

FROM RASTER TO VECTOR: THE NETHERLANDS AS PROFIT LANDSCAPE

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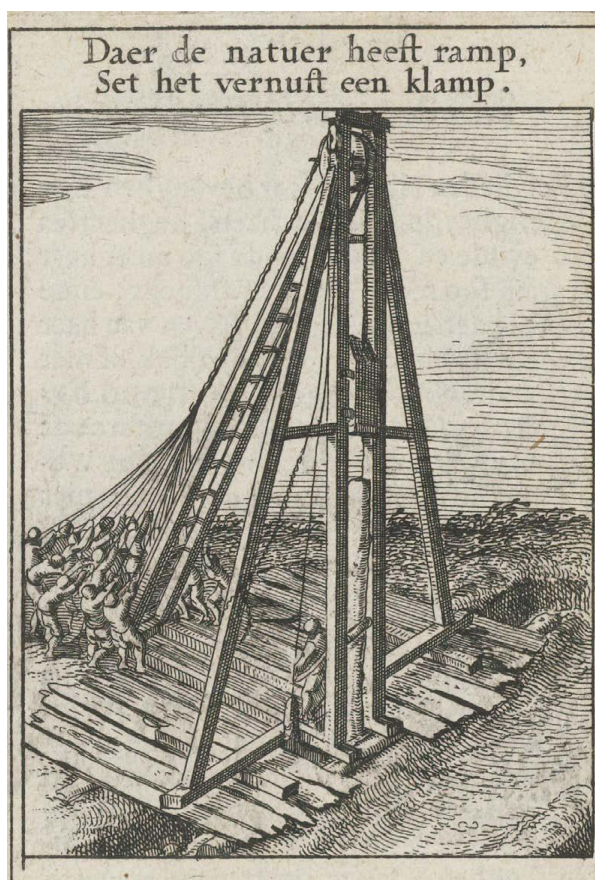
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THE LIMITS TO GROWTH Chapter 2: FROM RASTER TO VECTOR: THE NETHERLANDS AS PROFIT LANDSCAPE

A GROUP EXHIBITION ON THE MALLEABILITY AND PROFITABILITY OF
THE DUTCH LANDSCAPE THROUGH GLOBAL AND ADVANCED
CAPITALISM

BERKVELDT
DAAN COUZIJN
MIRTE VAN LAARHOVEN
VERA MENNENS
VÍCTOR MUÑOZ SANZ
SISSEL MARIE TONN & JONATHAN REUS
JOPPE VENEMA
AND WORKS FROM THE COLLECTION
OF THE CULTURAL HERITAGE AGENCY BY:
JOOPE DAM
BEN IKELAAR
EDITH VAN LECKWIJK
EDUARD VAN ZANDEN

For centuries humans have been working against nature in the Netherlands. Dykes are raised, polders are deepened, water is directed to areas where it was not held before, and conversely water is pumped out of areas that used to be naturally rich in water. We build cities, towns and roads, without attentiveness to the local, natural environment, its conditions and dynamics. Increasingly, we have exhausted our living environment to a point at which adaptation, let alone recovery and regeneration are no longer possible. We are increasingly accelerating drought, floods, soil subsidence, heat stress, downpours and crop failures through the continued depletion and exhaustion of natural ecosystems. The time has come to foster new alliances with nature and our shared living environment. Nature can act like a sponge and a container (think of soil which is able to retain water), as a barrier shielding us from the wind (think of dunes and floodplains), as an airconditioning (think of forests and parks where temperatures are considerably lower than in concrete and paved sites), and as a nursery for animals and other organisms we depend on for our subsistence (think of insects and soil life). Additionally, more nature means more places to recover and strengthen both physical and mental health: not just for humans, but equally for all the forty five thousand organisms with whom we share this land.



Roemer Visscher, *Daer de natuer heeft ramp, set het vernuft een klamp*, 1614.

