

oude kerk

aimée zito lema

Welcome in the Oude Kerk
We want to encourage you to walk and look around. That's why there are no signs about the work in general. Looking is a personal experience. It's where the giving of meaning begins. A meaning can be very personal and exclusively yours, but meaning can also touch upon larger themes and universal issues. We are asking you to look, first. There are people in the church who will answer your questions or talk to you. After your visit, this newspaper will allow you to read more about the work, the context and the artist.

Aimée Zito Lema
Here Is Where We Meet
25 May – 22 Aug 2021

Change: it may well be the only constant in the eventful history of the Oude Kerk and in a society in flux. How do we deal with change over time and what precedes it? These questions are central to the installation by artist Aimée Zito Lema in the Oude Kerk.

For the past three years, the Argentinian-Dutch artist Aimée Zito Lema has been delving into the archives of the Oude Kerk. She was interested in the reinterpretation of history and the value of heritage in the Oude Kerk; two moments of resistance stood out to her. The Iconoclastic Fury, which took place here on 23 August 1566 and in which people resisted the power of the Roman Catholic Church, and the recent resistance to the installation of a red window in the Holy Sepulchre Chapel, which some people believe has damaged the church's monumental values. These moments of resistance are characteristic of the change that follows. The installation in the church reflects on this. You will see water basins with photos and building elements, you will hear poems recited and, wandering through the church, you will come across a number of sculptures that include photos on paper. In the presbytery, you will find two large textile works. All of these elements reflect on the way in which resistance and change work for individuals and for society. What does resistance do to the course of 'our' history? And how do we initiate change as a society?

