



## **Positions #3**

**Rossella Biscotti, Duncan Campbell, Maryam Jafri and Natasja Kensmil**  
03.12.2016 – 05.03.2017

The exhibition *Positions #3*, opening on 3 December 2016, presents new and existing work by Rossella Biscotti, Duncan Campbell, Maryam Jafri and Natasja Kensmil. Each of the artists draws on extensive research, translating empirical data through different modes of storytelling, image making and historicization. They often deploy a rich selection of archival material and historical analyses evoking different economic, political, and social associations in the process. The resulting manifestations sit at the intersection of cultural anthropology and conceptual practice whilst drawing on a range of visual languages. *Positions #3* is the third edition of the exhibition series *Positions*, which explores different tones of contemporary artistic voices.

During the opening of the exhibition on Saturday 3 December at 16.00 there will be speeches by Charles Esche, director of the Van Abbemuseum, and Diana Franssen, curator of *Positions #3*.

### **Rossella Biscotti**

In her work, Rossella Biscotti (Molfetta, Italy, 1978) focuses on forgotten social and political events. Following meticulous preliminary research she recirculates these stories in her reconstructions, revealing their relevance to the present.

The starting point of her new project *The Journey* dates back to 2010. During the XIV International Sculpture Biennale of Carrara she received the *Premio Michelangelo* for the work *The Anarchists Do Not Archive*. This sculpture work embodies the history of 19th century syndicalism and anarchism of the Carrara quarries. Biscotti was awarded with a handpicked block of Carrara marble from the Cave of Michelangelo, famous since the time of Ancient Rome, popular amongst sculptors and known for its high quality and rare colour. She plans to sink the marble block into the Mediterranean Sea, as a ready-made. In collaboration with various local institutions and inspired by scientific research and oceanography, Biscotti will identify the block's new location through analysing the environmental complexity of the Sicilian canal in its surface and depth. She will overlap maps that

trace the historical commercial routes and migrant routes, artefacts and military deposit, analysing the morphology of the seabed in the international water between Italy, Libya and Tunisia. This 'simple' action brings to the surface the complex infrastructure and geopolitical situation in this area.

The second new work in *Positions #3* is called *Clara*, an installation around the rhinoceros, who became famous during 17 years of touring Europe in the mid-18th century as an unknown specimen. Captain Douwe Mout van der Meer of the VOC vessel *Knappenhof*, returned to the Netherlands with Clara and became her agent and companion until her death. The bricks in this installation serve as a historical witness to the colonial activities of the Dutch.

### **Duncan Campbell**

The films of Duncan Campbell take as their subject a specific historical event and the people and objects that were related to it. His films consist of a collage of archive recordings, new documentary material and fictional film excerpts. In this way he questions the documentary form

as a “true” representation of historic reality and plays with the boundaries between reality and fiction, and between recordings and interpretation. In *Positions #3* the film *Arbeit* (2011) will be screened, which tells the story of the German economist Hans Tietmeyer, one of the invisible bureaucrats behind the European monetary union. An anonymous narrator recounts the course of Tietmeyer’s career from his education and upbringing in 1930s Westphalia, through the economic miracle of post-war Germany and the rise of ‘unbridled affordable consumerism’, to its central role on the global economic stage through the 80s and 90s.

In addition a newly commissioned film - called *The Welfare of Tomás Ó Hallissy* (2016) - on the remote Irish village of Dun Chaoin in Kerry will also be on view. The film sits at the interface of the activist perspective of the two American anthropologists and their focus on individual subjectivity; and the pragmatic, deferential, and conservatively Catholic perspective of the people they are studying. Implicit in the film is the reality of constant emigration and the precarious existence of places like Dun Chaoin – consistently studied since the 19th century with reverence, or in an attempt to reform it.

#### Maryam Jafri

Maryam Jafri plays with fact and fiction. She frames her subjects meticulously, composing them afresh, renaming them and placing them in confrontation with each other, resulting in questions about the market orientation of our everyday lives. This can concern our food production and marketing, as in the installations *Product Recall: An Index of Innovation* (2014-15), *Generic Corner* (2015) and the video *Mouthfeel* (2014). The mixed-media installation *Product Recall*, for example, displays products that were withdrawn from the market. Jafri presents these recalled products (or old advertising shots of them) alongside informative labels. In some cases, products were recalled due to a bad choice of name or an unfortunate coincidence – as with Ayds diet cookies, whose sales plummeted with the advent of AIDS. In this way, *Product Recall* highlights the kind of ‘spells’ cast on products by marketing strategists and food designers in their attempts to generate demand. *Generic Corner* consists of packaging plucked from the history of consumer products alongside still-life photographs. During the 1970s and 1980s, generic food products featuring stark, black and white graphics were directed towards low-income and cost-conscious shoppers. These ‘unbranded’ surfaces connoted cheapness and economy, reflected in their lower price points. In *Mouthfeel*, staged and found footage are combined. The video shows a conversation between a fictitious married couple who both work for a multinational food company. Slippery ethics, bottom-line profiteering, and lies of convenience drive them. Another work, which is presented, is the ongoing project *Independence Day 1934-1975* (2009 - ongoing). It categorises found images on the independence of former colonies in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Analysing these photos shows how quickly these young nations assimilated to the norms of the colonial state.

