an institution is. You touched on this earlier—institutions, especially large museums, carry significant responsibilities. The larger the museum, the greater its accountability across multiple levels: financial responsibilities, insurance obligations, responsibilities toward the communities it serves, and even responsibilities toward the objects it houses and preserves.
So, working within an institution means navigating these layers of accountability. It can be a challenge, but it's also what defines institutional work. If you're considering working within a museum or with a museum, this is something to keep in mind. Of course, there are also alternatives to working within institutions.
You mentioned that you're questioning whether your project even needs to take the form of a museum. I think there are pros and cons to working within institutions. One advantage is that everything is carefully considered down to the smallest detail. But one major drawback is that you often have to make many compromises.
On the other hand, if you work outside of institutions, you may have fewer constraints, allowing your concept to remain stronger both theoretically and practically. The challenge, then, is how to negotiate between institutional realities and the vision you have for your project—whether you're working as a curator, an educator, an artist, or a designer.
There's always a balance to strike between the risks you take and the responsibilities you hold. These risks can be financial, but they can also relate to safety—both physical and emotional. Creating a safe space for different kinds of audiences, from activists to more conservative visitors, is a significant responsibility.
Personally, I find this constant negotiation between concept and institutional constraints to be both a challenge and a fascinating part of the work. When dealing with non-traditional subjects, you are often working outside the existing framework of museum practice. This means you have to constantly assess risks and responsibilities while ensuring that your core ideas remain intact.

Linda: What do you mean with the non-traditional subjects in art?

Britte: That's a good question. I would say the traditional framework was considered unconventional in art history until the institutionalization of art in the 1960s and 70s, which saw another peak in the 90s. Even then, it was still largely brought into the museum.
For example, in the 60s, with the emergence of conceptual art, there wasn't always a physical object—sometimes, the artwork was just a concept. That's one example. Then, in the 90s, we saw the beginning of decolonial theories, though they weren't widely put into practice yet. That started happening more in the early 2000s.
This is why I use the distinction between modern and contemporary art. The 60s and 70s could be considered modern art, whereas contemporary art includes these more recent developments. That's my perspective, but it's also where my expertise lies.

Linda: How does this work in practice? You mentioned that artists also have to negotiate. As a curator, you're in between the artist and the museum. Could you give an example? If an artist comes to you with an idea, do you need to find a compromise, or does the artist also compromise?

Britte: The artist's first responsibility is to create something that is meaningful and worth presenting to an audience. When an artist decides their work is ready to be shown, that's an important moment. Sometimes, though, the work is more of a concept and not quite ready for presentation. In those cases, you work together to prepare it for exhibition. Both the artist and the curator need to agree that the work is ready to be shown.
Once that's established, the artist knows their initial concept and how they have materialized—or sometimes not materialized—it. Some artists don't work with physical objects at all. From a curatorial perspective, the conversation then shifts to how the concept is best presented: in a solo exhibition, in a group show, or in a specific context.
There's also the question of audience. Do you want the work to be perceived by a wide, general audience or by a niche group? That's a crucial decision, and it affects how the work is contextualized. If it's for a broad audience, you need to consider both professionals and those without prior knowledge of contemporary art. Some people just want to see something interesting, while others are looking for something visually pleasing. It's important to be on the same page about the intended audience.
Then there are practical concerns. The materials an artist chooses in their studio might pose risks in a public space. For example, if the artwork involves fire, that has safety implications. As a curator, you need to consider how to present the work in a way that mitigates risks while maintaining the artist's vision.

Linda: What about artists using natural materials in a museum? How does that work?

Britte: Using organic materials is not

outright forbidden; it just comes with a set of conditions. Natural materials can be exhibited, but there are precautions to mitigate risks. For instance, if a material might attract insects, that's a problem because it could damage other artworks. When you exhibit in a museum, you're sharing a space with other artworks. It's not just your space; it belongs to everyone. As a curator, part of the job is ensuring that one artist's work doesn't negatively impact another's. If you introduce something that could cause harm—like bugs that might eat away at another artist's piece—you need to be willing to take responsibility for that.

Linda: Apart from the material aspect, what about the conceptual side? What if an artwork contains imagery that could be very upsetting for certain communities?

Britte: That's another layer of responsibility. If an artwork has imagery that could be shocking, angering, or deeply emotional for certain groups, you need to think about how to prepare the audience. Do you give a warning? Do you provide a safe space for discussion? If you choose to go forward with the work, how do you frame it so that people understand its intent?
For me, curating is a form of caretaking. It extends from the objects and concepts to the audience, the artist, and even the building itself. It's like taking care of a big family. You have to consider everyone—from the little children to the annoying uncle who always has something to say. You could see it as a challenge, but I actually enjoy it. I like the complexity of it. But if someone finds it too problematic or difficult, they can choose to work in a different setting. As a curator or an art professional, you have the option to go elsewhere if the compromises required don't align with your vision.

Linda: This is such a beautiful metaphor!

Britte: So, I think it's a good metaphor. However, it has consequences, and I think the method at stake now is crucial. The method at stake now involves people who are willing to bear all the consequences or, conversely, those who do not take responsibility. That is also a challenge—the works that require higher thresholds to be presented. That's the issue at hand.
In traditional painting, you have a static image—just a painting with a beautiful tree on it. That's something that can be done quite easily. The issue at stake is how to create circumstances that allow everyone to engage with art beyond a traditional, static presentation.

Linda: Yeah, I was really thinking about that as well when I was considering whether I should design a museum or a collective space. But then I realized that while there are many independent art galleries, they often remain polarized. The same groups of people frequent these spaces—artists and intellectuals who already think alike. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but if the goal is to change the way museums function, it has to be for a broader audience. Of course, not everyone goes to museums, but they still serve a much larger and more diverse audience than small independent spaces.

That's what makes it really interesting. I also wanted to ask if you have experience with collective curatorial practices. I remember you mentioning something about the exhibition and the collective approach there. I brought up the example of ruangrupa because it's such a well-known model—the way they expanded their curatorial approach at Documenta 15. Do you have experience with similar approaches, and how do you feel about them?

Britte: I'm a big supporter of collectivity, especially in large institutions where multiple people are involved in collaboration and communal practice. Different individuals contribute to the final outcome, and I strongly believe in acknowledging that.
In a museum context, this means not just presenting an exhibition as the work of the institution but recognizing the specific group of people behind it—mentioning everyone involved. It's a choice you make in advance. I think it's essential to highlight every individual voice, even though it requires additional time and effort. That's something you have to account for, and it requires a supportive team. You can't do this alone; you need people who believe in the idea. And I think this is why ruangrupa is such an interesting concept, especially regarding the challenges of decentralizing responsibility, which became apparent during Documenta. I don't think decentralization is necessarily a bad thing. It creates a dynamic ecosystem of contributors rather than attributing everything to one person, which is not reflective of reality. However, decentralization can lead to discomfort—it becomes harder to grasp who is responsible for what. But I'm not sure that's inherently negative.
For audiences unfamiliar with this kind of collaborative dynamic, it might be more difficult to understand. Documenta, for instance, is a highly professionalized institution geared toward art professionals. But ruangrupa doesn't only work within large institutional contexts; they also engage in schools and community projects. The fact that they operate on both levels is, in my opinion, really inspiring.

Linda: I wanted to ask you about the archive and its connection to contemporary art. Of course, contemporary art takes many forms, but I'm also curious about how archives function in an art museum. I've never been to one, so I don't know what they look like. Could you share your perspective?

Britte: The function of an archive is something you could explore further in your thesis—there are many theories about it. Personally, I see the archive as a tremendous tool for sharing knowledge across generations. That's why I believe it's crucial to have diverse voices working on archives because, much like a collection, an archive has mechanisms that determine what gets included and what is left out. A single perspective should not dictate this process.
When it comes to knowledge, I am a strong proponent of theories rooted in French constructivism, particularly Michel Foucault's idea that knowledge is power. However, from a decolonial perspective, I believe knowledge con-

struction has historically been shaped by white and colonial structures. This aligns with Edward Said's work, where he beautifully describes how the construction of knowledge is deeply tied to dominant languages and global power structures. Wealthy nations have had the privilege of recording, archiving, and shaping cultural narratives, while countries at war or under colonial rule have often been deprived of this opportunity—whether through the destruction of libraries, displacement, or lack of resources.
In museums, archives hold the power to share knowledge with new generations and introduce perspectives that challenge the status quo—a status quo built on the dominance of white and colonial voices. This also ties into the broader heritage discourse: documents, written records, and archives are a form of heritage, just as much as physical artifacts. The challenge is how to incorporate diverse forms of knowledge into archives that are traditionally structured around written documentation and verification. Museums have a responsibility to preserve and represent a broader cultural spectrum beyond just objects.
One example I often use is from my 12 years working at a museum for modern and contemporary art. I spent a long time as an assistant, which meant doing a lot of research for others—preparing documents, gathering sources, and working with archives. I noticed something striking: the Picasso binders were enormous, filled with rows of thick files. In contrast, the archives for non-Western artists or female artists were much smaller. This is a self-fulfilling prophecy—when extensive records exist for an artist like Picasso, it becomes easier to recognize, preserve, and expand knowledge about him. But if an artist is not part of the dominant art historical canon, their work is less likely to be preserved, making it harder to study, acknowledge, and appreciate their contributions.
This realization inspired an exhibition I co-curated with a friend, focusing on the idea that 'you can't love what you don't know.' If an artist's work isn't in the archive, it becomes almost invisible. Thankfully, museums also function as knowledge institutions, and there's growing awareness about the importance of expanding archives beyond traditional, Eurocentric frameworks.
The structure of an archive can vary. It can range from physical folders and binders filled with articles, letters, and correspondence to digital archives containing scanned documents, emails, sketches, and ideas. What matters most is ensuring that knowledge is shared across generations and that archives remain open to interpretation and new research perspectives.
Ultimately, broadening the focus of archives and including diverse voices allows for a richer and more inclusive understanding of cultural heritage.