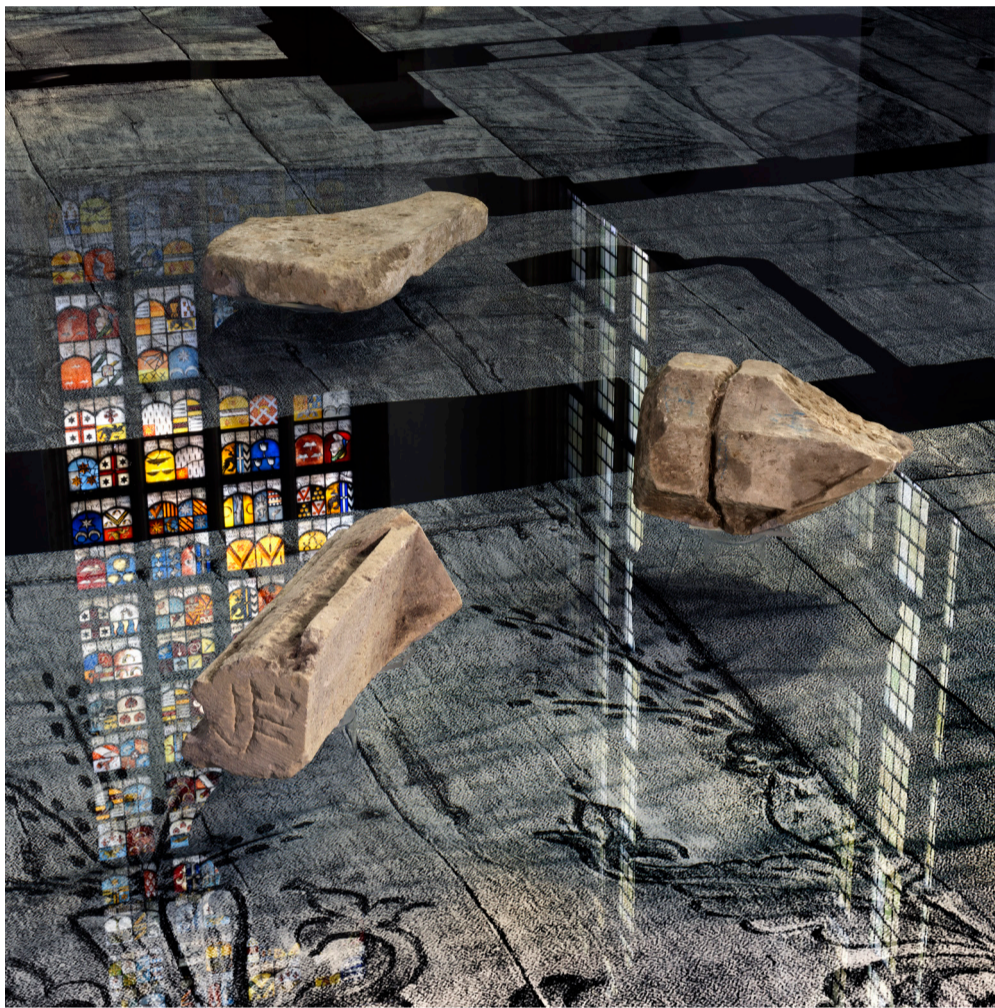


photo: Gert Jan van Rooij

alteration

If you look carefully, you can still find plenty of empty spots in which sculptures stood in the Oude Kerk's Roman Catholic past. Zito Lema also regards the voids left by the Iconoclastic Fury and the subsequent Reformation as forms of heritage. She creates sculptures comprising the empty spaces in which sculptures once stood and photographs showing the remains of Roman Catholic ceiling paintings that are still visible. The visual language of the installation (construction lamps, scaffolding) is reminiscent of the restoration work that is always going on in the church, symbolizing both change and resistance to change.

contemporary resistance

The installation of a red stained glass window by Giorgio Andreotta Calò caused resistance for a long time – a long court case about the subject ended on 17 March 2021 with a ruling by the Council of State – and even prompted a bomb scare. Zito Lema collected material related to this discussion, from newspaper clippings and letters to editors to legal texts. Last autumn, she organized a writing workshop in which she and young poetry students transformed words taken from these documents into the new poems that are recited as part of the exhibition. In the presbytery, the words from the legal texts come together in a multicoloured, 9-metre-long piece of woven fabric.

León Ferrari

In the Collegekamer (Boardroom or Church Commissioners' Chamber), you will find a small presentation of work by Argentinian artist León Ferrari (1920-2013), which has a connection to the work of Aimée Zito Lema. She grew up with his work and reviewed it during the first lockdown. Her research for this exhibition raised questions about the relationship between image and language in the context of resistance and this new parallel with his work struck her.

With his poems, collages and even a letter to the Pope, Ferrari warned of a 'cruelty intimately mixed with the kindness that covers it'. The artist's personal life, his relationship to religion and the geopolitical developments of his time are strongly recognizable in a number of selected works.

interview with aimée zito lema

During the construction of the works inside the church, artist Aimée Zito Lema and director and curator Jacqueline Grandjean spoke at length about the exhibition. Below is a brief account of this conversation.

JG: You first became acquainted with the place in which your work would be displayed when you visited the building three years ago. We are currently installing your work here. Is there a difference between that first time you walked in and looked around and this time?

AZL: The very first talks were in my studio, they were very substantive, about my work and about aspects of the history of the church. I had known about the Oude Kerk, the building, for years, but the moment I walked in with the idea of working in it, the space suddenly became a different space. What fascinates me even now is that every time I walk into this space, I feel like I'm walking into another time. I've been walking through that door for three years now, but that sense of changing time has never left me. I think it also has something to do with the emptiness.

JG: What about it struck you or fascinated you?

AZL: As an artist, you begin to search. For information. What can you read in the building? What I saw very clearly, for example, was that these walls carry history. There have been restorations that made the church's Roman Catholic past visible, for example in the paintings on the vault. That is something that I only found out about later, that those paintings from Roman Catholic times had been covered by a layer of paint and that this layer was removed during the restoration, at which time those traces of the past were rediscovered. This was a strong source of inspiration to me, I wanted to do something with that straight away. When I visit the church early in the morning – for the Silence concert series, for example – the light falls into the space in a different way. Each time the light falls differently, you discover other parts of the building. And so time after time, I notice something different. And this hasn't stopped yet.

