

The Wood for the Trees

Gallery texts in large-format letters

The Wood for the Trees

Calving glaciers, deteriorating forests, a dramatic decline in biodiversity and rising sea levels: the current climate crises are enormous and complex, and there is no single answer. Indeed, in a myriad of opinions, solutions, trends and discussions, we often cannot see the wood for the trees. Where should we start? How can we, or perhaps even 'must' we live our own lives? And what is 'good behaviour'? *The Wood for the Trees* brings together the work of four artists, each offering a possible perspective or line of thought within the discussions.

COMFORT

Working from very personal starting points, Andy Holden (Bedford, 1982) raises general philosophical questions with his work. His *Pyramid Piece and Natural Selection* touch on colonial guilt, the impulse to collect and how we shape our relationship with the world. The video installation *APRIL ≈ 61°01' 24°27'* by Eija-Liisa Ahtila (Hämeenlinna, 1959) is like a walk through the forest, often experienced as healing and comforting. In *Limen*, Julian Charrière (Morges, 1987) explores the boundary between the perception of the landscape and the actual landscape in North Greenland, an area where nature is on the verge of disappearing. Finally, with his installation *The Settlement (Indoor)*, Hans Op de Beeck (Turnhout, 1969) offers a place for reflection on how we treat the earth.

REFLECTION

Nestled in the forest of De Hoge Veluwe National Park, the Kröller-Müller Museum is the perfect location to enjoy art to the full. In the peace and tranquillity of nature, and away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. *The Wood for the Trees* does not provide answers or solutions to climate problems. Art encourages contemplation and reflection, or offers a place in which to linger. To create space in the mind and return to nature both reinvigorated and inspired.

SCULPTURE GARDEN WALKING ROUTE

Circus Andersom has developed two walking routes through the sculpture garden for *The Wood for the Trees*. One of the routes follows paved paths; both can be walked independently. It starts at the revolving door near the museum's cloakroom.

Andy Holden

Pyramid Piece

A hand-knitted sculpture dominates the space. This 'monument to a piece of a monument' as Andy Holden (Bedford, 1982) calls it, is a massive enlargement of a piece of stone from the Great Pyramid of Cheops in Giza (Egypt). As a young boy, Holden stole the small rock while visiting the monument with his father. But when he showed this 'treasure' to his father on the plane home, he received a scolding. It is strictly forbidden to take fragments of the pyramid because 'if "all children" took a piece with them, there would eventually be no pyramid left'.

ATONEMENT

His father's tirade made a deep impression on Andy. *Pyramid Piece* is a work to reconcile himself with his guilt over his ill-considered mischief. He decided to atone and spent a year knitting the work of art. The collection of small pyramids, bought from merchants around the Egyptian monument, are akin to indulgences to have his sin absolved.

RETURN

In the film *Return of the Pyramid Piece*, Holden returns to Giza. He scales the side of the Great Pyramid and looks for a good place to put the stone back. But in returning the stone, he may do more damage than by taking it in the first place. The music that accompanies the short film was composed by the artist for string quartet with the sound of a marble falling through a child's toy in the background.

Andy Holden

Natural Selection

Andy Holden often employs subtle irony in his work, using one subject as a way of talking about something else, thereby creating a multi-layered narrative. In *Natural Selection*, the story initially seems to revolve around birds, their powers of prediction, their creativity and their impending extinction. The plot soon thickens around issues of guilt, inheritance and accountability.

PASSION FOR COLLECTION

Pyramid Piece (see previous room) begins with personal guilt about childish mischief, but at the same time it asks broader questions about colonial guilt and which cultural artefacts should be returned. *A Social History of Egg Collecting* is also about curbing the passion for collection. A talking crow tells us the history of egg collecting in Britain and how knowledge accumulation can turn into destruction. The passion for collection among oologists (egg experts) sometimes led to bird species disappearing from the landscape.

