AKINCI

13 April - 19 May, 2018

INGE MEIJER
Companion

Tour through the exhibition

AKINCI

About

Inge Meijer's films transport the viewer to a familiar environment that still manages to feel strange. At the core is the uneasy relationship between humankind and its surroundings. An environment that lives and breathes but which humankind continuously tries to bend to its will. Ostensibly, Meijer aims at the 'little' things and the daily actions with which we express our concerns, our dreams and yearnings, and cherish our illusions. Complex phenomena are converted into clear, iconic images. Using a certain amount of self-mockery, she examines humankind, which is continuously arranging, cultivating and shaping its habitat. Plausible fiction or implausible facts are depicted, displaying a down-to-earth look at astonishing things or an astonished look at simple things. Inge Meijer places her viewer at a distance, which in her case has an alienating effect. She creates the illusion that we can view everything, yet although we see things as they are, we are wrong-footed by the combination of the individual elements. This bestows an almost absurd character upon the films, allowing them at the same time to be affectionate.

Inge Meijer (Beverwijk, 1986) studied Fine Art at ArtEZ University of the Arts in Arnhem. In 2012, she won the Hendrik Valk Award with her graduation film at ArtEZ University of the Arts. In 2017, she completed her residency at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam, where her films and installations received a great deal of attention and were highly acclaimed at the Open Studios in 2016 and 2017. After participating at Unfair Amsterdam, Inge Meijer opened her (currently running) first solo show Companion at AKINCI gallery. The installation Still Life #1 is currently on display in Garage Rotterdam as part of the exhibition Detached Involvement, curated by Bas Hendrikx. In collaboration with Roma Publications and graphic designer Roger Willems, Inge Meijer is now making a book on the central focus point of this installation: the plant collection of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam from 1945 – 1983. This book will be released in the autumn of 2019 and will be sold in Amsterdam (UNSEEN book market, Westergasfabriek), New York (MoMA, PS1) and OFF Print Paris (Beaux-arts de Paris).

If You Go Down To the Woods Today, 2016, 4K ultra high def. HD video, 5:58 min.
Companion, overview at AKINCI, 2018

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Oceanic Feeling

Leaning over the cruise ship's balustrade, I scan the infinite ocean and think of *Moby Dick*. There are many reasons to roam the oceans–trade, war, emigration or wanderlust–but our true motives often hide behind an enigmatic combination of fascination and fear for the great waters of the earth. No one put this more aptly than Herman Melville, who in the first chapter of his scriptural epic *Moby Dick* wrote that at sea, we face 'the image of the ungraspable phantom of life'. Making every effort to distance himself from prosaic motives such as 'earning money' or 'setting forth into the world', Melville's narrator Ishmael speaks with disdain of people that set out to sea as passengers: 'For to go as a passenger you must needs have a purse.' Besides', he adds, 'passengers get sea-sick- grow quarrelsome- don't sleep of nights- do not enjoy themselves much, as a general thing.' Anything but a tourist, Ishmael will abandon everything, all certanties life has to offer, *as long as he can go to sea*. Even though he knows that he will be worried within an inch of his life and forced to endure terrible ordeals. Ishmael's oceanic desire may resonate with the passengers on board of today's cruise ships but when they—in an effort to present as globe trotters rather than tourists—would profess to identify with a sailor of the lowest rank such as Ismael, they'd simply be unbelievable. Nevertheless, like Ishmael, today's passengers on cruise ships leave life on dry land behind to get a taste of the oceanic desire.

It may sound strange, but there's something spiritual about this. Not in the sense of 'religious', but in the sense of 'leaving behind the familiar to engage with the immeasurable depths, the ferocity of the waves in a world that is entirely made up of horizon'. There's something bigger than us out on the high seas and it makes even the most rabid atheist among us feel insignificant. There's a famous exchange between professed atheist Sigmund Freud and the gullible French author Romain Rollard that touches on the subject of the 'oceanic feeling'. Rolland writes to the Viennese psychiatrist that though he agrees with him generally, he nevertheless thinks the subjective oceanic feeling confronts us with the foundations of religion. Trying to follow him, Freud describes the oceanic feeling as 'a feeling of an indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world as a whole', though he immediately adds that he, himself has never actually felt that way. It's not only religion that's an illusion, it seems, but so is the feeling on which it is based. This is what language is capable of. It can describe experiences we never had—experiences that none of us may have or ever had—but that, once described, present as objects of our desire. According to Freud, this is precisely what religion does: describe experiences that are grand and compelling, experiences that we long to have, but that we don't have, really. If anything, it would seem, the oceanic desire is a desire to desire.