JG: I recognize what you're saying. I've been working here for eight years and I still see something new every week, or rather, I see something that I haven't noticed before or that is taking on a different meaning over time. Reinterpreting history is about re-viewing that which is already there.

The reinterpretation of the past is an important theme in your work. In what way have you come across this at the Oude Kerk?

AZL: Due to the circumstances at the time, I connected the past and present pretty quickly. The third time I came here in the research period was during Giorgio (Andreotta Calò)'s finissage. There was a bomb scare [because some people disagreed with the placement of a red window in the Holy sepulchre chapel]. So to me, this instantly made the building a space that was connected to the world of today. I was shocked by what happened, by the reactions and by the intensity, but fascinated at the same time. Many people – local residents, the church community – consider this building their own. They feel it belongs to them. I don't think that happens to any museums. Does anyone feel that the Stedelijk belongs to them? It has a very different co-ownership. In the Oude Kerk, that ownership unfortunately sometimes causes aggression, because people don't understand the potential of the church as an art space. It is just as much about accepting change.

JG: What did that tell you?

AZL: When I started to look into the past of this place I saw that conflict and resistance are actually a constant in its history. It may seem easy to talk about history, but as an artist, looking at history as a source material from today's perspective, you can add an extra layer. You can create different perspectives on the past, ones that also allow you to see the future in different ways.

JG: Social resistance represents something. The resistance of the Iconoclastic Fury was necessary to bring about religious changes and that had to do with the power and hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. Today's resistance

is more difficult to interpret, because you don't know what direction it will take and what change it will accomplish.

AZL: You're actually talking about people and these are around you. That is very different from talking about something that is not of direct interest to you. This quickly became personal. A conflict that is not of direct interest to you is easier to observe. That's why it was a good idea to start with the legal texts and turn these into poems at a workshop. This created the distance required for a dialogue, which is what I'm most interested in. The poems, which are quite open, suggest multiple possibilities and interpret the words of the conflict in different ways and this opens up the conflict. I think that's the power of art: it can point to alternatives.

JG: How do you see the relationship between the past and the present?

AZL: We think that the past is fixed because it has already happened, but we actually can look at the past from the present and discover alternative stories and perspectives. I think transformation and change develop as we make that effort. We are living, especially at this time in the pandemic, in a historical moment in which we have to start to embrace change.

JG: To be able to relate to the future you not only need changes, but also perspective. That's what's we're missing today. Not only because of the pandemic, but also because we live in a kind of pre-time. Coming from modernism, everyone understood what the counter-movement of postmodernism would bring. But this time has no name, yet, and that makes the uncertainty even greater. To many people, the past represents a comforting certainty, even a kind of truth. But what we are seeing today, also through movements like Black Lives Matter, is that the past is not at all as fixed as many of us thought it was.

AZL: Yes indeed, we need to review and rewrite the canon.

JG: We need to review the past before we can extract any future scenarios from it. Resistance precedes this. Resistance is an important theme in your work. Where does your fascination with resistance come from?

AZL: Resistance is crucial to change. Resistance is: not accepting a choice or a certain established order, so I think resistance is very healthy. We need resistance to understand what our world looks like. I grew up with the idea of resistance. My father was in the resistance during the dictatorship [the military dictatorship in Argentina between 1976 and 1983]. The reason I got to come into the world is because he fled [to the Netherlands] from the military regime. So actually, resistance is intrinsically connected to my life. That doesn't necessarily mean I have to use it as a theme in my work, but it has played a part in the way I was raised. My parents were very active, we always went to demonstrations. Work, live and fight for human rights: it was all one and the same thing. I'm not really an activist, but looking critically at the world around me is part of who I am. I often made banners as a child. I find the aesthetics of the urgency of banners fascinating. The goal is more important than the object itself. I've come to realize I like that in art as well.