FATHER AND SON

In the video installation *A Natural History of Nest Building*, father Peter Holden, a celebrated ornithologist (bird expert) in the UK, and son Andy Holden talk about different types of birds' nests, nest sites and materials. While one discusses the structures from a Darwinian perspective, the other focuses on creativity and beauty. Andy was taught birdwatching from a very early age, as evidenced by the photo his father took of baby Andy holding a *British Birds* magazine in his little hands. The artist Andy gains different knowledge from studying birds than the scientist Peter.

SILENT SPRING

Observing birds helps us learn about the world and make predictions about the future. Already in ancient times, so-called *augurs* (bird diviners) observed the behaviour of birds to find signs of the will of the gods, the *auspices*. Today, the decreasing numbers or changes in the distribution of birds teach us something about the extent of nature's decline or recovery. In 1962, American author Rachel Carson wrote *Silent Spring* about the disappearance of bird song due to the excessive use of pesticides. Holden uses oscillograms – electronically visualised sound waves – of bird song for his *Silent Spring and his Auguries*, in the sculpture garden of the Kröller-Müller Museum.

Andy Holden (Bedford 1982)

Andy Holden by Peter Holden I, 1982/2017

colour photograph

collection artist, an Artangel commission

In a photograph made by Peter Holden, Andy's father, the artist 'reads' his father's book as a baby. In a kind of Droste effect, it is apparent that a preoccupation with birds was instilled in Andy at an early age. The picture was used a year later in an advertising campaign for *British Birds* magazine.

Peter Holden, a leading British ornithologist, has worked at the RSPB (The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) for over forty years. He is best known as the author of several guide books of British and Scottish birds. In 1979, he initiated the annual *Big Garden Birdwatch*, in which half a million Britons participate every January. In the Netherlands, the *Vogelbescherming* (Netherlands Bird Protection) has been organising the *National Garden Bird Count* every January since 2001.

**Andy Holden (Bedford 1982) and Peter Holden
(London 1948)**

A Natural History of Nest Building, 2017

video installation, 30 minutes 53 seconds

collection artist, an Artangel commission

In the video installation *A Natural History of Nest Building*, father Peter Holden, a prominent British ornithologist, and son Andy Holden talk about different types of birds' nests, nest sites and materials. Although they share a sense of wonder at the ingenuity and skill of birds – from the chaffinch and crow to tailorbirds and weavers – they sometimes diverge on what intrigues them most. They take turns commenting on such things as the pragmatism of the wood pigeon, the delicate work of the long-tailed tit and the collaboration of mute swans, while photographs of the nests in question are shown on the centre screen.

Peter's approach is firmly grounded in Darwin's theory of evolution, while Andy is convinced by the idea that nest-building is a considered, creative act. As they look at the sheer diversity of birds' nests, their conversation touches on the difference between animal instinct and human learning, the importance of creative collaboration and nature of parental influence.

Andy Holden (Bedford 1982)

The Origin of the Work of Art (Study for Bower), 2017

Willow

collection artist

In imitation of, and in homage to, the bowerbird's skill, Andy Holden has created this enlarged 'nest'. However, no eggs will ever be laid in the bowerbird's bower. His 'nest' is not a 'cradle' for eggs and chicks or a 'house' for protection from the elements and predators, but purely a creation of form and colour. The 'gateway' is a courtship area carefully arranged by the male, often decorated with blue objects, to lure the female. If she walks through it, it is the sign of her approval of him as a mate. After mating, the female builds a nest for the eggs elsewhere.

Andy Holden (Bedford 1982)

Collected and Fabricated Nests, 2015-2019

mixed media: original bird nests and books

collection artist, an Artangel commission

For Andy Holden, birds' nests are not just structures to protect eggs from the rain, wind and predators. They are primarily creations, ingeniously constructed objects. In building them, each bird will have to make spatial, constructive, and – who knows – even aesthetic decisions to achieve a 'good nest'. The display case contains nests from the collection of Peter Holden, Andy's father and a leading British ornithologist, as well as nests made by Andy Holden himself.