Linda: So, when we're talking about objects, it's not only about the object itself but also the story behind it. But what about more intangible things, like, for example, spiritual values attached to certain objects or performances? How does that work? Can these still be archived?

Britte: Yeah, absolutely. It just requires more time and focus. You need to priori-

tize it, but it's definitely possible. You can record it, interview artists, or look at other ways to archive it. It's not impossible. I think the immaterial aspect has been part of art museum practices since conceptual art, so there's a tradition of archiving this kind of knowledge. Immaterial knowledge and art has been acknowledged and integrated into museum practices for quite a long time. There is also the case in which certain communities might have a desire not to share certain knowledge. It goes back to the idea that knowledge is power—sometimes you might not want to share your knowledge, especially with institutions like museums. Take something like witchcraft, for example. Do you want to share everything about it? Maybe not. It's not just the spiritual side but also political reasons—some artists or communities might not want their work or knowledge exploited, especially by the wrong people. It's more about protecting the integrity of the work and the people involved.

Linda: So you're saying there are political reasons why some knowledge or art is not shared?

Britte: Exactly. It's a caretaking issue for people, not just the archive as a system. The challenge comes when people who hold that knowledge are no longer in the institution—where does that knowledge go? There are ways to practice this, though. For example, I have been in contact with a German artist who refused to let his work be archived in the traditional way because he opposed the commercialization of what was considered "odd." He didn't want his work to be commodified or sold off, so he demanded that it not be registered in collections or the archive.

Linda: How does that work in practice?

Britte: His work is still in the archive, but the information is minimal. His name and the title of the work are there, but the details are blank. People within the institution know the specifics, but once they leave, the knowledge has to be passed on to the next person. It's a process, and it takes more time. It's not part of an automated system, but it's a method to preserve certain knowledge without it being exploited.

Linda: So it's a way of managing knowledge while still protecting it?

Britte: Yes, exactly. It's about finding a balance between archiving and protecting the knowledge, and sometimes that requires more time and careful handling.

Linda: That sounds super complex. I guess there are also works that don't have an author or where the authorship is unclear, right?

Britte: Yes, that's true. There are definitely works that don't have a clear author or that are anonymous. It's all part of the challenge of archiving immaterial knowledge—it's not always straightforward.

Linda: Thank you, this has been very interesting. Just one last question—if you have any tips or considerations about the architecture of the museum, what does that mean to you as a curator? How does architecture facilitate the experience of

curating and visiting an exhibition?

Britte: I've always liked the analogy of a house, where family and friends come together. A museum isn't just a storage space for objects or a display area; it's a place where people gather to spend time, share thoughts, and connect. It's not a shop or a warehouse. It's about creating a space for people, not just for showcasing items.

Linda: So you're saying that the architecture should facilitate human connection rather than just display?

Britte: Exactly. I think museums should have designated spaces for exchange, where people can feel comfortable to stay, share their thoughts, and contribute to history in some way. Curating history can be very difficult, especially in bigger museums with larger audiences. Not every thought or idea shared is necessarily relevant to keep, but there will always be a process of choosing what to show and what not to show. So, in terms of space, I think it's important to focus on the human aspect.

Linda: You're suggesting museums could do more to highlight these human exchanges, not just exhibitions?

Britte: Yes, definitely. A lot of people know the exhibition activities of a museum, but there's so much more—collecting, sharing, researching. Making that more visible would be a great way to show a broader perspective. For example, the Boymans Museum shows its depot, and the Van Abbe Museum has its library in the center of the building, which I think is a beautiful example.

Linda: So the idea is to make these behind-the-scenes activities more accessible and visible?

Britte: Yes, exactly. I think programs could also be more centralized, not just in auditoriums but in spaces that really encourage interaction. It would be interesting to create environments where people can connect more informally. The library example is a good one. The depot is special, but it can feel like a cold environment. While I love the building, I think it has a very specific aesthetic that can feel attracted to because of my upbringing. It seems the architecture influences how people experience the museum, especially when it's more rigid or modernist. Modernism has its set of aesthetics that can feel impersonal. I appreciate it, but I think it can create a barrier for certain visitors. For example, the white cube model makes it easy to display various works of art without the architecture overwhelming the experience. It allows the artwork to stand on its own.
I also think that in terms of architecture of the museum it would be great to find a balance between more intimate and more collective spaces. Some spaces should allow people to just enjoy the artwork without distraction, while others should encourage interaction and discussion. You need spaces that invite people to linger and share their thoughts. It's all about creating a dynamic experience. And of course, flexibility is essential as well. It's about creating spaces that allow

for different experiences. Some areas can focus on the artwork itself, while others can encourage informal knowledge-sharing. You want to make it accessible and open to a variety of experiences.

Linda: You mentioned the importance of context in exhibitions—how does that play out in curating?

Britte: It's a conversation with the artists. For example, in one exhibition, I worked with a blue carpet that followed the entrance and exit. It was a dominant feature, but the spaces it was present in were the most interesting for me. It required a lot of dialogue with the artists, as they initially didn't see how the context would fit their work, but we worked together to make it work. That's part of the curator's role—to create a context that enhances the work.

Linda: It seems like the curator's role is about facilitating conversations and sharing ideas.

Britte: Exactly. Museums should be places for dialogue and exchange.

Linda: This has given me a lot to think about. Thank you so much for your time. I definitely should define what I mean by a new museum.

Britte: I think defining the "old" museum is important, and then taking a strong position on what you want the "new" museum to be. Don't feel pressured to write an essay for everything—just make clear, strong arguments. Do you have any examples of a museum that might be considered feminist or decolonial in terms of its architecture?

Linda: I really like the Palais de Tokyo in Paris for its programming, but the architecture itself is very rigid since it's a repurposed building. I'm also looking for an exterior expression that gives off a more inclusive feeling.

Britte: Agreed. And do you know if there are any museums designed by women that fit this idea?

Linda: Yes, there's the MAXXI in Rome by Zaha Hadid. It's a great example, but I'm not sure about her architectural style.

Britte: It's interesting, though, to think about what makes a museum feminist—it doesn't necessarily have to be designed by a woman. It's about the approach and the values, not just the designer. Also about the values and the inclusivity of the space.

Conversation with designer Wietzke Nutma

About Wietzke

Wietske Nutma is a designer and researcher whose work is interdisciplinary in nature, with a focus on ecology and the more-than-human. Her research is driven by the objective of finding ways to contribute to the living world. Nutma is employed by Zoöp at the Zoönomic Institute, and also works on various other projects at Nieuwe Instituut.
In addition to her work in design and research, Nutma engages extensively with textile, wool and other fibres. She conducts research, learning and thinking related to cloth making and repair.

Linda: What is your background, and how did you end up working on eco-feminist projects?

Wietske: I studied graphic design at Kabk in Den Haag, and I really enjoyed it because it was strongly connected to research. However, when I started working, I found myself focusing more on the aesthetics rather than the conceptual depth. I felt alienated and somewhat useless in that role, as if I wasn't contributing meaningfully to the environment or society. So, I gradually started getting involved in other projects that aligned with my values and allowed me to work towards something more impactful. That's how I developed my current multidisciplinary practice.

Linda: Can you tell me more about your multidisciplinary practice?

Wietske: At the moment, I'm working on three main projects.
The first is at the Nieuwe Instituut, the museum for architecture, design, and digital culture in Rotterdam. I'm working on reorganizing the archive of landscape architecture. While architecture is well documented, landscape architecture remains fragmented and harder to access. Our goal is to create a model or

network to structure this archive better and ensure that landscape architecture is properly remembered and valued.
The second project I'm involved in is ZOOP, a movement and organization that develops models for collaborating with non-human voices in times of climate crisis. Many companies talk about sustainability, but they lack clear methods for ecological responsibility. Sustainability alone—merely reducing harm—is no longer enough. We need to go beyond that and actively help the environment repair itself. ZOOP was founded in 2018, and I joined in 2021. Now, I'm one of the organizers, working on expanding the movement and developing actionable strategies.
Thirdly, I have my own textile practice, focusing on mending and repairing clothes. I organize workshops to encourage alternatives to consumer culture and to help people reconnect with the garments they wear. It's not just about fixing things—it's about fostering a relationship of care between people and their clothing, acknowledging the stories embedded in fabric and craftsmanship.

Linda: Your work deeply engages with the concepts of care and repair. How do you envision these ideas within the exhibition and design world?

Wietske: I'm part of a collective called An Apple a Day, an online platform led by researcher Sam Bennett. We discuss architecture's tendency to prioritize new buildings over the maintenance of existing ones. In architecture, there's often no long-term responsibility for a building after it's completed, which leads to neglect. The same applies to textiles—people lack the knowledge or motivation to repair clothing, so they resort to buying new items instead. Both in architecture and fashion, repair should be valued as much as creation. Sharing repair knowledge is crucial for changing this mindset.

