

## Cultural impressions of a new generation

What drives a new generation of artists and creative professionals across the world? This question was the starting point for us, DutchCulture's NewGen project team. As the Dutch organisation supporting international cultural collaboration, [DutchCulture](#) wants to better understand what young creatives and professionals in the cultural sector aspire when it comes to developing their (international) career. Over the past two years, we have created a substantial and lively network of artists and creative professionals in their twenties, in the Netherlands and elsewhere in the world. For and with them, we organised meet-ups on the topics of [working digitally](#), [interdisciplinary cross-overs](#) and [internationalisation](#). The networking sessions at every event have fuelled new collaborations and sparked artistic inspiration, all the while expanding our own knowledge of the changing dynamics of international cultural exchange. We are keen to keep track of this growing community.

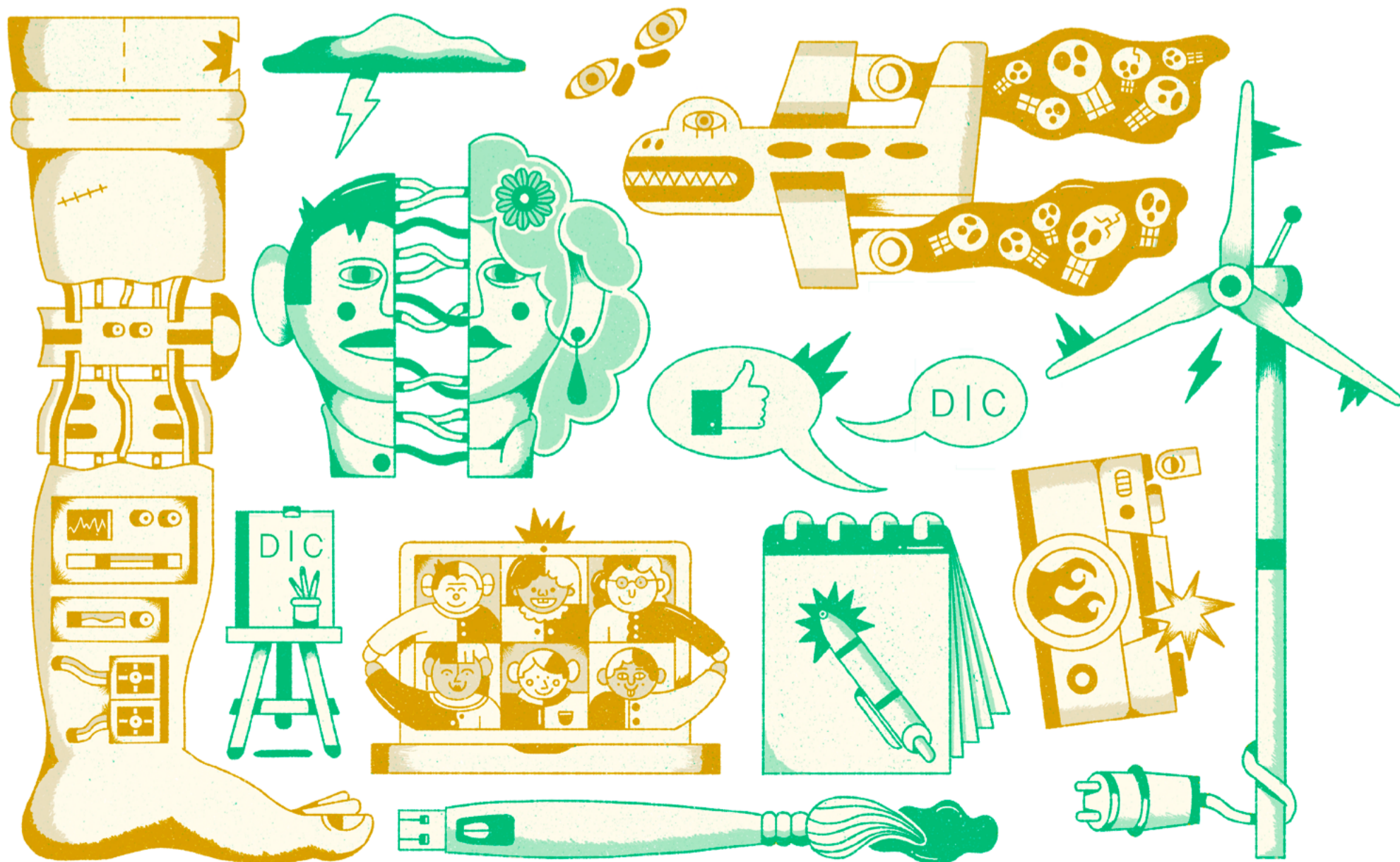
Besides the live events, the written [dossier](#) of NewGen-articles on our website is expanding. In the articles, international correspondents cover the local cultural environment, and the way young people shape the cultural field in their city and country. In this publication of NewGen World, we travel from

[Warsaw](#) to [Casablanca](#) and from [Bristol](#) to [Paramaribo](#) to see how young creatives are often disrupting the cultural status quo. For the written portraits, DutchCulture's NewGen project team interviewed three inspiring artists and creative professionals who are working on exciting international project that we will undoubtedly hear more of in the future: [digesting the colonial past in a theatre play](#), [researching the future of culinary heritage](#) and [using artificial intelligence in detecting archaeological sites](#).

Of course, the NewGen project and its events would not have been possible without the support of both our (international) network: from professors at art academies reaching out to their students to cultural venues in the Netherlands hosting our events and artists who don't count as the new generation but still wanted to help us to connect with their younger peers. And of course, to the portrayed artists and our correspondents: thank you for interacting, sharing, creating and inspiring.

We hope you enjoy reading this trip around NewGen World. Please follow our website [www.dutchculture.nl](http://www.dutchculture.nl) for more news about NewGen and future articles and portraits.

*Jacomine Hendrikse, Simon de Leeuw, Ian Yang*



# Loud & proud: Bristol artists taking back ownership of public space

**Young artists from Bristol, a city with a radical reputation, are taking back ownership of public space in the city from those in power.** BY PRIYANKA RAVAL

BRISTOL. Let me introduce you to Bristol. It's important to set the scene. Bristol has a radical reputation – from Extinction Rebellion to anarchist bookshops to Stop the War marches. The city is seen as a bastion of progressive and anti-establishment beliefs, a 'lefty' corner of the South-West of England. We are the city that values our independence. A full-scale riot broke out in 2011 when a Tesco supermarket was built in a former squat, amidst a stretch of independent shops in the vibrant district of Stokes Croft. We even have a local currency, the Bristol Pound, which can only be spent in local, independent businesses. When the Government last year proposed legislation to introduce tougher policing and sentencing measures, involving restrictions on protesting, it is no wonder that Bristol took to the streets en masse; with our 'Kill the Bill' demonstrations boasting the most militant turnouts in the country.

