

Spaces and Identity

A reflection on Cindy Moorman's exhibit at Nest, The Hague.

Spaces for art – to create and to partake in – seem rare for students in The Hague. So when an ex-LUC student offered the chance to perform in a piece and to see how the functioning of a gallery might actually work, I took her up on it.

NEST showcased Cindy Moorman's latest exhibition one evening in The Hague and brought together a compilation of her previous performances with new groups. The show offered an insight into an uncomfortable world of exclusion, tradition and the 'other'. Her work ranges from physical objects and video screenings to performance pieces to examine these group interactions in detail.

Groups form an integral part of Moorman's work and she looks at how individuals interact and respond to each other. Moorman's use of performance allows the visitor, or what she calls 'the other', to take part in these group dynamics. She creates scenes which aim to exclude the 'other'; one performance might show a group clapping in a particular rhythm the 'other' can't grasp, another might be a line of dancers interlocking with each other that is too complex for the 'other' to join.

The dimly lit space at the NEST invited the 'other' to walk around and explore; its steep ramps and hiding spaces encouraged you to engage in the show with your own physical movements. Adapting the constructions of a previous exhibit, Moorman fit her performances around the space offered. She works with it creatively and you see this in her comparison to Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck's playground designs. The five scenes she creates all offer different possibilities, for both the 'other' and the performer.

When Moorman begins to plan a new space, she always starts with this 'other' and thinks about how they might move through the space and how they will feel when they see these scenes. For Cindy, "there's no difference between the performer and the visitor. You are, as a visitor, immediately part of the scene - you couldn't do the work without the other at all." The 'other' might feel lost when they enter, even though they enter with a whole group. Cindy joked that some audience groups actually ended up walking round the entire gallery space as one unit, reflecting exactly what her work says about group dynamics. "I think in general people like to group and exclude and include, that's just the human thing to do because you want to belong to a group and if you have 'us', you have 'them'. And the stronger the 'us' is, the more the 'them' is excluded in a way and those are things I think a lot about, how I relate to the group and what it means to be part of the group or what it means to be excluded."

Moorman's work might seem political at first glance, but her aim is not to reflect on particular groups. Her work instead focuses on sociological aspects and her previous studies in the Netherlands depicts the power of cultural symbols. "I visited a lot of communities in Holland and documented their way of grouping together - so their traditions and their rituals." She says this did not work so well as the 'others' felt the videos shown only represented strange habits. Now Cindy creates her own scenes so that the 'other' will feel more actively excluded. She places the 'other' in an uncomfortable position by putting them on their own, and gives them a taste of "something that everybody has to deal with - that weird balance [between being an individual and part of a society] as a human."

This balance that Moorman examines questions what we value ourselves and why societies might be important for our own development. The individuals who come separately to the show leave feeling perhaps excluded from the closeness of the bond between the performers - Moorman refers to Elias Cannetti's concentrated 'mass crystals'. But they also often relate to the performers in some way, through common humanity, which is part of the reason why Moorman uses performance pieces more often. Her work goes to show the impact that art has on us and those mental imprints last long after we leave. If we as students do not have access to these outlets that encourage deeper thought, how can we expect to understand ourselves?

Tess Baker - January 2018