The group exhibition FROM RASTER TO VECTOR: THE NETHERLANDS AS PROFIT LANDSCAPE examines the malleability and constructed nature of the Dutch landscape. From the polders and the waterworks to the current nitrogen crisis, the exhibition demonstrates how the Dutch landscape has become entirely indexed on the vectors of advanced capitalism. In other words, the available land is transformed to maximise profit on the one hand, and to uphold the current degree of mostly human-centered wellbeing on the other—by resisting and working against the increasingly erratic and unstable living environment. Is the horizon of profit maximization any longer sustainable in the Netherlands within the current climate regime? The artists in the exhibition offer a historically-informed and current perspective on the future of the Dutch rasterised landscape, becoming increasingly subjected to conflicting interests concerning welfare, prosperity, economy, technology, innovation, and ecology. In their work the artists provide a counterpoint to the deterioration of the Dutch landscape and the rapid decline in biodiversity, in search of possibilities for recovery in regenerative landscapes, aimed at more-than-human sustainable, resilient and shared living environments.

CONTEXT

The saying goes: “God created the Earth, but the Dutch created the Netherlands.” For centuries the Dutch identity has been inextricably linked to the country’s ability to conquer nature and tailor the landscape to continued human habitation. As a proud exporter of technologies in the fields of appropriating land and cultivating nature, the Netherlands is enjoying its reputation as the world’s most efficient processor of land. Ever since the very first polders were created in the eighth century, the cultural identity of the Netherlands has been associated with reclaiming seascapes and turning these into profitable landscapes. We are currently researching the legacy of polder construction, now looking at it from the perspective of the many contemporary and future ecological issues the Netherlands is facing. To what degree has the urgent reconsideration of how we imagine and handle the Dutch landscape affected its sociocultural identity, something that most recently came to the surface during the agricultural crisis? How long can we keep putting our trust in technological innovations (politics of resilience) that are not aimed at solving ecological challenges, but rather on displacing or postponing these?

When people think of the geography of the current Dutch landscape, and its accompanying industry, they often picture an organised grid of urban, rural, and pastoral lots demarcated by a national border. But this is far from the truth. Advanced capitalism is completely globalised, totalising and all-encompassing. Because of its high demand for soy beans, the intensive cattle breeding industry in the Netherlands is, for instance, actively contributing to deforestation in Brazil. Those same soy beans are transported to the Netherlands where they serve as fodder. The soy-fed cattle is then slaughtered in the Netherlands to be processed as meat products, leaving behind all nitrogen on the limited acreage, after which seventy-five percent of it is exported to countries like Germany, the United Kingdom, and China. Has the Netherlands thus become an (agricultural) business park? Globally advanced capitalism, which is prevalent in the Netherlands, transcends national borders and can no longer be confined behind the lines or boundaries of some kind of natural, non-capitalist sphere: it has become a global economic vector. Because of this there is no longer a major chain of development that allows countries considered to be economically ‘backward’ to follow those in front to the top of the value chain, and neither is there any kind of true wilderness left to be preserved in its pure and unspoiled natural state. Instead, capital only has a subservient, though unexploited, hinterland at its disposal that in itself has been completely vectorised on global value chains.

The excesses of this system are currently reflected in the state of decline of the Dutch landscape. Scaling up, intensification, as well as the accompanying increase in traffic, are resulting in the deterioration of the landscape. Whether we are talking about the nitrogen crisis, the protection of the Wadden Sea against oil drilling, floods in Limburg, or earthquakes in Groningen, political reality seems extremely flexible while the boundaries of our ecosystems are fixed. In the exhibition FROM RASTER TO VECTOR: THE NETHERLANDS AS PROFIT LANDSCAPE, artists and other stakeholders are researching possibilities for a more balanced interpretation of the landscape, with proposals for more circular and sustainable relationships between economic and ecological interests. However, the participants are not considering the landscape to be an entity that is best left to its own devices. Landscaping is a verb, something that requires a continuous effort to ensure a better spatial quality, albeit beyond exclusively human-oriented interests, and as a unilateral answer to climate change. For this we need proper designers, imagination, and design talent.