## Dark history

Beneath this progressive, counter-cultural scene lies a dark history. Bristol gained much of its wealth from the slave trade. According to local historian Professor David Olusoga, from 1728 to 1732, Bristol dispatched more slave-trading expeditions than any other British port. Between 1698 and 1807 (the prohibition of the British slave trade), around 20 per cent of the slave-trading voyages that left British ports embarked from Bristol – between them carrying an estimated half a million Africans into enslavement.

The legacy of the slave trade is ingrained into the city's civic fabric. Street names, schools and buildings bear the name of former slavers. A fact that sits uncomfortably with the values of many Bristol residents, and the significant Afro-Caribbean community who live here.

The symbol of this struggle between the city's history and the ethics of today became the statue of 18th-century slave trader Edward Colston, which stood slap bang in the City Centre, overlooking the harbour from where his ships would depart. Adding insult to injury, the plaque beneath him described him as "One of the most virtuous and wise sons of the city." No mention of his involvement in the Royal African Company, active campaigning for the continuation of slavery and the 84,000 Africans he oversaw the trafficking of. This statue has been the centre of a furious debate for decades.

Until 7 June 2020, when Bristol made headlines worldwide when protesters pulled the statue down and rolled it into the harbour during a Black Lives Matter march. Those protestors achieved with direct action what countless petitions had failed to do. In the face of local government inaction, protestors took matters into their own hands. The act of pulling down the statue was a decisive move to retake ownership. And the battle for public space rages on, with young artists as the vanguard. Armed with imagination, creativity, spray cans and rollers, they are leading the way in developing a new vision of the city.

Lawrence Hoo. Soon after the toppling, Hoo launched [The People's Platform](#), a public art project inviting people from the city to submit designs for the empty plinth which could "reimagine how Bristol's history and common values can be best reflected."

Hundreds of designs were submitted. A diverse, intergenerational panel of community members from all of Bristol's postcodes then selected submissions that would be brought to life in the digital realm. On the one-year anniversary of the toppling, The People's Platform showcased the first sculptures and designs on the empty plinth through the power of augmented reality. Anyone with a smart device near the plinth could scan a QR code and see the different designs. Without having to download an app, you could experience and explore the designs from 360 degrees, along with information about the designer and the inspiration behind the piece. "Modern communities want their environments to reflect our values. These virtual statues in the heart of the city reflect the values of Bristol today," Hoo said.

Centralised decision-making over the local public realm will not help us create dynamic, diverse public spaces.

- Antonia Layard

## The People's Platform

Of course, once Colston was pulled down, there was the question of what to do with the empty plinth. Enter poet, educator, activist and agitator

The project was the brainchild of [CARGO classroom](#) (Charting African Resilience Generating Opportunities), an online educational resource dedicated to developing a global understanding of African and African diaspora history, founded by Hoo and Chaz Golding in 2019. Jazz Thompson, an artist who had contributed to the project, said: "To partake in art in public spaces, it's something you're often told not to do. The ownership of the plinth has now completely shifted." Professor Antonia Layard at the University of Bristol said at the time: "We now widely agree that neither heritage nor history is static. Contexts change and statues could reflect that. Centralised decision-making over the local public realm will not help us create dynamic, diverse public spaces."

The People's Platform helped articulate and imagine a new narrative for Bristol that refused the iconography of racism. Crucially, they showed how the design of public space could be democratised, co-created, inclusive and representative of Bristol's diversity. The virtual occupation of space is clever, it evades government control and local bureaucracy and puts power into the hands of the people. Moreover, the versatile virtual realm of The People's Platform can reflect the changing attitudes that come with the passage of time in a way that the rigidity of a statue simply cannot.



Josephine Gyasi, #whosefuture. Photo: Rising Arts Agency

It is our future to be disruptive, to claim spaces as ours. To be so political that the whole landscape across all industries is forced to take action.

- Emma Blake Morsi

### #WhoseFuture

In that summer of 2020, a creative agency sprang into action: [Rising Arts Agency](#). It was established in 2016, with a mission to empower Bristol's underrepresented young people to fulfil their creative ambitions and to affect wider social change through the arts. They now make up a diverse community of artists, activists, producers, facilitators, illustrators, photographers, filmmakers and more.

"We got a call asking if we would be interested in pulling together a huge, public-facing campaign celebrating culture in the city with just over four weeks to make it happen," explains co-director Euella Jackson. "Initially I thought it was impossible, but then a few weeks later George Floyd was murdered, the Colston statue was pulled down and this was no longer an opportunity we could turn down. #WhoseFuture was our response." Within weeks, 37 artists created 370 posters and nine billboards that exploded onto the city's streets.

"[Rising Arts Agency](#) has always dreamt of taking up space in the city, shouting loud and proud for what we believe in. #WhoseFuture gave young artists and creatives in the city the space to address some of the specific issues we have been grappling with head-on through our work: racism, access issues, climate crisis, leadership and young people's hopes for a secure and empowering future," Jackson continues. Emma Blake Morsi, a young artist and now Board member of Rising Arts Agency says: "This is our future. It is ours to be disruptive, to claim spaces as ours. To be so political that the whole landscape across all industries is forced to take action."

Similar to the CARGO movement, ownership and having your voice heard were central to the #WhoseFuture campaign. But using billboards as the mode of art is significant, as creative practice coordinator Eli Lower explains. "Billboards are usually trying to sell you something. We're disrupting and resisting that by doing an artistic takeover of billboards." Rosa ter Kuile, artist and Rising's campaign manager for the project adds:

"But why has it taken a Covid-19 pandemic, Black Lives Matter and an economic meltdown to replace ad space with art?"

### Bristol Womxn's Mural Collective

That same Rosa ter Kuile, an artist who works under the name [RTIIKA](#), set up the [Bristol Womxn's Mural Collective](#) to connect female and non-binary artists to take up more space in a largely male-dominated street art scene. They run mural painting meetups, 'Skate and Paint' sessions and general paint days. "Forming the [Bristol Womxn's Mural Collective](#) is my way to connect, support and ultimately encourage more womxn to take up space," says Ter Kuile. "Womxn's freedom to express themselves in the streets is as important personally as it is politically. The feeling of painting in public space can be a really empowering experience. For me, creating street art is a radical act. It is about claiming space and exercising agency. The act of painting on a wall that anyone can see is an act that says 'my voice matters'. The BWMC is about harnessing the power of the collective to feel empowered to take up literal space in the city streets." The collective is also campaigning for [more legal spaces](#) to paint. This would promote more advanced, exploratory art and also make street art more accessible to people of colour, who are more likely to be treated worse by the police.