Andy Holden (Bedford 1982)

The Opposite of Time, 2017

video installation, 30 minutes

collection artist, courtesy Hidde van Seggelen

In *The Opposite of Time*, a talking crow flies over a series of landscape paintings by artists including William Turner, John Constable, Paul Nash and David Hockney, while recounting the history of egg collecting in Britain. What initially begins as a pastime of the aristocracy gradually develops into a widespread hobby with all the harmful consequences thereof: from disturbing birds' habitats to threatening species extinction. In 1954, egg collecting was banned in England. The crow shows us the lengths to which collectors go to pursue their passion and hide their ill-gotten gains despite the ban.

Andy Holden (Bedford 1982)

Oologist Record, 2019

mixed media: porcelain, plastic, paper, textile, wood

collection artist, courtesy Hidde van Seggelen

Oologist Record is a replica of a recovered illegal collection of eggs. Egg collecting has been prohibited in Britain since 1954 – it carries a maximum prison sentence of six months – but it has a long tradition, as the crow in the video installation *A Social History of Egg Collecting* describes. Oology, the study of eggs, is at the source of ornithology, bird science. The knowledge collected by oologists is often very valuable. For instance, they play an important role in Rachel Carson's discovery in her *Silent Spring* (see elsewhere in this space). But with their passion for collecting, they destroy that which they love. By re-creating the egg collection in porcelain, Andy Holden seeks to understand what drives people to collect and how this can become an obsession.

Andy Holden (Bedford 1982)

Silent Spring (Blackbird), 2017

Ash wood

wood turning: Geoffrey Leeson

private collection, an Artangel commission

The shape of these five wooden 'totems' is derived from oscillograms – visual representations of sound waves – of the song of the Wren, Sparrow, Mistle Thrush, Robin and Blackbird. The title *Silent Spring* is a reference to Rachel Carson's 1962 book of the same name, which is an indictment of the then massive use of pesticides in America. The title refers to the spring in the year when the birds stop singing, having been wiped out as a result of DDT and PCB use. Carson's book resulted in US citizens rising up in protest and the government eventually passed a large number of legislative measures to reduce pesticide use. *Silent Spring* is sometimes seen as the beginning of the environmental movement.

In 2023, Holden executed these wooden sculptures in bronze. The sculpture garden is home to three of these *Auguries*, a title that refers to the Roman practice of predicting the future by observing birds. Three monuments to the Swift, the Yellowhammer and the Mistle Thrush respectively, birds whose numbers are declining.

Eija-Liisa Ahtila

APRIL ≈ 61°01' 24°27'

The work *APRIL ≈ 61°01' 24°27'* by Eija-Liisa Ahtila (Hämeenlinna, 1959) consists of eight projections of asynchronous camera movements. It shows the turn from winter to summer in a certain area of a forest in Southern Finland where Ahtila filmed during the spring seasons in 2022 and 2023. At the beginning the eight images form an even picture of the landscape. As soon as a slow camera movement in each of the projections breaks the illusion, eight passages into the forest start, gradually reforming the relations of the living beings and the spatiality in the forest.

ARCHITECTURE, ART AND NATURE

Ahtila incorporates the museum building and surrounding nature into the work. The eight projections cover a long wall connecting two exhibition spaces, so the work cannot be seen in a single glance. Behind the wall on which the images are projected lies the sculpture garden of the Kröller-Müller Museum. It's almost as if *APRIL ≈ 61°01' 24°27'* opens up the architecture to the nature behind it. It is also a continuation of, or reference to, the glass walls in the museum's corridors that offer a view of the sculpture garden.

COURSE OF THE SEASONS

Ahtila's work explores the possibility of ecological narratives in moving images. She no longer wants to show the world from a human centred perspective, but she ascribes an equal role and voice to nature. In a compression of time, the course of the seasons is shown from left to right: in the projection on the left, the snow is still on the ground; on the far right, spring has turned into summer. Together, the projections form a flowing movement like a kind of dance, which ends with a thickening of the vegetation.