JG: At the moment, we see people resisting all sorts of wrongs in many places in society. Covid has exposed many wrongs: social inequality, climate issues, consequences of the technological revolution. The people are now rebelling against these.

AZL: People have been hardly aware of the need for solidarity for a long time. I recently heard a podcast by Willem Schinkel. He talked about 'necropolitics', the politics of death. He says that today's politics won't let anyone stand in the way of the economy. As a result, much solidarity has been lost. I think it's unclear what exactly we have to resist and that resistance is therefore manifesting itself in many places at the moment.

JG: But collectively, many people feel that the road we are on now is coming to a dead end. Change is in the air, if only because once Covid is under control, the concept of togetherness will have changed.



photo: Gert Jan van Rooij

AZL: What you're describing is very much going strong right now. I hear more and more people speaking out against the colonialist system and against capitalism and for systemic change. And I keep thinking of Argentina: in South America this has been going on for years, because people there have always seen the other side of this socioeconomic system. Here, prosperity has kept people quiet for a bit, but now they're waking up. So this is definitely a moment in which a lot of what my work is about is materializing.

JG: Did the Argentinian resistance actually have a direct effect on the change from dictatorship to democracy?

AZL: Yes, certainly. But what's also true is that the dictatorship deeply marked the idea of a solidary society. In that respect, something has been broken. In the 1960s, the states of South America were founded on the basis of lofty ideals. The dictatorship has broken many of those ideals and that is difficult to come back from. In addition to the resistance at home, international pressure also accelerated when people found out what was happening in Argentina. I don't think Argentina will go back to a dictatorship any time soon, because it's one of the few countries in the world that has brought dictators to trial at home. This has had important consequences on the recovery of the social fabric. People can have different opinions, but the state has taken responsibility for the human rights violations. This has helped people to come to terms with this painful past. By apologizing and officially acknowledging and condemning the crimes, the government has given them a place in history. The dictatorship is, of course, very recent history; it is necessary to do something about it now to be able to move on. Argentina officially chose remembrance, truth and justice as the core values for the further development of its society whereas Spain, for example, decided to do exactly the opposite. After Franco, the Spanish held a different kind of trial: they decided they had to forget to be able to move on. This was literally the name of a law that was passed: the Pacto del olvido. We shall forget about it and move on. The Argentinians said: 'We shall never forget. This must never happen again. And keeping that in mind, we shall move on.'

JG: Iswanto Hartono, the Indonesian artist who held an exhibition in the church in 2017, said: 'Without memories, you cannot forget.' He made a sculpture of Jan Pieterszoon Coen out of candle wax and lit the wick running through it. Slowly, the sculpture melted away. We still keep a remnant of it in the baptistry. You light a candle because you want to commemorate someone, but their image fades away at the same time.

AZL: Right, you need to know what happened

to be able to remember it and make it part of the (collective) memory. If it's a healthy multicultural society we want, then apologies for slavery are crucial, I think.

JG: Much of the history of the church is related to colonialism and therefore also to slavery. The VOC past is visible in many places in the Oude Kerk. I think research into the subject is extremely important because first, you have to understand what you're apologizing for, precisely because of what you just said. But you were also working in a religious building. It has an active congregation and you met with its members. What was that like for you? What did you come across?

AZL: I didn't have a religious upbringing and religion doesn't play a part in my life. In the church, I've mainly been concerned with the historical perspective, but I was aware of the fact that the church is also used by a religious community. I didn't feel the need to make a radical statement, in fact I didn't make anything new: I just rearranged that which was already there.

JG: At that meeting with the congregation, we were told that they recognized traces of Protestantism in your work. How did you experience that?

AZL: I guess it must have something to do with the way I wanted to make the work. The work adds something to the whole. It has a certain austerity, perhaps that has something to do with it. In the presbytery, I talked about the human scale because it was actually clear to me from the beginning that the work had to be horizontal. The architecture is vertical. It's meant to make human beings feel very small. I wanted to bring the vault down to the human level. And the play with water also has something to do with it. There is water underneath us, you can feel the presence of water in the church and in the city. I put it in the basins, but the water was actually already there. The starting point was the human scale of observation and that's what they experienced as very Protestant.

