



Invitation to a theatrical walk through Prague

Looking for...

The Dutch exhibit challenges the visitors of the Prague Quadriennale 2011 to undertake a theatrical walk through Prague. Under the header *Looking for...*, you can go on a personal quest, designed by four Dutch designers, and with a smartphone as your guide.

The idea for this Dutch exhibit can be traced back to 2003, when Lena Müller visited Prague during the Quadriennale. She found a bag with fourteen rolls of film, some of them still in the original carton box. They appeared to date from the sixties. Lena Müller had the pictures developed and printed and tried to reconstruct the story of the photographer. She literally retraced his steps and was able to identify several places in Prague where the pictures had been taken. This found collection of pictures has now become the starting point for the

Dutch exhibit in 2011. When looking at them, one immediately sees the strong potential of this material: grey Eastern bloc buildings, remains of the Second World War, everyday life in a big city reminiscing the past, the transition of the stiff fifties to the beat generation of the sixties. Some of the pictures have a highly theatrical quality: persons dressing up, sometimes purely travesty. Some are even entirely staged, making one curious about the story of the unknown photographer. These pictures, dating from the six-





On the left page the young man and presumed photographer, on the right some family photo's.

ties and found in Prague in 2003, have been the inspiration for the four designers that were selected for this PQ. Lena Müller (1976), Roos van Geffen (1975), Theun Mosk (1980) and Marloeke van der Vlugt (1971) have jointly created a project, for which they have chosen the notions 'experience' and 'looking' as the starting point. They offer the visitors a theatrical tour of the city, based on the rediscovered locations in the pictures, and with a smartphone as their virtual guide. The four designers present a thoroughly conceived performance, using the latest digital and technological means. With

this project they also explicitly present themselves as theatre makers. The actual procedure is as follows. The visitor of the Dutch exhibit reports at a front desk in the exhibition building. He or she gets a smart phone on loan, on which the program *7scenes* is running, a piece of software developed by Waag Society in Amsterdam. The visitor now becomes a participant. The smartphone gives detailed instructions on the route to follow through images, sound and interactive apps, and provides materials and impulses to reconstruct the story behind the pictures and the unknown photographer. The visitor thus becomes

a participant in this *Dutch Experience*, to which the four designers each make their unique contribution.

Marloeke van der Vlugt: physical interaction

In the work of Marloeke van der Vlugt, the audience becomes co-performer. 'By means of technology I create spaces and objects which engage the audience in a direct, often physical relationship with the body of the performers. By physically activating the audience, I attempt to bring 'thinking' and 'experiencing' in balance. By addressing the different senses simultaneously, the co-performer is not only looking at what he sees, but offered an experience.' Through the smartphone she very precisely directs the 'co-performer' via pictures and text. He or she will be captivated by the activity and to the passer-by it will look as if the visitor performs. The visitor gets physical assignments, inspired by the *tableaux vivants* of the pictures from the sixties. For instance, the participant is invited to find the correct posture, in order to match the image in the viewfinder of the smartphone with the original black and white picture in the small screen. Furthermore, Marloeke has developed an *interactive glove*, held by an iron support somewhere along the route. When the co-performer puts his hand in the glove, a much older hand appears on the screen of the phone. The co-performer is asked to imitate the movements on the screen, by using the glove. The sensors in the glove measure the correctness of the movements, each movement produces a certain audio ▶



Some of the photo's that Lena Müller found in Prague in 2003.



The interactive glove (prototype) by Marloeke van der Vlugt. | PHOTO: © MARLOEKE VAN DER VLUGT |

and video output. In the meantime the voice of an old man gives comments, which adds a personal feeling, and lets the participant experience the character through technology.

**Lena Müller:
pictures and family album**

Lena Müller focuses on the pictures. She has designed the route that leads to the same places where the photographer took them. Here, the visitor will find clues for the story behind the pictures, a story which is, of course, ambiguous: the original pictures suggest a story, but any visitor can interpret or change it. The story, the route and the pictures are intriguing enough as it is, but Müller also has remodelled some of the pictures in a theatrical manner, by staging them on location in Rotterdam in exactly the

same way as the photographer once did. Furthermore Lena focuses on the historical context. At the start of the route she presents a typically 'sixties' Czech family album, mixed with documents from the sixties behind the iron curtain. This is a good choice, because the past is always physically present in Prague. Walking through the city the stories from a glorious past automatically present themselves.

**Roos van Geffen:
talks and thoughts**

Roos van Geffen is playing a special part in this performance. She is the 'philosopher' of the company, standing or sitting near the trunk of a fallen tree, where she engages into conversations with the visitor about the essence of theatre: the aware-

ness of looking and being looked at, the experience of what is shown to the eye. In these conversations the presumed photographer of the pictures is the starting point. His explicitly nonchalant appearance testifies of great self-awareness, which makes that he immediately attracts attention. He becomes visible, because he is aware of being looked at. She links this to the ideas of the eighteenth century British philosopher George Berkeley, who questions whether something does exist if it is not perceived. A similar philosophic question was raised at the end of the nineteenth century: if a tree falls in a wood without anyone hearing this, is there sound or not? Roos van Geffen documents each encounter in text, picture, audio or video clip, which are linked through 7Scenes to the tree. Thus a database of thoughts and views on theatre (design) is created.

**Theun Mosk:
meeting and looking**

Theun Mosk has installed a little house somewhere along the route in Prague. It serves as a meeting place, a hiding place and a lookout. It is big enough

The house designed by Theun Mosk. | PHOTO: © ANNA VAN KOOIJ |



for two visitors, who can look at each other, look outside or at video material through strategically positioned windows and screens. He designed similar houses for the exhibition *Ergens & Overal (Somewhere & Anywhere)* of the Theater Instituut Nederland, about location theatre in the Netherlands, which toured several open air festivals in 2010. Through its design, the house is guiding the direction in which the spectator can look and thus influences his experience. In his monumental work Mosk creates literally clear frames, that are often prominently present. Just as the other three selected designers, he is a multi-talent: theatre maker, set designer and lighting designer.