The act of painting on a wall that anyone can see is an act that says 'my voice matters'.

- Rosa ter Kuile

### Taking back ownership

These three artistic collectives represent a movement in Bristol – one to take back ownership of public space in the city. It's not a completely new movement, but it is one that seems to be reinvigorated since that historic day in 2020. The



Rising Arts co-director Euella Jackson.  
Photo: Rising Arts Agency

collectives have their differences: how much they work with or against authority, what forms they use, and what campaigns they run. But there is a unifying mission: to empower people to have a say in the design of their public space, to have our values co-created and reflective of our communities. And most of all, to especially platform the voices of those who have historically been listened to the least.

*Priyanka Raval is a Bristol-based freelance journalist, focusing on social justice and investigative reporting. Social movements and protests are her 'beat' and there has never been any shortage of events to report on. She also works for Rising Arts Agency, a community of young people mobilising for social change through the arts. She wrote this article after the two-year anniversary of the historic toppling of the statue of slave trader Edward Colston during a Black Lives Matter march in Bristol on 7 June 2020.*



Mural Collective Group. Photo: Bristol Womxn's Mural Collective

# Portrait: Kiriko Mechanicus on the (non)relation between food, film & identity

**Born to a Japanese mother and Dutch father, the young artist grew up in Amsterdam.**

**She currently finished the programme of Directing Documentary at the Netherlands Film Academy.** BY IAN YANG

*Kiriko Mechanicus' (1995)  
key interests are: history,  
food, documentary, writing,  
publishing, Japan and video  
art. We had a conversation  
with her about her many  
creative practices and  
the subject of identity.*

**You have a bachelor's degree in history from the John Cabot University in Rome. Can you tell us more about your studies?**

"Both my parents are artists. Since I was little, the expectation was that I would also become an artist. But of course, as a teenager, you want to be everything but your parents. My romantic idea at that time was to become an historian in Rome. It was as if I needed to prove that somewhere else, I could be completely different. So I left Amsterdam at the age of 18. Rome was a wonderful experience. I enrolled at the American John Cabot University where I met people from all over the world. I sort of created the study programme myself by choosing specific professors' classes, with a focus on culinary history. I lived there for five years, and then I went to New York to study filmmaking for one semester. There I realised that I want to express history in a more visual way. Film is the medium to do so, specifically documentary."

In the Netherlands, documentary is perhaps the form of art that combines reality and poetry in the best possible way.

**What does documentary making mean to you?**

"It is a really useful, colourful and almost funky way to tell history. Studying history helps us understand ourselves and the world around us. But it can also feel abstract to dive into a past that has nothing to do with our present-day life directly. Filmmaking can capture the past in a way that you can immediately understand. When you film a historical narrative, you register both the past and the present with one image. It is something that I missed when I was only studying history."

**Why did you decide to focus on culinary history?**

"We eat food every day, otherwise we would die. But both the way you consume it, and your choice for a particular type of food create your identity day-by-day, I would say. Food is an attractive subject; probably because of its everydayness, and because many people love to eat. But the culture of eating has many different layers that are built up from the past, including the painful parts, of course – for example when it concerns animals as a source of human nutrition. I'm simply fascinated by everything around it."



Kiriko Mechanicus. Photo: Lisa Schamlé

**How is your experience at the Netherlands Film Academy? What kind of documentaries have you been making?**

"After my New York experience, I returned to enrol in the Netherlands Film Academy, to properly school myself in all the aspects of documentary making. You know, the Netherlands has a rich history of documentary-making, Dutch people are really good at it. Here, perhaps this form of art combines reality and poetry in the best way."

disappearing due to environmental issues and overfishing. Nowadays there are only about a hundred fishermen left, still working in the way their ancestors did for hundreds of years. They are like cowboys of the sea, spending days on a boat just by themselves. Their strong understanding and poetic appreciation of the old craftsmanship are so beautiful. At the same time, the eel is an endangered fish, so its consumption is completely at odds with what I believe in. That's the story and the complexity I want to tell with the camera."

My graduation film is going to be quite political, about how the taste of food varies based on your heritage.

At the Film Academy, I made a documentary titled *De paling, de gabber en zijn zoon*, to be released this autumn. It's about eel-fishing in the north of the Netherlands, which is one of the oldest professions in the country but gradually

**Speaking of which, does your Japanese heritage also shape your identity through food?**

"My mother deliberately raised me in a Japanese way. In our house, there are always Japanese morals, rituals and ways of living. She made me

return to my grandmother's home in Japan every summer, which is by the sea in the mountains, quite far away from Tokyo. Japanese people communicate more directly through food than with words. So yes, I really understood my heritage through the food that my mother and grandma fed me. How they feel about the family, how they express love, and what they think is important. All are deeply ingrained in and reflected by their food. Maybe my relationship with food started from the way I primarily felt loved at home. Dutch and Japanese cultures are very contrasting cultures. As a mixed child in the Netherlands, it's quite complicated to be raised in a Japanese way. Everything I learned is the opposite of the things around me. It is challenging but also very charming because it gives me the energy to create my own self-identity, instead of having one made out for you already. Also, the Western world has a very specific perception of Japanese culture, and the way people here approach me or look at me reflects this perception. Even though I grew up here, just like them. I find that fascinating. Especially the eroticisation of Japanese women, which is something that is part of my everyday life, simply because of the way I look."

**Does the poem *Ik kadreer haar zo* that you wrote during the DeBuren writer's residency in Paris last year reflect your approach to the subject of identity and the gaze of others?**

"Yes, I had to choose a 19th-century painting from the collection of Rijksmuseum Amsterdam and write a story inspired by it. So I picked the painting *Girl in a White Kimono* by George Hendrik Breitner (1894). Strangely, I started to identify with the image and think about how other people might perceive it. My story is about what it means to perceive, frame, deconstruct and persuade. It was presented on the Night of History at the Rijksmuseum along with my fellow residents' contributions.

