

MOVING BEYOND THE LANDSCAPE

A REFLECTION ON OUR TIME IN THE GARDEN

This past spring, the garden of the Toluistuin set the stage for a three-week residency that brought together choreographers Dario Tortorelli, Elisa Zuppini and Nica, scenographer Theun Misk, composer Job Oberman, and landscape architect Anna Fink. Through the project *Landscaping*, dance and performance platform WhyNot set out to learn how we can relate to the landscape through movement.

‘Landscaping’ as a theme could not be more relevant as humanity is currently facing the devastating effects of climate change, resulting from our unbridled destruction of the environment. Our landscapes and our engagement with them require us to bridge the divide between the human and non-human. At first this seems like an impossible challenge when the difference in scale between the body and that which we commonly refer to as landscape couldn’t be greater. Yet, many artists have attempted to discover where landscapes end and our bodies begin. During the residency, we instinctively followed in their footsteps through our own experiments, learning that most answers were to be found in practice. Reasoning with the landscape proved to be more demanding, as the word itself is not readily defined. ➔ CONTINUES ON PAGE 2

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brought about a paradigm shift that had already been brewing — land became something one could control and acquire. Paintings depicting landscapes became the vehicle through which one could express one's status and dominion over nature. The medium of the painting was also a tool for propaganda, proving that one's domination of the land, and the people within it, was natural and good.

Not long after, the broader world crept into the frame. 'Landscape' evolved from a depiction of a view to the actual view. It was no longer enough to express one's wealth and property through the commissioning of a painting. These aestheticised depictions of territory informed people's desire to recreate these scenes within their own environment, spurring the development of a new profession — the landscape designer. Through the practice of enclosure (appropriating common land into private estates) the English countryside became the ideal canvas for the upper classes, aided by wealth generated from the colonies, to set about shaping their environment into an idealised vision of nature. John B. Jackson, one of the founders of landscape studies, describes this moment as the theatricalisation of the world.² Humanity became the protagonist acting upon our natural environments, which were relegated to the backdrop. Simply put, the world in a frame is a theatre.

WHAT IS LANDSCAPE?

Ask 10 people to give you a definition of 'landscape' and you will get 10 different answers. The term is slippery and vague, infused with personal, local, historical, and political meaning. Yet its indefinability carries within it conceptual freedom, best exemplified by W.J.T. Mitchell's assertion that landscape is a medium.¹ In other words, it is a concept we can work through and with. The term landscape does not so much describe that which we call a landscape itself, but the symbolic and cultural coding we project onto our environment.

The conceptual nature of the word is no doubt the result of its fascinating history. Derived from the Dutch *landschap*, which originally meant the state of the land, it entered the English vocabulary in the 16th century through landscape painting. This new genre developed during a period marked by epic upheavals within science and the way Europeans perceived their environments, but it was also spurred on by changes specifically with-in the Netherlands. As a new republic — having successfully gained its independence from Spain and gained wealth from the advance of capitalism — the Low Countries desired to express their status. This of course was underscored by the continent's frenzied colonisation of the New World. European encounters with these new environments

ANNA
HALPRIN



ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE

“We experience ourselves as dancers through awareness of our movements and our city through awareness of our movements within it.”

No other choreographer has worked so rigorously with the landscape than the late Anna Halprin. Though her intellectual collaboration with her husband Lawrence, a landscape architect, played a significant role, ultimately it was a practical dilemma which would compel her to engage so intimately with her natural surroundings. Anna wished to continue her career in dance without sacrificing the care of her two daughters. This required a studio near to the Halprins' home, thus eliminating the need to commute from the studio in the city to their house on a hillside grove of redwoods and madronas, near

Mount Tamalpais and San Francisco. Together with respected theatre architect and designer Arch Lauterer, Lawrence designed an outdoor dance studio for Anna that would profoundly change her art and practice. Lauterer was an ideal design partner since he relished the opportunity to develop a transparent theatre. “Virtually every theater since the fifteenth century has been opaque, presenting a series of narrow pictures on a box-like stage hemmed in by scenery. In this theater we are not attempting to present pictures. We're trying to create dramatic images out of movement.”³