Looking back

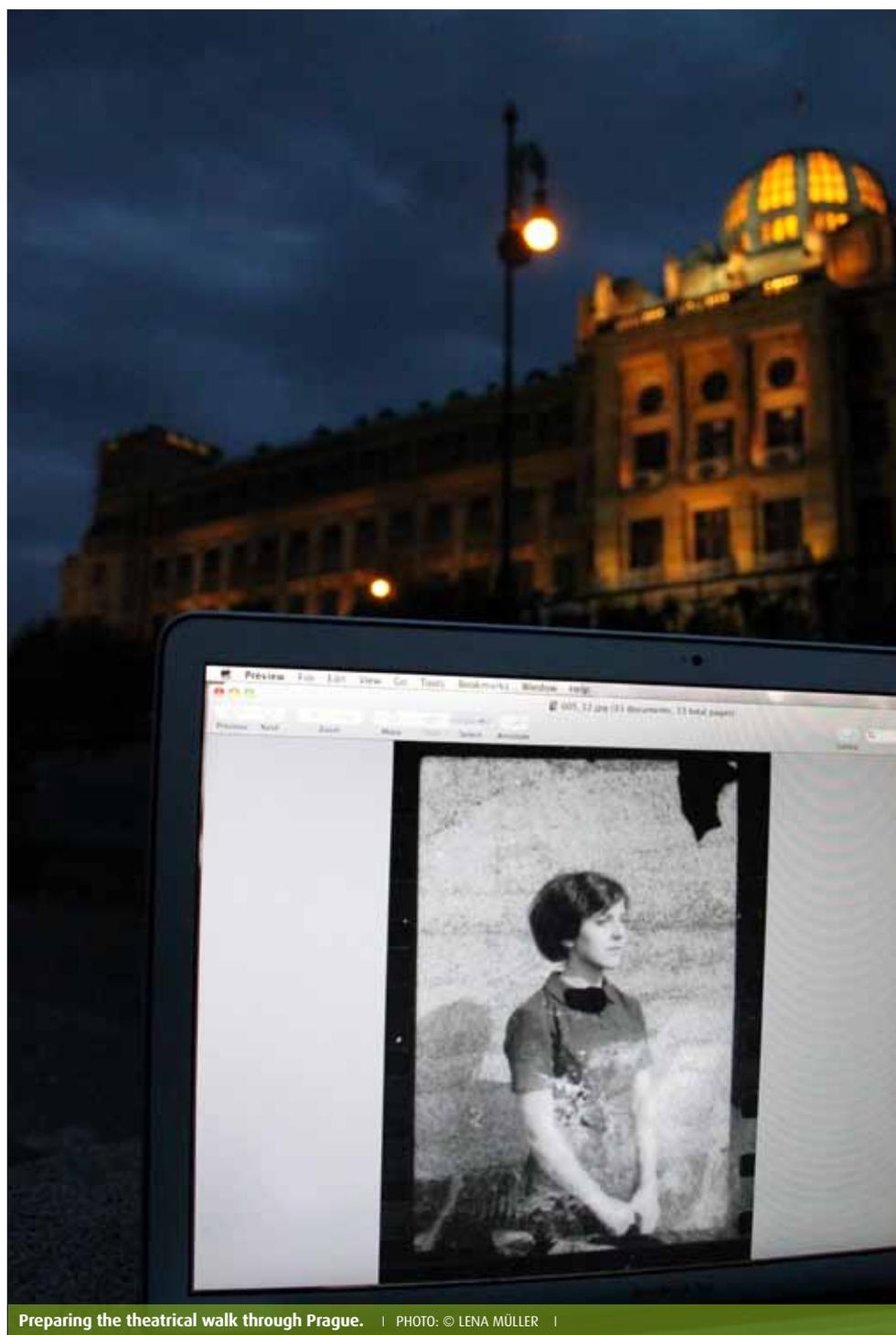
Typical of the Dutch exhibits in the last decades were the multiple layers, the use of modern technology and the theatrical quality of the exhibit itself. Instead of exhibiting the designs as such, the Netherlands strongly focussed on the designer, the design process and the designer as theatre maker. In 1999 both in the form of the presentation and in the choice of the designers, a preference could be seen for designers who are also multidisciplinary theatre makers. Rieks Swarte even brought a complete performance. This PQ was a huge step forward to a focus on the designer itself, and away from merely displaying the fixed forms and tools that a designer works with, such as scale-models, pictures or sketches. In 2003 the Dutch theme was 'theatre on location'. In a monumental pavilion video material was shown, in which the theatrical intervention in a landscape or location was the key element. However, the underpinning theme of this exhibit was that the designer, for any form of theatre, had become theatre maker and part of an artistic team. Four years later, in 2007, full focus was on the designer. The theme was now 'the soul of the designer'. In an environment of loosely placed construction sheds, the selected designers showed their designs in an improvised manner, but the real focus was on the debate. With mediator Klaas Vos leading the way as a host, each designer had a full

day to reveal the core of his or her work through presentations and debates, in meetings with the numerous colleagues attending the PQ - which had all been heartily invited. In 2011 the Netherlands

take a new step. The four designers now invite each visitor to undertake a theatrical and personal quest through Prague, and become a co-performer. This is experience theatre 2.0! ◀

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Preparing the theatrical walk through Prague. | PHOTO: © LENA MÜLLER |