Crowded cruise ships are the cathedrals of our day: they've replaced the churches that now stand abandoned. Their magnificence is overwhelming: that of the oceans, infinitely more so. Navigating the oceans, they are cathedrals that immerse their passengers and crew in an experience of the sublime that hovers between omnipotence and infinity. Cathedrals reach for the sky like cruise ships reach for the horizon. In people, they both inspire a yearning to transcend limitations: to boldly go where no man has gone before; to know the unknowable; to transcend death. This cannot but involve control: in Moby Dick, Captain Ahab wants to conquer the ocean in order to kill the monstrous white whale that has devoured his leg. And we all know how that ends: Moby Dick not only devours Ahab whole but, at least in John Huston's masterful film version, drags him down to the ocean's unfathomable depths. It's like the bible says: *no one can see God's face and live.*

The indefinable desire that lures passengers aboard cruise ships comprises one part awe of the ocean —enough to unbridle any imagination— and one part pride in belonging to a species that is capable of building cathedral-like ships. They're overwhelmed by infinite divine Omnipotence on one side and finite human omnipotence on the other. The story of the Titanic is nothing but a prophetic myth warning us about our Promethean pride. Apparently calling a ship 'unsinkable'—never before was a ship pitched in these terms—equals calling down its misfortune. No wonder that *Moby Dick* reads like a protestant version of the Bible, including one of the most brilliant sermons in the history of literature (delivered by Orson Welles playing the vicar in the aforementioned film version). Sooner or later, sailing the ocean means being drawn into an experience of insignificance that can turn to its opposite, an experience of omnipotence, in a heartbeat.

So one might say cruise ships are like modern-day cathedrals. But the stained-glass windows that—letting scant light in, their colours blocking the view of all things blasphemously worldly—bath churchgoers in Bible stories have given way to the windows of hundreds of passenger's cabins—the world's biggest cruise ship, the *Harmony of the Seas*, has 2,747 windowed cabins—that all overlook the ocean. Rather than in their shape or in the material of which they are made, the difference between cathedrals and cruise ships is in their orientation. Looking at the ocean, passengers get an eyeful of infinity—an experience they don't want to prolong unnecessarily. This is why the passengers tend to prefer the ship's interior over its exterior. Cruise ship interiors have developed into cities that are as large as life and, as befits polises, are entirely self-sufficient. A ship is no longer a vessel that takes people from A to B, like the ships that sailed from the Rotterdam docks to Indonesia and later Canada in days of old. For everything one might want to go on a journey for—tropical paradises and palm trees, wave pools, loungers and bars, shopping malls, world cuisine restaurants that cater to every possible taste—is aboard the ship itself, rather than ashore. The ship is no longer a means of transport that will take passengers to all of these earthly paradises: the ship is the Promised Land. It is, to bring up some more biblical metaphors, Noah's ark. The world is coming to an end; after us, the deluge. The contemporary cruise ship is not going anywhere, does not set forth into the world, but rather allows people to withdraw. To travel now means: to stay indoors. Cruise ships do not sail the oceans, the earth just happens to revolve underneath them while they in fact do not change their position. Like cathedrals, they radiate omnipotence. Cruise passengers board them thinking they've signed up for a voyage, only to find that the ship is like the city in which they live, only more luxuriously. And that's actually what they've come for. From this perspective, cruise passengers have not come to search for any oceanic feeling, but rather to suppress it. They haven't set out to sea to flee their everyday lives, but rather to be able, when they've had enough of the crowds inside the floating cathedral, to retire to their 'cabins'—a deceptive designation that brings to mind simplicity and solitude even though they're just like the living room at home, if, of course, more luxurious.

