

Transformation/ inspiration

Madelon Hooykaas and Keiko Sato in the SieboldHuis Leiden

Kitty Zijlmans

Japan Museum SieboldHuis is located in a stately canal house on the rapenburg in Leiden. It is here from 16 September to 25 November 2012 that the multimedia installations of contemporary artists Madelon Hooykaas and Keiko Sato will be in dialogue with the collection that was brought here by the German scholar Dr. Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796-1866). Siebold trained in medicine and natural history, was employed by the Dutch Government and assigned the task of gathering all possible knowledge about Japan. He did this with great gusto: between 1823 - 1829 he nurtured numerous contacts with Japanese scholars and brought about a lively exchange of knowledge between Japan and The Netherlands in the fields of medicine, geology, botany and ethnography. He learned the language and collected objects from every aspect of Japanese life, plants, seeds, stuffed animals, maps, utensils, toys, prints, drawings and all kinds of Japanese artifacts.

Siebold worked from the artificial fan shaped island of Deshima (no larger than two football pitches) just off Kyushu island in the port of Nagasaki, connected to the mainland by only a small stone bridge.¹ Siebold was an esteemed gentleman, also in Japan because of his clinic and the part he played in the introduction of the first vaccinations.² He asked for no payment for treatments but received payment in kind in the form of exceptional manuscripts, works of art and artifacts. Siebold's knowledge of Japan and his collection steadily grew. However this was not without issue, because the Japanese rulers (read Shoguns) had a strict policy prohibiting the foreign ownership of Japanese objects. This would ultimately be the reason that Siebold was expelled from Japan. He was found in possession of a number of maps and his activities were immediately curtailed. He did, however manage to smuggle a number of documents and maps out upon his departure. His collection of Japanese objects was housed in assorted scientific institutes in Leiden until he opened his house and garden to the interested public in 1837, binding him forever to Leiden. When, in 1853 after pressure from the West, Japan opened their borders to Western powers the way was again clear for Siebold and in 1859 he returned to Japan. Alongside his scant work for the Netherlands Trading Company he worked to improve his knowledge and wrote a Japanese/Dutch/French/English dictionary. After the Netherlands Trading Company did not renew his appointment Siebold managed to find work until the end of 1862 as an advisor to the Dutch Government. The advice he offered was not always well received and he again left Japan, reluctantly returning to Leiden but he struggled to settle in the Netherlands and left for Munich in 1864. There he housed his second ethnographic collection in a private museum,³ thankfully his first collection remained in Leiden.

The most beautiful pieces are now in the SieboldHuis, his former city residence. He also had a country home that is now within the Leiden city limits but only the street name, Sieboldstraat refers to what was once there. His former home is partially intact and as a visitor you feel immersed in the atmosphere and objects

of the rich Japanese culture. The Siebold collection is the basis for the academic study of Japanese culture, nature and science at Leiden University, the Natural History Museum Naturalis and the Museum of Ethnology. As at the museum a large proportion of the extensive Japanese collections held by the museums and various academic institutions come directly from the collection that Siebold built in Japan or subsequently collected. Many histories are thus linked in the SieboldHuis, that of Siebold, the house itself, the hitherto constant exchanges between Japan and The Netherlands, the history of the collection, a number of Leiden museums, Leiden University and the study of Japanese language, culture and history. This rich historical background, Siebold and the collection are the keys to the contemporary art exhibition Transformation/Inspiration of Madelon Hooykaas and Keiko Sato. Their artistic interventions have energized the SieboldHuis in an extraordinary way.

Alliances

We all know the work of Stansfield/Hooykaas, the Scottish/ Dutch pioneers of video and multimedia art. After the early death of Elsa Stansfield in 2004 Madelon Hooykaas continued to work under the name Stansfield/Hooykaas and now for the first time exhibits under her own name. Madelon Hooykaas has a special relationship with Japan, as Japan has with her. In 1970 she was one of the first European women to be given permission to stay long term in a Zen Buddhist monastery in Japan. She documented her experiences in a photo-book, *Zazen* in 1971. Two videos of her recent visits to the monastery, 'Zazen now, daily life in a Japanese monastery' (2009) and 'The path, a stranger in a Japanese Zen monastery' (2010) play on the top floor of the SieboldHuis. There are many more connections. Elsa Stansfield and Madelon Hooykaas visited Hiroshima. This profound experience is reflected in a number of audio/visual installations in the series 'museum of memory', part 1 (1985) and 'shadow pictures... from the museum of memory II' (1986), and recent works by Hooykaas again refer to it in 'feeling the invisible', (2012), to which I return later. The invisible but ever present deadly atomic radiation plays a role in each of these works. The atomic bomb left only a 'shadow picture' of the people behind, the contours of their bodies etched in stone. Revealing the Invisible (2010)⁴ was chosen for a multitude of reasons as the title of the book reviewing the work of Stansfield/Hooykaas: how to show the invisible? The evolution in material and form of what exists only gradually forms layers of reality that are given the chance to manifest through art.⁵

Here we find the connection with the work of Keiko Sato.