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Editing:	Heikki Kotsalo
Image post-production:	Jari Hakala
Sound design:	Olli Pärnänen
Colour grading:	Pentti Keskomäki
Data management:	Niko Skorpio
Production assistant:	Yinsuo Ahtila
Producer:	Ilppo Pohjola

The production of *APRIL ≈ 61°01' 24°27'* is made possible with the support of the Kröller-Müller Museum.

Julian Charrière

Limen

In three colours I printed photographs of places where the boundaries between sky and earth seem to merge. In the process, the real ground becomes the image, a kind of sedimentation of the visual realm.

– Julian Charrière

For his series *Limen* – ‘threshold’ or ‘transition’ – Julian Charrière (Morges, 1987) takes digital aerial photographs in the dizzyingly and disorienting landscape of North Greenland. There are no landmarks in the form of houses, trees or animals and no clear spatial delineations such as foreground or background. The weather changes constantly and a boundary between the sky and earth is often imperceptible. The landscape there is in constant transition.

IMAGE OF NATURE

With *Limen*, Charrière examines the complicated relationship between image-making and reality-making. Early photography and its dissemination in the media have shaped expectations of what landscapes – glaciers, forests, fields or meadows – look like. But the image formed by photography is by no means always consistent with reality. Images of nature are always interpretation.

Framing, lens sharpness, print size, exposure time, paper type: all aspects of photography affect the image and the way in which nature is subsequently perceived.

PHOTOGRAVURE

To print his photographs, Charrière uses a printmaking technique developed in the nineteenth century: photogravure. Without a chemical development process, the image is created by exposure to a light-sensitive layer on a printing plate, which is then etched. The image can then be transferred to paper by rubbing the etched plate with ink and using a press.

COLOUR SCHEMES

Charrière composes the colours for his photogravures by collecting material left behind in the North Greenlandic landscape by moving glaciers: stones, moraine clay, grit, soot and bacteria. The darkcoloured materials accumulate in so-called cryoconites, small holes in the surface of glaciers, which accelerates the melting process. He grinds the collected material into pigments that are digitally scanned to create colour schemes of the specific locations. With these 'true colours of the landscape', Charrière creates his photogravures of an ever more rapidly disappearing landscape.

Hans Op de Beeck

The Settlement (Indoor)

Water reflects not only in a literal sense, but also figuratively encourages reflection, the reflective, contemplative thinking about existence and the world.

– Hans Op de Beeck

The Settlement (Indoor) by Hans Op de Beeck (Turnhout, 1969) is reminiscent of a deserted film set where a scene could take place at any moment. Amid the black, gently rippling water stands a grey-coloured miniature village of houses on stilts. The whole is surrounded by a high, black wall the construction of which is visible at the back. As in a theatre, visitors can take a seat on the auditorium to look out over the entirety from a slightly elevated vantage point. With his installation, Op de Beeck invites people to reflect, to look back on their own actions and experiences in order to make new choices.

EVOCATION

Over the past twenty years, Op de Beeck has created many monumental installations, scenes of non-existent but often still recognisable places from everyday life. He alters the scale – in *The Settlement (Indoor)* everything is reduced in size – and gives everything the same colour:

often grey, sometimes black or white. The 'visual fictions', as he describes his installations, are sculptural translations of reality: 'My work is about evocation and not pointless simulation or imitation'. Only occasionally does he give a realistic depiction of reality, as in *Roe Deer* where the blossoms are white-pink.

REFLECTION

With The Settlement (Indoor), Op de Beeck offers a place for reflection and creates space for the observer's imagination: 'I hope to give the viewer a sense of calm, tranquillity, and from there I sneak in other questions about how we are, how we live, how we deal with time and space'. Virtually nothing happens in the miniature settlement; only the surface of the water moves slightly, reflecting the lights and houses. And just as the constant breaking waves by the sea or the flames of a wood fire are calming and clear the mind, *The Settlement (Indoor)* also creates space for reflection.