Writing has been an ongoing practice for me. It [started at Vice](#) where I did an internship when I was 18 years old. It was also the first time I wrote about food. And I was very inspired by my friend, writer and journalist Pete Wu. His book and viewpoint really bear out how other (Dutch) people's perception of East Asia can create your identity. Pete told me that his journey started when he went to the DeBuren writer's residency programme. That's how I applied for it as well. It was a wonderful experience that helped me to fully understand what I want to say and who I want to become. At DeBuren, I also started writing stories about bread and healing. I talked to many bakers and pastry makers in Paris. These stories are to be the first book published by the [Jongenelis&Mechanicus](#) publishing house that I set up with Una Jongenelis. She is a fashion designer but also makes comics,



Still from the film *De paling, de gabber en zijn zoon*, by Kiriko Mechanicus.



*Ik kadreer haar zo* (detail). Photo: Kiriko Mechanicus

does performances and more – a lot of things, just like me."

**What are your next future projects or plans?**

"After the summer I'll shoot my graduation work in Italy. It's a 30-minute documentary film about the tomato. What I want to show is how tomatoes reflect people's lives. Each tomato tastes differently to different people. For some, they are sweet, but for others extremely bitter. For example, in the south of Italy, most tomatoes are picked by migrants from Africa who get entangled in a circuit of modern slavery instituted by the mafia. To them, tomatoes are anything but delicious. So it's going to be quite a political film, about how the

taste of food varies based on your heritage.

In the long run, I might make a documentary for the VPRO about the fascination some people have for Japan. I feel much anger towards men with so-called yellow fever. Often my solution to deal with the things I hate is to try to learn to love them. So I thought I could make a film about dating these men, and to deconstruct false fantasies about Asian women."



Kiriko Mechanicus. Photo: Lisa Schamlé

# Reclaiming Casablanca

**The Casablanca School in the 1960s was the first counterculture art movement.**

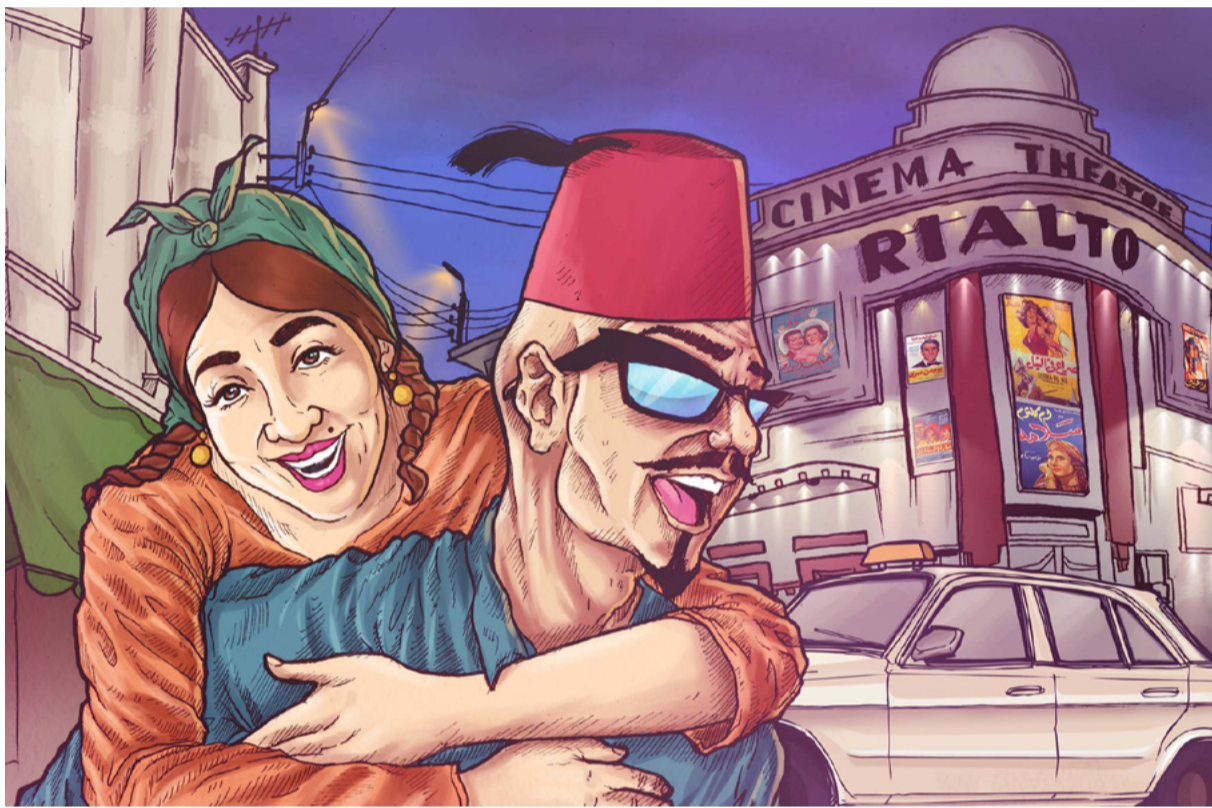
**How does their heritage carry on in present times?** BY CHAMA TAHIRI IVORRA

CASABLANCA. The artists of the Casablanca School, a modernist art movement in the 1960s led by painters Farid Belkahia, Mohamed Melehi, and Mohamed Chabâa, were among the first Moroccan artists to express a cultural claim on their native city from a post-colonial narrative. Sixty years later, does their heritage carry on?

The School of Fine Arts of Casablanca, founded in 1919, traditionally required that all instructors were French. Moroccan students weren't allowed to exhibit their works and were pushed to pursue craftsmanship and design. They could not develop further than to become technicians to assist the French, who were encouraged and nurtured

Laâbi and Mohamed Melehi gained international recognition and shone a new light on Morocco and especially Casablanca, mostly known back then for its art deco heritage and the famous movie *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942). In a documentary filmed by Shalom Gorewitz, Melehi stated that "North Africa has been a source of inspiration and revelation for many Western artists." In 1972, the magazine *Souffles* – having slowly turned into a platform for the Moroccan Marxist-Leninist movement – was banned, and its founders were jailed and tortured. The rise of such repression marked the end of what seemed to be a social and artistic utopia, having laid the groundwork for Moroccan modern art.

Knowing that political colonialism shifted to a more intellectual and cultural hegemony of the West, what story of the city is the young generation telling?



Madini, one of [Rebel Spirit's](#) Casaoui characters

## Crushing or inspiring

"We can't separate Casa from her colonial past. But the way the city evolved is another story," explains artist and architect [Aïcha El Beloui](#), dedicated in her practice to highlighting forgotten and unwritten historical narratives about her city. The intense rural exodus and constant growth of its population have made Casablanca a laboratory for modern architecture – yet it was

in the fine arts. "The story of Moroccan art has been a European speciality for over half a century, a monopoly of the western science," as poet Abdellatif Laâbi wrote in *Souffles* magazine in the late 1960s. *Souffles* became a key intellectual and countercultural space of experimentation and political statements that held the hopes of a cultural revolution in Morocco.