Keiko Sato was born in Iwaki city in the province of Fukushima in Japan and has lived and worked in the Netherlands since 1995. She has also made works about Hiroshima partly because of her own personal history. Her father, a former kamikaze pilot could not fulfill his mission because his plane didn't have enough fuel. What a twist of fate. She hardly knew him but destiny is capricious, she witnessed the attack on the WTC towers in New York in 2001 and this prompted her to investigate her father. *How to tell a story of my father* (2009) recounts her search and her 5 conversations with her father's contemporaries disclose the many shades of grey that are revealed by every war. ⁷ Texts, interviews, drawings, photographs and collages alternate and overlap one another. The reality is at least as layered. Radiation and destruction play a further role in the work of both artists. In installations created especially for the exhibition in the SieboldHuis Hooykaas and Sato refer to the earthquake and tsunami of March 2011 and the subsequent disastrous consequences. As Sato observes, the earthquake was a natural disaster but the events at Fukushima are man-made. She and Madelon Hooykaas question why, as the only country in the world to have experienced the destructive effects of atomic bombs, would Japan build a series of nuclear power plants along the entire, earthquake prone east coast? Nature is destroyed by nuclear radiation and remains damaged for countless years, a fate that Japan has already twice experienced. In the basement of the SieboldHuis there is a site-specific work, 'shadows of memory' by Keiko Sato dedicated to the victims of Hiroshima. Meat hooks hang from the ceiling, strung with shards of glass jars and bottles containing photographs of the victims of Hiroshima and torn fragments of text. The faces of the victims are highlighted by spotlights and cast shadows on the walls. The work tells the story of all of the people whose life stories we will never know. The events in her homeland Fukushima are still too fresh in her memory, the wounds have not yet healed and thus it can only be indirectly referenced. Although their meeting was unplanned, that Keiko Sato and Madelon Hooykaas would eventually meet was no coincidence. They were introduced to one another because of their shared Japanese connection in 2007 at a presentation of the book *Present. Art in Government buildings 2004-2006*. It was a meeting of kindred spirits, two artists that recognized themselves in each others work. They are connected by Japan, their preoccupation with nature and how technology can be united with nature. These are not mutually exclusive domains for Sato and Hooykaas; together they are both parallel and connected. Energy is the basis of all things, the interchangeability of mass and energy and of energy as life force. That invisibility manifests itself in their art.

Voyage of Discovery

Madelon Hooykaas was the first of the artists to visit the SieboldHuis, curious as to how she would react to the place, the house and the collection. After meeting Keiko Sato, who in turn visited the museum the idea to exhibit together, in dialogue with the house, the collection and

each other was born. With the work of Hooykaas and sato the SieboldHuis has acquired a whole new dimension, exhibiting the objects and artifacts in a new way, new interactions connecting to each other and to the present. The installations of the two artists are site-specific, responding to the space itself and referring to the each other's works.

These multiple references interpret the transformation itself and the mutual inspiration. The multimedia works are throughout the entire SieboldHuis, from the basement to the top floor, the courtyard and the garden. Would you care to walk with me?

after the entrance just a little way down the hall is the work 'something That seems Very far away...' (2012) by Madelon Hooykaas. it is inspired by a sei shōnagon text from around the year 1000. Seishounagon was a Lady-in-waiting at the court of the empress Teishi and became a famous poet and diarist after her diary Makura no soushi (the 'Pillow book') gave a wonderful and rare insight into Japanese court life in the Heian period. The video sculpture is a new work using familiar techniques and stratification. A small video screen stand on the right and on the left a Japanese beauty case with drawers and a small mirror stands on top of an upright wooden packing case with a strip of paper on the underside adorned with Japanese characters. Within a similar oval on the monitor alternately the text 'something that seems very far away ... but is, in fact, very close' is to be seen on the palm of one hand or one brown eye. Depending on where one stands the text or the eye are reflected in the mirror on the left, or the viewer sees him or herself looking at the eye that is looking. Something that seems to be far away is very close by, namely you.