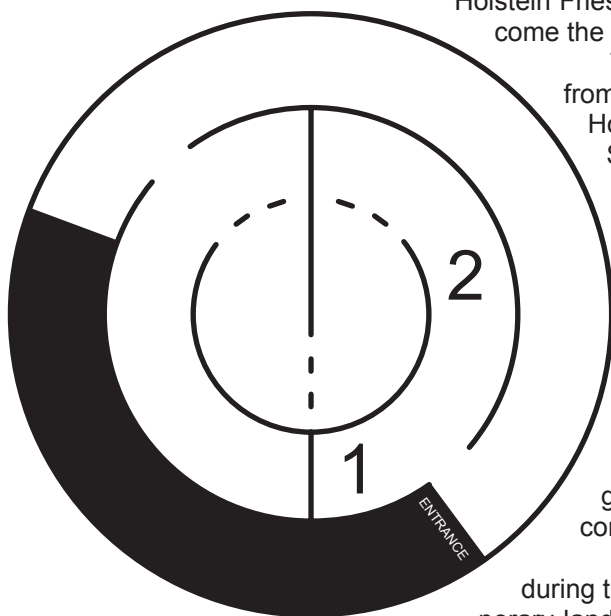
ARTWORKS

1

VÍCTOR MUÑOZ SANZ

Cowborgs in the Polder: True Type

The current transdisciplinary research of Víctor Muñoz Sanz examines the interactions between animals, humans, robots, data technologies, and farm architecture in the industrialised large-scale Dutch dairy landscapes. In this exhibition he is presenting the initial part of his research, which focuses on the Holstein Friesian cow, a breed that originates from Friesland and that has become the dominant breed in industrial dairy farming worldwide.



The presentation consists of a video essay that weaves images from the Holland Holstein Show—a contest aiming to promote the Holstein breed among Dutch farmers—with an interview with Quim Serrabassa, competition judge and manager of a company specialised in genetics and in the selection of that breed. The video introduces the Ideal True Type Holstein Cow, a painting commissioned by the Holstein Association USA and the internationally recognised yardstick for perfect body proportions, tailoring it to industrial tools like automated milking systems. In combination with the video, he also presents an engraved drawing of the ideal true type Holstein cow, with all the measurements, proportions, and angles that would enable the replication of a perfectly productive specimen. Transposing the current official painting of the Holstein cow by the artist Bonnie Mohr to a diagram, Muñoz Sanz reveals the elaborate design thinking behind contemporary animal breeding to maximise dairy production.

The cow became a symbol of the prosperity of the Netherlands during the 17th century and is still an established inhabitant of its contemporary landscape. Nevertheless, unsustainable management of cattle has severe environmental impacts, including methane and nitrous oxide pollution, eutrophication, and large volumes of wastewater. Current ecological thinking emphasises the need for a shift in how humans coexist with other species for more sustainable futures. How can this be achieved when animals are continuously vectorised onto unethical grids of profit-making?

This work has been made possible thanks to the important contribution of Divya Agarwal.

2

DAAN COUZIEN

Thinking of Holland

Daan Couzijn's series of paintings *Thinking of Holland* investigates the notion of authenticity in the representations of the Dutch landscapes and seascapes in art history from the 17th and 18th centuries. Bucolic depictions of the local scenery fed into the Netherlands' national pride, while seascapes populated by Dutch fleets and vistas of its colonies rejoiced the extent of its mighty overseas commerce and domination. This artistic heritage naturalised a kind of "pure" and "beautiful" aesthetics, romanticising a landscape the depiction of which was rather imaginary—and oftentimes propagandistic—and the result of the artificial reclamation of land from the sea to make polders.