Linda: Where do you usually work?

Wietske: I don't have my own studio, which can be challenging. However, I work closely with Extra Practice, a community and platform that organizes workshops. They have a street-facing space with large windows, which creates a sense of openness and connection with passersby. I love how this space allows for a more communal, welcoming atmosphere. Mending can be a solitary activity, but it's so much more enjoyable when done together.
I mainly focus on darning, and I make it clear in my workshops that I'm not the sole expert in the room. There are people who excel at zippers, patching, or other repair techniques, and I want to create an environment where we can all share and learn from one another. The goal is not just to teach a skill but to foster a space for collective learning and exchange of knowledge.

Linda: That's really interesting. What about your work at the archive of the Nieuwe Instituut? How challenging is it to reshape an existing institutional archive?

Wietske: We discovered that there's a significant gap in the archiving of landscape architecture and gardening. The

Ministry conducted reports confirming this issue and commissioned the Nieuwe Instituut to investigate solutions. We are advising existing landscape architects on how they can contribute to the archive while also developing strategies to make the archive more visible and accessible. One of the key challenges is that landscape architecture studios often don't prioritize archiving. Many architects only start documenting their work when they're nearing the end of their careers, which makes it difficult to preserve the full trajectory of their practice. We are trying to encourage studios to archive their work from the beginning. We also provide practical guidance, such as using PDF formats instead of software like InDesign, which can cause data loss over time. Proper documentation is crucial for preserving knowledge and making it useful for future generations.

Linda: That's a great point—archiving isn't just the responsibility of institutions but also of the designers themselves. I'm also really curious about your work with ZOOP. How do you translate ecological theory into practical action?

Wietske: ZOOP helps existing organizations develop models to represent non-human perspectives. We emphasize that humans are not at the top of the ecosystem but part of it. This principle guides decision-making even within the Nieuwe Instituut. For example, when considering interventions in the museum's outdoor pond, we have to account for the geese that live there.
A great example of theory applied to practice is De Ceuvel in Amsterdam. It's a community of makers that transformed a polluted section of the harbor into a thriving ecological space. Twelve years ago, the soil was toxic, and a competition was launched to find ways to purify it. The winning project used plants and trees to extract toxins from the soil, demonstrating how ecological restoration can work in practice. They also implemented interventions to support biodiversity. For example, they created underwater shelters for fish, using discarded Christmas trees as protective structures. They elevated footpaths to allow plants to grow freely underneath. And they organized diving workshops with wildlife cameras to show people the life forms that exist beneath the water's surface. Awareness is key—once people understand who shares their environment, they are more likely to create spaces that support life rather than harm it. If you're interested, I can connect you with ZOOP. We're working on making our research publicly accessible, and we're always happy to discuss ways to integrate these ideas into broader practices.

Conversation with creative collective Extra Practice

About EXTRA PRACTICE

"Extra Practice is a shared workspace in the north of Rotterdam for working and learning. It was founded by six friends active in the fields of art and design. We created the space to fulfill our desire for a "school-after-school," a fruitful environment for working and learning amongst peers. This environment was missing after we all finished our Master's degrees in 2019. At Extra Practice, we support each other's individual practices and organize workshops, presentations, and public events to share insights and experiences."

Linda: When did you start this collective?

Gijs: We started in 2019 as a group of six friends who used to study together. We realized that working as freelancers could be quite lonely, so we decided to come together and form a studio where we could work alongside each other.

Linda: What did you study?

Gijs: We all studied graphic design, but in different places. Some of us were already friends, while others had mutual friends.

Linda: Have you always been in this space?

Gijs: No, we started in a much smaller space at the Zwanshaalstraat. It was just a corner space, about half the size of what we have now. Back then, we only had room for desks, but we also began organizing events—workshops, food events, and more. Now, we have expanded and even have a meeting space in front of the window, which is great because people walking by can see what's happening inside.

Linda: Which type of activities do you

organize?

Gijs: Over time, we decided to do more things together and also to invite people from outside our group. We send out a monthly newsletter and organize tax sessions where people can come and do their taxes together—something that can be really boring, time-consuming, and complicated. We also host parties, food events, and research groups, and we spend a lot of time maintaining the space. It's really a lot of work.

Linda: Is this work paid?

Gijs: No, for now, it's unpaid labor. This is something we are currently struggling with and trying to find a solution for.
Linda: Are there other spaces that embrace a similar collective working model?

Gijs: Yes, for example, the Post Office in Amsterdam is another collective. It works a bit differently from ours because it has 75 members who each pay only €36 per month. Unlike us, they don't have their own designated desks; instead, they can use a desk whenever they visit the space. Members are required to contribute time and effort—for example, they organize Public Fridays, where everyone is welcome to join events. It's a diverse space, full of artists, researchers, and people from various fields, and it offers 24-hour access, which is quite special. Members can also organize any event they want.
In our case, we each have our own office space, but we're thinking about ways to include more people from the outside. We're also considering growing into a larger organization or community.

Linda: Can you elaborate on how you want to change the financial model of the collective?

Gijs: The issue is that, even though we engage in community activities, we are all technically independent businesses and freelancers. This means that, in a way, we are still operating within a capitalistic framework where we are also competitors. That feels contradictory to our values.
We're considering transitioning into an organization that allows us to share both financial resources and projects collectively. A book that really inspired us in this process is Vulture Capitalism by Grace Blakeley. It's made us think about how we can shape our practice in a way that is more sustainable and cooperative. At the core of this shift is the question: what can we provide for each other? What is the added value of our activities? How can we make our work more meaningful, bring more people in, and create a stronger cultural and social impact—beyond just money?

Conversation with architect and curator Setareh Noorani

About Setareh

Setareh Noorani is a Dutch architect, researcher, curator, and independent artist whose work explores themes of decoloniality, feminisms, queer ecologies, and collective representation in contemporary architecture. She holds a Master of Science degree in Architecture from TU Delft, graduating cum laude.
At Het Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam, Noorani leads projects such as "Collecting Otherwise" and "New Currents: Indian Ocean Futures." She co-initiated the "Open Call Hidden Histories" in collaboration with the Creative Industries Fund NL and co-curated the exhibition "Designing the Netherlands" in 2023. Her work emphasizes the inclusion of underrepresented voices and challenges traditional value systems in art and architectural production. In her artistic practice, Noorani investigates public resistance and the navigation of diasporic trauma.

Linda: How would you define your work?

Setareh: I see myself as a cultural worker, a resource worker.
In regard to the work at Het Nieuwe Instituut, an interesting concept is the TOOLSHED—a space, a learning environment, and a commons where one can find tools for emancipation. It's both metaphorical and real. Another one is TESTING GROUND—a space for doing and learning through doing.
The Architecture of Het Nieuwe Instituut is very relevant as well. Nothing really has a fixed place there, but with the help of a community, you can find your place. There are different levels of opacity. I really like the layeredness of the Kunsthal. Both the Kunsthal and Het Nieuwe Instituut are postmodern—nothing has inherent meaning anymore; you make your own meaning.

Linda: In your research you deal a lot with the archival practices. Can you tell me more about it?

Setareh: I see the archive as a living room for the community. This is also reflected in my architectural practice. I'm interested in challenging the institution from within the archive. It's vital for valuing

and making knowledge accessible.

Linda: Could you tell me more about your walking tours?

Setareh: Embodying and walking are part of my artistic and activist practice. You can focus on spatial typologies—how different functions are organized. What makes good design?

Linda: What projects have you been working on?

Setareh: One long-term project is Collecting Otherwise, which I've been working on for five years.

Linda: How do you deal with the gaps in the archive?

Setareh: I don't see them as gaps, but as different perspectives. The idea of "filling the gap" is a colonial urge—completeness doesn't exist. On the Collecting Otherwise website, you'll find five "tools"—strategies we've developed and applied. The person who collects becomes an "archival care-writer." They may come from the community—people with a personal relationship to the materials, people who are willing to activate the archive in the present and annotate it. There's a blurred boundary between the margin and the center; they become equally important. (This reminds me of Erin Manning's The Minor Gesture.) The goal is to create space for shifting architectural culture. Architecture and its mediums have changed. Social design practices and different kinds of archives also play a role.

Often, documentation from marginalized communities is unorthodox—missing papers, drawings, or models. It's important to witness and honor those practices.

Linda: How do you collect non-written forms of knowledge, like oral and somatic knowledge?

Setareh: This question is very relevant and very actual for us. For oral histories, you can check the HNI archive—there are videos of women speaking about their experiences. Just email the collection box. In those videos, women reflect on the difficulties of becoming architects, but also other professions like politicians involved in social housing. I'll send you the trailer!

Linda: Do you have other project examples?

Setareh: Arus Balik with Delani Boutkan and the Ruangrupa collective. It was a 45-week project, in a corridor space upstairs, accessible from the back—outside the building. Internal coordination was crucial. It raised the question: Is it art or is it public space?
We also thought deeply about security and value.
I can put you in touch with Isabel, a former intern who studied at CAST in Maastricht. She did a project on Arus Balik.

Linda: What's architecture's role in all this?

