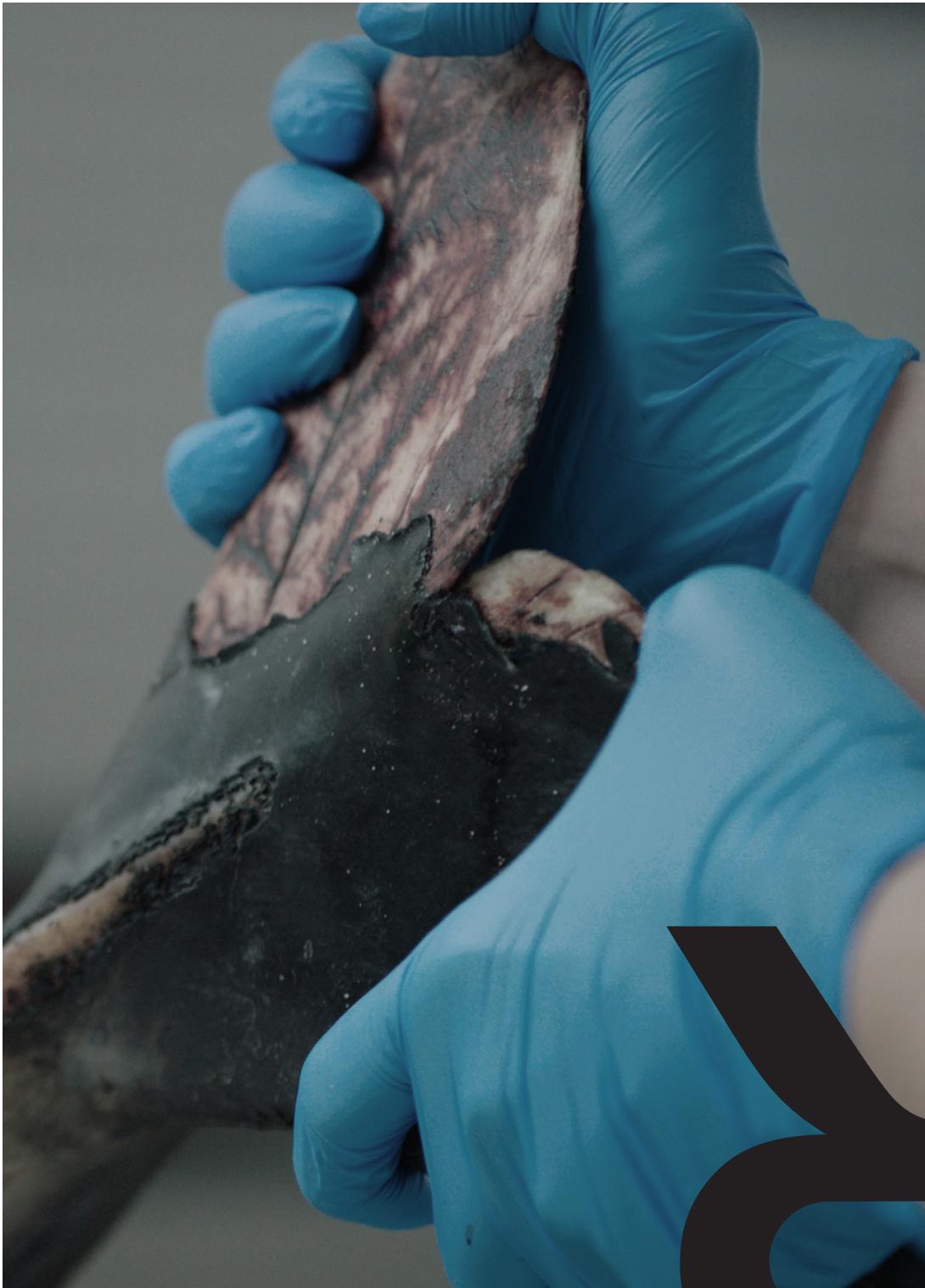


THE WORLD IS A VERB

Vibeke Mascini

EN



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In the solo exhibition *THE WORLD IS A VERB*, artist Vibeke Mascini presents new work that delves deeper into the subject of energy. The exhibition focuses in particular on the tension and deep connection between human agency and the physical and energetic implications on more-than-human bodies and landscapes. Central to this development is the ongoing striving towards innovative, technological solutions to maintain and continue to satisfy the same human habits around production and consumption. Through her work, Mascini makes suggestions for changing these very habits, by proposing a haunting intimacy and by reliving language and entangled relations around questions of ethics and value between people and what we have come to call natural resources.

