

WAR/RAW

Tonie van Marle

Twenty-four black-and-white lino prints about the two extremes of human suffering and aesthetic experience



WAR/RAW is an art project that combines the two extremes of human suffering and aesthetic experience

The project consists of 24 black-and-white lino prints: 12 portraits of WWI broken faces and 12 portraits of damaged classical heads

The Project

Broken faces

24 black-and-white lino prints of 50 x 50 cm in a diamond shape on white Hahnemühle paper (300 grams), hand-printed

The WAR/RAW project focuses on the plight of the WWI soldiers whose broken faces literally pushed them into the margins of the visible world. With the exception of medical professionals, the general public found no way to accommodate for the victims of shrapnel or flame-thrower. Thus, many of those whose disfigurements were too hideous for others to bear never left the war, but stayed in special homes and hospitals hidden from sight. Others were given new faces by means of plastic surgery, which often yielded fairly monstrous results and still made it impossible for them to return to their former lives. Masks, provided for the same purpose, even though skilfully made, still kept their faces hidden behind an artificial facade that kept them prisoners inside.

Even now, almost a hundred years since the Great War began, the photographs taken of the soldiers in their hospital beds, their skin raw, burnt or in tatters, their jaws shot away and their eyesight gone, touch a nerve of empathy, once you dare to look at their all too human faces. However, their faces are hardly ever considered as a fit subject for aesthetic

portraits, because their effect on viewers is simply one of horror and shock. By looking away from their broken faces, these soldiers are again rejected and exiled from society, even though the WWI soldier is universally honoured in the abstract.

Mutilated human faces can only be looked at in a medical or military context, or, under very specific circumstances, in the context of war photography. Even then, these photographs are not easily made available or presented without prior warnings about their gruesome effect. Even though the British artist Henry Tonks made many watercolours of British soldiers with disfigured faces, he did so for the purpose of the plastic surgeon Harold Gillies.¹ Not many viewers would consider these photographs or watercolours art or aesthetic, their purpose being to educate or inform professionals, not the general public.

¹ Pat Barker's *Life Class* (2007) deals with the issue whether it is acceptable to depict other people's suffering and to exhibit this in a public space. In the novel Henry Tonks responds to a drawing by one of his (fictive) students of "a young man who had had the whole of his lower jaw blown off by a shell": "I don't see how you could ever show that anywhere." (p.238)



With the death of the last veteran, the soldiers of the Great War have now left living memory, the photographs being the visual reminders of the real-life experience of the war.

Damaged heads

On the other hand, when looking at the Greek and Roman faces found in museums of classical art, viewers admire the artistry and aesthetics of these marble heads, even though plenty of them are purposely or accidentally defaced. Instead of reacting to their mutilated features with compassion or revulsion, viewers only perceive them from a certain remove as art objects, even though these heads are portraits of deceased loved ones or representations of citizens that played a role in the ancient public space.² In addition to gods and mythical figures, most of these marbles figures represent well-known public men. Next to a range of leaders, philosophers and aristocrats, the heroes who had earned fame in military battles, to protect the state against foreign invaders, were honoured with having their statues erected in the cities. Naturally, the skills of the sculptor commissioned added to the inherent aesthetic quality of the statues and heads. Yet, apart from being artworks in their own right, they were meant to keep the memories of history alive for future generations. Having seen their faces destroyed by natural causes or enemy conquests would have been distressing for these citizens.

Nowadays these figures with their once familiar faces have been uprooted from their original context. Even if we remember their names, nothing of their lives still reverberates. We are no longer touched by the damage done to their

² For instance, in the National Archeological Museum of Acquileia I found a series of damaged heads of ordinary Roman citizens, some of whose portraits are included in this project. Other museums whose collections I have made use of are the Pergamon Museum, Berlin, Gallo-Roman Museum, Tongeren, Archeological Museum, Butrint, Albania, Archeological Museum, Preveza, Greece, Dutch National Museum of Antiquities, Leyden.

once proud and respected faces. They are now admired, not for their valour and prowess, but only for their aesthetic value. But as works of art, they have left behind their original function, which explains the ease with which we can look at their damaged faces, the way we can never look at the broken faces of the WWI soldiers. Whereas the classical sculptures have never been cast out of the public realm, it has been the fate of the WWI soldiers never to have entered it.

