

A GRAIN OF SALT

KAREL DOING



12TH DECEMBER 2013 - 6TH FEBRUARY 2014

SF: Your solo exhibition *a grain of salt* is one installation, composed of 5 individual works, encompassing the front and the backspace at DAS ESSZIMMER. The starting point for this body of work was outdated film material, originally destined as camera original.

What was your first impulse, when a friend offered you this material?

KD: I was thrilled with the fact that I suddenly had a lot of 35mm motion picture film in my hands, and I was planning to use it for making photograms. This is a technique that was developed by Man Ray for his film *Le Retour à la Raison*, hence the alternative name Rayogram. The idea is to put objects or materials directly onto the film strip and then expose the film from a single light source. The objects will appear in white and the parts of the film strip that were not covered will be black. But when I started experimenting it turned out that the film was completely *fogged*. – Hardly any contrast was left, it was a grey soup. I had to come up with another strategy.

The next step was to experiment with organic materials and see if I could use those to influence the film-emulsion. I wrapped a strip of film in autumn leaves. When I processed that, the effect was dramatic. The acid the leaves released had attacked the emulsion and the leaves had left imprints on the film. This success encouraged me to experiment with different materials. Beside organic substances I also started using minerals, like sand, charcoal and salt.

SF: Is that the first time that you manipulated the film material directly and that you experimented with different substances?

KD: I have been using motion picture film as my prime artistic material since 1987, when I shot my first Super 8 film at art school. During an exchange program in the UK I realised that what I was doing was part of an ongoing tradition.

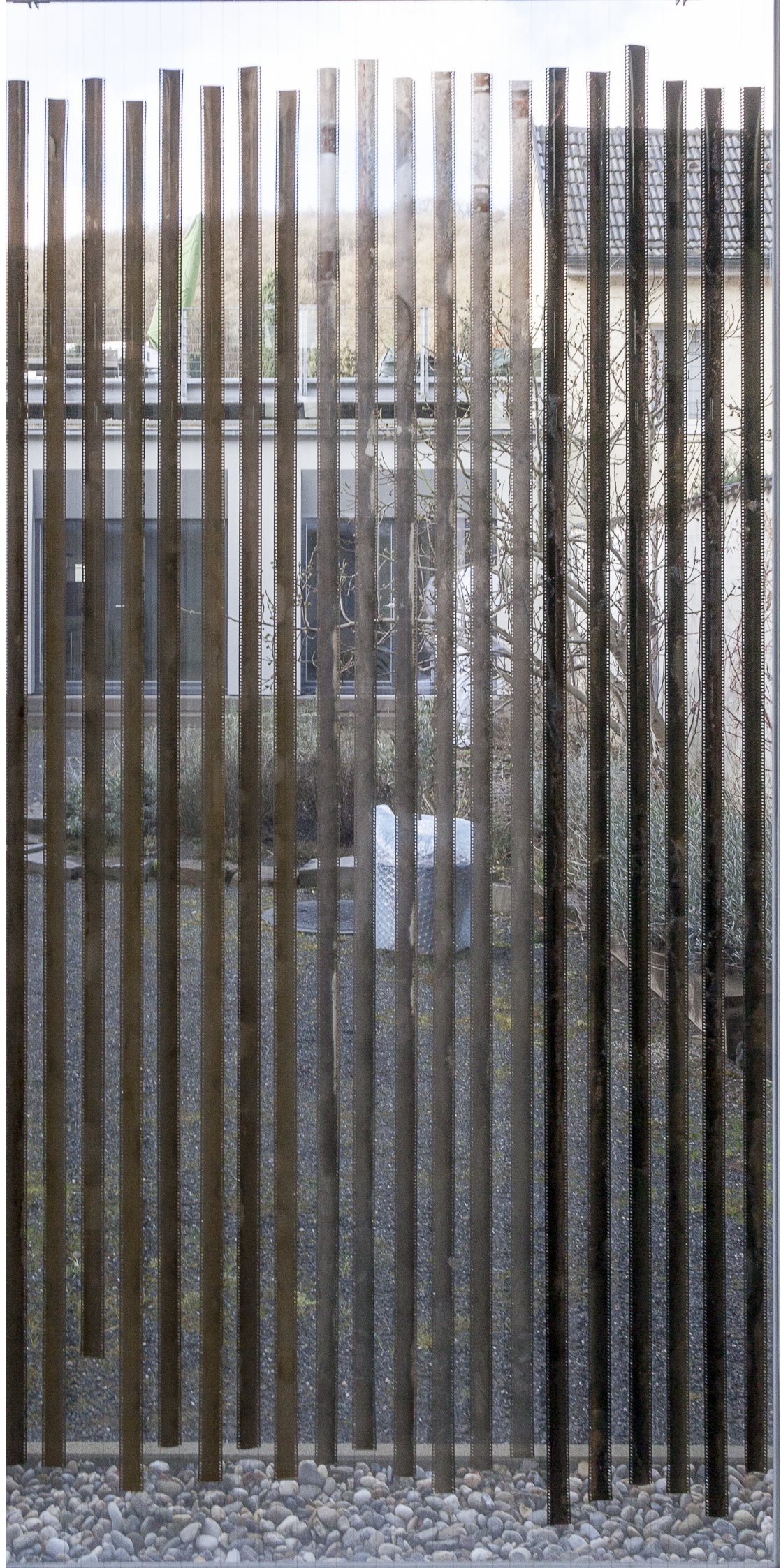
Reading Stan Brakhage's book *Metaphors on Vision* published in 1976 was a revelation. I started painting on film and doing my own processing. I also got in touch with many other artists working in similar ways. In 2001 I got engaged with digital video, triggered by a journey to Indonesia where I worked together with an Indonesian group of video activists. This led eventually to mixing old and new techniques. In 2010 I embarked on a project marrying the two media. I used a heavily deteriorated nitrate film from 1922; on this print the image had undergone a dramatic change because of mould growing on the film emulsion. I manipulated these images with digital techniques. What fascinated me was how a material change can also change the way we look at an image and interpret it. All of that together inspired me to experiment with organic and mineral substances and film emulsion. Working with film is in my blood, but combining film with these substances is a new thing.