In *THE WORLD IS A VERB*, the bandwidth of this human-centered systems thinking around energy is stretched and new protagonists—usually as the effect of climate change or environmental pollution caused by human actions—appear on the scene. From electricity obtained from melting glacier water and heavy metals recovered from the body of a beached whale, Mascini's presentation offers new perspectives on energetic processes in a world subject to constant metamorphosis: the world is a verb!

We live in a time of high tension. Time and again, the world becomes the playing field of social and political conflicts between people. A political conflict 'elsewhere' on Earth, such as currently in the Ukraine, has a direct influence on what is happening 'here' in Delft. The degrees and intensity with which such a conflict manifests itself translates disproportionately. 'Elsewhere' there is devastation, victims and entire communities are displaced by the misdeeds of Putin and the Russian regime, resulting in mass migration of refugees. This situation is felt more indirectly 'here', reflected by inflation and sanctions through the tightened political and economic relations between European countries and Russia. The first is reflected in the cost of our living, with sharp price increases for energy, labor costs and transport. From bread to fuel, from living to working, the Dutch dependence on gas from Russia affects our lives and livelihoods. Against our better judgement, should we fall back on energy production in Groningen and increase coal plant activity? Is there actually a substantial alternative, also for the long term?

By presenting a series of new artworks, Mascini shows that 'here' and 'elsewhere' cannot be seen in isolation, partly due to the profound impact of climate change. That energy exchange takes place in a global chain, within which energetic processes are interconnected and often enough transcend national borders. She shows that the world of people is increasingly coincident with processes on Earth. With the knowledge that energy supplies from fossil fuels—including coal, gas, and oil—are finite, so too does the tone of the discussion shift from purely social and political in nature, to undeniably geographical and geopolitical. In the meantime, governments and municipalities are considering their 'energy transition', in order to make the extraction and consumption of energy more sustainable and future-proof. With hydrogen, heat pumps and floating fields of solar panels in the North Sea, human technological innovation and resilience offer a potential response to the scarcity and finiteness of certain energy sources.

In *THE WORLD IS A VERB*, Mascini shares her longstanding interest in the fiction surrounding the concept of 'neutral energy'. What the earlier examples in this text and the works in the exhibition show is that despite the high level of abstraction, there is no such thing as neutral energy. That electricity and the electricity grid may create the false impression that there are no material implications associated with generating, transporting and storing electricity, but that such (infra)structures and processes promote socio-political interests that have far-reaching consequences beyond human life on earth.

2022

The project *Lethe* is part of Mascini's ongoing field research on unlikely sources from which electricity is generated through destruction processes. Previous works within this research, including *Salvage* (2019) and *Instar* (2021), focus on energy recovery from the annihilation of the body of a whale stranded on the coast and a batch of cocaine seized by customs. The electricity released in this destruction process is stored by Mascini and developed into battery works, which are part of existing, open systems related to the transfer of energies. In the case of *Lethe*—the installation now on display at RADIUS—Mascini explores a demolition process that takes place on a much larger scale than what the artist has encountered with other energy sources to date. *Lethe* is about the destruction and loss of a landscape: the melting of a glacier in the Swiss mountains under the increasing influences of global warming.

Climate change has a major impact on the Alps. The temperature there has risen by two degrees Celsius in the last century and is therefore at the forefront of global temperature increases. With *Lethe*, Mascini responds to this complex and disturbing situation, in which conflicting feelings of ecological grief arise. In agreement with the Swiss electricity company Kraftwerke Zervreila, Mascini has obtained access to the plant with which the company generates electricity from melting glacier water. This melting ice water accumulates in man made artificial lakes, and is led from a great height to turbines and generators below, which then convert this thrust into electricity. This transforms a nature reserve into a profit landscape, where an ecological catastrophe is capitalized upon and the negative consequences of climate change are converted into a paradoxical, positively charged exchange rate in the form of the product that is electricity. During the exhibition, the energy stored in steel gas cylinders will be gradually discharged, in a process in which tiny particles of glacial water mist into the space of RADIUS.

The title *Lethe* refers in Greek mythology to the Goddess of Forgetfulness and to one of the five rivers in the underworld from which the dead drink to forget their earthly lives. In this way, Mascini explores in the work the concept of amnesia in relation to a slowly vanishing landscape. Within this landscape, the power station also serves as a witness in the 'naturalization process' from rapidly changing environment to electricity as an abstract building block for all kinds of human applications. The idea of amnesia in the ecological demise of this landscape applies not only to humans but equally to the ice and the memories that were locked into the memory of the ice—a concept also known as 'ice memory'—and now thaw and are lost.

When we talk about ecological grief, how do we then make this tangible when we talk about a place 'elsewhere'—such as a melting Swiss glacier—that does not seem to affect us directly in our existence in The Netherlands? If we realize that temperature rise (caused by climate change and human carbon dioxide emissions) is a global phenomenon with erratic local excesses, what does that mean for our sense of complicity? Just like the strange intimacy between our energy consumption on the one hand, and against the background of our crumbling immediate living environment on the other? In other words, what is the correlation between a nighttime glimpse into the fridge and the dwindling glacier that dominated the landscape for many hundreds of years?



Aerial view of the Safien valley area, from the public archive of Vals, Switzerland, 2003.

BLIND MEN

2022, 20 minutes

Blind Men is a video and sound composition that provides an intimate glimpse into a sterile necropsy room—an inquest room for scientific research—in which a beached whale is presented for pathological examination.

Filmed close to the skin, the blurred camera shows small fragments of the whale's body. The only way in which the viewer can see a total picture is by imaginatively puzzling the fragments together. With this, *Blind Men* evokes the parable from the story *The Blind Men and the Elephant*, in which the limits of human perception are demonstrated and the imagination is actively addressed. *Blind Men*'s fragmented impressions encourage attentive and careful observation. Sound plays an essential role in obtaining a parallel experience of the environment, dominated by rustling cold rooms, humming extractor hoods and latex gloves. By means of a spatial, multi-channel sound installation, the exhibition space is approached acoustically in a way that is more similar to the way a blind person or a whale experiences it: by sensing it based on hearing.

Blind Men plays with a high degree of abstraction that makes it challenging to distinguish body and environment from each other. In this way, Mascini wants to address the porosity and connection between bodies and environments and establish the profound, reciprocal relationship between the two. For Mascini, this has been a central factor in approaching the subject, experiencing the whale's body as an alienating archive in which traces of human society are stored, accumulated over the centuries. Apart from the history of processing whale bodies into various products and applications used in human society, there is also a long history of humans entering whale bodies. The story of Jonah and the Whale is perhaps the most famous example, but recent scientific studies have also found traces of human industries accumulating in the tissue of whales, making whales some of the most polluted animals in the world. This kind of anthropogenic traces of contamination are central to the current pathological research that takes place at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at Utrecht University, where *Blind Men* is recorded.

The body as a toxic archive, in which an apparently external world has a major internal influence. A world in which a single element can expose a whole chain of (eco)systems and industries, as evidence of a deep and sometimes disturbing entanglement between existences.



Film still from *Blind Men*, 2022.

THE WORLD IS A VERB

2022

The third and eponymous work that Mascini presents in the exhibition consists of text fragments woven and printed on second-hand T-shirts and labels, distributed throughout the exhibition space and on display in the RADIUS store. The T-shirts have been collected at various flea markets and are intended to playfully make the public part of the work, by allowing them to be worn outside the walls of the exhibition space.

The work is the impetus for a comprehensive essay as part of an upcoming publication in which Mascini writes about her research and the dialogues, collaborations and observations that result from her various 'battery works'. Central to this publication is the undermining of the fiction surrounding the concept of 'neutral energy'—or the idea that energy has no material implications—in an increasingly energy-hungry society.



Micro essays stitched onto T-shirts as washing instructions.

BIO

Vibeke Mascini

Pre-modern notions considered electricity as a sacred phenomenon that houses a sort of spirit, which animates matter. For the past few years Mascini's artistic research evolved around historic and futuristic concepts of electricity as a speculative agent of life. Combining natural and industrial processes, through the binding force of their energy, her work addresses a fundamental dynamic underlying materials and organisms. Through sculptures, installations, video and text she seeks to channel a close understanding of electricity by drawing a direct relation to its source. In long-term collaboration with scientists, engineers, government employees and musicians Mascini proposes a conscious understanding of electric energy as a statement of interconnectedness and entanglement—between species, media and nature, matter and energy. Navigating through this era of environmental fragility, her statement lies in a deep notion of intimacy. Witnessing the profound energetic relation between our environment and ourselves we cannot help but experience profound empathy and concern.

Vibeke Mascini
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The world is a verb

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