Couzijn, who grew up in a polder close to the coast, doubles down on the invention of authenticity and cultural identity through painting by further artificialising and romanticising the Dutch landscape. He does so by training artificial intelligence to generate interpretations of landscapes based on a database of thousands of 17th- and 18th-century paintings, and afterwards the interpretations are transposed onto oil paintings. The result is a series of pictures depicting extremely artificial landscapes that never existed through oil painting—the preferred artistic means to represent and signify nature throughout art history.

How has the representation of the Dutch landscape, legitimised and upheld in art history and national museums, informed an important part of the cultural identity of the Netherlands? What are the implications of conceiving a heavily artificialised landscape as an authentic memory of the historical and cultural construction of the country? How has the naturalisation of polder-making and its extractive logic fed into national pride, and how much does it complicate the political address of the current ecological breakdown?

MIRTE VAN LAARHOVEN*Courtesy to Mud*

Mirte van Laarhoven develops landscape architecture and sculptures with a focus on self-sustaining environments, biotope creation and human experience. Her work represents a mentality shift in thinking about nature in the Netherlands—from industrial engineering projects and conquering the land to listening and moving along with its natural forces.

Courtesy to Mud is a project made in collaboration with landscape architect Anne Nieuwenhuijs that shines light on the dredging industry, which revolves around the removal of sediments and debris from the bottom of water bodies such as rivers and harbours. Dredging is often focused on maintaining or increasing the depth of waterways to ensure the safe passage of boats and ships, on land reclamation projects, and on excavating materials for commercial value. Dredging poses several environmental issues, such as water pollution and the destruction of sea- and river-bed ecosystems.

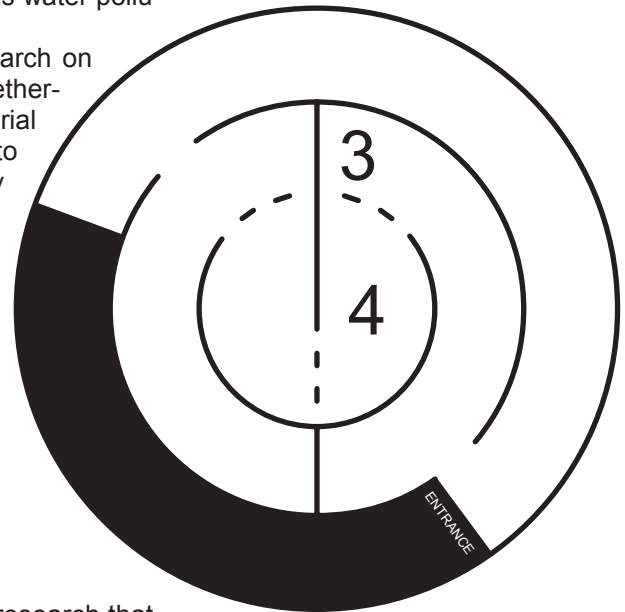
Mirte van Laarhoven's project consists of extensive research on the impact of the dredging industry in the bodies of water of the Netherlands and pleads for a re-valorisation of sediment as a raw material with a lot of potential in architecture and design instead of waste to be disposed of to ensure the stability of economic flows—eighty percent of goods around the world are transported by ships. With this project, van Laarhoven intends to shift the perception of mud from being considered a dirty, soggy material to a lush, valuable resource. Presented in this exhibition are a series of models out of eight different types of dredged mud, which will afterwards be transformed into a walled sedimentation garden that exposes the qualities of the material as well as fostering vegetable growth, paired with research material.

VERA MENNENS*The Three Stages*

The Three Stages is an ongoing cultural, historical and artistic research that examines how the human relationships with “Dutch nature” have changed in the last hundred fifty years, and proposes alternative perspectives for more sustainable and sympathetic ones. Vera Mennens explores how historical and archival research can be approached as an artistic practice, and whether it is possible to reorganise, retranslate, and rearrange the way we understand and explain “Dutch nature.” Currently, as presented in the exhibition, the work consists of three video essays, a collection of short stories, and a tapestry.