There's nothing left of the ships that breasted the waves in the old days, of passengers willingly suffering weeks of motion sickness to get the Promised Land. On a 226,963-ton cruise ship, no-one gets seasick anymore. Rather than feel oceanic, passengers on tourist tankers want to be wowed, or as one operator puts it:

*'A cruise on the ** makes your wildest dreams come true! Surfing, ice skating, wall climbing, racing: anything goes! **'s newest ships take things up a notch: how about flying in a free-fall simulator? Or diving down ten decks by the tallest slide at sea? ** ships, the largest in the world, are sure to wow you!'*

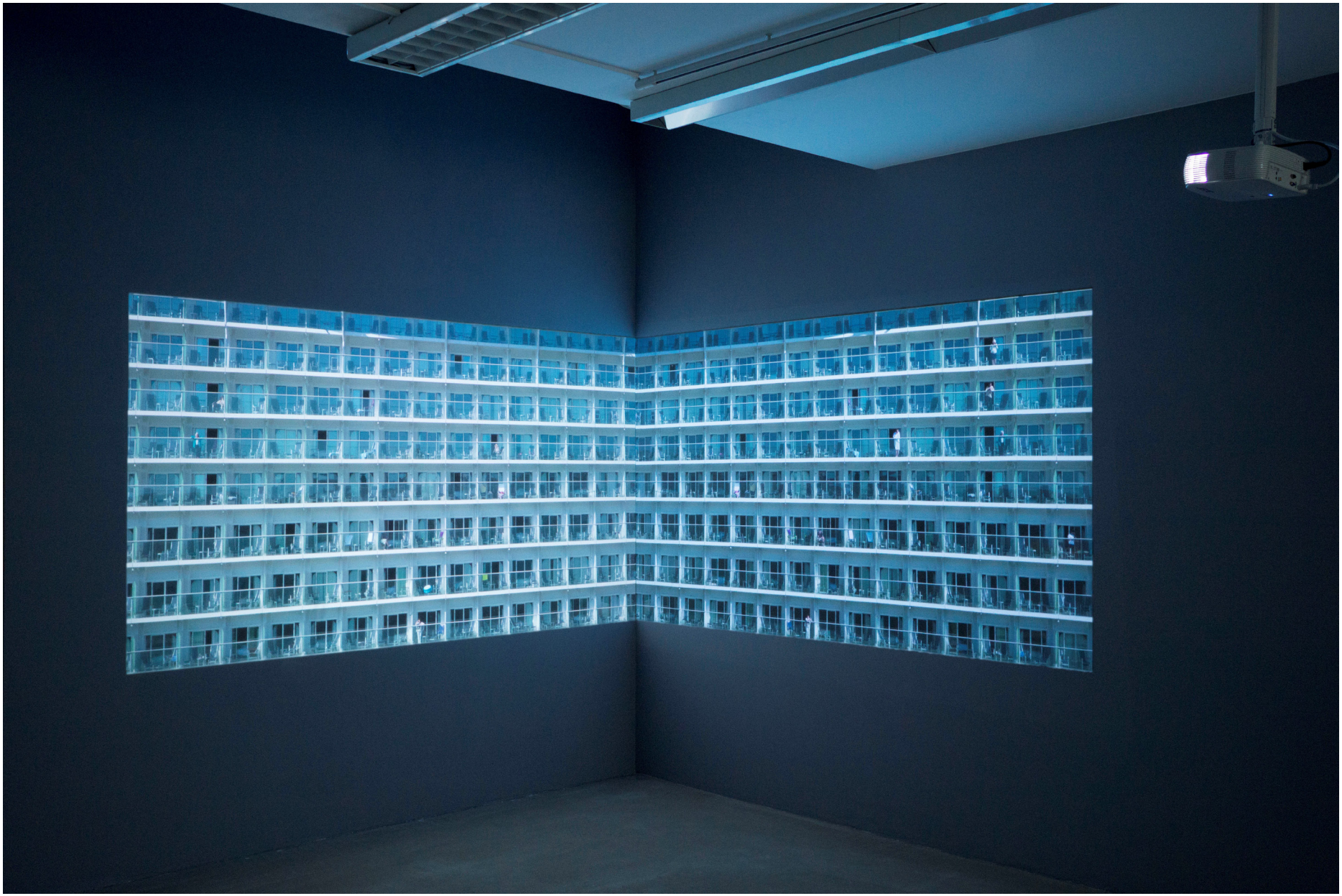
But this doesn't make fathoming the elusive oceanic feeling any easier. Wowed people feel omnipotent, like masters of the sea, yes: but the ocean also makes them feel secure. Where does that come from?