WAR/RAW

With my present WAR/RAW art project, I intend to make it possible for the non-professional viewer to be able to look at the faces of the WWI soldiers, who were life-long prisoners of the Great War, in being pushed to the margins of our society. This in contrast with the damaged classical heads whose presence has now entered the non-historical realm that makes their visibility of a different, yet very present character. In my project, accepted aesthetic classical prototypes are used to make the aesthetization of the unpalatable possible. The means to do so lies in the medium chosen for the representation of both the classical images and the broken faces. By transforming the hard, physical quality of the marble and the soft, physical quality of the human skin into the two dimensions of the lino print, I try to unite the extremes of aesthetics and suffering.

Pondering the possibility to turn gruesomeness into an aesthetic experience, one is reminded of Goya's depictions of the Spanish-French war, *The Disasters of War* (1810-1820)³. This series of prints, which has become the standard of the de-glorification of war, is the forerunner of the art of the trenches by the German Expressionists, such as Otto Dix and George Grosz, and the

³ During my project, I discovered that the art historian Robert Hughes, looking at the classical archetypes of some of Goya's prints, commented that "If only [these figures] had been marble and the work of their destruction had been done by time rather than sabres, [art historians] would have been in aesthetic raptures over them". A remark that underpins my present project.

*Wir sind verlassen wie
Kinder und erfahren wie
alte Leute, wir sind roh
und traurig und
oberflächlich, - ich glaube,
wir sind verloren.*

*Erich Maria Remarque, Im
Westen nichts Neues*



English war artists, among them Charley Spencer and John Nash. These latter works represent the artistic counterpart to Ernest Friedrich's photographs in *Krieg dem Kriege*, which have partly been a source for my project. In contrast with literature and cinematography about WWI, which is produced until today, the visual arts have not continued this tradition over the same length of time. With my WAR/RAW project, I intend to pay tribute to WWI in the present-day visual arts tradition.

Visibility in the public realm

It is the purpose of this project to make it possible in retrospect for these soldiers to take up their rightful place among their families and society as a whole. It seeks to give expression to human suffering. By means of a metamorphosis of their broken faces into the medium of the black-and-white lino cut, I attempt to create a visible space for these soldiers in the iconography of the Great War, by enabling the general public to literally look them into the face. In combination with the damaged heads of the great classical tradition, the broken faces of those furthest removed from any aesthetic visual representation can now enter the public realm of visibility and aesthetics.

Recommending Committee:

The following specialists support the WAR/RAW project:

Dr. Leo van Bergen, medical historian, author of *Before my Helpless Sight. Suffering, Dying and Military Medicine on the Western Front 1914-1918*, published in 2009, for which he received the Dr. J.A. Verdoorn Award 2009. Board member of the Dutch section of the IPPNW (International Physicians for the prevention of Nuclear War) and member of the editorial board of the peer-reviewed magazine *Medicine, Conflict and Survival*.

Prof. Dr. J.T (Joep) Leerssen, Professor of Modern European Literature, University of Amsterdam, Academy professor of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences (KNAW), winner of the Spinoza Prize in 2008. Has established the Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalisms (SPIN).

Prof. Dr. Jos W.M. van der Meer. Professor of Internal Medicine and Chairman of the Division of General Internal Medicine at Radboud University Nijmegen Medical Centre. He is an honorary fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, Knight in the order of the Dutch Lion and a member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Prof. Dr. Ann Rigney, University of Utrecht, Fellow of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences (KNAW). Research in the field of cultural memory studies and philosophy of history. Project programmes include *The Dynamics of Cultural Remembrance: An Intermedial Perspective*, (2006-2011), and an interdisciplinary platform at Utrecht on Transnational Memory.



About my work: In Memoriam projects

A major theme in my work is the expression of the personal histories of people who lived through extreme times. Therefore, the First World War presented itself as a logical project. Contrary to earlier works, this time I started from a visual source, something that had been absent from earlier projects. In earlier works, I focussed on non-documented history: the historical reality of unknown people that has only been preserved in fragments that have not been described by contemporary or later historians, at least not in a way that sufficiently documents their everyday lives. As it is the artist's privilege to work precisely with this undocumented material, it allowed me to use my imagination to create a story out of these fragments, trying to come closer to a possible truthful reality without pretending to be able to recreate the full truth.