JG: So you could see using words as images as something close to the Protestant religious experience, but in your case this has all come about very intuitively.

AZL: It is very important though, now that you mention it, the relationship between text and image. And that may well be why it fits the space so well: it's history, it's in the air. I have related everything that was image, to text, on the basis of the idea of writing in images or making texts by using images. So that was a very strong relationship and, besides the aesthetic of the restoration that was always going on, one of my most important sources of inspiration. On a practical and visual level, it helped me create the sculptures. So I first looked at

the traces, in the documentation for example, and then connected them to language and from there a new image emerged. I really like that connection.

JG: This quite naturally brings us to León Ferrari, an artist you grew up with.

AZL: Yes it does. He was a close friend of my father's. They both fled to Brazil from Argentina. From Brazil, my father eventually came to Europe: first to Spain and finally to the Netherlands. Here, he was granted temporary admission as an asylum seeker and he also got help. I think Ferrari stayed in Brazil for a long time. But anyway, they were friends from a young age. After the dictatorship, my parents moved back to Argentina in the early years of the democracy, 1983–1984. In those years, the people who had fled got to see each other again. The work that's on show here is from that period. It was a gift from León Ferrari to us, to me as well, but I was only two at the time. This and other Ferrari works were in our home. They are very graphic, strong images. I grew up with those images; I think that the images you grow up with influence your connection or relationship to images in general. Later, I learned more about his work. I always saw him as a friend of the family. It was only during the lockdown that I started looking at his work in a different way. When we had to decide to postpone the exhibition for a year I thought: 'Okay, I'll start reading again.' We'd already done a lot of work and then everything suddenly stopped. In those days, that year felt like an awfully long time. So I started reading about the Iconoclastic Fury and the part language played in it. That is how I started looking at Ferrari's work in another way, especially because of its relationship with religion (the Roman Catholic Church) and his way of working, by painting and drawing.

His work is also about the Argentinian censorship of that time. At one point, he wrote a letter to a general, but written or rather drawn in that illegible style of his. In the early days of Videla's dictatorship, journalist Rodolfo Walsh also sent a letter to the regime. It was made public. The letter was entitled 'Carta Abierta a la Junta Militar'. After the publication of that letter, Walsh was killed. His daughter was also murdered, so that letter had some very violent consequences. Ferrari's letter is sometimes compared to Walsh's simply because he wrote something, too, but writing something that is illegible is a completely different way of responding to censorship. I'm not saying one way is better than the other, but the letters clearly had different consequences. Ferrari

did have to flee, so his letter did have an impact, but not to the extent of Rodolfo Walsh's. There's a layer that's about censorship in the work, but there's a personal layer as well – Ferrari had a daughter who couldn't hear. People tend to write about that, about the fact that this inspired him. The work is of course very different from my own, of a different generation and with a very different status, but I wanted to select a number of very specific works as a footnote to this exhibition. There are references to the Catholic Church and to dictatorship and those are all themes in my work as well.

JG: Ferrari currently has an exhibition at the Museo Reina Sofia and this will travel to the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven in May. There's something else that fascinates me about Ferrari's work. At the beginning of this interview, you told me that when you walk into the church, you feel time around you. This temporal aspect is very important in his work as well. Also important is the way he parted with his own work; giving up ownership by giving away work is a meaningful gesture.

AZL: That was a kind of revolt against the art world as well. He didn't have to live off his art for most of his life; he was actually an engineer, so he had a job alongside his artistry. That's why his art was so very free and playful. It really was, until his very last day. There's a lot of humour in it as well, also in the way he valued things. Not that he didn't think his work was important, on the contrary, but not because of its material value. It had to go out into the world. It had to get distributed. We also know that he made copies and that a copy could be a work in its own right. He was much more interested in what a work would do, than in what a work was. So yes, his work can also be seen as an expression of resistance.

