

Het Parool Vrij, Onverveerd

A green world in which humankind is
merely a spectator



A green path guides the visitor through a variety of 'landscapes,' both conceptual and figurative. One side of the green carpet accommodates utopian works, while the other side is reserved for dystopian art. IMAGE MARTIN VAN WELZEN

The exhibition *Earth – A Collective Landscape*, on display until the summer of 2024 at the AkzoNobel headquarters on the Zuidas, explores our relationship with the vulnerable nature. Featuring, among other things, a tree trunk bench and a tree with fake euro bills growing on it.

Jan Pieter Ekker - October 28, 2023

In the beginning of this year, the animation of a figure bouncing up and down against an ever-changing landscape, created by Amsterdam based artist Jacco Olivier, was displayed on the Rotterdam Euromast. Now, *Perpetuum*, as the sparkling work is called, is part of the exhibition *Earth – A Collective Landscape* at the AkzoNobel Art Foundation. The euphoric, wildly waving figure with its

arms is the only human in the exhibition. 'We have chosen to remove humans from the center,' says the introduction of the free, sometimes slightly woolly catalog. 'Here, you enter a world where humanity is just a spectator.'

A green path takes the visitor along the most diverse 'landscapes', both conceptual and figurative. There are works dating back to the early nineties, pieces created specifically for the exhibition, and everything in between. In various disciplines - from photography and video installation to painting and sculpture - created by 41 artists from home and abroad, who engage to varying degrees with themes such as ecological awareness, landscape, and the artificial distinction between humans and nature.

Tree Trunk Bench

One side of the green path is reserved for utopian works, the other side for dystopian art. One of the 'paradisiacal works' is *Passion* by Job Koelewijn, in which the capitalized word echoes against the wall four times, each time slightly larger. It has a smell; it is made of eucalyptus ointment. (Many of Koelewijn's works are fleeting; they consist of a performance or are made of vulnerable, temporary materials such as talcum powder, broth, candy, spaghetti, or green soap.)

In front of it is a 'tree trunk bench' by Mirte van Laarhoven, who graduated as a landscape architect in 2017 from the Academy of Architecture: *Cake for Diversity*. The 800-kilo giant aims to be a habitat for a hundred different organisms. Of these, 99 species, including wasps, bees, beetles, birds, caterpillars, and fungi, can find shelter in or on the tree trunk. For the hundredth species - humans - Van Laarhoven created a layer of ceramics on top of the wood.

On the seat, you can read the catalog in peace: 'The current climate crisis unfolding before our eyes brings with it the realization that it is time to stand with our feet on the ground again. Time not to stare blindly at the panoramas above us but to enter into a symbiosis with the landscape of which we are a part. Time to realize that paradise has not been outside, above, or past us all this time, but at our feet.' Even without explanation, the works are well worth it.

Apocalyptic Landscape

A little further on is a giant, colorful sculpture by Taiwanese designer Chan Chiao Chun, who graduated from the Design Academy Eindhoven in 2016. The polyester case looks like a toxic mushroom. Or a mushroom cloud that arises from nuclear explosions. With the work, Chun links the ability of fungi - the fungus that served as a model is used in Taiwan as a medicinal herb - to establish connections between the imperceptible connections between people and cultures.

In his meters-wide painting *Zora* (2023), Robert Zandvliet also places the visitor in the middle of nature; it's as if the yellow-orange sun is shining right in your face. The summer scene contrasts sharply with the storm and flood-ravaged landscape in the installation of Jan Robert Leegte. When you enter the space, a threatening soundscape is audible, making the spectacle even more ominous.

Leegte, one of the first Dutch artists to make the internet the subject of his work in the 1990s, did not manually create the apocalyptic landscape but had it generated down to the smallest detail by a real-time landscape simulator from the gaming industry. The attraction of this technique has a downside: the digital landscape can be destroyed with the press of a button. According to Leegte, this vulnerability reflects the precarious relationship between humans and nature in our era of climate change and ecological degradation.

Fake Euro Bills

Inge Meijer is also taken aback by the neglect of the greenery around us. She made an intriguing video with beautiful drone footage of her planted 'garden car' driving slowly along a straight dike road. The paths in the collective landscape that is the art space are less straight; the surprises are therefore great.

The tree by American sculptor Tony Matelli is also not what it seems from a distance. The tree, made on the occasion of the introduction of the euro, doesn't have purple leaves, but fake euro bills. In the world of the arts, where everything is an illusion, money does grow on a tree.

Earth - A Collective Landscape can be seen until the summer of 2024 from Monday to Friday from 9 am to 6 pm at the AkzoNobel Art Foundation, Christian Neefestraat 2.

AkzoNobel Art Foundation

AkzoNobel, producer of sustainable and innovative paints and coatings under brands like Flexa and Sikkens, has been collecting art from internationally renowned artists and young talents since 1996. The art collection is not only intended to create a stimulating work environment for the staff. Since 2016, the AkzoNobel Art Foundation also has an Art Space in the headquarters on the Zuidas; a space for art that is free to access during office hours. The collection, now comprising more than 2,000 pieces, has been largely curated by Art Foundation director Hester Alberdingk Thijm.

She is also responsible for *Earth - A Collective Landscape* (the exhibition title brings together 'art' and 'earth'). "One of the main objectives of the exhibition is to emphasize why it is more important than ever that we emotionally engage with our natural environment to better understand the challenges we all face," says Alberdingk Thijm. "As a company, it is also an opportunity to reflect on how the natural world feeds our imagination - it provides inspiration for new color palettes and the development of more sustainable products."



The mushroom-shaped sculpture by Chan Chiao Chun links the ability of fungi – the fungus used as a model is used as a medicinal herb in Taiwan – to form connections among themselves with the imperceptible connections between people and cultures. IMAGE FRISO KEURIS