Provenance Unknown, an Imaginary Family Portrait

In 2011, I made an installation based on the imaginary family of a Jewish optician, *Provenance Unknown, an Imaginary Family Portrait*, which will be exhibited in the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam in 2013. The origin of this work derives from a collection of spectacle lenses that I found at an Amsterdam flea market. The fact that some of these lenses were wrapped up in a piece of newspaper in Hebrew and that the majority of the lenses could be dated to before the Second World War convinced me that they must have belonged to a Jewish optician whose personal fate could only be surmised by what is known about the Jewish community in Amsterdam. Since practically all of them had been deported and murdered, I made this *in memoriam* installation to celebrate the lives of this optician and his family.⁴

Seven Pilgrim's Boxes

In 2009, I made *Seven Pilgrim's Boxes* as an *in memoriam* installation for those unknown pilgrims who came to venerate the grave of St Servatius in the church in Maastricht in the Middle Ages and who, for whatever reason, died in this city. They were buried anonymously in the churchyard next to the St Servatius church, a churchyard that has since been destroyed. The installation was shown in an exhibition dedicated to *Life and Death*, organised by the city of Maastricht and held in the 18th century gendarmerie in the centre square of the city.⁵

Three Children's Boxes

In 2006, the installation titled *Three Children's Boxes* was an *in memoriam* for 153 young children who had been buried under the floor of the choir in the ancient church in Vries in the Drenthe province in the Netherlands around the year 1000 AD. Archaeological research carried out by Professor van Giffen in 1947 had not yielded an explanation of why these children were buried here. *Three Children's Boxes* was a means to recreate the story behind this mass burial and was exhibited in a group exhibition in the gallery of the coach-house of Mensinge Castle in Roden, as the exhibition was not allowed to be held in the church in Vries.⁶

⁴ *Provenance Unknown* will be exhibited in the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam in 2012. For a more extensive description, see my website, www.tonievanmarle.nl.

⁵ See my website, www.tonievanmarle.nl.

⁶ See also the short film about the *Children's Boxes* on my website, www.tonievanmarle.nl.

