

Anniversary Exhibition AkzoNobel Art Foundation: ReflAction

For thirty years, the AkzoNobel Art Foundation has been collecting art: early, consistently, and with a sharp eye for artists still at the start of their careers. Starting October 1, 2026, the anniversary exhibition *ReflAction* presents these three decades through more than one hundred works and a multitude of voices, drawn from a collection of more than 2,500 artworks organized around themes such as color and research, the individual and society, and space.

The title *ReflAction* refers to a double movement: looking back on thirty years of collecting and launching the collection toward the future. However, the title is also a call to action. In turbulent times, we tend to focus primarily on ourselves, much like Narcissus, who lost himself in his own reflection, a fascination that lives on today in our addictive selfie culture. *ReflAction* offers a different perspective: not looking at yourself, but at the other, as an act. The philosopher Emmanuel Levinas wrote that it is only in the face of the other that you are free; the artists in *ReflAction*, too, engage with one another and with previous generations, in search of their own unmistakable voice. Some works literally mirror, but never as mere reflective surfaces: it is about the layers underneath, about the act of truly looking. The exhibition opens with the painting *Christian* (2025) by **Sarah De Vos**, a close-up of the iconic sunglasses of fashion designer Christian Wijnants. A blue shadow, reminiscent of the Impressionists' luminous use of color glides like water across a woman's skin: through optical illusion, De Vos questions how our gaze is directed.

The exhibition is on view at the public AkzoNobel Art Space, designed by Tom Postma Design: mirrors, sharp diagonals, and panels functioning as multilayered walls. Rather than a chronological layout, works from different periods are reflected against one another: walls slide open to reveal new scenes at every turn. *ReflAction* presents painting and drawing, sculpture, installation, photography, film, and digital art, exploring current themes like migration, connection and geopolitical unrest into dialogue with a continued focus on sustainability, nature, and color.

Susanne Khalil Yusef and **WONNE** respond jointly to the harrowing events in Palestine with four coffee pots from the series *Beverages for Friends* (2020) inspired by the traditional Arabic dallah. Brightly colored and playful, they look light-hearted, yet the body of each coffee pot bears a portrait of well-known figures who have spoken out publicly against the oppression of the Palestinians. Standing at the entrance, like a gatekeeper, is **Atelier van Lieshout's** *Female Battledress* (2024): an everyday suit of armor perfectly suited to guarding a corporate collection. At the exhibition's central square, **Femmy Otten's** sculpture *One Tear at a Time* (2020) captures the power of the female body: motherhood and sexuality, strength and vulnerability in one single breath. Further on, **Louise Giovanelli's** painting *Wager* (2020) with golden blouses that cast their own reflections, whilst **Stephan Balkenhol's** silver knight from 2024 writes his own chapter in history, half knight, half astronaut, simultaneously the past and a shining future.

The AkzoNobel Art Foundation has followed the work of some artists for three decades, such as **Robert Zandvliet** and **Steven Aalders**. In the exhibition, their work is displayed in dialogue with that of **Bernard Frize**, who, like Aalders, uses color as a driving force. Their abstract paintings serve as windows onto a more expressive dialogue in paint right next to them. There, a work by CoBrA pioneer **Karel Appel** from 1960 hangs side by side with a layered work by **Michael Tedja** from 2026: whilst Appel laid the foundations for expressive freedom in Dutch art, Tedja uses that same freedom to raise critical questions about the canon.

Film also forms part of the exhibition: a recent video installation by **Pip Greenaway**, *Prologue–Too Much to Swallow* (2025), and an early acquisition, **Hans Op de Beeck's** animated film *Gardening* (2001), share a melancholic atmosphere. In Greenaway's work, the human figure is solitary within an artificial environment of rain; in Op de Beeck's film, the seasons flow into one another, rendered in delicate, animated pencil lines. In that same corner, a garden unfolds with colorful sculptures by **Chan Chiao Chun** from 2025, which appear to emerge from the ground like lava, surrounded by paintings with floral motifs by artists including **Jennifer Tee** and **Keetje Mans**. Here, flora becomes a language of hope and calm, a feeling that also resonates in the painting by **Sam Samiee**. His recent flower series *The Trophies* (2026) pays tribute to artists and thinkers worldwide who supported him when the war in the Middle East reached Iran, forcing him into a bomb

shelter. He carried on working, for the will to live lies in the beauty of the flower. Elsewhere in this corner, the mood shifts: in *Do!* (2000), **Natasja Kensmil** depicts three bikini-clad women with hollow, staring faces, offering a sharp critique of Western beauty standards.

A special section of the exhibition is dedicated to **Otobong Nkanga**, recipient of the Sikkens Prize 2026, who explores the relationship between people and the land, not as a possession, but as a multi-layered place shaped by extraction, history, and collective memory. *ReflAction* presents work from her studio that has never been shown before in the Netherlands. Like the raw materials mica and steel, the kola nut runs as a recurring thread throughout her work. In her monumental tapestries, the interwoven relationship between people and matter becomes literally visible, with shimmering threads evoking the mineral mica, while figures, landscapes and machines intertwine to form richly layered images.

ReflAction will be on view for a full year starting October 1, 2026. The section featuring works by **Otobong Nkanga** runs through February 28, 2027, coinciding with her solo exhibition *HUMUS BLUES*, which opens on October 27, 2026, at Singer Laren.

Practical information

ReflAction is on view from October 1, 2026, at the AkzoNobel Art Space, Christian Neefestraat 2, Amsterdam. Monday through Friday, 9.00 AM to 6.00 PM
For images or interview requests, please contact artfoundation@akzonobel.com or Els Drummen, tel. 06-82870682, els.drummen@akzonobel.com.

A preview of the exhibition is available by appointment from Monday, September 28.

Thirty Years. Museum partners across the Netherlands

For many years, the AkzoNobel Art Foundation has generously loaned works to museums in the Netherlands and abroad. The anniversary celebrates and strengthens that collaboration. In 2026 and 2027, works from the collection will be on view at numerous anniversary partners, including: Chabot Museum Rotterdam, CODA Apeldoorn, Dordrechts Museum, Fries Museum, Museum Jan Cunen, Kröller-Müller Museum, Museum MORE, SCHUNCK Museum Heerlen, Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, Singer Laren, and Verwey Museum Haarlem