The dance deck, as it was dubbed by the Halprins, was a deceptively simple structure that responded to its surroundings. “The deck was not an object,” explained Lawrence, as “it did not become an object in the landscape. It became part of the landscape and that is very different. The fact of its free form, which moves around responding to the trees and to the mountain views and other things, has been a premise of mine ever since. So it was a place that affected [Anna's] work and also affected mine as a role model for the future.”⁴ Engaging so directly with the natural environment that enshrined the deck forced Anna to start from scratch and rethink her whole approach to dance and movement. The ever-changing light, from morning to evening and season to season, pushed her to experiment. “Movement within a moving space, I have found, is different from movement within a static cube.”⁵



During our Tolhuistuin residency, simple actions were considered in order to play around with the staging of the landscape. There was also the desire that, by intervening with it, we would feel more connected to the natural environment. The artists discussed the various possibilities and arrived at the act of digging. It is a seemingly modest intervention since it requires a shovel — a humble tool. We experimented with various types of sand and soil — the uniform heap of white construction sand, a patch of earth overrun with roots from the surrounding trees, and an inviting lawn covered with grass in Amsterdamse Bos. We took turns to see if it could feel like a collective experience. The simple act of digging a hole suddenly became fraught with varying concerns, from the philosophical to the practical. What right did we have to disturb the field? Is a permit required to do so? Is it pretentious to call it art when we are appropriating the work of gardeners? The implications of digging became very real as we witnessed the earthworms writhing in the black, upturned soil. We carefully picked them up and placed them near the edge of the field, hoping they would burrow their way back into the soil. There is a certain inherent violence to the process of digging for the sake of digging, and with no clear intention or goal behind it, we could not justify continuing to puncture the soil.

Anna Fink's earlier exercise contrasted greatly to the digging of the hole. In Vliegenbos, a park in the north of Amsterdam, Anna guided us, barefoot, to a spot where a pile of sticks and branches awaited us. Silently, she started to arrange the sticks one next to the other, placing each at an angle on the trunk of a tree which had grown sideways, defying gravity. As if bowing to the earth, the trunk of the tree was supported by a new set of roots from what were once branches. We followed suit, one by one, adding to Anna's careful arrangement. Slowly, a simple hut came into being, one which resembled the skeletal frame of a whale. Not all of us could fit within the enclosed space, but the porous nature of the structure made up for the lack of ample sitting room. Something was created from what was found, and it only required our hands and cooperation.

Both experiments could be read as simple interpretations of two art movements from the 1960s which were defined by their relationship to the landscape. The shovelling of soil recalls the work of the artists associated with the 1968 *Earthworks* exhibition at the Dawn Gallery in New York, the most famous of which is undoubtedly Robert Smithson. Smithson's works, such as *Spiral Jetty* (1970) and *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* (1971), were made through direct engagement with the landscape but required machines to transport, dig, and arrange stone and sand. In contrast, those working within the Land Art movement, best represented by the oeuvre of Richard Long, called for a gentle and ephemeral approach, one which works with the landscape as it is, and not how one wishes it to be. All that is left of his work — the lines in the

landscapes from repetitive walks, arrangements of stones and sticks—is the documentation. Whereas the digging of the field was marked by debate and negotiations and has left a scar in the field, the assembly of the hut occurred in silence and solicited no questions. There was a sense of completeness in the ephemerality of it which we knew would just as easily be dismantled by the park ranger to prevent people from sleeping in the public park.

THE MOVING LANDSCAPE

‘To be clear, everything I have ever done or will ever do can be summed up in one sentence: people walk on planet earth.’

This approach of embracing ephemerality can also enrich the design of the landscape. The collaboration between landscape architect George Descombes and artist Carmen Perrin exemplifies this. For the 1991 *Swiss Way*, Descombes was tasked to commemorate 700 years of the Swiss Confederation, deciding that instead of a series of monuments, they should create a path around Lake Brunnen. Guided by the credo that they would not introduce anything that could not be found within the project site, they intensified the elements that made up the Swiss landscape. One such element were the boulders strewn about the landscape, deposited by glaciers. Together with students, Perrin scrubbed all the layers of moss and dirt to reveal pristine white stone, as if the boulders had just been deposited there. “Washing uncovered memory,” explained Descombe. “Nothing more was needed.”⁶ Perrin’s intervention also revealed the movement of the landscape by emphasising the movement of the boulders through time. After less than two years, the boulders regained their patina.