Setareh: I also work with Forensic Ar-

chitecture. We focus on the soft power of architecture: creating environments that de-hierarchize and decolonize.
You should look into the work of Lara Schrijver—she's a feminist and an academic. I'll also connect you with Rita Ouédraogo, curator and co-founder of Buro Stedelijk. She has reflected a lot on what it means to operate within a museum like the Stedelijk.

Linda: Do you think I should base my project on real conditions?

Setareh: Yes. For your project, it's important to approximate real life. Always work with communities in mind. Think about the moments where ideas and urgencies intersect. Conflicts are important—they make the museum relevant. There will never be full consensus.
Ask: Who is able to enter? Hospitality is crucial.
You should watch the Sarah Ahmed lecture at HNI on the museum as an institution—I'll send it to you. Also check out Resolve Collective and how they use institutional resources.

Linda: Amazing, there's so much interesting material to explore.

Setareh: To quote Sarah Ahmed: your project is a shadow project. It will follow you wherever you go. Even if you don't finish it in your university project, it'll stay with you. Not everyone needs to understand what you're doing. You can bring things in through the back door and reveal them when they're already happening. That's what I do.

Linda: Do you have any examples of museums?

Setareh: Check out Jan Van Eyck Academie in Maastricht. They have a material lab—you can grow salt crystals, and there's a cooking section.
You might want to map the functions of a museum. I can show you around some examples of what works and what doesn't in our building.
[During our walk, Setareh shows me the spaces around the museum]
At the entrance, there's a small space that's been appropriated by designers and artists. A space of passage became a space of staying.
[...]
Outside, on the lake there are some walking paths but in winter they are terrible because they become very slippery and it is dangerous to walk on them.
[...]
This space on top of the staircase and underneath the archive is a STRETCHING space, perfect also for bookfairs.
[...]
Let's go to the garden now. I don't like it so much anymore, because now they opened it up because of the municipality. Before it was more cozy and with benches, but they made it hostile for homeless people. It is a pity that now it is not a place to stay anymore, but only a place of passage.
For a good reference on art gardens, you should Look into ART JAMELL, Dubai. It was a garden with region specific plants. It was made by an artist gardener, and it was quite hidden, also dealing with subversive themes such as

queerness in Dubai. The artworks were specific to the garden.
[...]
Here there used to be a staircase in the garden made by ZUS for the project on architectural appropriation.There was also a staircase going to the roof for the architecture month, but the neighbors were complaining because they said that the people were too loud.
[...]
Another very interesting space is this in-between space, a third space on the water near the entrance and the cafe'. I would love to do something here.

Linda: Thank you! So many valuable insights from someone working inside the museum. I would just like to hear about what you think with my last question: how can I position myself as a white woman dealing with colonial matters?

Setareh: The most important thing is to avoid self-pity. The dilemma of solidarity and allyship is real. Black is also a political term—it refers to exploited people, not just skin color. The worst hurt comes when someone you thought was an ally betrays you because they can't deal with their white tears.
Always ask yourself: Who are we practicing for? Who are you an ally to?

Conversation with performance artist Ingrid Jejina

About Ingrid

Ingrid Jejina is an Amsterdam-based performance and installation artist known for her interactive and thought-provoking works that explore themes of memory, displacement, and human connection. Her practice often involves creating immersive environments where audience participation plays a central role.
I met Ingrid during a workshop that I organized at the Van Eesteren Museum and we became friends. I admire her strong feminist spirit a lot and I have so much to learn from her.

Linda: What kind of art do you make?

Ingrid: I'm an artist who also works with theater and dance. For me, everything is interconnected – it's all art. Fine art that isn't activist is just bullshit. Contemporary art museums often turn artists into heroes or pop icons, like celebrities in blockbuster shows. Take Anselm Kiefer for example: his work is relevant now because we're living in a pre-war time, and he addresses war trauma. But at some point in his career, he found a formula and just repeated it over and over again. It's boring.

Linda: Do you think group exhibitions are more effective?

Ingrid: Yes, variation makes it more interesting. A group show can create a dialogue between different artists and with the architecture itself. That's much more dynamic.

Linda: Do you believe a feminist and decolonial alternative to the museum is possible?

Ingrid: You should look into the work of Grace Ndiritu – she focuses on community and healing the museum space through meditation. What's powerful is

that she involves the museum staff too, making sure they understand and participate. It's important they know what's going on – not just the artists or visitors. In her exhibitions, artworks don't have titles, years, or descriptions. Today there's this trend of over-explaining everything, like putting a novel next to each piece. In her case, you just look at the work and make up your own mind. There is an audio tour, but it's very different – not the usual one that tells you what to think or feel.

Linda: Why are you against audioguides?

Ingrid: Audioguides stop you from experiencing the artwork directly. They only highlight one interpretation and select certain pieces – it becomes a form of selective storytelling, which isn't inclusive. It's just random art historian stuff. Instead, I want people to ask: What am I learning? What am I remembering?
I work a lot with memory. And memory isn't only visual – you don't vividly remember colors, for example. I believe that the first memory is often a smell. Usually a bad one. When you're growing up, you're taught to recognize what's wrong first. We're often told what not to do instead of being celebrated for what we do well. That's why bad smells stick.

Linda: Can you give an example of one of your performances?

Ingrid: One of my most successful performances involved crocheting a white rope around roughly 250 bottles of red wine, which I then threw into the space. The audience didn't see me create the work – instead, they became the artwork themselves by walking over the broken glass and red wine, which also resembled blood. The red wine would stain their shoes, and they'd carry it outside the exhibition space, becoming the performance themselves. That trace was part of the work. The first time I did this was at the Rietveld Academy; then I repeated it in a gallery.
The gallery version wasn't very successful. The gallerist liked the piece and invested in it, knowing it couldn't be sold. But the staff kept cleaning up the wine trails outside the main room, and that really upset me – the whole point was that it didn't end in the exhibition room.
Another performance I did was keeping a museum open 24/7. I took the responsibility to keep the gallery open and people could come in at any time of the day and night and cook food that reminded them of their grandmothers. I provided audio, visuals, and equipment to cook and eat together. It was a great success. The focus was: Where do we meet? Where do we come together?

Linda: What's the most important thing in your collaborative art practice?

Ingrid: The difference between you and me isn't what matters. What matters is creating a space for sharing. Care is at the foundation of my work.

Linda: Do you have an artistic manifesto?

Ingrid: No, I don't have anything written down – a manifesto would box me in.

But my academic background helped me apply for grants and become an artist. I also had all my photos and work removed from the internet. You can hardly find anything about me online anymore. I stepped out of the art world because it's too corrupt. I still want to be able to look at myself in the mirror without shame – that's why I left.

Linda: What message would you give to young people in the field?

Ingrid: People need to pay you for your work. As a woman, you need to make yourself respected. Be strong. Be difficult. People used to call me a witch because I fought for what I wanted. If you want to make it, you have to assert yourself – otherwise, no one will listen to you.

Conversation with Natural Dye developer and artesan Roua Alhalabi

About Roua

Roua Atelier is a natural dye sustainable atelier that focuses on developing local natural dye pigments and dye methods. Roua works closer with textile materials designers and companies to develop their way of making sustainable textile production. The Atelier's mission is to go use eco-friendly materials and local natural dye pigments. Besides that, the atelier develops new techniques and methods to use less water and achieve high quality results.
Roua Alhalabi has more than 10 years of expertise in developing natural dye recipes and techniques for different types of fiber and material. By using her knowledge, she finds and develops the best dye recipes and methods for fibers. She works closely with farmers and chemistries to collect her resources and test her techniques. Rouaatelier has a lot of experience in scaled techniques and production without losing the impact and quality.

Linda: Hello Roua, thank you for your time. I'm doing research into ecofeminist and decolonial alternatives to traditional art museums. At the moment, I've found a location that aligns with my ideas — the Katoenhuis in Rotterdam. In this new art space, the history of colonialism and the exploitation of women is hidden, and I'd like to reveal it, especially through the study of cotton and textiles as materials that carry deep meaning.

Roua: Yes, textiles are very interesting in general. But if you want to go deeper into production within the Netherlands, then maybe it's better to focus on hemp, linen, or nettle. Historically, these are the fibers that were grown and used here. If you want to focus on the Dutch and European context, then one of these local fibers would be more relevant. But if you want to talk about imported textiles and colonialism, then cotton is very appropriate. So it depends on the angle you want to take.

Linda: Okay, so cotton wasn't grown here, right?

Roua: No, it wasn't.

Linda: That's also interesting to me

because it points to a history of exploitation and strong connections with colonialism.

Roua: Yes, and if you're talking about the colonies, it's also important to think about how they affected local fiber production. When cheaper materials like cotton started being imported, the demand for local fibers like hemp, linen, and wool decreased. That's really the root of today's issues in the industry. Colonial imports disrupted local production — not just the materials, but also the knowledge and skills. For example, Dutch linen today can't be fully produced here anymore. Some steps in the process have to be done in Germany or elsewhere and then brought back. This all started during the colonial period. It's super interesting.

Linda: Do you know of any books I could read about this?

Roua: I have two books on the topic. You can come to my atelier and borrow them.
I also want to show you a map I've made. It shows both fibers and natural dyes — how indigo and wool were affected at the time, and how chemical dyes started to replace natural ones.
At the Katoenhuis, it's likely that they were shipping cotton, not growing it. Cotton wasn't cultivated here. In recent years, some cotton has been grown in greenhouses in the Netherlands — G-Star, for example, experimented with it. It grows well and you can produce it all year round, but the issue is that it's not scalable. You can't build that many greenhouses.