SF: There is a very strong tradition in manipulating and experimenting with film material – for photographic or motion picture use. Do you see yourself a bit in this tradition and what does it mean to you letting in and combining it with digital video techniques?

KD: For me the technique or the material is not the goal, but it does interest me what can be expressed through a certain technique and material. I like things that do not try to hide what they are, so when I use digital techniques I will make sure that this becomes part of the expression of the work.

For the exhibition at DAS ESSZIMMER I started with a 35mm film strip that was treated with salt, water and homemade developer. What interested me was how I could use this discarded film material that was not fit anymore to reproduce reality.

I installed the film strips on the window so that they can be seen in daylight from the inside and at nighttime from the outside. In daytime the natural light will shine through



a grain of salt, Installation, salt
treated film strips, 2013, Karel Doing

and at nighttime the artificial light. The film strip was digitized and the digital file was translated to an 8 meter long paper print and a digital projection. Each of these works have a different materiality and expression.

To return to your question, limiting myself to only analogue techniques to me feels a bit silly, but throwing those away would be even more stupid. The digital age has many problems, the instantaneous access to everything, all the time and everywhere - numbs the mind.

The internet did not bring us total democracy. It is now more likely that it will bring us total surveillance.

Through my approach I try to 'hack' both the digital and the analogue; I don't want to simply repeat what is already laid out in front of me, I am sincerely trying to create something new by recombining materials and techniques.

a grain of salt, Installation, salt treated negative, 2013, Karel Doing



SF: I find this combination of an analogue and digital approach very intriguing. Your whole installation is for me like an homage to the film and its material as well as to its possibilities and unseen beauty.

How is your installation here to be positioned within your body of work of the last years?

KD: I already mentioned the film *Liquidator*. This work was based on a deteriorated nitrate print that was discovered in an Italian film archive and given to the Dutch Filmmuseum. I was allowed to work with a high definition scan of this print in the context of a large scale program that focussed on saving moving images for the future. The museum was interested in a work that could show the devastating effects of time on old film prints. This particular print was overgrown with moulds that were affecting the original image. I was fascinated by the beauty of this process of decay and by the way the content of the film had been completely changed by it.