Maternal, secure, oceanic, amniotic fluid: passengers on mega cruise ships are driven by an unconscious desire that may well be traceable to the sense of swaying security created by the amniotic fluid inside the womb. From this perspective, the earth and its oceans equal the maternal belly and its life-bearing amniotic fluid. If it makes sense to claim this it follows that we long to return somewhere, rather than go somewhere. Freud explained that people's urges drive them back to their origins: in some sense or other, they all want to return to the great womb of Mother Earth. Death drive has little to do with morbid inclinations. It's not ego that pursues the deep; it's urges that are driven towards it. Of course, cruise ship passengers aren't aware of this. All they want is to be wowed.

The indomitability of the ocean and the ferocity of tornadoes and natural disasters are among the last reminders we have of what we once called 'the elements'. The world, or so pre-Socratic philosophers fell us, can ultimately be traced back to its elements. Water is unmistakably such an element. People that set out to sea literally feel the ground disappear beneath their feet. Footsoles don't walk; they have no ground beneath their feet. They exist anonymous, at one with the swaying water. It's not strange that new-born babies submerged in water will not drown, or that they only lose their capacity to survive in water in a couple of days. Their feet may 'remember' being flippers, but only for a little while. Next, water becomes an opponent, to drink or drown in, either way: the natural connection has gone. From that moment on, water is an object of desire or fear. We don't know whether the oceanic desire is about either the fear or the desire, or about both at the same time. Cruise ships are clearly safe and their passengers, when asked, won't admit they're looking for danger. They may passionately claim they want adventure, yes, but without travel insurance, they wouldn't have come. However this doesn't explain why they won't simply stay ashore. But people may take to the oceans *to stay grounded*. Dry land can never provide for this, after all, human beings exist in water before they are born and from that water, they are thrown upon the earth. When philosophers say that human beings are 'thrown upon the earth' they refer to the fact that humans have crawled out of the sea onto land: the difference is elemental, so to speak. Once on land, people have to learn how to walk and avoid water, that is, to deal with water that is not under their control. Water is put behind dikes and navigated to allow an ever so gentle return to the oceanic feeling. Ships are feminine grammatically, and for good reason. All ships are mother ships, mothers on Mother Earth. So it would be a mistake to think that cruise ship passengers go to sea because they want to see the world. Of course that's what they'll say, but it's is much deeper than that. Their desire is a primal desire to return to the womb of Mother Earth, not in any notional sense, but simply to be rocked and carried. As passengers they are carried by a ship that's bobbing up and down on waves which, without the ship, would devour them. It's like people asking to have their ashes scattered over the sea after their death. They want to be swallowed up and dissolved by the ocean, the infinite, the boundless. This wouldn't surprise Elias Canetti, to whom the ocean is a crowd just like a human crowd. Their structures are the same, he says. The human mass will simply dissolve in the oceanic mass of water molecules; indeed, the ocean is a mass even before it's a liquid. In *Crowds and Power*, Canetti says humans form crowds in exactly the same way as water. Humans, he says, are driven by a fear and an aversion of being touched. Being touched makes them aware of their boundaries. Humans that lose themselves into crowds overcome this fear and aversion through a radical affirmation of touch that makes the touch disappear. Recoiling won't work: sooner or later they'll find that there is nowhere left to go. So, humans aspire to overall touch because it makes individual touch *disappear*. It is like standing at the edge of the pool in fear of the touch of the cold water and overcoming that fear by jumping in: the all-encompassing touch of the water makes the icy, individual touch disappear. Thales of Miletus had a point when he said everything was water. Humans are water not only in the physical sense, but also in the sense that their individual identities dissolve in crowds, which are like water. Again, I think of *Moby Dick*. It is getting too cold out on the cruise ship deck. So I go back inside.