Linda: Do you think greenhouses are a good environmental solution?

Roua: Greenhouses are helpful in some ways — you can control the quality, and you know the plant will grow well. But heating them contributes to climate change, so it's not a perfect solution. We should think more about what can grow naturally now and in the future, considering climate change. Also, how you can grow different kinds of plants together to support each other. Not rely so much on greenhouses.
Still, your question about cotton made me curious — I'll look into it more. I know a factory owner, a woman, who's trying to revive local textile knowledge and production. She's based in Enschede, which historically was a textile-producing city. You should talk to her — she has a lot of knowledge about fibers.
And in Leiden, for example, the textile factories used to focus on producing blankets. The Lakenhal Museum used to be a textile factory. I can share the contact of the director with you.

Linda: That would be great! What's your view on museums? Do we still need them?

Roua: I think we do. As an artist, I need a space to exhibit and share my knowledge. But often, museums don't have a budget, and then we have to figure it out together. Artists often don't know how to apply for subsidies or funding.
And many museums are still stuck in

traditional ways — focused on specific paintings or artists. Some don't offer space for other types of knowledge, like textiles.
That's why it's hard to find in-depth information or exhibitions on textile history. Artists do small projects, but it's only a small slice of the story. We need more complete exhibitions where people can learn the full picture. That's one of the big challenges for museums, in my opinion.

Linda: What would your ideal exhibition or space look like?

Roua: I'd love to see a permanent exhibition on the history of textiles, with a section that changes for different artists. I'm always connected to nature, roots, and history — I prefer exhibiting in spaces that already have a story, not new buildings. I love when natural light comes in and you feel connected to the environment.
But if the space is too decorative or rich in style, it can limit the freedom of your exhibition. Each artist should be able to find a space that suits their work.
I'm actually designing something in my head — I'd love to present it at the Stedelijk Museum or somewhere similar. I've seen exhibitions that are very stylized, but they don't teach you anything. I want to create an exhibition where you walk through and understand how plants become colors, how fabric is made, and how it returns to the soil — a circular system. I haven't seen any exhibition like that yet.
Often I see samples, but not enough explanation. It becomes more about the artistic expression than the actual knowledge behind it.

Linda: Would you consider yourself more of an artist or a craftsperson?

Roua: I see myself more as an artisan and a researcher. That's how I introduce myself — I call myself a dye specialist rather than an artist. I use art as a way to share my knowledge and research, and that's what I love to do.

Linda: Your studio feels like a material library — full of colors and samples. Do you collect everything you discover?
Roua: Yes, I collect a lot. But now I'm looking for a bigger space — I've outgrown my current studio.
Next time you visit, I can show you my archive. I have so many tests and materials I haven't had time to continue developing. I keep them because I love them, and I hope to return to them one day.
The challenge is finding a balance between making art and doing research — otherwise, it's hard to sustain financially.

Linda: I think it's totally normal to have gaps in your archive. You don't need to have everything figured out.

Roua: Yes, exactly. That's why you choose the projects where you see potential for development, and keep the others for later.

Linda: I was also curious — how do you experience giving workshops? And what kind of spaces do you prefer for them?

Roua: It depends. When I work with

fashion students, I prefer them to come to my studio — I can show many samples and techniques. But if I'm doing a specific technique, like the one we did in our workshop, I prefer doing it in museums. It enriches the museum's program and gives people a new reason to visit.
I also work in schools with kids, and I often participate in festivals, especially those focused on ecology and sustainability. I love when people go home from a festival having learned something.

Linda: You also mentioned working with farmers and people in the industry. Do you usually go to them, or do they come to you?

Roua: With farmers, I usually reach out to them. Most don't think about organic materials or natural dyes, so I introduce the idea. Some are only interested if there's money in it, but I've found three groups who are really engaged.
They ask questions, send me photos, and even experiment — like saying, "We stopped growing flowers in this field. Maybe you can use it?" I love that. I learn a lot from them, especially about how plants grow and how soil conditions affect color. It's all connected.

Linda: What kind of things do they grow?

Roua: Everything — herbs for tea, walnuts, vegetables like carrots and potatoes. The ones I work with most grow herbs.
We're trying to find a balance — so they can keep growing what they already sell, but also grow plants for me. It's important to think about the ecosystem. You can't just demand one thing and damage the soil.
They also grow indigo. I'm talking with the municipality now, and once I get the green light, I'll invite people to help plant the seeds. I'll add you to the list!

Linda: I'd love that! Do you know if they also grow indigo in Rotterdam?

Roua: I'm not sure. I know they grow it in Friesland — Claudy Jongstra started that. I've heard there's a natural dye community in Rotterdam, but I haven't met them yet. Let me know if you find anyone. And stay in touch! You're welcome to visit the atelier to pick up the books — I'll also show you the samples and the maps.

Linda: Thank you so much!

Conversation with activist Philsan Omar Osman

About Philsan

Philsan Omar Osman is a writer, activist and community builder from Somalia based in the Netherlands and Belgium. Philsan Omar Osman is a PhD candidate at the Open University in the Netherlands and co-author of Voor Wie Willen We Zorgen: Ecofeminisme als Inspiratiebron (EPO, 2021). Her work moves around intersectionality and decolonial ecologies. She is launching research within the Innovating for Resilience programme, which focuses on how marginalised communities in the Low Countries contribute to innovative and inclusive sustainability transitions. Philsan Omar Osman hails from Somalia, is a writer, activist and community builder.

Linda: Philsan, can you tell me about your background and how you got involved in activism?

Philsan: I am a community organizer and a PhD candidate. I came from Somalia to Belgium, and back in Somalia, I was part of a very big family, a very big community. However, when I arrived in Belgium, I felt alone with just my mother and siblings. We tried to find a sense of community, but it was difficult. Family, for me, was always more than just close relatives; it was a collective where love and support were shared, and where different generations played different roles. The older generation was more passive and knowledgeable, while the younger generation had more fire and wanted to act immediately. In our community, knowledge was passed down organically.
When we moved, this way of living wasn't understood. Our way of dressing, for example, was seen as foreign. I felt like I was living on the margins and had no sense of belonging. Activism became my way of surviving, of resisting the passive mindset around me and creating a new community—one where different ideas could come together, and where people could form real connections.

Linda: How does your activism shape the work you do today?

Philsan: I see my role as being a part of the communities I aim to serve. I feel privileged to be able to sit down and write about the interdisciplinary processes of how Black communities resist institutionalized systems. I also curate the book Dare to Care, which challenges the mainstream climate discourse—it is predominantly white and male-dominated. I have met people who believe Black people don't care about the environment, but that couldn't be further from the truth. There is a scientific consensus on climate change, yet governments do nothing because capitalism and money take priority. I believe people should have more power over decisions that impact their lives.

Linda: Can you talk about some of the colonial concepts that have shaped land and environmental struggles?

Philsan: One example is the concept of terra nullius, where governments declare a place "uninhabited," making it legally possible to take it over. This has happened repeatedly in Africa—entire communities have been erased, and their people treated as if they were part of the land itself, rather than as human beings with rights.

Another example is the military power that destroys everything so people can no longer live there, effectively taking their land by force. This ties into environmental racism—communities of color often suffer the most from climate change and environmental degradation, yet they have the least say in policies that affect them.

Linda: How did you create a new community in Belgium?

Philsan: We opened up our own home. We put carpets on the streets and created a communal space outside. We realized that even though we lacked a large extended family, we had the privilege of knowing what a strong, united family feels like. We wanted to create a space where everyone could come and feel welcomed.

For me, activism is about care. It's about daily acts of kindness that show we care for one another. In 1977, the Combahee River Collective stated that serving the weakest leads to liberation for everyone. This is the foundation of intersectional activism—it's about identity politics but also about looking beyond them. We are not the first to do this; there is a long legacy of Black ecologies.

Linda: You mention the importance of history and reclaiming identity. Can you expand on that?

Philsan: One example is the famous speech Ain't I a Woman?, often attributed to Sojourner Truth. The reality is that it was edited and rewritten by a white woman, which changed its meaning. This happens all the time—Black narratives are distorted or erased.

Colonialism didn't just take land; it took away identities. Many Black people were forced to adopt new names and new realities. Today, people are reclaiming their names and histories. Identity is fluid—it acknowledges colonialism's impact, but

it also reclaims pre-colonial histories. Take Black American culture, for example. The hip-hop scene, language, and expressions—all of these are a mix of pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial influences. The ability to take something and make it your own is powerful.

Linda: You also talk about hope being essential to activism. Why is that?

Philsan: Hope is the engine of activism. We cannot afford hopelessness. I always reference bell hooks—her book "Homeplace: A Site of Resistance" describes how Black women have historically turned home into a radical space of political resistance. Healing from oppression is not just a private act; it has a broader impact.
During the Black Lives Matter protests, first aid and food distributions happened in Black women's homes. Care was extended outward. It's about reappropriating what it means to be a woman—politicizing care and making it valuable and acknowledged. Challenging oppression requires love and affirmation.

Linda: How does this idea of community care relate to ecological activism?