The Meeting (2019) is the first chapter of the project. It recounts a fictional conversation between the artist and Eli Heimans (1861–1914), a teacher and conservationist who greatly contributed to the foundation of the Dutch nature preservation movement. The conversation centres around the transformation of the landscape in the Netherlands throughout the geological evolution of the Earth. *Between Mountains and Sea* (2020) delves into the exploration of identifying, critiquing, and shaping the narrative surrounding the utilisation, perception, and future perspective on nature. The video essay explores what constitutes ‘nature’ in the Netherlands and it questions whether the discourse on nature should initially revolve around language, prompting the consideration of what we truly mean when discussing the concept of ‘nature.’ The third chapter is *Shifting Dunes* (2022), which focuses on the meaning of the ‘nature monument’, how it is being represented in Dutch historical and scientific archives, and how it is currently used when conserving and protecting the Dutch natural landscape. Embarking on a walk through a region captured between land and sea, Mennens and Eli Heimans investigate the losses already incurred and ponder the potential fate of nature in the near future.

Zur Geologie des Gerolsteiner Landes (2020) is a woven tapestry that draws inspiration from key archival materials belonging to Eli Heimans and incorporates theories concerning the historical comprehension of geological movements beneath the landscape. The tapestry's foundation is a map of the height variations of Gerolstein (Germany) crafted by Heimans around 1910. Additionally, the tapestry features several archival images strategically placed as markers of the beginning and ending stages of both the works and life of Heimans.



SISSEL MARIE TONN & JONATHAN REUS
The Intimate Earthquake Archive

In the last thirty-two years, the provinces of Groningen and Drenthe have been experiencing man-made earthquakes caused by the gas extraction in the Groningen Gas Field, the largest field for natural gas in Europe. Intrigued by this phenomenon, Sissel Marie Tonn researched two different ways of storing information about it. On the one hand, the digital data bank of the Dutch Meteorological Institute (KNMI), and, on the other, the personal stories of inhabitants of Groningen. While the first encompasses meticulous annotations, calculations, and graphs, the other is composed of effects the earthquakes have produced in people, creating a sensorial archive within their bodies. The aftershocks of earthquakes go beyond the actual tremors, with recurrent issues such as anxiety, sleep problems, dizziness, and other health issues in the hours and days after a quake.

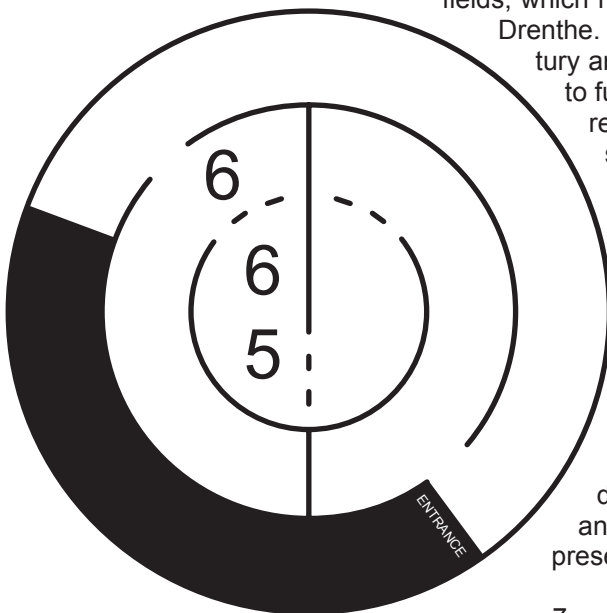
The Intimate Earthquake Archive consists of a vest equipped with tactile transducers (vibrating speakers) and an audio piece on headphones that together offer a sensory experience. As the history of gas extraction in Groningen and the consequent man-made earthquakes is unravelled in the audio piece, the visitor can feel the vibrations and rumblings in their body through the vest. The archive is a sensory-tactile experience of the earthquakes rippling across the body, the same way the seismic waves move across the land and affect the population in northern Netherlands.