Landscapes do not only move in time, but also through our perceptions as we move through them. By walking, we become part of the geography. Though the visual aspects dominate our perception of the landscape, our residency experiments attempted to engage with the landscape beyond merely observing it. One way to challenge our position as a spectator was by literally moving through the landscape. Under the guidance of Theun Mosk, we slowly walked, one after the other, taking care to maintain

a distance between each other that expanded and contracted as we moved through the urban centre of Amsterdam. As we progressed through the city, we formed a line, calibrating our distance and speed to one another. After some time, we adjusted pace and realised we had become part of the city. We were part of the spectacle of urban drama and at times were asked to explain ourselves. This echoed the work of Stanley Brouwn, a Surinamese-Dutch artist who was perhaps the first to elevate the act of walking to performance art. Starting in Amsterdam, Brouwn would meticulously record his movements. Expressed in simple measurements of time and space, his practice was centred around the erasure of his identity, which could be considered a radical attempt at becoming one with the landscape.

STANLEY
BROUWN



BECOMING LANDSCAPE

“Reading the land through my feet was one of the first ways in which I learnt to alter my walking. The need to test the stability and the ground under your feet is a basic and instinctive act but understanding how the ground responds is not so easy and demands an awareness of our own bodies that most of us have no need to use on any daily basis and so have forgotten.”

TRACY
HILL

The residency culminated in two evenings of performance. The underlying theme driving the artists’ experiments was the desire to transcend the boundaries between performer and spectator as this would also challenge the binary division between ourselves and our surroundings. Dario Tortorelli and Elisa Zuppini developed their own performances, specifically tailored to the characteristics of the garden, while keeping in mind the broader implications of working within the landscape. Dario started from the concept of evolution in movement and shapes while collaborating with four student dancers on his choreography. Elisa brought in Nica and together developed a duet around the concept of projection infused with classical elements, a nod to the romantic ideals that still echo through our perceptions of nature.

The first evening culminated in an improvised performance defined only through the minimal staging by Theun and a soundtrack by Job Oberman through a portable Bluetooth speaker. Chairs were nonchalantly placed around the intersection of two bike lanes near the expedition zone of Eye museum, an area defined by traffic and movement.

The audience was invited to take a seat and, while we anticipated the dances, a continuous stream of cyclists moved through the diffusely defined stage. To the people going about their day, the presence of the audience was a performance in and of itself since our appearance at the unremarkable crossing was so unexpected. Our unnaturalness became heightened as the performers appeared. The intersection of lanes became a space of layered and blurred experiences in which everyone became implicated in the performance. We remained seated long after the dancing had come to an end, comfortable within the landscape.

Some weeks later, while attempting to define the performance, Theun arrived at the term ‘intervention’—that once banal intersection had now forever been changed, even though the performance had left no physical mark. The collective experience had altered the landscape in his mind’s eye, after all, and it is what we project onto the landscape that will define it. This hints at the imminent and subtle transformation of the landscape of Amsterdamse Bos, a park far removed from the bustling centre of the Dutch capital. Though designed in the 1930s by urban planner Jakoba Mulder, the park’s aesthetics recall the principles of the 18th century English landscaped garden. The intention was to evoke an idealised natural landscape of rolling fields and curved waterways that do not hint at their actual origins. Amsterdamse Bos was built on former peat meadows—fields of fossil fuel extraction—with the labour of thousands of people, most of whom were unemployed, as well as Jewish prisoners who were forced to work the land during the second world war. What we define as pleasant landscapes are often attempts to obscure the uncomfortable truth of our impact on the human and non-human alike. Moving through and with the landscape is a modest way of engaging with our natural surroundings for what it is and not what we wish it should be.

1 W.J.T. Mitchell, ‘Imperial Landscape’ in W.J.T. Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 5.

2 Una Chaudhuri, ‘Land/Scene/Theory’ in Una Chaudhuri and Elinor Fuchs, eds., *Land/Scene/Theater* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan, 2002), 15.

3 Janice Ross, Anna Halprin: *Experience as Dance* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press), 105.

4 Ibid, 104.

5 Ibid, 106.

6 Georges Descombes, ‘How to Make a Path. The Swiss Way Project 1991’ in Penny Florence, ed., *Thinking the Sculpture Garden: Art, Plant, Landscape* (New York, NY: Routledge), 151.

FINDING KIN IN LAND / SOUNDSCAPE

TEXT BY
JOB OBERMAN

Landscapes, and everything that lives in them, produce soundscapes and simultaneously shape the way sound travels through them. Hills can direct sounds, trees can mask them, fauna can overpower them. *Finding Kin in Land / Soundscape* illuminates the connection between human spectators and the sounds that arise from the life around us.