— Ruud Welten

Companion, overview at AKINCI, 2018, (photo: Charlott Markus)
text by R.B.J. Welten



Beautiful Isle of Somewhere, 2016, Full HD video double projection, 11 min.
Companion, overview at AKINCI, 2018

Oceanic Feeling

- by R.B.J. Welten

Leaning over the cruise ship's balustrade, I scan the infinite ocean and think of Moby Dick. There are many reasons to roam the oceans—trade, war, emigration or wanderlust—but our true motives often hide behind an enigmatic combination of fascination and fear for the great waters of the earth. No one put this more aptly than Herman Melville, who in the first chapter of his scriptural epic Moby Dick wrote that at sea, we face 'the image of the ungraspable phantom of life'. Making every effort to distance himself from prosaic motives such as 'earning money' or 'setting forth into the world', Melville's narrator Ishmael speaks with disdain of people that set out to sea as passengers: 'For to go as a passenger you must needs have a purse.' Besides', he adds, 'passengers get sea-sick- grow quarrelsome- don't sleep of nights- do not enjoy themselves much, as a general thing.' Anything but a tourist, Ishmael will abandon everything, all certainties life has to offer, as long as he can go to sea. Even though he knows that he will be worked within an inch of his life and forced to endure terrible ordeals. Ishmael's oceanic desire may resonate with the passengers on board of today's cruise ships but when they—in an effort to present as globe trotters rather than tourists—would profess to identify with a sailor of the lowest rank such as Ismael, they'd simply be unbelievable. Nevertheless, like Ishmael, today's passengers on cruise ships leave life on dry land behind to get a taste of the oceanic desire.

It may sound strange, but there's something spiritual about this. Not in the sense of 'religious', but in the sense of 'leaving behind the familiar to engage with the immeasurable depths, the ferocity of the waves in a world that is entirely made up of horizon'. There's something bigger than us out on the high seas and it makes even the most rabid atheist among us feel insignificant. There's a famous exchange between professed atheist Sigmund Freud and the gullible French author Romain Rolland that touches on the subject of the 'oceanic feeling'. Rolland writes to the Viennese psychiatrist that though he agrees with him generally, he nevertheless thinks the subjective oceanic feeling confronts us with the foundations of religion. Trying to follow him, Freud describes the oceanic feeling as 'a feeling of an indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world as a whole', though he immediately adds that he, himself has never actually felt that way. It's not only religion that's an illusion, it seems, but so is the feeling on which it is based. This is what language is capable of: it can describe experiences we never had—experiences that none of us may have or ever had—but that, once described, present as objects of our desire. According to Freud, this is precisely what religion does: describe experiences that are grand and compelling, experiences that we long to have, but that we don't have, really. If anything, it would seem, the oceanic desire is a desire to desire.

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Cathedrals reach for the sky like cruise ships reach for the horizon. In people, they both inspire a yearning to transcend limitations: to boldly go where no man has gone before; to know the unknowable; to transcend death. This cannot but involve control: in Moby Dick, Captain Ahab wants to conquer the ocean in order to kill the monstrous white whale that has devoured his leg. And we all know how that ends: Moby Dick not only devours Ahab whole but, at least in John Huston's masterful film version, drags him down to the ocean's unfathomable depths. It's like the bible says: no one can see God's face and live. The indefinable desire that lures passengers aboard cruise ships comprises one part awe of the ocean—enough to unbridle any imagination—and one part pride in belonging to a species that is capable of building cathedral-like ships. They're overwhelmed by infinite divine Omnipotence on one side and finite human omnipotence on the other. The story of the Titanic is nothing but a prophetic myth warning us about our Promethean pride. Apparently calling a ship 'unsinkable'—never before was a ship pitched in these terms—equals calling down its misfortune. No wonder that Moby Dick reads like a protestant version of the Bible, including one of the most brilliant sermons in the history of literature (delivered by Orson Welles playing the vicar in the aforementioned film version). Sooner or later, sailing the ocean means being drawn into an experience of insignificance that can turn to its opposite, an experience of omnipotence, in a heartbeat.

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Crutch, 2017, inkjet, dubond, 147 x 197 cm
Companion, overview at AKINCI, 2018

Companion, overview at AKINCI, 2018 (photo: Charlott Markus)

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Companion, overview at AKINCI, 2018

Maple Tree, 2017, Full HD video, 7:04 min.
Companion, overview at AKINCI, 2018