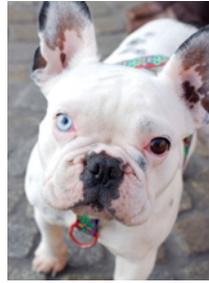


SPECTATOR

THEO NIEKUS





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Street photography frames a moment in the ever-changing and moving organism we call 'city'. It highlights aspects of daily life that all too often go unnoticed. As such, street photography becomes an analysis of our time and culture – the camera functions as the artist's microscope.

In his project *Spectator* photographer Theo Niekus focuses on the street life in Amsterdam's consumer centre. The area, roughly between Central Station, Rembrandt Square and Leidse Square, is a place where tourists and locals mix in what often looks like a desperate attempt to shop for anything edible and to be entertained by the act of buying. The hectic behaviour, the density of people and the overall ugliness feels apocalyptic, reminding the viewer of a 16th-century Brueghel painting.

As the de facto chronicler of Amsterdam street life, Niekus has lived the changes in street culture over the past 20 years. Police presence has increased considerably – you only have to think of the omnipresence of surveillance cameras. Minor offences lead to exaggerated police reactions on an almost daily basis. Niekus himself became a victim of police intimidation when he was taken to court for 'hanging around for no specific reason'. However, Niekus acknowledges the increasingly aggressive, apathetic and anti-social behaviour of the public on the street; not only towards the presence of his camera, but also towards each other. For him, this behaviour is the product of the commercialisation of public space on the one hand and public order regulations on the other. Regulated freedom becomes a burden.

Formally speaking, his images are as unpretentious as the life they document: no visual drama is added, not a single shot is staged. Niekus never uses a flash and never asks. Thus his work, recording the banal, is confrontational and immediate. The viewer can identify with the situation because it remains tangible and becomes part of Niekus' observation. This is where the role-play of his images begins, photographer and viewer become part of the same scene - just like the people in the photographs. As an installation, *Spectator* reflects the fast-paced and inescapable life of Amsterdam as a consumer's urban hunting ground. It plays with the illusions of the omnipresent observer and the observed. The viewer becomes immersed in the role-play about consumerism, public regulations, urban life and daily curiosities.

BIOGRAPHY Theo Niekus works in the long tradition of Dutch street photography - consider the work of Ed van der Elsken (1925-1990). Niekus (born 1956) picked up a camera in 1989 in order to photograph the streets of Amsterdam, ending his activities as a painter.

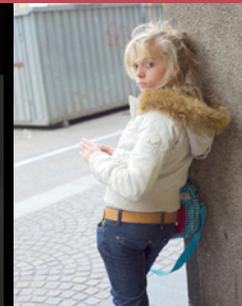
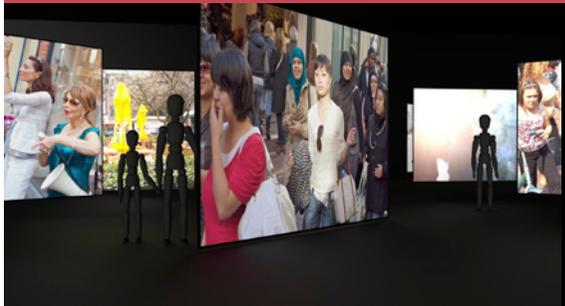
His first work formed the basis of the photo book *Passanten*, published in 1996. Other photo books soon followed, such as *Pasatiempo/Passing Time* (1998), *Made in China* (2002) and *Damrak* (2005). Niekus received a grant from The Netherlands Foundation for Visual Arts, Design and Architecture (Fonds BKVB) in 2009 to publish his encyclopaedia of street behaviour online. *Spectator* will be available as a photo book in early 2010. Niekus' work is represented in several international collections, including the *Albertina Museum* (Vienna), the *Stedelijk Museum* (Amsterdam) and the *Special Collections Department of the University Leiden*.



SPECTATOR – THEO NIEKUS EXHIBITION: AUDIOVISUAL INSTALLATION WITH FIVE CHANNELS (ca. 15 minutes long), accompanied by a multi-channel soundtrack.

Projection in XGA, 720p or HD from HD-MPEG players or computer. **PROJECTION SCREENS 200 X 300 CM** (minimum of five) **PUBLICATION: TO BE ANNOUNCED**

EXHIBITION FEE: € 5,000 (excluding installation and equipment) AVAILABILITY: **NOVEMBER 2009** première at the Three Shadows Photography Art Centre, Beijing (subject to change)



PARADOX creates projects in photography, video and media related arts. The interaction between social, economic and technological change is central to most thematic and monographic projects developed. **PARADOX'** activities include travelling exhibitions, film production, book and electronic publishing and organising workshops and symposiums. For further info: www.paradox.nl