Similar to the way that landscaping is the act of shaping land in new forms to fit human consumption, 'soundscaping' is the process of moulding its sonic qualities. Humans have a direct influence in the soundscape — during the Covid-19 pandemic, for instance, there has been a drop in anthropogenic sounds due to lockdown measures. Cities and landscapes have quietened down, whilst more birds and other non-human life have entered the public sphere. I want listeners to become more aware of the sounds around them that are already present.

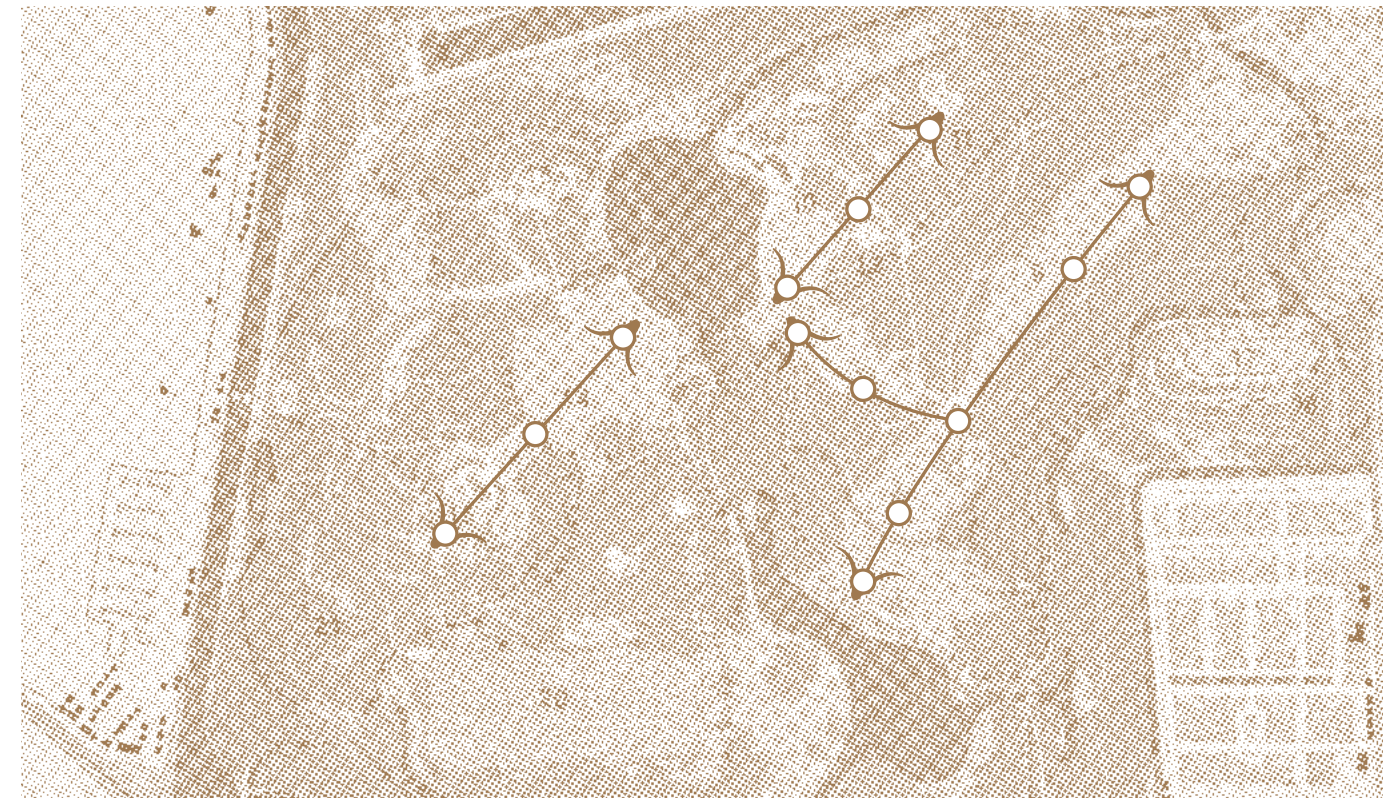
Soundwalks and Recordings

I made several sound walks through Amsterdamse Bos and recorded what I encountered. Sound walking is a method of walking along predetermined paths and, through recording processes, becoming acoustically aware of your surroundings. In recording, you have to be conscious that the very act of pointing a microphone shapes the sound being recorded.