#### Natasja Kensmil

Natasja Kensmil uses moments from (art) history in her practice to highlight the relationship between the present and the past. She believes that “in the end, a painting must comprise layers of accumulated images, added together to create a new image ... it is a process of re-digesting material and ideas”.

The movement of the Anabaptists has a central place in a number of her portraits and other history paintings. In her new silkscreens *Martyrs Mirror* (2016), she incorporates fragments of their executions, depicted in numerous prints by the 17th-century graphic artist Jan Luyken and written on in the famous book *Martyrs’ Mirror* by Thieleman van Braght (1685). Original prints from this book - on loan from the archive of Special Collections University of Amsterdam – will counterbalance the works on display.

By using existing visual material, Kensmil has produced a new configuration. In an historical approach without, however, focusing on precise moments in time as a scientist would, she chose a poetic reality. She structures and interweaves her archive of (art) historical imagery to compose a new, dynamic story. She approaches the material subjectively, and guided by a critical distance. Kensmil does not offer solutions or adopt a specific standpoint: she creates insights by discovering parallels in her extensive pictorial archive. Often she uses barbaric images culled from mysticism and religion because of their lyrical power, not from a methodical or technical perspective. With this, she makes these rituals, metaphors and symbols of the past accessible to us, in the present and repeatedly questions the historical relationship between our identity and the world we live in. In *Positions #3* Kensmil also shows a selection of her oil paintings, always composed of multiple layers.

#### Curator

Diana Franssen.

#### Subsidisers

*Positions #3* is supported by Ammodo, Mondriaan Fund, Stichting Promotors Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven and Danish Arts Foundation.



#### Partners

Duncan Campbell’s *The Welfare of Tomás Ó Hallissy* is made possible is commissioned by the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) with co-commissioners Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven and Western Front, Vancouver an supported by the Irish Film Board.



press release  
november 2016

Natasja Kensmil's ten new silkscreens of *Martyrs Mirror* were produced in collaboration with the Grafisch Atelier Daglicht, Eindhoven.

GRAFISCH ATELIER



### **Positions**

In 2014 the Van Abbemuseum started the exhibition series *Positions* that sets a series of projects in dialogue with one another in the ten galleries of the museum's old building. The artists in *Positions #1* (2014) were Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Céline Condorelli, Bouchra Khalili, Charles van Otterdijk and Koki Tanaka. In *Positions #2* (2015) works by Anna Boghiguan, Chia-Wei Hsu, Nástio Mosquito and Sarah Pierce were shown.

### **For the editors:**

For further information and photographs see: [www.vanabbemusuem.nl/en/press](http://www.vanabbemusuem.nl/en/press)

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### **Van Abbemuseum**

The Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven is one of the leading museums for contemporary art in Europe. The museum has an intensive international collection of more than 2,700 works of art, including key works by Lissitzky, Picasso, Kokoschka, Chagall, Beuys, McCarthy, Daniëls and Körmeling. Questions in the field of art and society are raised by the museum in an experimental way. An open attitude, hospitality and the exchange of information are important for the Van Abbemuseum and we encourage both ourselves and the visitors to think about different subjects, for example about the role of the collection as a cultural "memory" or about the museum as a public space. As a result of international cooperation and exchange, the Van Abbemuseum is also a place where cultural cross-pollination takes place. It is a source of wonder, inspiration and imagination.

Van Abbemuseum,  
Bilderdijklaan 10, Eindhoven.  
[www.vanabbemuseum.nl](http://www.vanabbemuseum.nl)

### **Opening hours**

Tuesday to Sunday 11.00 – 17.00. Thursday 11.00 - 21.00.

### **Admission**

Adults: € 12.00 / Groups of 10 or more: € 9.00 / Young people 13-18 years old, students, CJP holders, Eindhoven city pass (stadspas) holders: € 6.00/ Children under 13 years of age, Museum card: free / Family pass (2 adults and max. of 3 children until 18 years): € 18.00. Tuesday 15.00 – 17.00: free.