Philsan: "Earthbound – on Solid Ground" by bell hooks discusses displacement and loss of land. Black communities who escaped oppression often turned to the forest, foraging to survive. Their homes were built with organic materials, and they learned from Indigenous South African knowledge. There is a deep spirituality and connection to the land.

The term Black ecologist exists because environmental concerns are often seen as a privilege of white people. But Black ecologies are deeply political and rooted in survival, not just theory. The main question is always: What does the community need?

Linda: Your PhD focuses on food practices in the diaspora. Can you share more about that?

Philsan: I focus on food practices in diasporic communities in Belgium and the Netherlands. Food changes depending on context, and I explore how to create safe spaces for people to heal and share together. Healing happens collectively, in the same physical space. Online activism is useful but limiting—it creates absolutes, where you are either right or wrong. Real activism happens in real space, through negotiation and trial and error.
For example, opening up our home required constant negotiation. Sometimes my family felt inconvenienced or annoyed, but that's the price of having a community. We live in a society that avoids discomfort, but facing difficult emotions is necessary for growth.

Linda: You talk about activism as something embedded in daily life. Can you expand on that?

Philsan: Love is always at the center of my practice. I care for others because I need care myself. Activism doesn't always have to be loud—it can be soft activism, in daily life. Checking on people, asking what they need.

People need a village. But the real question is: Are you a good villager?
It is important to inconvenience yourself for others. If something is wrong, shouldn't we feel it? Too much of our world is about avoiding discomfort, but real activism means stepping into discomfort, being present, and building something real.

Conversation with artist Müge Yilmaz

About Müge

Müge Yilmaz's (İstanbul, 1985 – Based in Amsterdam) artistic practice centres on themes of safety, communal support, and faith. Through her use of performance, photography, and installations, she creates a feminist, science-fiction-inspired aesthetic. Her work explores the psychological, societal, and environmental aspects of three ecosystems in order to imagine possible future scenarios, with a particular emphasis on the concept of protection and scarcity. She obtained an MFA in photography at ISIA Urbino, Italy, and was a resident artist at the Rijksakademie van Beelde Kunsten in 2013 – 2014, Amsterdam, Netherlands.
Yılmaz has exhibited her work at numerous venues, including the 59th Venice Biennial (2022), the 16th Istanbul Biennial (2019), the 11th Shanghai Biennial (2016) and many other museums and art spaces.

Linda: Your work really engages deeply with feminist and ecofeminist themes. I'm curious, what do you think are the main limitations of museums in terms of their logic or structure? And how do you personally experience those limitations when it comes to exhibiting your work?

Müge: Yeah... almost everything, really. I think the biggest issue is that museums are mostly indoor spaces, and for me, that's always been a problem. I believe museums should have a lot more outdoor areas. That would be a simple yet significant change, especially as more artists are working with ecological thinking. The indoor museum is really the antithesis of nature—it's the opposite of ecology. You can't have anything alive inside a museum.
So even when there are exhibitions about nature, they're only displaying dead things. It's kind of sad. The only museum I know of that has made a shift in this direction is the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven. They have a small space called "The Eye," which is basically a room without a ceiling—so it's open to the air. They recently started including living elements in the collection there, like one artist collective grew tomatoes in the space. That was exciting.
But most museums are sterile and life-

less. Especially for me, when I work with wood—if I use construction wood, it's fine. But if I use natural wood, like local trees or volunteer trees, they literally have to freeze it and then put it in a gas chamber. I'm not joking—they kill everything alive in that piece of wood. Because they can't risk any living beings entering the museum.
And I do understand it to some extent—if there's a Rembrandt hanging in the next room, you can't exactly have mushrooms growing on your sculpture. But at the same time, a lot of these exhibitions about nature have nothing to do with nature itself—they're just representations. That's frustrating.
I really think museums should have outdoor spaces, or even gardens attached to them. Something like an arboretum. Maybe there should be separate spaces: one for organic art, and one for inorganic art. I don't know, just something more flexible.

Linda: And how do you see that working with the Dutch winter?

Müge: You can definitely adapt to the climate. You can have covered areas, semi-open spaces—transition zones between indoors and outdoors. You could have large windows and indoor spaces that extend into sculpture gardens. The idea is that artists don't necessarily have to work outside in winter, but visitors can still experience outdoor works.
And honestly, the winters in the Netherlands are getting milder. It didn't even snow this year. The canals didn't freeze. My boyfriend used to skate on the canals every winter, but now that just doesn't happen. So yeah, we can rethink how we use outdoor space in museums.
Of course, climate control is important for preserving collections. But artists should have more freedom. That's my point.

Linda: That makes total sense. And then I also wanted to ask—besides the physical limitations, what's your experience with museum bureaucracy?

Müge: Oh, that's my other big issue. The timelines and bureaucracy are just exhausting. When museums commission a work, they want to know exactly what you're going to make six months in advance. And I'm like... I don't know yet. I need time to think, to feel it out.
This isn't directly about your research, but it's a huge issue. Museums operate on this capitalist, production-oriented timeline that's completely at odds with the artistic process. Art isn't linear—it's emotional, spiritual, intuitive. Things emerge in their own time.

Linda: No, I actually think that's very relevant. That whole perception of time and productivity is so ingrained in how institutions function—it's totally disconnected from how art is made.

Müge: Exactly. For example, now we're working with Museum Amsterdam, and they told me I can't grow anything in the space. And then three months before the exhibition, they're asking me for a high-res image of the work. I'm like—what? It's not even finished!
They don't expect you to just finish the work; they expect you to plan it out in

a way that fits their schedule. It's such a top-down, institutional mindset. And ironically, sometimes even the curators themselves feel restricted—they're stuck in this bureaucracy, too.
You should talk to the people at Museum Arnhem if you want a good example of a museum that's doing things differently. It's probably the most feminist museum in the Netherlands. They've had female directors for nearly 30 years, and their collection has one of the highest percentages of female artists. They also have an outdoor sculpture park, and they listen. It's actually the only museum where my work is in the permanent collection. So if you're looking to talk to a museum that aligns more with your thinking, they'd be a great place to start.

Linda: Amazing—thank you! I'll definitely look into that. And I really liked what you said earlier about finding these "in-between" spaces—corridors, outdoor areas—because that's also very much in line with my ideas. A space that adapts to change, with different elements coexisting. Not completely separate, but interwoven.

Müge: Exactly. It's interesting because the word "museum" comes from the muses—goddesses of the arts. It has a very feminine origin. But the museum space today feels so masculine.

Linda: Yes! That's exactly what I was thinking. The muse is seen as a feminine figure, but also in this passive role, while the man is the creator.

Müge: Right. That's why I like the metaphor of the goddess better. The goddess is a symbol of power—not power in the sense of dominance, but in the sense of equality. It's about having agency, making decisions, being strong. That's the kind of figure we need more of. I think the goddess is the opposite of the muse—active rather than passive.
And I mean, sure, you can redefine "muse" in a positive way. Like, my dog is my muse—she inspires me every day. But the goddess represents the female figure taking initiative. It's not about being a superhero. It's about women just living their lives, taking responsibility, and being visible in history—especially in histories where they've been erased or ignored.

Linda: That's so powerful. I also saw you're really interested in science fiction, and I went through your Instagram, which links this idea of science fiction with femininity and speculative thinking. I've been reading a bit of Ursula Le Guin, and I'm curious—how do you think fabulation or speculative fiction can be integrated into exhibition spaces? How can they help us tell stories differently?

Müge: I think all art is a kind of fabulation. All art is speculation. That's why I love the connection between science fiction literature and visual art. It's the same process—you imagine a story and write it, or you imagine a sculpture and make it. It's just different media, but the creative process is so similar.
We did an exhibition at W139 that explored exactly this—artists working with feminine or queer science fiction. That

space is amazing because it's the complete opposite of a museum. They let you do whatever you want, as long as it's safe for the public. It was a museum-scale exhibition, but with total artistic freedom. We also had a library installation that had been shown at the Venice Biennale—Cecilia Alemani curated it for The Milk of Dreams. It included over 300 books in a kind of immersive reading room. People could come, browse the books, and see the artworks. That was a great example of bringing fiction into a spatial experience.

Linda: Wow, that's a beautiful way to do "outdoors indoors"—really inspiring.

Müge: Yes, and Cecilia was really great about breaking the rules. The only thing I couldn't have were pillows—because of hygiene, apparently. Italy still has so much bureaucracy, too. Not as much as the Netherlands, but still enough to complicate things.
These are just examples of how we tried to create spaces that support speculation and fabulation—not as fantasy, but as real political commentary. I think it's important to remember that all politics are a kind of science fiction.

Linda: Could you say more about that?

Müge: Sure. Every politician has a vision of the future, and they try to shape the world toward that vision. Some are fascists—they imagine a future without Black people, for example. That's science fiction. It's horrifying, but it's a speculative fiction they're trying to make real. Then there are people who imagine a future where women have equal power—that's also science fiction, because it's not reality yet. So all these political visions are just different versions of speculative futures. It's not always about space or spaceships. It's just imagining something different from what we have now. Octavia Butler and Ursula Le Guin are great at this—they use metaphors like aliens to talk about people who are marginalized. "Alien" just becomes a metaphor for being treated as a foreigner, as someone not accepted. Invasion stories? They're about colonialism. These stories are deeply rooted in reality, and very political.

Linda: That's such a powerful perspective. I've never thought of it like that, but it makes so much sense.