Casa's identity today is the result of very violent frictions where everyone's trying to make it. Then it's up to you what you do with this energy. It's either crushing or inspiring.

- Aïcha El Beloui

also where the French word for slum, *bidonville*, was invented. "Casa's identity today is the result of very violent frictions where everyone's trying to make it. Then it's up to you what you do with this energy. It's either crushing or inspiring," pursues El Beloui. The real identity of the city, made by and for locals, therefore begins to be shaped in the late fifties after the end of the period of French military occupation of Morocco – an extension of the colonial regime that lasted until 1956.

## The end of a social and artistic utopia

In this vein, a radical change had also come at the School of Fine Arts, where Farid Belkahia took over in 1962. He broke free from Western perspectives and fashion, drawing inspiration from local crafts and traditional practices, integrating calligraphy or Amazigh heritage. The Casablanca School expanded to different areas of the creative scene in Morocco, bringing together a large community of artists and activists. Much of this creative energy came together in the manifest-exhibition *Présence Plastique* in 1969. *Souffles*-founders

## The new 'Casaoui' scene: looking inward

Nowadays, although the art scene is rather scattered and eclectic, artists and creatives mostly share that conflictual love-hate relationship to the city that both inspires and frustrates them. As far as Aïcha El Beloui is concerned: "Living abroad is what allowed me to see Casa differently on the daily basis. To keep a healthy relationship with the city you need to leave regularly and come back." This vision is shared by self-taught street photographer and hip-hop dancer Yassine Ismaili Alaoui, aka Yoriyas, whose gaze on Casablanca totally shifted after his first trip away for a competition. "The specificities and vibrant energy of the city I had always known, struck me. This is when I understood that our creative inspiration should come from where we come from," he says. Berlin-based curator and ifa-Gallery director Alya Sebti goes even further. "There's a tendency from our cultural institutions to look at the North like it's the only horizon, when we need to look more inwards and question what we do and where we come from." She remains admiring of the people who managed to stay but claims she'd rather love from a distance – a quintessential diasporic condition.

## Reclaiming the city's heritage

For artists like Mohamed Fariji, Hassan Darsi or Zineb Andress Arraki, creating a new narrative first comes from reclaiming the city's heritage, both tangible and intangible, and working towards its preservation. In 2002, Darsi's model of the Hermitage park, later acquired by the Centre Pompidou in Paris, shone a light on the state of abandonment of one of the very few green spaces of the city which led to its restoration in 2010. "A city should be negotiated," he claims, implying that we often take and destroy unilaterally, ironically falling into the same perverted colonial schemes of appropriation and destruction without permission.

As so many social and cultural landmarks in Casablanca are falling into oblivion, burying with them parts of history, what can artists do? The slaughterhouse of Casablanca was the first brownfield turned into a cultural space in the Arab world in 2008. Citizens and activists, including Aïcha El Beloui, who wrote her college thesis about it, tried to keep it alive through the non-profit Casamémoire, but it ultimately was left to fall into ruins due to a lack of management and institutional support.

For Zineb Andress Arraki, coming to terms with a shared past as a society first needs archiving.



Mia, Ellis, Kenza et Marina, from the series *Sweet Surrender*, 2017. Photo: Deborah Benzaquen

She resents the fact that the memory of the city is being erased as if nothing ever existed, and as if there's no proper identity. "We're tearing all our heritage down and building a new globalised architecture from scratch that has nothing to do whatsoever with our culture," she says. Her series of photographs of abandoned places is a way for her to deal with this frustration: "I want to photograph it all so that we don't forget."

Mohamed Fariji Hassan Darsi's [Collective Museum of Casablanca](#) also works on preserving the memory of the city, collecting objects and documents bound to disappear and exhibiting them in nomad and ephemeral public spaces. "It is meant to offer a shared process of creating a narrative that allows a negotiation with the city and the construction of a critical mind for its inhabitants," explains co-founder Léa Morin at a conference in 2018.

Nostalgia and will to preserve the past are also found in more abstract and poetic approaches. Take for example Deborah Benzaquen who photographed the remains of an amusement park that is incidentally the subject of the current Collective Museum's exhibition. In her latest works though, she shifts her focus to more intimate stories about misfits and marginalised people with the series *Super Héros*, and later *Sweet Surrender*, a portrait of a non-binary liberated youth.

Casablanca counts many success stories as social media empowered young creatives to get a voice and tell their own stories, offering a new, fresh and edgy perspective on a still over-folklorised country and culture.

#### From preserving material heritage to celebrating pop culture

Replacing the subject at the centre of the artistic approach is probably an essential process to rehumanise the city and let go of the scientific focus inherited by the French. Morocco's pioneer pop art artist Hassan Hajjaj was the first to play with the popular culture codes, including counterfeit goods, and to reverse the western gaze placing the people at the centre of his compositions, disrupting the codes of fashion and magazines that used cities like Marrakech solely as an exotic background. Boosted by the culture of Instagram and self-staging, fashion has been a natural way of expression for Casaoiis (inhabitants of Casablanca) for decades. Joseph Ouechen started fashion street photography in the early 2010s and managed to propel himself from the slum of Sidi Moumen to Elle Magazine. Casablanca counts many similar success stories as social media empowered young creatives to get a voice and tell their own stories, offering a new, fresh and edgy perspective on a still over-

folklorised country and culture. From the city's district Hay Mohammadi, Karim Chater, through his [@style\\_beldi feed](#) - literally: popular, traditional style-is defining the very essence of Moroccaness and what makes someone a true Casaoi. His quirky outfits and deceiving confidence got him features on GQ and Hypebeast Arabia.

#### Little magic moments

While most movies have been depicting a rather miserabilist portrait of the city for the past 20 years, these artists tend to look for the little magic moments in the cracks of the unmerciful concrete. While the roughness of Casablanca is real, they manage - sometimes with a dash of humour - to gracefully highlight what brings people together and makes the city so endearing with effortless ease. Their profound attachment to Casa led them to maybe unintentionally shape a post-colonial narrative to reclaim their city. Yoriyas's first series that made him famous was titled *Casablanca*, not the movie in an attempt to document Casa as it is here and now, for future generations to be able to look back and know what it was like to live in the biggest city of the country in the 21st century.