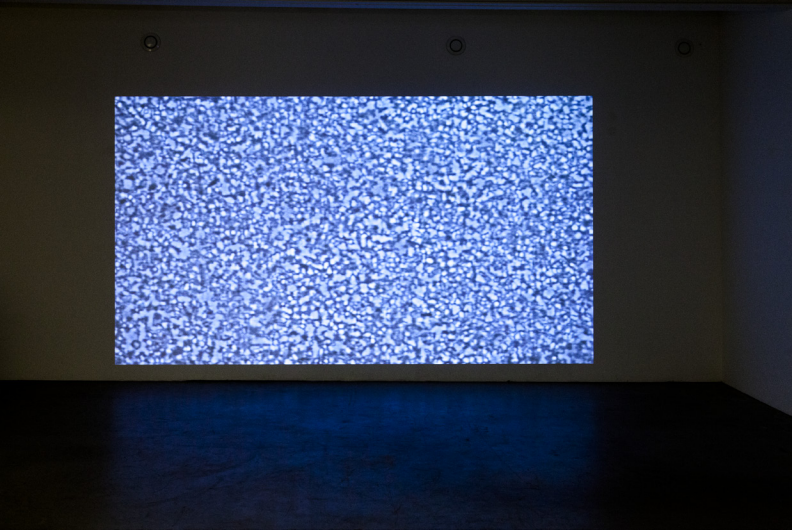
a grain of salt, Installation, salt, 2013, Karel Doing





a grain of salt, Installation, enlarged and printed film stripes, 2013, Karel Doing





a grain of salt, Installation, video projection, 2013, Karel Doing

The original film was made as a commission for a Dutch municipality (Haarlem) to advertise the beauty of their city nationally and internationally. Instead of promoting timeless beauty, the film now actually was a record of decay and disappearance.

From there onwards I have experimented in various ways with decay as a creative process. In addition I became interested in working with very small budgets as a reaction towards the increasing public notion of the arts being *worthless* and discardable in the context of the financial crisis and the resulting political repercussions.

In 2012 I moved from Rotterdam to London and started working part time for an artist run film lab named *no.w.here*. In my spare time I made a series of double screen works using cheap print film, scrap paper, small coins, discarded film test strips and so on.

The installation for *DAS ESSZIMMER* fits into that practice of working lovingly with precariousness and decay.

SF: Film and Video works in art tend to be more and more costly in their production. You consciously decided to renounce to expensive productions. Instead you chose to experiment with *poor* materials – also as reaction to more and more precarious living and working conditions for artists. Do you know of other artists following similar ways leading to some sort of a new *Arte Povera*?

KD: Vicky Smith, a British artist who I met last year, makes inspiring film work with very minimal budgets. For example her performance *Bicycle Tyre Track* involves her riding her bicycle along the length of a 16mm film strip, thereafter projecting the traces of the muddy tyres.

More in general there is a whole movement of artist run film labs around the world, aiming to keep the art of film-making alive by means of DIY techniques.

Another connection is hacking, in the sense of using digital media in ways that are not designed or programmed by the manufacturer. This extends to all kind of media; like hacking biotechnology and the use of arduino to steer redundant technology.

In our time talking about an art *movement* seems to be highly problematic; every new trend is immediately encapsulated by mainstream media.

Thus it is interesting to think about other ways to resist the total commodification of the arts. In this art is certainly not alone, you can see similar problems in food production or medical research. By finding the right partners a lot can change. I am very much in favour of crossing borders in all possible senses of these words.

SF: Crossing the borders seems to be the important keyword.

KD: Absolutely. I am driven to mix, experiment and synthesize.