Müge: And a lot of what I do around goddesses ties into this too. It's about reclaiming history—reclaiming power—not in a dominating way, but in an equal, self-actualized way. We weren't taught any of this in school. We learned about the Ottomans, sure, but not about the ancient goddess cultures.
The same goes for ecology—no one taught us how to grow food. We had to learn algebra, but not how to take care of the earth. So now we sit down and teach ourselves. That's what research is—filling in the gaps of what we weren't taught. Self-education is so powerful.

Linda: And I'm also curious about the work you do with the Four Siblings in Amsterdam, but also your practice of workshops?

Müge: That's a very interesting question—and I'll give you quite a controversial answer. I do give a lot of workshops, and I used to teach a lot too. But I don't anymore, because it's exhausting and it pays very little. It just doesn't make sense.

Of course, that's not necessarily a problem with the practice itself—it's a problem with institutions. I think workshops are an amazing format. We do a lot of them. For example, in the exhibition I sent you with W139, the public program included what we called "anti-workshops," and they were amazing. It was like a three-week summer school with a lot of knowledge sharing. But the important thing was that everyone involved was paid at least 500 euros, minimum. Because it's a lot of work.

In the Four Siblings, we also do many workshops, but only when we can pay people properly—at least 500 euros, plus 100 euros for materials, and sometimes even 200 if needed. Because it's not just one hour of work—it's the accumulation of knowledge, preparation, emotional labor, everything.

Of course, it doesn't always have to be based on monetary exchange. You can also gather ten people, and each of them gives a workshop—that becomes a school, you know?

Conversation with curator Rita Ouedraogo

About Rita

Rita Ouédraogo is a curator, writer, and researcher. She lives and works in Amsterdam.
She studied cultural anthropology at the University of Amsterdam (UvA). She lives and works in Amsterdam. As a curator, writer, and research and community programmer, her work is driven by her interest in the African diaspora, the decolonization of organizations, institutional racism, pop culture, and social issues. She has worked on various projects aimed at making museum collections more accessible. She researches questions related to cooperation and solidarity, such as how cooperation can take place in situations of power inequality from a decolonial point of view.
From 2020 to 2021, she was the co-curator of the Hartwig Art Collection Fund. In 2021, she and Metro54 curated the project "A Funeral for Street Culture" for Framer Framed in Amsterdam. In December 2022, she became the curator of Buro Stedelijktogether with Azu Nwagbogu.

Linda:When did you start working for Buro Stedelijk? And how has your role and the organization evolved over time? What are the main differences between when it was outside the museum walls and now?

Rita:I started in December 2022, together with another curator, Azu Nwagbogu, when we received the funding to launch the project. When the position opened up, I actually never imagined myself working in a museum.
SMBA — Stedelijk Bureau Museum Amsterdam — the former location of the organization, was a really important place, but it was founded the year after I was born. It functioned as a project space in the city center. Because of that, the whole premise was very different from what Buro Stedelijk is now. It existed outside the museum.
Now Buro is inside the Stedelijk Museum, which changes everything. Being a project space within a museum is almost the opposite situation. Before, you could simply give an artist the keys and say, "Let's get some

pizzas and figure this out." That kind of freedom is something you constantly have to negotiate in a museum context.
So the question becomes: how do you create a space that still allows experimentation, trying things out, without breaking all the rules of the museum? And at the same time, how can we question those rules?
Almost everything we've done so far has been about asking what these walls actually do. What do they allow? What are their limits? There are certain practices, artworks, and projects that really flourish in museum spaces—and many that don't. That's fine too. So we ask: what does an artist or collaborator need, and how can we support that?
We started with listening sessions. There were so many people with expectations about what Buro should become. Many had warm feelings about SMBA and were asking whether this would be "the next SMBA," but actually it's something quite different. So we wanted to listen. There are still many people who participated in those listening sessions who are collaborating with us today. For example, in a few weeks we're doing a manifestation with an artist who joined those early sessions. She wanted to create a tapestry work that will be installed in the hallway of the Buro. It's also an experiment—how do people move through the space when there's a work like that on the floor?
We've been in conversation about how her work could exist in the Buro for almost two years now. That kind of long-term dialogue has been very important.
Collaboration is really central to my curatorial practice. Just yesterday we opened Manifestation 53, *I Must Still Grow in the Dark*. It's a collaboration with Stephanie Noach and grows out of her research on darkness. It also intersects with my own interests—darkness as a concept, but also darkness as Blackness—and how those ideas can find a place in the Buro.

Linda: I can imagine there's a big difference between the community around Buro Stedelijk and the regular visitors of the museum. Do people usually understand that difference?

Rita: Some do, and some probably don't. There are many tourists coming to the museum, of course. In Amsterdam, people who are interested in more experimental practices might know about Buro. But internationally it might not always be clear.
Also, the central exhibition space has only been open for about two years. It's still developing what it can be. That's also why I've programmed so much. It may seem like a lot, but it's intentional. I want to show that many different things are possible here.

We do reading groups, essays, manifestations on the windows, collaborations with nightclubs, projects near Westerpark where we fill windows with artworks. We're constantly asking: how can we manifest in different places and collaborate with different organizations?
For example, we collaborate with W139 and other spaces around the city.
From the beginning, there was also a focus on Amsterdam. I was born and raised here, which is helpful because I already have a community here. The work is intense, so it helps when people know you and your practice.
Even though most of our programming is in English to include more people, understanding the subtleties of Dutch culture helps me navigate these spaces.

Linda: The idea of having a central space but also many other spaces is really interesting.

Rita: *Yes. One of the first things we asked when I started was to remove the blinds from the windows so people could actually see inside.
Often in institutions you don't see who is working there. Where are these people? Now you can see me making a sandwich at my desk. It humanizes the institution a little.
The windows are huge, and we use them as a platform for artworks. It's a way to communicate with people outside. Not everyone wants to enter museum buildings, which is understandable. Many people have institutional trauma or simply don't feel welcome there.
So we also bring art outside.
For example, every year on July 1st we close Buro Stedelijk to commemorate the abolition of slavery in Suriname and the Caribbean—Keti Koti. The rest of the museum stays open, but Buro closes.
Each year I invite a graphic designer to create a visual intervention for the windows around this commemoration.
For one project we collaborated with a poet who wrote a beautiful poem about Keti Koti. We placed different verses of the poem on windows across the neighborhood so visitors could walk a route and read the poem.
The route is open 24/7, which makes it accessible. Some people might only see one verse; others might walk the whole route.
Another artist involved researches visual language in Curaçao. She explores elements like knots in her graphic work, and on our website we also share parts of her research process so people can understand how these works are developed.
I think that makes art and design more accessible—people can see how ideas take shape.

Linda: How does that work in practice? If you want to put something

on the windows, do you have to ask permission from the museum?

Rita: At the beginning I did. I asked, "Is it okay if we use the windows?" And they said yes.
After that, I didn't need to ask permission for each specific project.
Of course the building belongs to the Stedelijk Museum. Buro Stedelijk is actually a project within the museum—it's not its own independent foundation.
Our funding was secured for three years. We received a fixed budget, and everything comes out of that: salaries, production costs, guards, PR, marketing—everything.
So even though I'm paid by the museum, the project itself operates somewhat independently within it.

Linda: Some of the projects seem quite risky for a museum. For example, the one where the space was filled with water.

Rita: Yes, almost everything we've done has involved some level of struggle.
Museums are very "careful" spaces. They preserve artworks, everything is climate-controlled, and that makes sense. But a project space is about experimentation.
So there's an inherent contradiction there. And that contradiction interests me.

My background is in anthropology and institutional critique. I've always been interested in the question: can you change institutions from the inside?

That's part of the premise here. What can you actually do when you are inside an institution? And how can you make people aware of how these structures operate?

One project I do every year is called "To Be Determined."* I invite three artists to bring their studio practice into the space.
They share the space and decide how they want to use it. They each receive a production budget. There's no formal opening, but each artist organizes one "manifestation night," which we curate together.
It could be anything—a reading, a performance, even a block party.
Last year one of the artists, Kenneth, arrived on the first day with just two paintings. I told him, "You can really take up space here." He ended up painting a huge mural across the wall. He worked there almost every day while visitors watched. It was one of the strongest works he's ever done. Eventually we had to paint it over, which was sad. But that's also part of the temporary nature of Buro Stedelijk.
From the beginning I knew this project was funded for three years. That also shapes how you program—

there's a sense of urgency.

Linda: But it doesn't feel like an ego project. It feels like you're really giving artists freedom and trust.

Rita: I hope so.
When artists feel trusted, the work becomes stronger. They feel they can really explore the potential of the space.
For the exhibition we just opened, many of the artists came to work in the space themselves. They inhabited it.
This may sound a bit mystical, but I think you can feel when artists want their work to be there.
Another important question for me is: how do we take care of artworks—and the people who make them? Different artists need different things. One artist from Cuba, for example, has photographs in the show but didn't want to travel here. That's okay. Taking care of his work means respecting that decision.
Another artist might want to spend a lot of time in the space. So the care looks different in each case.

Linda: I also noticed that some works contain codes that many viewers might not fully understand.