Although his compositions are always very thought through and might have to do with some sort of magic of the moment, his goal isn't to show Casa as pretty or ugly, but as it is. Coming from the suburbs as well, he belongs to that generation who stand for their neighbourhoods and defy classism and determinism that are directly connected to how the city was built as it mushroomed during the French protectorate. As claims Mohammed Amine Bellaoui, aka Rebel Spirit, School of Fine Arts alumni and celebrity street artist (amongst other talents): "It's the energy of the 'scary' suburbs, beyond the highway, that holds the very spirit of Casablanca." He also makes a reference to the movie in the design of his graphic novel *Le Guide Casablançais*, where he details the specificity of the Casaoi way of life, through the daily struggles of a mundane antihero.

#### The claim on public space

In other respects, street art is nowadays very far

from its subversive origins, commissioned and instrumentalised by institutions incapable of providing actual content. Whole buildings of social housing are now covered with gigantic vibrant frescos, as a way to draw the attention away from the lack of actual cultural offers, and social solutions. Cléo Marmié, who finished a PhD in sociology, explains: "Integrated into Casablanca's urban strategy and marketing, street art also participates in the country's soft power. It shows a modern and open image of the country and at the same time, the pieces lose their virulence and anti-establishment edge. As street art makes its way into art galleries, the political statements of the works get even more diluted to meet the commercial needs of the contemporary art market." As such, it has become a way to control an artistic expression that once was regarded as underground and dissident.

Therefore, one of the major stakes that artists share is the mediation with the public and the possibility to occupy and claim public space,

which is not a given in a country where freedom, not only of speech, is not always guaranteed. The times when Melehi had an open studio in a very popular neighbourhood in order to keep a constant dialogue with the viewers are over, but the need for genuine connections and open dialogues is pressing more than ever. For instance, in the exhibition *Ce qui s'oublie et ce qui reste*, curated by Meriem Berrada from the MACAAL at the Museum of Migration in Paris during the Cultural Season African 2020, the viewer is repeatedly made aware of their responsibility towards the narratives that are being presented to them, mobilising them into the duty of memory and conservation of the works. A heavy burden to carry for a population in Casablanca that is still too often in survival mode and has no tools and no art education due to a lack of plans from the government, despite some institutions' efforts.



Karim Chater, also known as [@style\\_beldi](#)

Sixty years after the Casablanca School, a research residency led by independent curator Fatim Zahra Lakhri and supported by local and foreign private institutions aims to reflect upon the heritage of the movement through a contemporary prism. It combines on the one hand archiving, valuing, and reviving the immense body of works of the Casablanca School era, and on the other hand creating and exhibiting new material as a natural extension of what was once the dream of a generation. Maybe a final cathartic act of reconciliation?

*Chama Tahiri Ivorra is a creative director, producer, and journalist based in Casablanca and Paris. She wrote this article ahead of the opening of the exhibition *The Other Story*, curated by Abdelkader Benali in the CoBRA Museum in Amstelveen. Many of the artists mentioned in this article were exhibited in this important ensemble of Moroccan modernism. The exhibition lasted from 14 April until 18 September 2022 and was made possible with the support of DutchCulture.*

# Portrait: how Iris Kramer's ArchAI is breaking new ground in archaeology

**Rather than digging in the mud, future archaeologists will work from behind their computer using satellite imagery to detect archaeological sites.** BY JACOMINE HENDRIKSE



*Iris Kramer (1993) is the founder of ArchAI, a company that uses artificial intelligence (AI)\* and satellite imagery to detect, alert and monitor archaeological sites. Compared to traditional archaeology, this way of working is ground-breaking. Born in the Netherlands, based in Southampton but travelling the world, Iris spends considerable time educating the field about the advantages offered by this technology. Overall, it's faster, more accurate and more sustainable.*

## Inspired by self-driving cars

Iris Kramer obtained her Bachelor's degree in archaeology at Leiden University. She continued studying for a Master's degree in archaeological computing, for which she moved to the University of Southampton. At that time, she was deeply interested in self-driving cars and their use of AI and became intrigued by the thought that the same technology could perhaps be used in archaeology. For her Master's thesis she explored the current state of research on automated detection for archaeology and found out that it was very limited. But if self-driving cars can take to the road, then that same technology should certainly be usable for archaeology, Kramer argued.

## Using AI for archaeology

"I discovered that AI is already being used in geography to detect landslides. Just like any archaeological site, every landslide is unique each time they occur. This inspired me to create the same kind of technology for my Master's thesis, aimed at detecting burial mounds in landscapes. First by telling the computer what to look for, and then to have the computer train itself, like the deep learning in self-driving cars. The computer

## Iris Kramer, founder of ArchAI

learns from the variations between the burial mounds and internally creates patterns to find other burial mounds, adapting to new landscapes. That was much more exciting than simply telling it what to look for, because it reached much higher accuracies!"

## Coding course

After receiving her Master's degree, Kramer took a coding course in Amsterdam. "It was kind of a coding course for unsuccessful young professionals that wanted to change their career because they couldn't find a job. I didn't have a job because I had just finished my Master's and wanted to develop AI technology. I learned how to code in three months and used that knowledge to apply for PhD positions." Eventually, she started as a PhD student in deep learning for the detection of archaeological sites on earth observation data at the University of Southampton, where she could further develop the technology. "A couple of years in, I asked myself: what am I going to do with this

technology once I finish my PhD? In an academic setting you always need to publish, while for me it would be much more useful to discover archaeology nationally and internationally and to create a team." Towards the end of her PhD in early 2020, she thus founded ArchAI. With the help of business accelerators and the prestigious Royal Academy of Engineering enterprise fellowship, she was able to obtain the necessary funding and the knowledge of advanced engineers and business experts.

## Market education

The technology of using satellite imagery and artificial intelligence is so novel in the field of archaeology that wherever Kramer comes, she needs to explain what it is. People are suspicious of AI or fear they will lose their jobs. By speaking to lots of people and visiting many different conferences, she is making more and more people

aware of the benefits of using satellite imagery to detect archaeological sites. "The realisation that you can do this very successfully using satellite imagery instead of with airplanes is a whole shift in the mindset of archaeologists," Kramer says.

Among the first customers was the National Trust in the UK, for who ArchAI digitised orchards in historical landscapes based on maps from the 1900s. Without much effort, ArchAI was able to do this at a national level with the help of AI, thereby replacing the work of countless volunteers for years. The project was reported in [The Guardian](#) and the resulting data set will be made freely available for research.