The work is complemented by a timeline of recorded earthquakes alongside the political and social actions and repercussions around them.

JOPPE VENEMA
As Above So Below

As Above So Below consists of three large earthen batteries that generate electricity from telluric currents, extremely low frequencies influenced by solar flares, lightning and other electro-magnetic phenomena that traverse the Earth's surface. Telluric currents are often mapped to search for oil and gas fields, which have been the economic motor of the artist's native province of Drenthe. In Drenthe, peat colonies started being formed in the 18th century and were largely developed after 1850, becoming a key element to fuel the industrialisation of the Netherlands. Central to Venema's research is the area around the village of Schoonebeek, which still has a reserve of oil that for years has been extracted by the company NAM (Nederlandse Aardolie Maatschappij).

In the batteries, Venema performs one more cycle of extraction by using peat from the area around Schoonebeek to generate a low amount of voltage. The shape of the batteries is inspired by antenna networks, specifically the one at LOFAR in Exloo, Drenthe, currently the largest radio telescope operating at the lowest frequencies that can be perceived from Earth. The LOFAR telescope is used in multiple lines of research simultaneously, from astrophysics to precision agriculture. Instead of a telescope looking beyond the borders of the Earth, *As Above So Below* looks at what is present in and beneath the soil and brings to sight the underground energies present in the compromised peatlands of Drenthe.



EDITH VAN LECKWIJK
De Gashouders
 1928

Edith van Leckwijk (1899–1987) was a Belgian painter who lived between Belgium and the Netherlands. She mainly gained fame as a painter of expressionist landscapes and cityscapes, an example of which is *De Gashouders* (1928). Van Leckwijk's painting depicts a landscape with gas holders, a storage infrastructure that became widely present in the Netherlands in the first half of the twentieth century. Gas holders were built to store gas extracted from coal for industrial and domestic use. Gas holders were mostly demolished after the introduction of natural gas, yet some remain as national monuments and cul-

tural venues, such as the Westergasfabriek in Amsterdam or the Gashouder Dedemsvaart. These infrastructures produced and stored gas that was key to polder-making, and became part of the developing industrialised landscape of the Netherlands.

The work of Edith van Leckwijk has been kindly loaned from the Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed / Cultural Heritage Agency.

8

THE DELTA WORKS IN THE HARINGVLIET

EDUARD VAN ZANDEN

Bouwput in het Haringvliet I & II
1960

BEN IKELAAR

Deltawerken Haringvliet I & II
1966

Between January 31st and February 1st 1953, the devastating North Sea flood took place, flooding 162,000 hectares of land, killing 1,800 people and extensively damaging property. Ten days after the disaster, the Ministry of Transport, Public Works, and Water Management created the Delta Commission, whose mission was to carry out a series of large-scale constructions throughout the coastline of the country to prevent future flooding. They came to be known as the Delta Works, and were realised from 1954 to 1997. This gigantic infrastructural project was politicised as a national pride, which led to the commission of artworks to document the Delta Works to twenty-seven artists.

Among these artists were Eduard van Zanden and Ben Ikelaar, who made work on the Haringvliet, a large inlet in the province of South Holland. The Haringvliet used to be a flourishing ecology, with its brackish waters fed by both rivers and sea supporting a healthy population of seals, as well as providing an access point to migrating fish like salmon and sturgeon. The construction of a dam in the 1960s sealed off the inlet, causing the disappearance of seals and hindering the fish migration.

In the etchings of Van Zanden and Ikelaar, the delta infrastructure in the Haringvliet strike with its scale and monumentality, registering not only the impactful alteration it caused in the landscape and its ecology, but also the significance of the Delta Works in shaping the cultural and ecological identity of modern and contemporary the Netherlands.

The work of Eduard van Zanden and Ben Ikelaar has been kindly loaned from the Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed / Cultural Heritage Agency.