Rita: Yes, and that's okay.
One artist in "To Be Determined" works with spirituality from Curaçao. Blue is a protective color in his practice.
When he came to the Netherlands, he noticed how spirituality is often marginalized here. In many parts of the world, spirituality coexists naturally with daily life.
He placed a text in Papiamento at the entrance of the space. For many visitors, it was unreadable. For me too. That kind of opacity is important—it creates a different relationship with the work.
You can still feel something even if you don't fully decode it.

Linda: I felt that yesterday. There were many codes I didn't understand, but the work was still very powerful.

Rita: Exactly. Art doesn't always need to be fully explained.

Linda: I also wanted to ask about your background in anthropology. Anthropology has colonial roots—how do you navigate that in your curatorial practice?

Rita: During my studies I was lucky to have mentors who were very critical of anthropology's colonial history. My focus became power relations and institutional critique.
For my master's thesis I worked at the Research Center for Material Culture, connected to the Wereldmuseum. We worked with historical collections and asked: how can we reinterpret them today?

How can we involve people who were historically excluded from these institutions?
For me, art is a way of engaging with the world. Artists help us think through complex realities.
Sometimes I feel it's too much to ask artists to constantly explain their work in words. They've already made the argument through the artwork itself.

Linda: And art can also function as a form of healing.

Rita: Yes, though sometimes you also feel complicit. You bring people into museum spaces that might actually feel hostile.
So communication becomes very important. I try to be transparent about what the institution can and cannot offer.
For example, our reading group doesn't happen in the exhibition space. We meet in our office—what we call the studio space.
There we can drink tea, write on the walls, and feel more relaxed. In the museum galleries you're not even allowed to bring liquids.

Linda: One last question: how do you think about archiving, especially since many of the projects are temporary?

Rita: I find archives fascinating—especially what gets left out or erased.
From the beginning we decided not to produce an annual publication, partly because there wasn't money for it.
Instead we've been building an archive on the website—documenting projects, essays, research materials, even artists' working notes.
At the end of my three-year term we will publish a book. It will launch on November 27, together with a final manifestation.
The publication will include writings from many collaborators who helped shape Buro Stedelijk.
It's also important because institutions sometimes forget how projects like this were built. Years later people might just see that it exists without knowing the history.
This project has been built by many people, and I'd really want that to be visible.

Conversation with MCAD's director Joselina Cruz and curator Arianna Mercado

About MCAD

Manila is a city of many facets, where colonial churches stand next to glass skyscrapers and daily life unfolds among street vendors, shopping centers, restaurants, and galleries. Shaped by improvisation and resilience, the city hosts a variety of artistic practices, from public murals to the iconic jeepneys, colorful public buses that traverse the city, serving as mobile public spaces. In recent years, these widespread practices have contributed to a growing and vibrant contemporary art scene characterized by experimentation, collaboration, and often social and political activism, responding to everyday issues such as corruption, inequality, and the impact of climate change.

In this context, the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design (MCAD) at De La Salle–College of Saint Benilde holds a distinctive position. Unlike most museums in the Philippines, which are privately funded and collection-based, MCAD operates as a non-profit, non-collecting institution, focusing on temporary exhibitions and experimental projects. This choice distinctly sets it apart within the Philippine museum landscape, often dominated by collection-based institutions, patronage, and art market connections. Through both on-site and off-site programs, the museum promotes dialogue, participation, and engagement with new audiences, creating opportunities for artists and communities who might otherwise lack access to the contemporary art scene. This approach reflects a broader understanding of what a museum can be: not only a space to view artworks but also a platform for learning, collaboration, and exchange.

Conversations with Joselina Cruz, MCAD director, and Arianna Mercado, curator of the exhibition Moments of Delay, make it clear that the museum's work is deeply tied to the urban and social context in which it operates. The questions shaping artistic practice in the Philippines, such as making art in a moment of precarity, and reflecting on the temporality of human experience, are also global issues. Through exhibitions and programs, MCAD creates a space in which these shared experiences can be explored, linking the local and the international in subtle but meaningful ways.

A New Museum Model in the Philippines

Linda: How did the idea of a non-collecting institution emerge in the Philippine museum context?

Joselina: Returning from the Singapore Biennale, Saint Benilde College initially asked me to start a collection on the campus's ground floor. It soon became clear that the building was unsuitable: too much light, too many windows, and non-optimal conditions for long-term preservation. But more importantly, I asked a broader question: why do all museums in Manila revolve around private collections? Even university museums are tied to the market and patronage, meaning artists are often connected to the market before experimentation or creative process. Choosing not to build a collection became a way to step outside that system and rethink what a museum could be in the Philippines.

Linda: How did MCAD's architecture, with its light and dimensions influenced curatorial and artistic practices?

Joselina: The building, built in 2007 according to the design of Filipino modernist architect Eduardo Calma, is quite atypical, almost warehouse-like. The ceilings are incredibly high, the spaces enormous, and the scale can feel overwhelming. The initial idea was to create a laboratory for artists and architects, a place where they could experiment with space. However, very few artists in the philippines operate on this scale, often for the lack of means and financial availability. However, we tried to transform the space into an opportunity, and instead of forcing the building into a conventional museum model, we embraced its peculiarities, creating a space for temporary projects, installations, and experimentation. The architecture pushed us to be flexible, responsive, and open, becoming integral to the museum's identity.

MCAD Commons: Art Beyond the Walls

Linda: This flexibility also extends to MCAD Commons, where you work in spaces outside the museum. What motivated this approach, and how does it change the way exhibitions and audiences are conceived?

Joselina: The main goal was accessibility. Many people don't come to Malate, the museum's neighborhood, because it's far and in the middle of traffic. We asked: why not bring the art to them? Going outside the museum changes everything: we have to consider the space, the audience, and their interaction. This makes exhibitions more dynamic, integrated into daily life, and allows us to reach people who would never set foot in a traditional gallery.

Linda: Many MCAD Commons projects take place in unconventional spaces, sometimes outside of Metro Manila. How do you choose sites, and what do they offer compared to a traditional museum?

Joselina: Site selection is always collab-

orative with the artist. We ask: will this space be meaningful for the work? Will it engage the public in new ways? During the pandemic, we transformed a sari-sari (a small neighborhood minimarket and social space) into a projection venue, integrating the project into everyday life. In another case, the sixth floor of an old shopping center became the "Library of Unread Books," where anyone could select books via free donation. In the last MCAD commons happening, Elisa Tan's exhibition, we chose a collective creative hub, so the show could enter the city's cultural discourse rather than remain confined to a museum setting. These off-site projects make art more accessible, socially engaged, and often more impactful than if it were confined to the museum walls.

Global Problems, Local Contexts: Moments of Delay

However, this focus on public engagement, artistic process and temporality, are also made possible within the museum walls, as the exhibition Moments of Delay has exemplified. Following MCAD's distinctive approach, the exhibition emphasizes process, temporality, and engagement, placing Filipino artists in dialogue with global issues while remaining grounded in local conditions. This approach transcends dichotomies like "local vs. global" or "Filipino vs. foreign," offering a lens into the complex realities of contemporary artistic production.

Linda: Moments of Delay seems to position Filipino artists within a global debate while remaining rooted locally. How do you balance the local and global aspects of the exhibition?

Arianna: In Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, we are often considered an "other" compared to the Western art scene. The exhibition aims to show that, even with limited resources, artists' thinking is similar to their Western peers. Artists respond to global issues, such as the multiplicity of identities, issues of climate and labor, from a local perspective. It's not about exporting "Filipino-ness" or fitting into a foreign narrative, but about connecting local experience to broader questions meaningfully.

Linda: The exhibition goes beyond the construction of a Filipino identity and national binaries. How does this affect the selection of artists and works?

Arianna: We look for artists working in intermediate, hybrid spaces where identity isn't fixed. Activist collectives like Tambisan ng Sining, born during Martial Law, are paired with younger artists, such as the multimedia artist Celine Lee. The focus is on practice and action: how artists explore complexity and multiplicity rather than answering "what does it mean to be Filipino?" It's about embracing the layers and contradictions of lived experience, both individual and collective.

Linda: Moments of Delay is not an object-focused exhibition. Can you explain its structure and what it means for the audience?

Arianna: The exhibition emphasizes process, temporality, and engagement. It includes workshops, extended programs, and projects beyond the opening. This approach allows the audience to engage with artists' practices over time, not just view static works. In this way, the exhibition becomes part of the city's life and fosters dialogue rather than producing art solely for display.

On the Challenges of Running MCAD and Its Value for the City

Linda: While MCAD's mission is clear, operating as a non-collecting museum presents specific challenges. What are the main difficulties in maintaining this continuous public engagement, as well as relevance in the art world and structural stability?

Joselina: There are certainly some challenges. First, funding can be complicated since we are a non-profit organization and do not have a permanent collection, so some sponsors do not immediately understand how we work. And since our model is different, being a temporary and non-collecting museum, sometimes both artists and the public need a bit of time to get used to it. But these challenges also push us to be creative, flexible, and attentive to how we relate to people and the city.
To conclude, MCAD represents an innovative model of a contemporary museum: collection-free, flexible, socially engaged, and rooted in the local context, while maintaining a global outlook. Despite the challenges, such as limited funding, accessibility issues, and imposing architecture, the museum continues to experiment, creating meaningful opportunities for both artists and audiences. Exhibitions like "Moments of Delay" show how Filipino artists engage with global issues while remaining locally grounded, demonstrating that art can create possibilities and offering a model for contemporary institutions far beyond Metro Manila and the Philippines.