To the left of the hallway is the courtyard with the installation 'Tower' by Keiko Sato that honours Siebold as the passionate collector of plants and seeds from the far east. Glass jars filled with plants and flowers balance on a tall wooden framework. New jars and plants are still joining the installation. This is necessary because the flowers wilt and a breath of wind is enough to blow the jars onto the ground. Time passes, the seasons change, nature goes through its cycle. Next to the courtyard is the flora and fauna room. A small digital photo display by Madelon Hooykaas stands as a memento mori on the mantelpiece showing a vase of tulips photographed as they bloom and wither over a month. This 'still Life' (2008) cycle takes two and a half minutes and is in a continuous loop, like the cycle of life itself. The still life brought to life by technology recall the Dutch masters of the seventeenth century and remind us that however strong the association with the Netherlands and the tulip is today, the tulip itself was imported from abroad. Keiko Sato's work 'White shadow' is in the garden at the end of the corridor. The white stones mark the shadow that is cast for only a short time on that specific spot by the large tree in the garden. The shadow is not dark like shadows are but reveals various shades of white as the light changes. The fleeting shadow is fixed in stones acting as a present reminder of the Siebold collection that documents the Japan of yesteryear. Strong memories are also an important and recurring motif in the work of Hooykaas. The garden is also home to Sato's 'flowers'. Bundles of electrical wires emerge straight from the ground, the coloured wires and bundles of copper wire unfurl their calyxes. These flowers know nothing of the natural cycle of blossom/decay/ blossom. If they corrode they will fall apart and will to some extent return to nature but will never generate new blooms. The question of how technology and nature can relate to one another is being asked again. Back in the hallway we can choose to go to the basement to see the work 'shadows of memory' by sato that i have already described above or to the first floor. Let's go upstairs. 'Stones II' (2012) by Keiko Sato has more association with Siebold than may appear at first sight. In the first instance we see a pile of stones and pebbles arranged in somewhat tidy piles. On closer inspection we see Dutch and Japanese text on some of the stones and the smiling faces of people of mixed descent like Siebold's daughter Ine. This was very rare in Siebold's time and although she did experience discrimination it did not deter Ine from becoming the first female obstetrician. The work has more layers of meaning. The stones are all different and yet all the same just like humans. Stone and humans are all part of the same nature. Each stone carries with it a long history and it is customary in Japan to give someone a stone accompanied with a wish. Finally, in Japan piled up stones are used as a memorial for young children who have died. In it 'stones II' unites nature and culture, the past and present processes of intercultural exchange between Japan and The Netherlands. In the map room at the end of the hallway on the left is the especially for that room created drawing 'The Unknown island' (2012) of Madelon Hooykaas. Amid the maps that Siebold took from Japan, against the wishes of the Japanese rulers as we noted earlier – located in one of the drawers

of the map cabinet is the map of an unknown island. Within the title lies a contradiction in terms because as soon as a map is drawn the island is no longer unknown and above all, unknown by whom? Certainly not the indigenous population but perhaps from the perspective of the explorer or coloniser. A map also gives the location relative to other (is)lands and is always relational. With a map, the location of the country and its coordinates and position in the world map are known, precisely what the Japanese leaders resisted because it brings vulnerability. Possession of a map can also represent a position of power. Knowledge and power are inseparable. Working with geographical coordinates and points of reference, (celestial bodies, the north pole) is a frequently recurring element in the work of Hooykaas.⁸ also Sato in her floor installations makes frequent references to the themes of land/earth. In the group exhibition *Everyday life another space* that ran from 16 December 2009 until 23 January 2010 in the Kanagawa prefectural Gallery, Japan, the large, three part floor installation 'metamorphosis' is a kind of internal landscape, viewed over two floors. Upstairs on the balcony was the 'archetypal scene' (white sand patterns with protruding coloured and clear glass shards); the view from the balcony is on the 'outer world' (earth, sand, decayed leaves, tree trunks that form a kind of archipelago) and the 'inner world' (the house/ home represented by food, utensils etc.).⁹ natural and manmade objects (some also neglected) are intertwined. Sato connects the concepts of destruction and construction and from destruction and demolition comes the germ of new life. Sato and Hooykaas are also connected by this cyclical way of thinking.