JG: The title of this exhibition, finally, is: *Here Is Where We Meet*. It refers to a text of the same title by British art critic John Berger (1926–2017). The description of this story is: 'Here Is Where We Meet is a literary journey that moves freely through time and space, but never loses its grip on the present.'

AZL: In the story, the writer walks through various cities while he engages with the past, for example by talking with his deceased mother. In the text, talking about the past and the city are important. These are elements that are also present in this exhibition. I also think the title has a positive ring to it. 'Here Is Where We Meet' can also be an invitation for a new kind of encounter, after the pandemic.



photo: Gert Jan van Rooij

Biography

Aimée Zito Lema (1982) was born in Amsterdam and grew up in Buenos Aires. She studied at the Universidad Nacional de las Artes (Buenos Aires), the Gerrit Rietveld Academy (Amsterdam) and the Royal Academy of Art (The Hague). She was also a resident at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam, which celebrates its 150th anniversary this year. Fascination with social resistance is an important theme in Zito Lema's work: she previously made work about the Argentinian dictatorship and the protests that took place during the construction of the Stoperá. Her work has been shown at MACBA, Centre Pompidou and the Gwangju Biennale, among others. The exhibition in the Oude Kerk will be her largest solo exhibition to date and it is the first time she has made such an extensive context-specific work.

25 May – 22 Aug 2021 oudekerk.nl

Basins

Four water basins, different sizes, wooden frame, black plastic, inkjet print on Hahnemühle paper, water, lamps on stands, original church ornaments

The images on the paper in the basins are compositions comprising photo reproductions of the Oude Kerk's original vault paintings and architectural drawings, floor plans and notes taken from the restoration books in the Oude Kerk archives.

Standing Sculpture on Scaffolding

Scaffolding, inkjet print on Hahnemühle paper, 500 X 800 cm

The image is a digital drawing based on the contours of original vault paintings in the Oude Kerk.

Sculptures

12 sculptures, cement, inkjet print on Hahnemühle paper, 120 X 28,5 X 23 cm

In Roman Catholic times, before the 1578 Reformation, sculptures of the 12 apostles were mounted on the pillars in the presbytery. These sculptures were removed or destroyed, leaving only the empty spaces on the pillars. It is the traces of their absence that inspired the creation of a series of abstract sculptures, made from cement mixed with photographic prints on paper. The photographs are infrared and X-ray documentation of the original pillars.

Textile

Two tapestries, each measuring 160 X 900 cm, jacquard-woven textile

The two tapestries are inspired by a reconstruction of the facts surrounding tapestries that have vanished and for which artist Maarten van Heemskerck (1498–1574) made the designs, so-called cartoons, around 1560. Maarten van Heemskerck is one of the most important Dutch painters of the sixteenth century; in the nineteenth century they called him 'the Dutch Raphael'. Measuring about 1,80 X 7,15 metres, the four tapestries hung on either side of the presbytery and depicted scenes from the lives of St Nicholas and John the Baptist, both patron saints of the Oude Kerk. The tapestries survived the Iconoclastic Fury, probably because they hung too high for the rioters to reach, and were still in use as ceremonial decoration at weddings in the seventeenth century. The images on the tapestries made by Aimée Zito Lema are based on the contours of the original vault

paintings that date from the Roman Catholic period of the Oude Kerk.

In the tapestry on the left, viewed from the east, you can see a woven composition containing scanned documents of a selection of legal documents and formal correspondence relating to the placing of a red window in the Holy Sepulchre Chapel. The legal process took three years (2018–2021), with the Council of State declaring the objections unfounded on 17 March 2021.

Sound Sculpture

Five speakers on stands, recited poetry.

Duration 00:37:26

The poems recited in this sound sculpture were written during two workshops that were part of this exhibition's creation process. A group of young writers studied legal documents and formal correspondence relating to the placing of a red window in the Holy Sepulchre Chapel. The authors, themselves, recite the poems they wrote during the workshops.