For England's Forestry Commission, ArchAI investigated the patterns of medieval ploughing that are still traceable in the landscape in the form of earthworks, basically "small humps and bumps", using LiDAR data. LiDAR, also known as Airborne Laser Scanning, is a revolutionary technology that creates a 3D-model of the landscape and can reveal archaeological earthworks, even those hidden underneath tree canopy, bringing to light even small humps and bumps. By using this technology, ArchAI helped the Forestry Commission decide where they could plant new trees or which areas should be protected for archaeological research. By the width of ridge and furrow, ArchAI could even detect whether they were made by a medieval plough or a more modern steam plough.

## Increasing awareness of the past

ArchAI's technology can be used for different purposes, from development-led archaeology (researching possible archaeological traces on construction sites, which reduces the risk of destruction and costs) to detecting and monitoring archaeology and possible threats like coastal erosion. "The ultimate goal is to increase people's awareness that archaeological sites are all around us and that our past is important," Kramer says. "Only when you know where archaeological findings or historic features are located, you can protect these landscapes. Or, in the case of destroyed landscapes, we can show where hedgerows and ponds used to be, so that the landscape can be recreated with a historical perspective, which is better for wildlife and nature. So basically, we are improving the environment by applying a historical perspective."

Take for example the hedgerows in the United Kingdom. "Roughly a century ago, most of the hedgerows between the fields were taken out in order to create fields on a larger scale. These hedges were very important for insects and birds. The country now wants to put the hedges back, but in their historical location. So people need to know where the hedges were, but even though they disappeared only a century ago, that knowledge has been lost. With ArchAI, we want to play a role in restoring the landscapes to a more human size again, reducing the scale and creating a nice symbiosis between humans and animals."



The future of cultural heritage lies in earth observation.

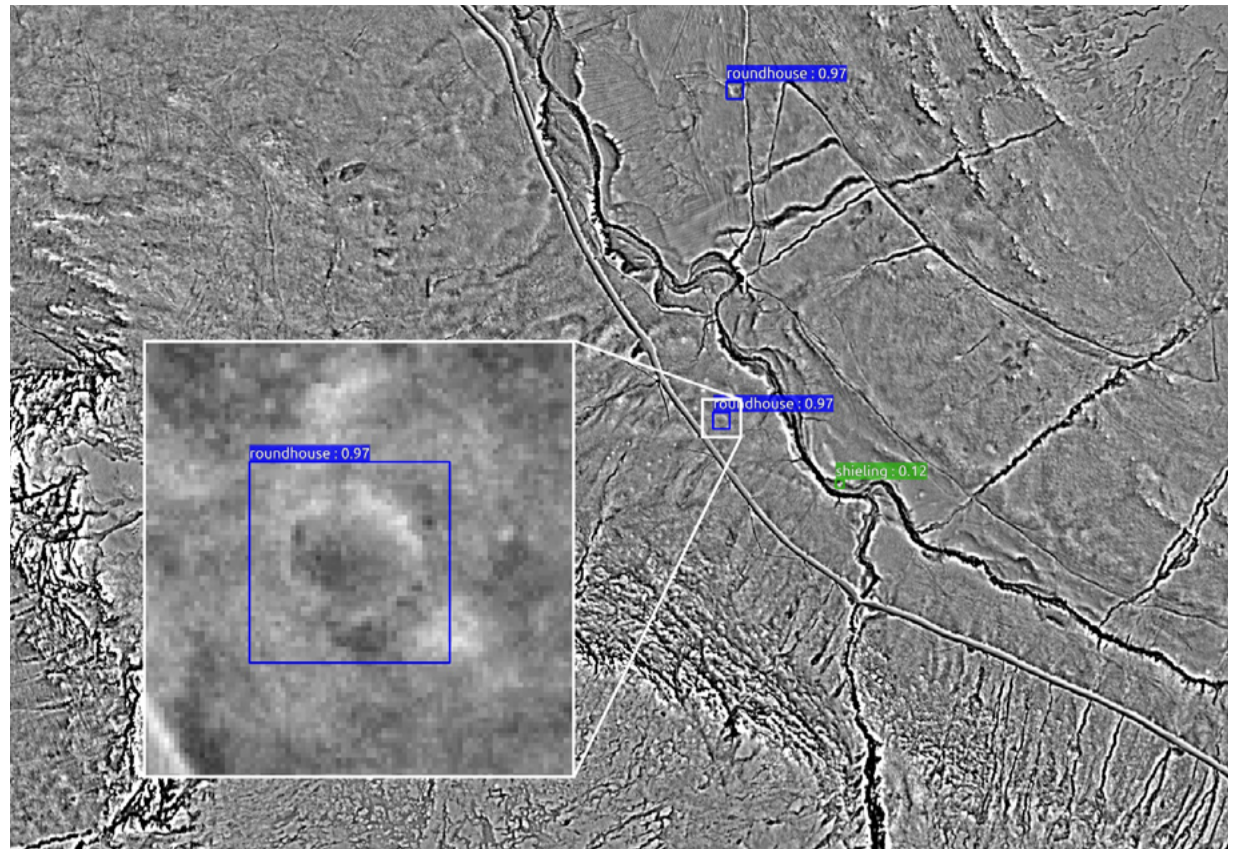
### Archaeologist, entrepreneur or computer scientist

Kramer has hired one fulltime employee at ArchAI, tasked with further developing the computer science side, so that she can concentrate on the business development side. When asked if she feels more an archaeologist, entrepreneur and/or a computer scientist, Kramer replies: "A bit of everything. I find it really exciting to constantly change hats. In London, I'm an entrepreneur. When I go back to Southampton, I feel like a computer scientist and an entrepreneur. But whenever I'm online and on Zoom and in conferences, I mostly feel like an archaeologist."

Changing hats also applies to the role Kramer plays among the people she meets. "On the one hand, I am an early career researcher who feels connected with other young researchers. On the other hand, I have conversations with policy makers and business owners. Sometimes, I have to ask stupid questions, and people will think I'm really young. As long as I'm not too embarrassed about it, and as long as I get the answer I need for ArchAI, it can be worth making a fool out of myself. I'm here for ArchAI, and I'm here for archaeology. It's not a burden but it's definitely a responsibility that I carry for the company. I also care about our employee and consultants."

### Fieldwork

"Fieldwork is a really fun part of archaeology that I haven't done at all for many years now. But I'm constantly looking at archaeological sites from behind the screen instead of on the ground, so it feels like a kind of fieldwork. I can often see more on the screen than in the field. Small elevation details of half a meter, which are almost certainly overlooked when you are in the field or in a forest, are visible on the screen. When you are in the field you can walk across an archaeological site without even noticing it. The site might be very big so you can't see the full extent, and the vegetation might disorient you," she explains.