The two artists are literally connected in the work 'We Connect' on the wall of the staircase from the first floor to the attic. As a scroll unrolled between the hands of Madelon Hooykaas on the left and Keiko Sato on the right is a collage of five slightly overlapping photographs mounted on a long piece of wood. Against the background of a sort of cloud formation of fragments of text the line: "I can not connect. We (in Japanese:) connect. nothing with nothing emerges." They are lines from the famous T.S. Eliot poem *The Waste Land* (1922): "on margate sands i can connect nothing with nothing. The broken finger nails of dirty hands. My people humble people who expect nothing."

The text is alternately recessed in the white 'clouds' and sometimes written in grey ink. Japan and the Netherlands are connected in this work. The exhibition space on the top floor has two installations by Madelon Hooykaas. The audio/video sculpture 'Haiku, the art of the present moment' (2007) and the new work 'feeling the invisible' (2012). The first work is a poetic audio/video sculpture of about half an hour and follows the narrative of the famous haiku poet and Zen Buddhist from the Edo period Matsuo Bashou (1644-1694). On an opened wooden 'book sculpture' two video images play at the same time, each of the seasons adorned by english translations of three haiku, simultaneously spoken by a male Japanese voice, with images showing often only the silhouette of a traveller, feet, and images of nature. The haiku, the natural seasons par excellence are from *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, a sweeping almost cinematic travelogue with poems and observations of Bashou on his journey through the far north eastern Tohoku region. Very gentle music composed by the Dutch clarinetist and saxophonist Ab Baars and inspired by the haiku (the consciousness of being in the present) played on the shakuhachi, an authentic Japanese bamboo wind instrument is interspersed with the sounds of nature. Finally, 'feeling the invisible' (2012) is a video installation with painting. a triangle is painted on to the wall using fluorescent paint, that is occasionally illuminated, inspired by the ink drawing, 'Circle, Triangle, square' by Sengai Gibon (1750-1837). The video is projected over the painting in a vertically split screen, the left mostly in colour and the right in black and white, or vice versa. We see two movements that of a waterwheel on the left, and on the right plastic waste spin around in a vortex. We hear the sound of a Geiger counter measuring radiation between the images which suddenly gives the luminous paint a different meaning: danger, radioactive radiation. The intense poetry of the natural images cannot hide how humans endanger nature and life. The exhibition *Transformation/inspiration* is more than a voyage of discovery through the world of Siebold and contemporary art. The artists awaken the viewer's awareness of life itself, of humans as part of nature, the inseparability of all things but also how the influence of the human touch often has an irreversible effect. Both artists make visible and palpable that which is present but not always tangible. It is in this way that their art deepens our experience of the world.

Notes

1 see extended: *Bewogen Betrekkingen. 400 jaar Nederland – Japan*. Ed. Leonard Blussé, Willem Remmelink, Ivo Smits. Teleac/not 2000 (alongside the Dutch version there is also an english, and Japanese version of this book published as part of the celebration of the 400 years of exchanges between Japan and The Netherlands in Leiden in 2000.

2 For this and a much more detailed history of Siebold, Bart Schmitz, *Huize Nippon aan de Rijn. Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796-1866)*, Leiden tales 2, 2000. p. 26.

3 Schmitz *ibid*.

4 *Revealing the Invisible. The Art of Stansfield/Hooykaas from Different Perspectives*. Eds. Madelon Hooykaas and Claire van putten. amsterdam, de Buitenkant 2010. www.stansfield-hooykaas.net

5 For a good essay by Dorothea Franck, 'Kunst en aandacht. Het Beklimmen van "mount analogue"', in: *Stansfield/Hooykaas. Revealing the Invisible*. ed. Claire van Putten. Schiedam, de Ketelfactory 2011, pp. 19-29, p.21.

6 Domeniek ruyters, '*op de rand van totale vernietiging*', *Metropolis M*, no. 6, 2010, pp. 36-39, p. 37.

7 Keiko Sato, *How to tell a story of my father*. Heijningen, Jap sam Books 2009.

8 For an extensive overview see the book revealing the invisible (note 4).

9 The work is much more complex and layered than the brief description here.

See also the catalogue of this exhibition in Japan with Yosuke Amemiya, Taiyo Kimura, Keiko sato, Taro Izumi, Todo Ramon, Hironari Kubota and Ruyter (note 5). This was the first time that Sato's work was exhibited in Japan. Hitoshi Nakano, who was important for the realization of the installations, wrote the text '*another space*' by Keiko Sato', for the catalog, pp. 114-115.

See her website: www.keikosato.nl on the website you can see that the three installations have already been realized separately on an earlier occasion. Keiko Sato adapted the concept for the gallery space in Kanagawa. The utensils and timber are gathered at the location where the work is carried out.