Maybe it is me trying to understand the whole concept of borders, since in fact it is alien to me.

a grain of salt, Installation view, 2013, Karel Doing



Films

Palindrome Series	16mm double screen 18 min. 2013
No crows land in Vratsa	HD colour 30 min. 2012
Bedevelled	HD b&w 12 min. 2012
Saamaka	Digibeta b&w 50 min. 2010
Liquidator	35mm colour 9 min. 2010
Looking for Apoekoe	16mm b&w / colour 13 min. 2010
Elvenland	HD-cam colour 33 min. 2009
Getijden	Digibeta colour b&w 12 min. 2008
Happy End	HD-cam colour 10 min. 2006
El	DV b&w 5 min. 2005
Jinx	DV colour 9 min. 2005
Türchen öffne dich	DV colour 3 min. 2004
Rêve Rive	16mm colour 6 min. 2003
A journey to Tarakan	35mm colour 47 min. 2002
Best Foot Forward	Betacam SP colour 21 min. 2001
Images of a moving city	35mm b&w 37 min. 2001
Energy energy	16mm b&w 7 min. 1999
Whirlwind	16mm colour 9min. 1998
Maas Observation	16mm b&w 11 min. 1997
5 Portretten	16mm colour 6 min. 1995
Fricadelles de veau smitane	16mm colour 4 min. 1995
Meni	35mm b&w 4 min. 1994
Lichtjaren	16mm colour 7 min. 1993
Nature Trail	16mm colour 3 min. 1993
Ultimatum	16mm colour 7 min. 1992

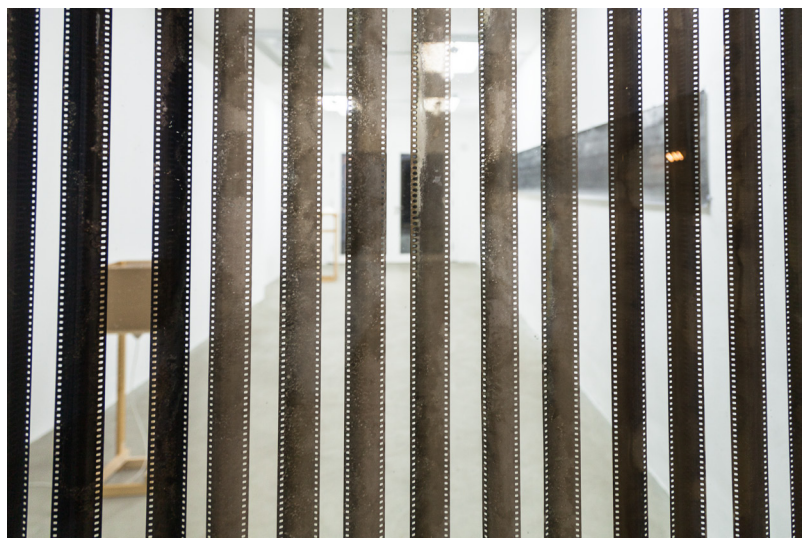
Performances, Installations

Darkloupe	Performance 30 min. 2012
Servants	Installation DVD 2007
Groupportrait I	Installation DVD 2005
Connections	Installation DVD 2004
Four Eyes	Performance 45 min. 2002
Nine Optical Toys	CD-ROM 2000
Recollection	Performance 40 min. 1998
Obscure/Reveal	16mm installation 1998
Rotary Factory	Performance 30 min. 1996

Projections / Festivals (2007 – now)

2013	National Portrait Gallery (London)
	Arsenal (Berlin)
	Echo Park Film Center (Los Angeles)
	OK video festival (Jakarta)
	Le jour le plus court (6 cities in France, Algeria and Armenia)
	International Filmfestival Rotterdam (Rotterdam)
2012	Cinématheque Française (Paris)
	Archive Film Festival (London)
	ESFF, MIT (Boston)
	Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Zamek Ujazdowski (Warsaw)
	Regional Historical Museum Vratsa (Vratsa)