I used omnidirectional and directional microphones to record both general soundscapes and specific 'zoomed-in' sounds. These records are mostly comprised of wind, birds, aeroplanes, humans, and various other rustling noises from which I digitally created melodies, rhythms, and other musical elements. I tried to visualise the shaping and moulding of the land to create a landscape in the same way that I shaped the sounds of the landscape.

Human and Bird Language

The recordings primarily focused on bird sounds as the 'voice' of non-human life in landscapes. Birds offer an innate connection between landscape, language, and soundscape, and Amsterdamse Bos is full of areas where the combination of different vegetation forces different species to interact and influence each other — what ornithologists call hybrid zones. Birdsong is, like human language, a cultural trait developed over years of migration and the copying of each other and other species. As Donna Haraway tells us in *Staying with the Trouble*, these voices and languages are prominent markers of kinship. The sound of birds and other animals around us creates a connection, as if we see them as voices and address them with shared language. Consciously listening to non-human voices is therefore a direct route towards understanding and finding our place in a natural world.

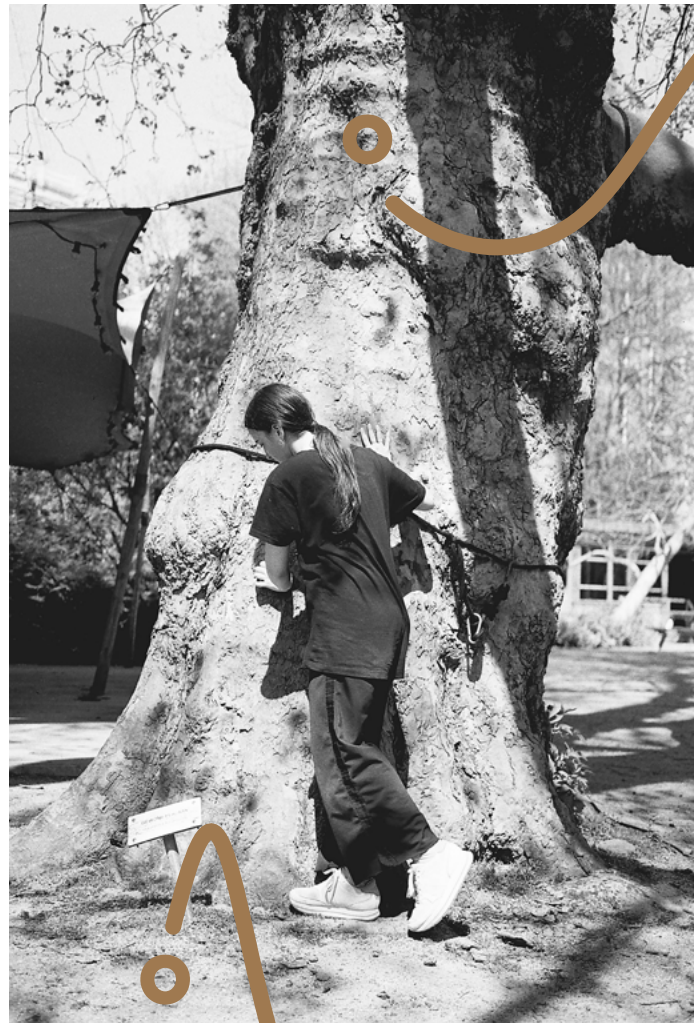


↑ BOSCHPLAN (1937), GEMEENTE AMSTERDAM.

All the sounds in *Finding Kin in Land / Soundscape* come from recordings in Amsterdamse Bos, forming a chorus with the present soundscape. I hope this process makes people more aware of the sounds around them and highlights our active role in shaping it. *Finding Kin in Land / Soundscape* reminds us that we are not only spectators in the landscape but also active participants. Will the sounds we make influence the bird songs of Amsterdamse Bos?



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Haraway, Donna (2016). *Staying with the Trouble*. Duke University Press.