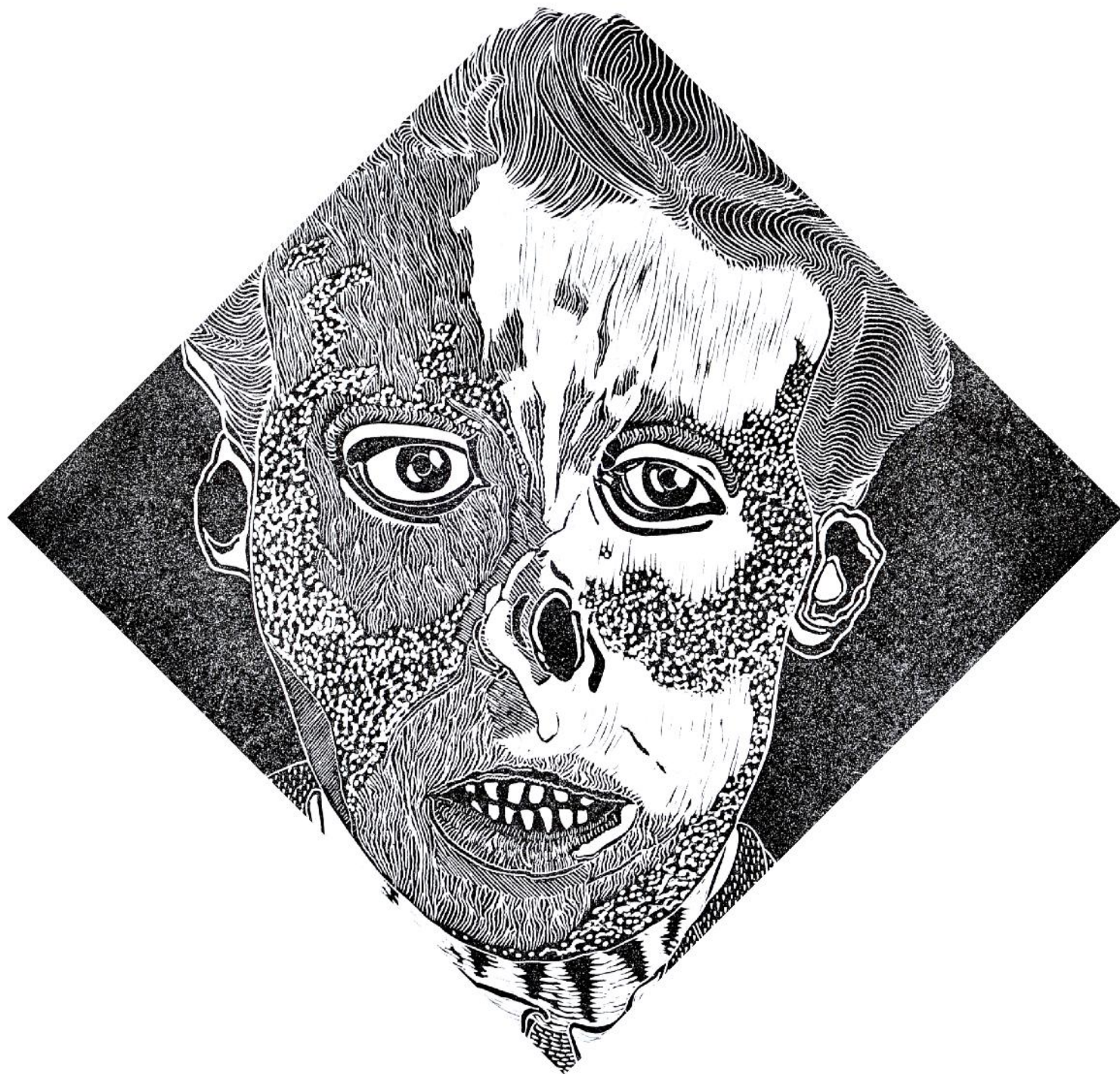


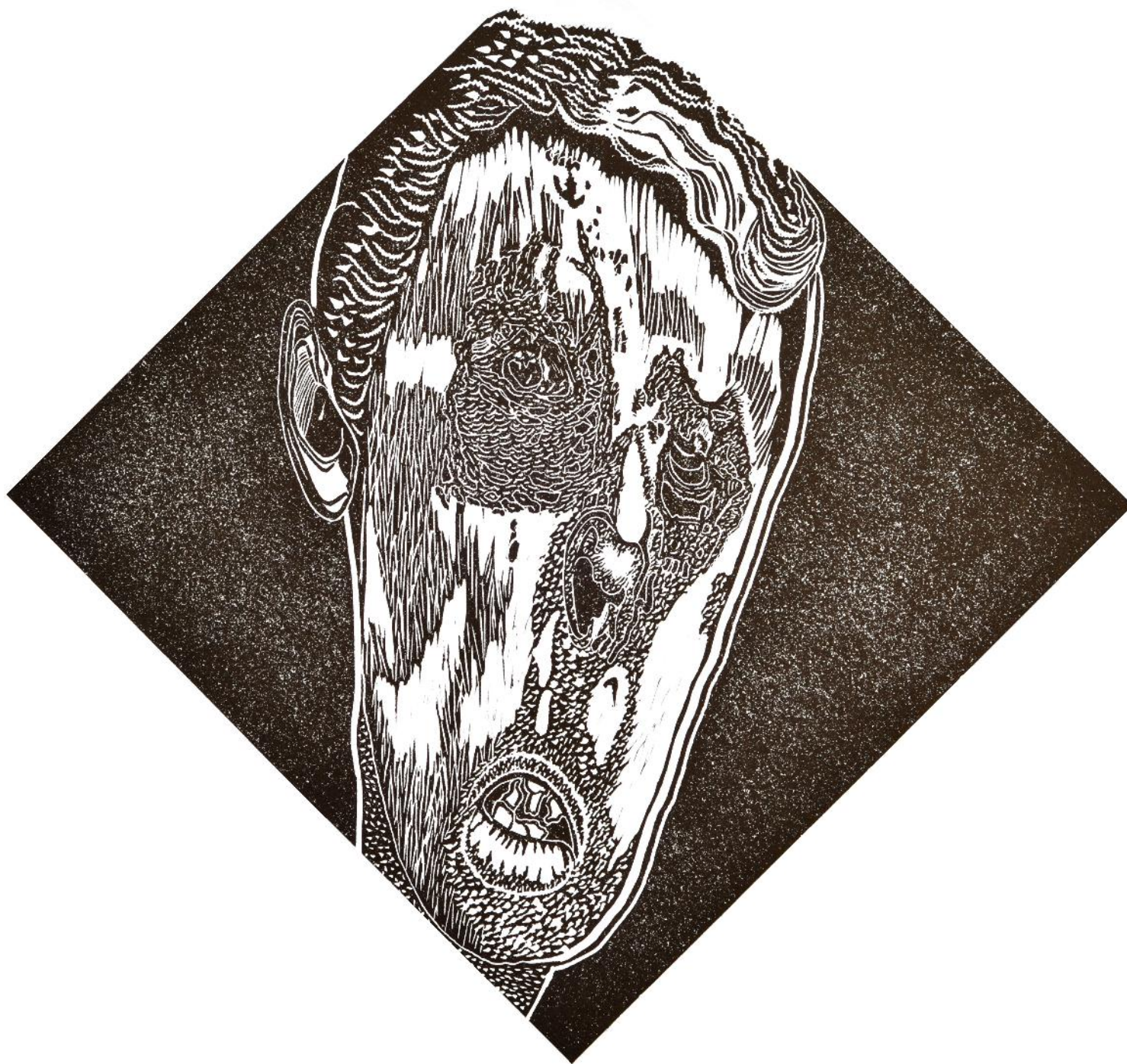