a grain of salt, Installation, film strips, detail, 2013, Karel Doing



- EYE film institute (Amsterdam)
- 2011 International Filmfestival Rotterdam (Rotterdam)
ISFF Hamburg (Hamburg)
In the Palace (Balchik)
Festival on Wheels (Ankara)
Nouveau Cinéma (Montréal)
OKVideo festival (Jakarta)
IDFF Jihlava (Jihlava)
Aesthetica ISFF (York)
- 2010 Film Museum Biënnale (Amsterdam)
Signes de Nuit (Paris)
EMAF (Osnabrück)
EX-is (Seoul)
Union Docs (New York)
Leeds International Film Festival (Leeds)
- 2009 International Film Festival Breda (Breda)
EMAF (Osnabrück)
De Balie (Amsterdam)
Scratch / Scratch Expanded (Parijs)
de Wereld van Witte de With (Rotterdam)
Dutch Punch (Kiev, St.Petersburg)
Garfield Artworks (Pittsburgh)
- 2008 IFFR (Rotterdam)
Cinéma L'Eden (Le Havre)
IBFF (Ventimiglia)
Filmmuseum (Amsterdam)
Sequence Court Metrage (Toulouse)
Cinéma Different (Paris)
Musée Malraux (le Havre)
MIX (New York)
Moderna Museet (Stockholm)
- 2007 Festival Temps d'Images (Warsaw)
La Enana Marron (Madrid)
Nashville Film Festival (Nashville)
Artcinema Off Off (Gent)
Millenium (New York)

Performances (2007 – now)

- 2013 Café OTO (London)
Fondazione Morra (Napoli)
- 2012 Art Cinema Off Off (Gent)
Coté Court (Paris)
OCW (Rotterdam)
- 2010 Skolska 29 (Praag)
Filmhuis Lumen (Delft)
Extrapool (Nijmegen)
- 2009 Petersburg Project Space (Amsterdam)
- 2008 Lantaren/Venster (Rotterdam)
Oost/West Burlesk (Rotterdam)
- 2007 Cinema Nova (Brussels)

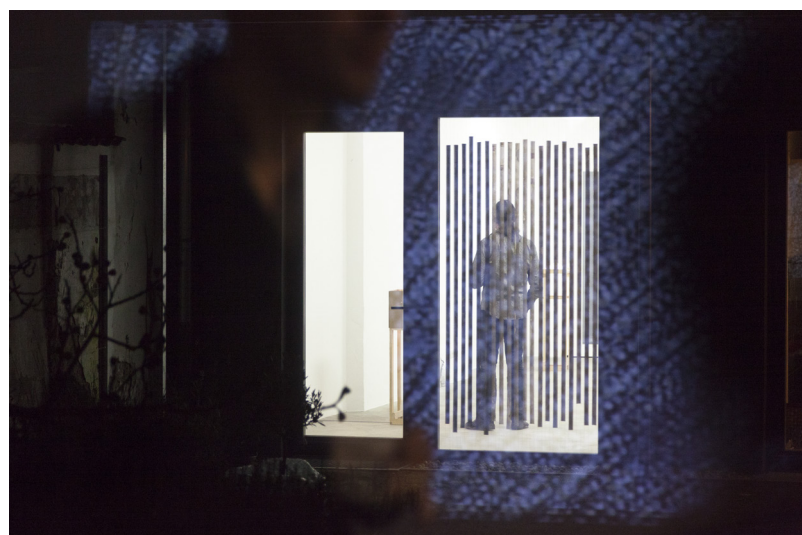
Exhibitions (2007 – now)

- 2013 Frequency festival (Lincoln)
no.w.here, art licks weekend (London)
- 2012 Voorkamer; Cinema (Lier)
- 2010 de Surinaamse Bank, Paramaribo SPAN (Paramaribo)
Expoplu, Synchronic Spaces (Nijmegen)
TENT, Paramaribo Perspectives (Rotterdam)
Centraal Station, Zoomscape (Amsterdam)
Voorkamer; Carte blanche à Pierre Bastien (Lier)
- 2009 FILE (Sao Paolo, Brazilië)
- 2008 Urban Espresso Bar (Rotterdam)
Corrosia - CBK (Almere)
- 2007 Schielandhuis (Rotterdam)

Curating (2007 – now)

- 2013 Dutch Absurdism, Echo Park Film Center (Los Angeles)
Living Film, no.w.here (London)
- 2012 Cinema Inside out, Fondazione Morra (Napoli)
- 2010 Cinema Toranica (Rot(t)terdam Roodkapje)
- 2008 Visual Audible (Filmbank Tour #17)
- 2007 Fatale (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Gouda)

a grain of salt, Installation, reflection of video projection, 2013, Karel Doing



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