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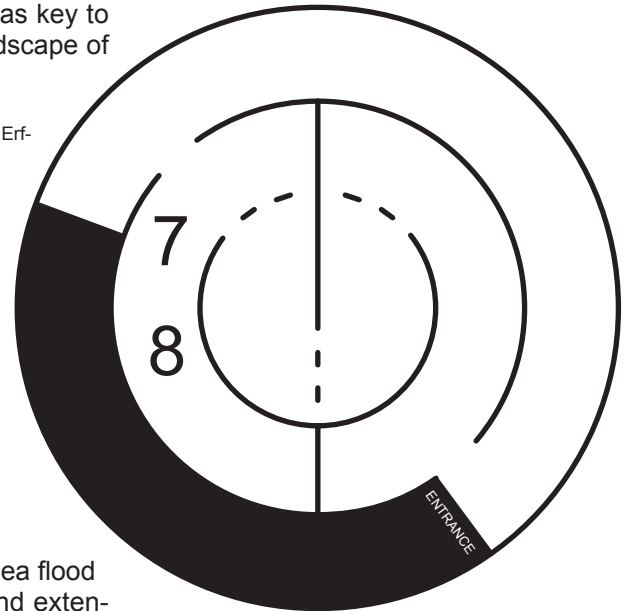
JOOP DAM

Alternatief Oosterschelde Onderzoek & Kaart Oosterschelde
1970—1974

Joop Dam (1922–1997) was a writer and artist whose practice began as an impressionist watercolourist but later shifted to developing research and artistic work on the pollution of tidal areas in the Netherlands. In the early 1970s, he developed the *Alternatief Oosterschelde Onderzoek* ('Alternative Oosterschelde Resereach') to investigate the environmental changes occurring in Oosterschelde, a former estuary in Zeeland that became the largest project in the Delta Works, a series of construction projects in the southwest of the Netherlands to protect a large area of land around the Rhine–Meuse–Scheldt delta from the sea. Realised between 1954 and 1997, the Delta Works consist of dams, sluices, locks, dykes, levees, and storm surge barriers.

Joop Dam's project was intended to raise awareness of the complex and vibrant ecology of the estuary and to learn about the importance of tides, compromised by the construction of huge sluice gates, to sustain it. He compiled all his research on tides in his publication *Getijdenboek* (1975), which includes scientific and artistic material, a selection of which is presented in this exhibition.

The work of Joop Dam has been kindly loaned from the Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed / Cultural Heritage Agency.



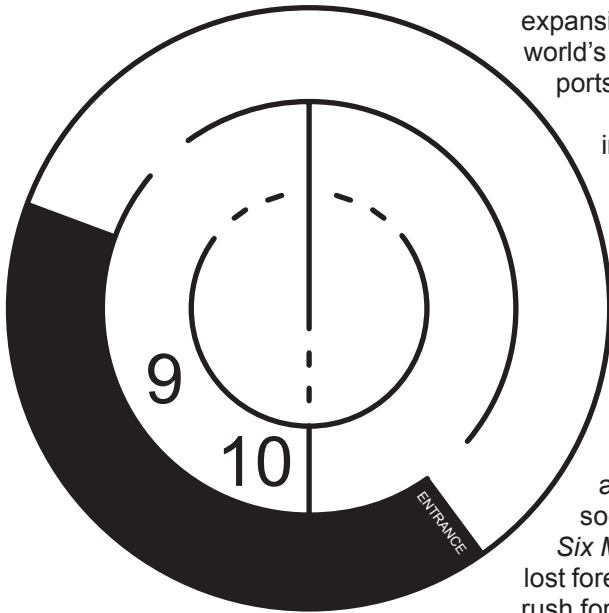
BERKVELDT*Under Six Meters Of Sand*

Duration: 25 minutes

Berkveldt is a Rotterdam-based studio founded by Noëlle Ingeveldt and Juriaan van Berkel. Their work explores the complex relationships and tensions that exist between humans and the ecologies they are part of. In their documentary *Under Six Meters of Sand*, Berkveldt traces the destructive and rapid industrial expansion of Europoort, a substantial area of the Port of Rotterdam, one of the world's largest (petro)chemical industrial areas and one of the most polluting ports in Europe.