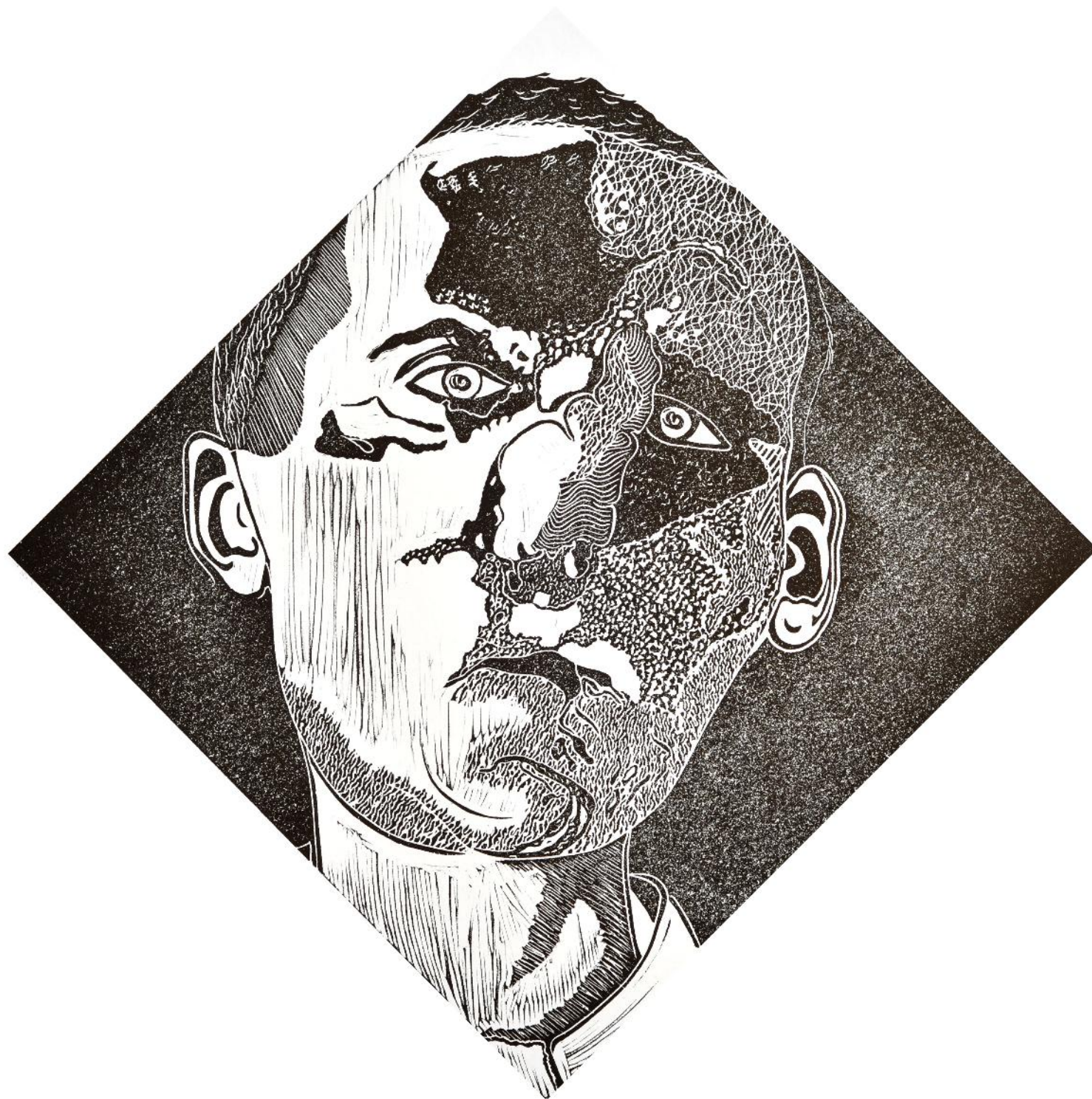














