Alice Smits

Kenniskring / Knowledge Network: Alice Smits

Alice Smits researches the way in which the relation between nature and culture – which lies at the basis of our vision of how people position themselves – is given form in art. One of the starting points of this research is the essay *The Three Ecologies* by Félix Guattari, in which he tries to find new social and aesthetic practices of self in relation to the other: 'The ecological crisis is a political, cultural and social one, calling for an eco-sophy as well as an eco-art, as a political, social and cultural revolution able to reorient the objectives of production, the forms of organization, the ways of being together'. She wants this research to target our primary relation with the earth: land.

Ever since it first became possible in the late 1960s to view the earth as a whole object, as what Buckminster Fuller called 'spaceship earth', our relation to the planet has changed. In art nature is no longer just a theme, but work is done directly in and with nature to develop new experiences and practices. The Land Art of the 1970s hardly bore any trace of a romantic escape into nature, but visualised the complex relation between nature and culture using a variety of artistic strategies. In the meantime the context of society and the parameters of the discussion have been transformed. In her research, Smits wants to see what we can learn from Smithson and other historical practices by conducting critical research on the present-day relation between art and ecology.

Land Art is seen as a discourse, a cultural construct within specific historical and political contexts in which the change in artistic ideas, forms, technologies, communication, etc. is examined in an attempt to redefine the boundaries of the world. More and more artists are working on redefining the concept of nature from a diversity of practices connected with land, soil, space, territory and landscape in which nature is regarded as a living ecosystem of which people and their technologies form a part. In the proposed Anthropocene era, in which human history coincides for the first time with geological transformations, climate change is seized upon to undermine the foundations of modernity and to develop new forms of knowledge, agency and organisation in which the division between nature and culture, object and subject no longer holds. The cooperation between the natural sciences and the humanities is at the centre of this development to construct a new world vision.

The aim of this research is to chart new aesthetic strategies in which contemporary ecological politics is developed in artistic practices connected with land. The research is linked with a curatorial project Zone2Source , an exhibition platform where artists are invited to develop projects in pavilions in the Amstel Park which rethink the relations between people, nature and technology. The research will result in a publication and possibly a symposium too.

Alice Smits is the initiator and artistic director of Zone2Source, a platform for art, nature and technology in the Amstelpark in Amsterdam. International artists are invited for regular exhibitions, talks, workshops and excursions in which new imaginations on nature-culture relations are being developed in the parks pavillion and outdoor spaces. With Zone2Source she is also organizing longer term transdisciplinairy collaborative research programs such as Machine Wilderness (together with FoAM) with a series of artist residencies in Artis Zoo

planned for 2022. She writes regularly as a freelance art critic for catalogues and art magazines such as Metropolis M. She is also a guitarist in the free improvisation band Oorbeek.
She is currently as researcher also affiliated with the Rietveld Academy as part of a Smart Culture NWO grant, focusing on art-science collaborations in the field of AI and ecology. Read more here.

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