ABOUT LANDSCAPING

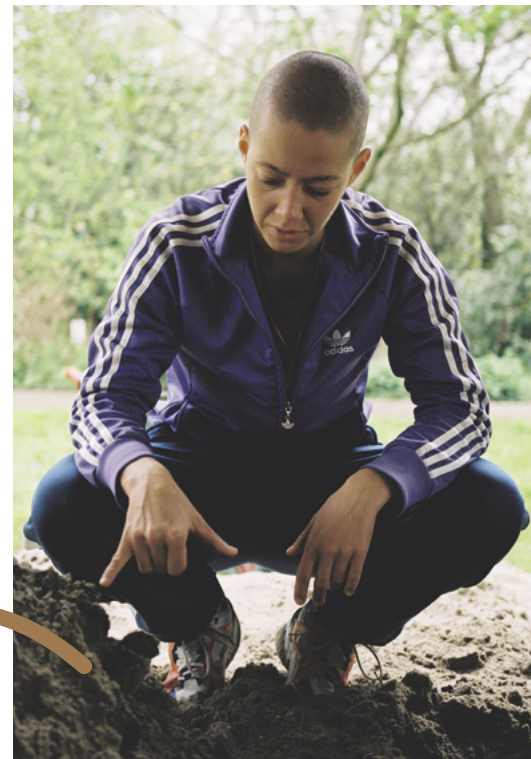
In 2021, WhyNot started a project that aims to explore our interaction with the landscape by means of movement and traces people leave behind. The Landscaping project kicked off with a three week residency in May and the event 'The Body & The Landscape' in August, both in the garden of the Tolhuistuin in Amsterdam. WhyNot brought together a group of artist from different corners of the cultural field to explore the topic and create the multidisciplinary performance piece *Landscaping*: landscape architect Anna Fink, researcher of (landscape) architecture Daphne Bakker, choreographers Dario Tortorelli, Elisa Zuppini & Nica, composer and producer Job Oberman alias Oceanic and scenographer Theun Mosk.

From 31 August to 4 September 2021, *Landscaping* will be presented as a series of interventions staged in the green backdrop of the Amsterdamse Bos. By working with physical connections, disruptions, rhythms, rituals, and changing sightlines, they unravel the continuous construction of the land and the role humans play in it. Part of the project is this publication 'Moving Beyond the Landscape', written by Daphne Bakker.

She analysed the whole work-in-progress of the collective and the discussions they had. In the publication she combines her own perspective and conclusions with those of the artists and presents compelling examples of various forms of land art from art history.

ABOUT WHYNOT

WhyNot is an Amsterdam based contemporary dance- and performance platform that aims to break open the world of dance by connecting body art to other creative domains. Their projects are presented in distinctive ways outside of the theatre black box. In addition to the biennial WhyNot festival, which always takes place in different locations and at different times in the year, WhyNot initiates interdisciplinary productions and research projects to experiment with concepts, themes and formats. In 2019/2020 their projects and festival focussed on the relationship between the body and architecture by taking the amoeba, the 'building block' of life and the body, as a starting point. From the micro to the macro, the project *Landscaping* (2021) now zooms out to examine the body in relation to our natural environment.



DAPHNE BAKKER is an editor for Failed Architecture Platform and co-curator of the 'Stories on Earth' project, one of the parallel projects of the Venice Biennale 2021. Her work explores past, present and future ways of inhabiting the landscape, specifically focusing on themes of resource extraction, displacement, traumatic heritages, and (personal) archives. At this moment Daphne is in the early stages of two research projects based in Suriname and Indonesia. The former will look at the ancestral land of the Saramaccan Maroon community, which was submerged to realize a hydroelectric dam for the bauxite mining industry. She will collaborate with artist Miguel Peres Dos Santos and curator Vincent van Velsen on the exhibition for Het Nieuwe Instituut, set to open in fall 2022. For the latter project, alongside René Boer from Failed Architecture and with the support of the Research Center for Material Culture (RCMC), Daphne will aide the Jakarta-based ruangrupa in a project on land reclamation, its colonial roots and its impact on the contemporary Indonesian landscape.

ANNA MARIA FINK is a landscape architect, artistic researcher and teacher based in Amsterdam. Anna holds a master's degree in landscape architecture from the Academy of Architecture Amsterdam and is teaching architecture students there as well as at the TU Delft. Her Atelier Fischbach investigates the relationships between people and landscapes through personal fieldwork. By designing small scale spatial interventions, so called 'topographic furnitures', and creating experimental publications, she reveals notions of 'inhabiting place'.

With projects like 'Im Fluss' (2020) Anna engages people in a collective exploration of their bonds with land through building alternative spaces of dwelling. Her project 'Landscape as House' was exhibited at the Architecture Museum Wroclaw (2019), MU hybrid arthouse (2020) and is published as a book by Architectura&Natura booksellers (2018). Recent publications include the essay 'On small and big fires' (Robida Magazine Nr. 7, 2021) and 'Topographic Living' with David Habets (Slow Spatial Reader by Carolyn F. Strauss, 2021). In 2020 Anna was awarded the talent development grant of Creative Industries Fund Netherlands and she is one of the Young Innovators 2021 of the Dutch Board of Government Advisors.

www.annafink.eu

THEUN MOSK firmly believes in layering ideas and in never limiting yourself to one style or technique. Working as a theatre maker, set and lighting designer and creator of autonomous installations since studying at the Rietveld Academy and graduating from the Amsterdam Academy of Dance and Theatre, Theun likes to collaborate with multiple creative teams to further develop his own artistic language. He received the Charlotte Köhler Award in 2007, was selected for the Prague Quadrennial in 2007 and 2011, and was awarded the Proscenium Prize for his substantial contribution to the Dutch theatre in 2017. In 2020 he founded the creative production company Ruimtetijd together with partners Balster van Duijn and Siemen van de Werf.

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JOB OBERMAN If dance floors were underwater, Oceanic would be a modern-day siren. As both a DJ and a producer — often releasing tracks on family label Nous'klaer — he creates immersive and shape-shifting environments in which boundaries dissolve. Like tides, the musical experiences Oceanic creates feel driven forces bigger than the sum of their parts, pushing towards new and unknown frontiers. In 2019 he was part of the roster of SHAPE, an EU-funded network and platform for experimental artists. 2020 saw the collaboration with legendary Dutch free-jazz vocalist Greetje Bijma on the 'Swallow A Party' LP. Also, his 2019 standout track Yellow Cone, was featured on Avalon Emerson's DJ-Kicks mix CD.

<https://soundcloud.com/job-oberman>

DARIO TORTORELLI Italian dancer and transdisciplinary artist Dario Tortorelli works on the cutting edge of dance, performance, and visual art. He creates poetic representations of identity and gender with the transforming body as the central notion. Since 2016, Dario has been pursuing his projects under the umbrella of his own company DIVEinD — visual poetry of performing bodies, based in Rotterdam, and developed a rich body of award-winning works. In 2018 he was nominated for the Dutch Dance Festival Award and German magazine TANZ named him 'one of the 41 most promising artists in Europe'. His performance D NO BODY 5 #transcending was nominated by Theaterkrant as best new performance of the 2017-2018 Dutch theatre season. Dario also works for and teaches at various Dutch dance academies and companies such as Scapino Ballet, Sally Dansgezelschap and Conny Janssen Danst.

www.diveind.com

ELISA ZUPPINI is an Italian choreographer, dance maker and SNDO- alumni (School for New Dance Development), based in Amsterdam. Her choreographic research articulates around notions of relational movement and materiality in relation to the body and its affective dimensions. In 2016 she was awarded Young Talent in Choreography at OpenFlr, Florence (IT), in 2018 she won the scholarship for Danceweb's residency program at Impulstanz in Vienna (AT). In 2019, Elisa became one of the supported artists by dance company ICK and joined Jacuzzi, a convergence of Amsterdam-based choreographers. For *Landscaping*, Elisa is collaborating with Nica Roses, an Argentinean performance artist and body movement researcher based in Amsterdam. Since 2015, Nica is an active member of the international performance group "Young Boy Dancing Group" and has collaborated with artists such as Vincent Riebeek, Nils Amadeus Lange, Simone Augtherlony and Fernando Belfiore. Her work has been presented at FIBA (International Theater Festival of Buenos Aires), Spider Festival, Ljubljana, FLAM festival Amsterdam and Tanzhaus Zurich among others. Their joint practice focuses on the exploration of intimacy through dance performances, installation and relational art. Their work consists of sensorially immersive environments that revolve around the physical body.

www.elisazuppini.com



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This publication is part of the WhyNot production Landscaping (2021). Landscaping is realised in collaboration with the Amsterdamse Bostheater, Korzo, Ruimtetijd and Tolhuistuin. Made possible by Amsterdams Fonds voor de Kunst, BNG Cultuurfonds, Fonds Podiumkunsten, Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds en Stimuleringsfonds Creatieve Industrie.

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