Footnote, Collegekamer, León Ferrari

Seven works on paper, different sizes
Argentinian artist León Ferrari (Buenos Aires, 1920–2013) is considered one of Latin America's most important contemporary artists. In his work, Ferrari reacts to the influence of Western Christian civilization on South America, to the dictatorship periods in Argentina and to the part that the church played in them. A number of his works are on display in the Collegekamer.

Letter to a General (*Carta a un general*, 1963) raises the question of what it is that this illegible letter is saying. Both the indefinite article in the title ('a general'/'un general') and the illegibility of the work make sure that its meaning is not definitive. It proved to have been prophetic later on, because it was the army of Argentina that was the protagonist of later coups, in 1966 and 1976.

Years afterwards, Ferrari himself revealed that it had been difficult to write a rational letter to a general, one that was artistic and not merely insulting. Faced with the powerlessness of not knowing how, not being able to express his anger of illegitimate authority, he chose to write illegally.

'The way I write, the drawing of the words, is part of their meaning, just like the tone of the voice that speaks them. And I write drawings to convey thoughts, images that words cannot convey' (León Ferrari, May 1996).

the Oude Kerk

The Oude Kerk was built from the thirteenth century onwards, making it the oldest building in Amsterdam. As an icon of the Iconoclastic Fury that swept through it on 23 August 1566, it occupies a unique place in the Dutch and European heritage landscape.

The Oude Kerk is open every day of the week as a museum in which architecture, old and new art merge. On Sunday mornings, we make room for the worship services of the Protestant Oude Kerk congregation, which has been worshipping here since the Alteration in 1578. The Oude Kerk was and is home to craftsmen, organ builders, stonemasons, artists, organists and painters. With their work, they immortalized the people of Amsterdam, music, Biblical stories and the church interior. Their work is the heritage of today and tomorrow.

With an inter-historical* programme, the museum concentrates on heritage and contemporary art, with the monument and the collection as a constant and contemporary art as a discontinuous aspect that questions and reinterprets history. The heritage forms a pars pro toto for the world around us. Twice a year, national and international artists produce large-scale new work that can only be seen here once. In addition, there is music in concert series such as *Silence* and *Playing the Cathedral* and you can find more depth in the series *Come Closer*.

* Interhistoric: by examining history from contemporary questions, new perspectives on the past arise and we can see and discuss them differently.

The book of poetry recited during the exhibition is available at the museum shop (ISBN 9789082244250).

credits

The following people participated in the exhibition:
director Jacqueline Grandjean /
business manager Emma van Oudheusden

curatorial team

curator Jacqueline Grandjean / curator,
research and archive Marianna van der Zwaag /
curator music Jacob Lekkerkerker /
curator Come Closer Radna Rumping

production team

acting project manager Reinier Klok / acting
producer Simone de Vries / acting editors
Brecht Russchen and Camiel de Kom /
exhibition construction Anything is Possible
(Joep Münstermann, Robert Clarijs, Thomas
Wildner, Rob Liefing, Meinbert Gozewijn
van Soest) / digital printing Taylor Made
(Roy Taylor) / carpet production Textiellab
(Stef Miero) / poetry workshop lead Dasja Koot
/ poetry workshop participants Annegreet Bos,
Keet Winter, Mona Thomasse, Nina Ramcharan,
Jane Ramcharan / sound recording Tiago Worm
Tirone / photography: Eveline Renaud / infrared
and x-ray photography René Gerritsen / digital
image assistance Andrea Chehade / Dorestad
Services – Dennis ten Boske / sound technician:
Frank van der Weij / translations: InOtherWords
(D'laine Camp, Maria van Tol & Nasja de Vries)
/ assistance: Line Matson / 3D drawings
Luuk Wezenberg / sound recording: Beatrice
Bernocchi / graphic design studio Hendriksen /
graphic design book of poetry Paul Gangloff

The exhibition *Here is Where We Meet* was
made possible by generous contributions from:

