

Fact sheet *Strange and Close* november 2009



Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin, *Self-Heterotopia, Catching Up with Self* (detail), 1991-2007

exhibition title	Strange and Close
part of	Play Van Abbe, Part 1 – The Game and the Players
location	Nieuwbouw (New building), B0
duration	28/11/2009 - 21/03/2010
curator	Charles Esche

Strange and Close, composed by the current director Charles Esche, shows a selection of works from the Van Abbemuseum collection. With *Strange and Close*, Esche reflects on the history of the period since 1989, the year of the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the protests on Tiananmen Square, and the beginning of the end of apartheid in South Africa.

Showing many new recent acquisitions for the first time, the exhibition invites the visitor to discover new relationships between art and its various contexts in the museum. As a complement to the reconstructed exhibition of Rudi Fuchs, it demonstrates the widening of the geographical terrain of contemporary art and

establishes the shift in museum collecting from autonomous artworks to an entanglement of objects, archives, (documentary) sources and narratives. The exhibition includes work of Hüseyin Alptekin, Yael Bartana, Harun Farocki, Dan Flavin, Gülsün Karamustafa, Dan Peterman and Nedko Solakov.

Strange and Close begins, like so much began and ended, in 1989. This date has become a symbol for the start of our contemporary world. While many changes can be traced back years before, it is 1989 – with Tiananmen Square, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the beginning of the end of apartheid in South Africa – that irrevocably ushered in the new world order.

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And in 1989, art was also at a point where it needed new beginnings. Exhibitions such as *Magiciens de La Terre*, *The Other Story* or The Havana Biennial offered a new view of the artistic world, one where the centres of western art such as New York or Paris were no longer the masters of all they surveyed.

The exhibition *Strange and Close*, using the collection of the Van Abbemuseum, focuses on the period after the 1989 changes. It asks visitors to reflect on changes in their view of the world from 1989 to 2009 and looks at art in terms of the human beings and the memories that surround them, whether physically or through every type of media image. What does it mean today to say we understand? How much background information do we need to carry with us? What is it to know a fact or another person? In one sense, this exhibition is about knowledge, or rather the non-knowledge produced by art and the way that we can know something without understanding it in the scientific sense. In another sense, it is about repetition and difference, and about how looking anew at the past changes the present.

Strange and Close is a title that comes from a talk by the philosopher Homi Bhabha that he held in the museum in 2007. Bhabha spoke about the experience of a Rwandan Hutu who killed his Tutsi neighbour. In his testimony after the event, the murderer explained that at the fatal moment his neighbour appeared neither strange nor close to him. Bhabha uses this to build up an argument for neighbourliness which is necessarily both strange and close. The story, which can be found on video in the exhibition, stayed with museum. Could we agree with Bhabha that 'strange and close' is a relationship that could define our contemporary entanglements? Can 'strange and close' be a way of understanding the necessary conditions for a successful neighbourliness and a way of living together that remains in both engagement and disagreement without it spilling over into indifference or violence? Could this also be a way to think about the visitors' ways of interacting with the museum and its artworks?

The exhibition *Strange and Close* is also another way thinking about Rudi Fuchs's exhibition in the Oudbouw (Old building). It helps us to reflect on the worlds of then and now, how much they are the same, and how strange they might have become to each other.

Strange and Close is curated with respect and curiosity about how it will be seen as a companion to *Repetition: Summer Display 1983*.

Important works

Strange and Close shows a selection of recent works from the collection of the Van Abbemuseum, amongst this works by Hüseyin Alptekin, Yael Bartana, Harun Farocki and Gülsün Karamustafa.

The work *Self-Heterotopia, Catching Up with Self* (1991-2007) by Alptekin is shown for the first time in the Netherlands and displays a collection of found, used and taken objects, giving an impression of the travels the artist has undertaken these 16 years.

In *Summer camp* (2007) Bartana films a group of people rebuilding Palestinian houses in the occupied territories. She uses the same stylistic devices as the Zionist propaganda films from the first half of the twentieth century.

In *Respite* (2007), shown for the first time in the Netherlands, Farocki shows a black-and-white film shot at Westerbork, a refugee camp that was turned into a concentration camp for Dutch Jews that had been rounded up by the authorities and were awaiting deportation to the death camps further east. He adds personal texts, pointing out certain details, or emphasizing one aspect of the image.

Karamustafa's *Stairway* (2001) gives a melancholic impression of Romanian street kids who have permission to play music on the streets of Istanbul for three months, after that period they will be replaced by other kids. In the exhibition visitors can also watch the film *Poème Electronique*, made by Le Corbusier en Edgard Varèse, which was shown in 1958 in the Philips pavilion of the World Expo in Brussels.

Part of van Play Van Abbe

Play Van Abbe seeks to put the museum as institution into focus. *Strange and Close* looks at the recent policy of the museum and tries to explain which external conditions have effected display ideas and even what is considered part of the art collection.

Strange and Close plays with the display of the collection to show how they generate always partial narratives of art and its place in society. There is no defining truth to which the works belong but a series of possibilities that are always in play for the museum and for the visitor. The players are the museum director, who has always been a key part of the story of Van Abbemuseum, the works themselves, the theorists who can be heard and read in the exhibition, and the public who have to work out their role or part in the proceedings. Making what in some ways is a traditional 'new acquisitions' exhibition is also a way to show the modes of exhibition as a medium in its own right.

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Subsidisers

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