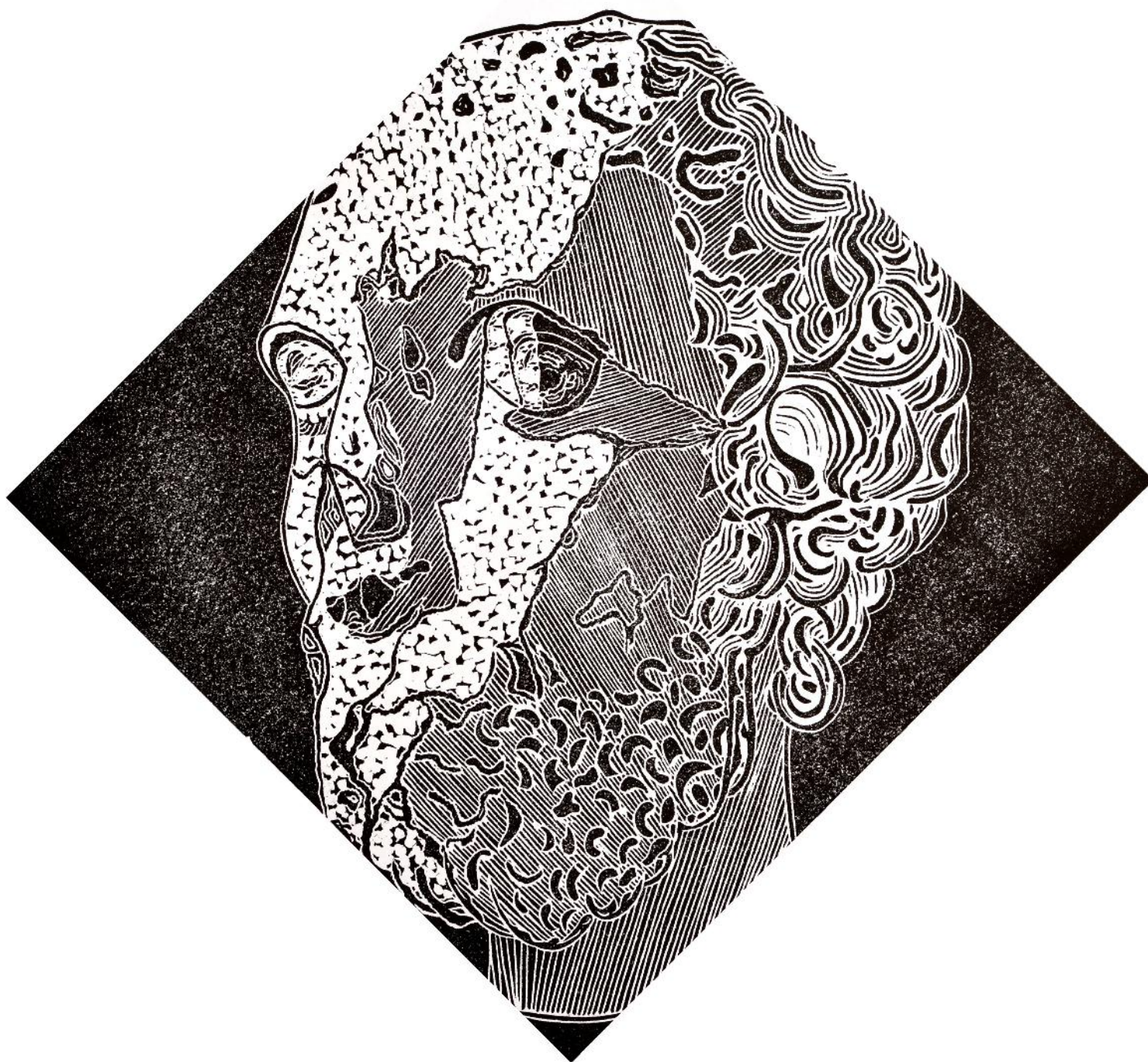






















Curriculum Vitae

Education:

1975: Diploma Academy for Art and Industry, AKI, Enschede.
 1987: M.A. in Irish Studies, University College Dublin.
 1984: M.A. English Language and Literature, University of Amsterdam, specialization Irish Language and Literature.
 1981: Study year, Trinity College Dublin.
 1968: Leaving Certificate MMS, Zwolle.
 2007: Two-week course in Italian, Rome
 1998-2002: Course in Italian at the Italian Cultural Institute, Amsterdam.

Current and future activities:

2013: Exhibition of *Provenance Unknown, an Imaginary Family History*, Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam

2012: Exhibitions: Solo exhibition, Gallery Unita, Beek Noordwaarts+, artist presentation Open Studio, Amsterdam

Projects: WAR/RAW, 24 lino cuts, WWI

2011: "Summer Exhibition", group exhibition, Vantaa Artists, Vantaa, Finland
 "Provenance Unknown", installation, Noordwaarts, Amsterdam
 "Great Expectations", group exhibition, Art 27, Heusden-Zolder, Belgium
 Group exhibition, Gallery Unita, Beek
 Solo Exhibition, Peter Rommers, Amsterdam

Projects: Surrealist Women Artists, lecture series
 Artist in Residence: Gjutars, Vantaa, Finland

2010: "Over Grenzen", Drive-by showroom 'Dutch Artists', Amsterdam
 "C2C, Cradle to Cradle", Zensoft, Heusden-Zolder, Belgium
 "Il Vento Creativo", 'Antichi Palazzi', Camaver Kunsthaus Int., Desio, Italy
 "Zomers", De Nieuwe Galerie, AvK, Paviljoen Stadshart, Amstelveen
 "La Décadence", Art27, Heusden-Zolder, Belgium.

2009: "Thirty Somethings", Art 27, group exhibition about the 30 Human Rights: Dominican church, Antwerp, Belgium,
 Gallery "Emotion", Mijndrecht and in AINSI, Maastricht
 "Het Geluid van de Stilte", international art route, Borgloon, Belgium
 "Dood/Leven", Hoofdwacht, Vrijthof, Maastricht
 "Zomer", group exhibition AvK, Oudekerk a/d Amstel Museum "De Noord", group exhibition Noordwaarts, Amsterdam
 Public Library Nieuwendam, group exhibition Noordwaarts, Amsterdam
 Public Library Banne Buiksloot, group exhibition Noordwaarts, Amsterdam
 "Ondeeltjes", Stichting Facetten van de Kunst, Art, Poetry and Fashion in Boven-IJ hospital, Amsterdam
 End-of-the year exhibition Kunstuitleen, Alkmaar.

"On the Origin of Humanity, Inspired by Charles Robert Darwin", Group Exhibition Art 27, Heusden-Zolder, Belgium

Projects: "Amsterdam-Moord", film project with students of Open Studio, Amsterdam
 Author and editor of the catalogue of Noordwaarts 5, Creative Noord, Amsterdam.

2008: "Thirty Somethings", Art 27, International Group exhibition, Heusden-Zolder, Belgium
 "MosArte", Art Fair, O.L. Vrouweplein, Maastricht
 "La Mela d'Oro", solo exhibition, Seregno, Italy
 Antichi Palazzi, International group exhibition, Acquasparta, Italy
 Vruchtbaarheid en Erotiek", International Art Route, Borgloon, Belgium
 "In Search of Identity", International Group exhibition, Art 27, St John's Art Studios and Gallery, Waterloo, Belgium

2007: Exit Kunstenaars Kollektief, group exhibition, Amsterdam
 Antichi Palazzi, International group exhibition, Acquasparta, Italy
 "QU-ART-O", Art fair Onze-Lieve-Vrouweplein Maastricht
 "Art Moves", International group exhibition Oude Kerk, Amsterdam
 "Noordwaarts", Open Days, Amsterdam
 "De Brillenmaeker", solo exhibition, Amsterdam
 "Solo", solo exhibition, De Architectengroep, Amsterdam
 "WISER", International group exhibition Rijkswaterstaat, Maastricht
 International group exhibition Art 27, Heusden-Zolder Belgium