The documentary exposes the profound consequences of the rapid industrial expansion of the Port of Rotterdam in the aftermath of the Second World War. Focusing on reconstruction and economic progress, a dramatic transformation took place in the area. With the increased frequency of large oil tankers and massive container ships navigating towards the port, a westward expansion was completed on reclaimed land from the sea, the Maasvlakte. This massive project resulted in the obliteration and burial of two villages, Blankenburg and Nieuwesluis, as well as the loss of the natural reserve De Beer, all covered beneath six meters of sand.

Through historical documentation and the testimonies of affected inhabitants and experts, the documentary exposes the disappearance of not only a flourishing biodiverse area for avifauna, but also of the sociocultural relations of a community of people forced to relocate. *Under Six Meters of Sand* encourages the perseverance of the memory of an area lost forever to severe industrialisation imposed by political opportunism and the rush for unsustainable economic growth.



YEAR PROGRAM THE LIMITS TO GROWTH

BETWEEN SYSTEMIC CHANGE AND CONSUMER ACTIVISM

[...] The adventure of these last three centuries can be summed up by the story of a double displacement: from economy to ecology. Two forms of familiar habitats, oikos: we know that the first is uninhabitable and the second is not yet ready for us. The whole world has been forced to move into “The Economy,” which we now know is only a utopia—or rather a dystopia, something like the opium of the people. We are now being asked to move suddenly with our baggage into the new dwelling place called “Ecology,” which was sold to us as being more habitable and more sustainable but which for the moment has no more form or substance than The Economy, which we are in such a hurry to leave behind. [...] We are travelers in transit, as displaced masses currently wandering between the dystopia of The Economy and the promise of ecology, in need of an urbanist who can design a shelter for us, show us drawings of a temporary living space on Earth.¹

In 1972, the now-famous report *The Limits to Growth* was published by the Club of Rome. Founded by a group of intellectuals and major industrialists, the club commissioned a team of MIT scientists, led by Donella and Dennis Meadows, to investigate the relationship between the exponential growth of our material consumption and its impact on Earth’s climate and environment. The report, which was the first ever to use computer simulations, studied several scenarios set in the future, examining the future impact of resource and food consumption. The premise of the report: within a few decades, Earth’s resources will deplete. At the time, the Club of Rome’s report had a major impact in The Netherlands. To keep the Earth habitable, we need to control economic growth, proclaimed prominent politicians such as Joop den Uyl: “*The unbridled operation of the profit motive has led to a parasitic upward production. We thought we were getting rich, but we became poor, poor in available living environment, in welfare*”.² Currently, fifty years later, the implementation of the report’s core message has been relegated to the background. This is partly due to short-term thinking in politics concerning the government budget deficit and employment opportunities, the rise of the neoliberal doctrine proclaiming that everyone benefits from more growth through the trickle-down mechanism, and the lobbying of big companies who prioritise profit maximisation.

Departing from the *The Limits to Growth* report, the 2024 year programme of RADIUS explores the relationships between economy and ecology. Through five exhibitions, a public and education programme, we aim to counterbalance the global and totalising effects of advanced capitalism as the prevailing economic system. By harnessing the propositional and imaginative capacities of artists and other stakeholders, this annual programme aims to re-evaluate notions such as value, desire, abundance and scarcity in the face of climate change and ecological degradation. Are there forms of resistance, organisation and (proposals for) systemic change that escape these totalising effects and prioritise well-being and welfare above profit? How can we resist the totalising effect of capitalism and prioritise well-being over the profit motive?

¹ Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2013), 23.

² Jaap Tielbeke, *We Waren Gewaarschuwd* (Amsterdam: Das Mag, 2022), 27.

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EDUARD VAN ZANDEN

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