Projects: Workshop Installations, Sondrio, Italy

2006: "Janus", "group exhibition, Galerie Camaver, Lecco
 "153 Kinderkistjes", in memoriam group exhibition, Roden
 "La Perfezione della Conoscenza", Antichi Palazzi, Acquasparta, Italy

Italy
 "Terra per Uomini Liberi", group exhibition, Sondrio, Italy
 Solo exhibition, SVB-bank, Amstelveen
 "Kijk op de Wijk", art fair, Amsterdam
 "Onderdak", group exhibition, Art 27, Heusden-Zolder, Belgium
 "Art Event" art fair, Antwerp
 "Antichi Palazzi", group exhibition Palazzo Martinengo, Sondrio, Italy

2005: "Antichi Palazzi", Palazzo Cesi, Acquasparta, Italy
 "AntichiPalazzi", Torre Viscontea, Lecco, Italy
 "Noordwaarts", Open Days, Amsterdam
 "Art Event", art fair, Antwerp
 "Kijk op de Wijk", art fair, Amsterdam

2004: "Abstract", Stichting Facetten, solo exhibition with classical concert, Amsterdam.

2003: "Noordwaarts", Open Days, Amsterdam.

2002: Galerie "Le Garage", Amsterdam.
 "Het Illuseum", group exhibition, Amsterdam.
 "Open studio", 'tKan, Kunstenaars Amsterdam Noord.



Present and past activities:

*Representative for the Netherlands and Northern Europe for Camaver International

*Member of art collective Art 27, Heusden-Zolder, Belgium

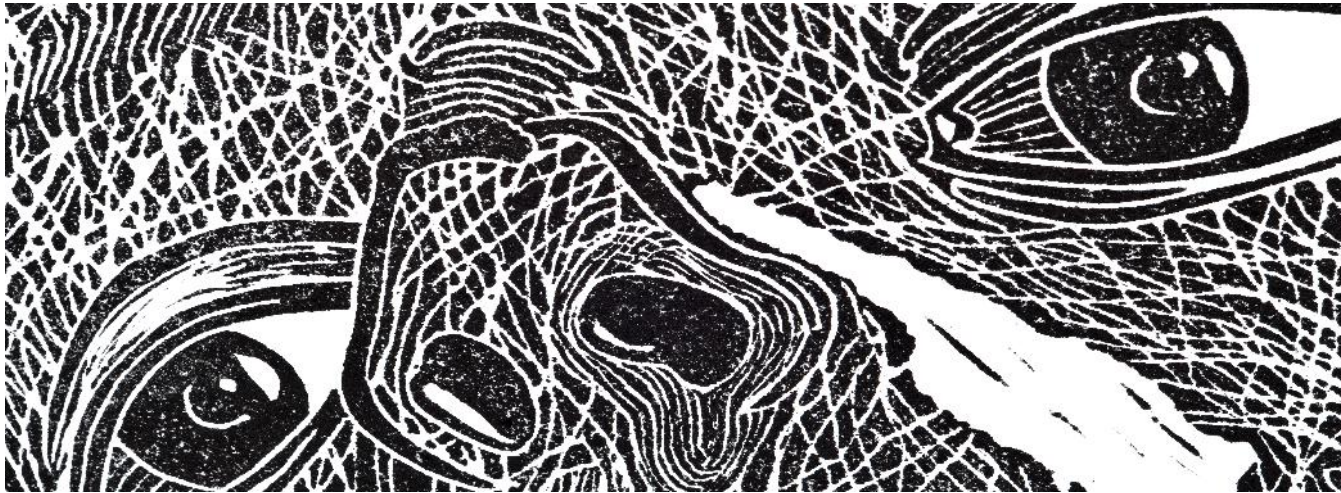
*Member of Art Collective Amstelland, Amsterdam

*Member of EKK, Exit Kunstenaars Kollektief, Amsterdam

*Secretary and member of the Nederlandse Kring van Beeldhouwers, Dutch Sculptors' Association

*Secretary and member of artists' collective Stichting Zamenhofstraat

*Member of art collective 't Kan in Amsterdam-Noord



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