A LiDAR image showing object detection results on the Isle of Arran, Scotland, with a highlighted detection and certainty score of a roundhouse. This location was previously disregarded in a field survey, but the AI detections has re-opened the discussion and the experts now agree with the AI classification. Photo: ArchAI

"One of the market education parts is that a LiDAR image can sometimes be enough, you don't need the fieldwork. Most archaeologists today still want to go out in the field, but the data don't lie. In one day we can look at a much bigger area or even examine other dimensions (like elevation differences) from behind our computers. Plus, it takes much less time than travelling to an archaeological site."

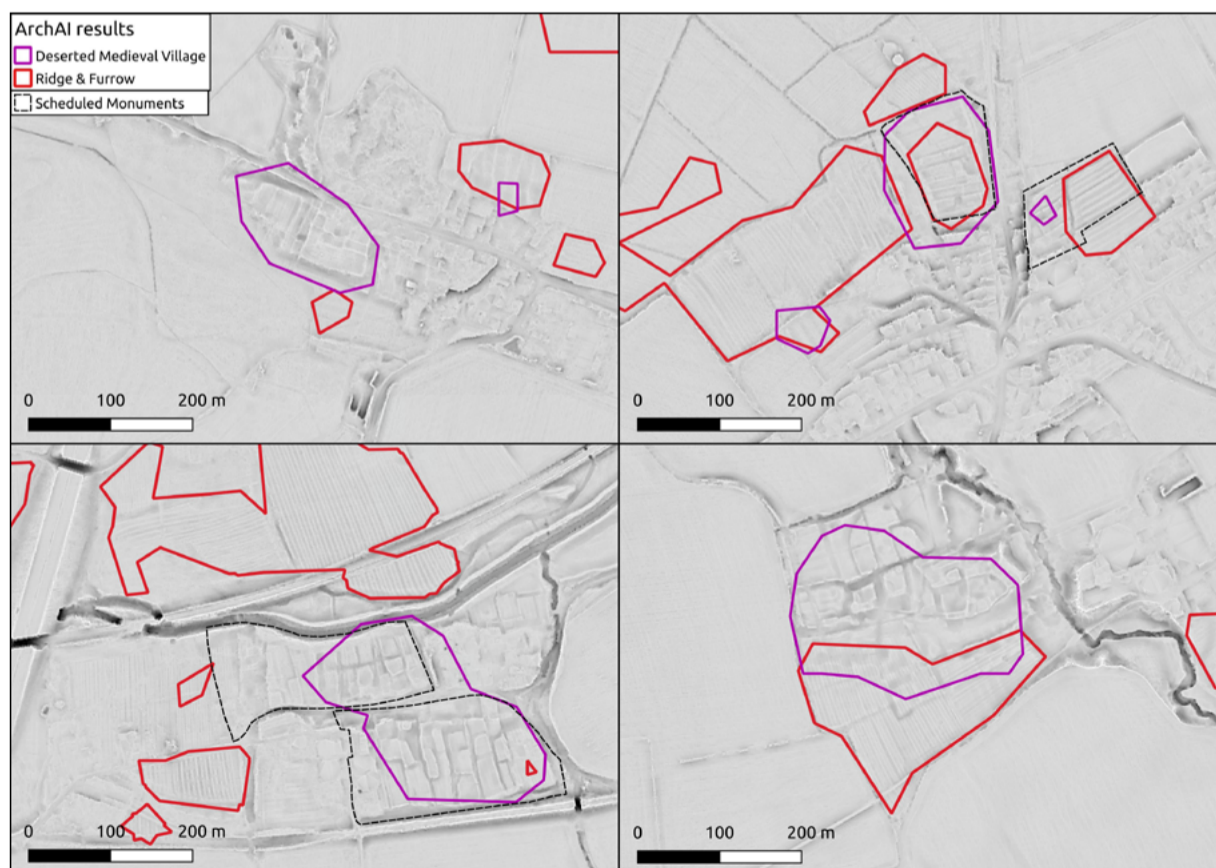
Kramer doesn't rule out fieldwork completely: "There's definitely still a place for doing fieldwork, especially for doing further geophysics and excavations. You can work more specifically: digging up things can be precisely targeted, more specified."

### Earth observation is the future

Kramer is now looking at how ArchAI can expand its market internationally. From a project in the Mayan area in Mexico she learned that AI works

internationally as well. "The future of cultural heritage lies in earth observation," she says. "It is not great for the climate to be going out into the field to dig up things. When we use earth observation data that is already there, there is so much that you can capture from that. Satellites are not expensive compared to using airplanes that fly specifically for the purpose of taking pictures, and they are becoming more and more available. There are very frequent fly-overs, some once every seven days, and some satellites take an image every day at a really high resolution. There is so much potential for the future, but as archaeologists we don't have the skills yet. We have to address the skills gap."

She continues: "We are not just thinking about detecting archaeology, there is so much more potential for using satellite imagery for monitoring and alerting: looting, animal burrowing, climate change in cliff erosion, detecting historic features on historic maps and combining everything. It's a lot of unrealised potential – for others to explore as well. It's really exciting, and it's almost easy since there is so much low-hanging fruit!"



A LiDAR image showing image segmentation results of ridge and furrow earthworks (medieval ploughing remains) and deserted medieval villages in England. Photo: ArchAI

\*Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Brittanica.com defines artificial intelligence as the ability of a digital computer or computer-controlled robot to perform tasks commonly associated with intelligent beings (like humans or animals, ed.). The term is frequently applied to the project of developing systems endowed with the intellectual processes characteristic of humans, such as the ability to reason, discover meaning, generalize, or learn from past experience.

# The impact of Nowaks in the Polish art scene

**Artists from both Belarus and Ukraine are shaping Polish artistic practices and society's attitudes on migrants at large.** BY KAROLINA PLINTA

*Editor's note: This article was written on 7 March 2022. The massive uptake of migration caused by the war on Ukraine will have a lasting effect on Polish society, and by extension, its cultural life. The number of Ukrainians in Poland has risen dramatically since the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. On 25 October 2022, according to the UNHCR, 7.7 million Ukrainian refugees are recorded across Europe, of which 1.4 million in Poland.*

WARSAW. The art scene in Poland has undergone a significant evolution in recent years thanks to young artists, who to be more politically involved than their predecessors, and its sensitivity seems to be a response to the hostile political context in which it has developed.

## Opposition

Since the right-wing party Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) took power in Poland in 2015, nationalist and xenophobic tendencies have been growing in the country. Young artists feel that they must oppose them, which is reflected in numerous actions, initiated, for example, by groups such as the Consortium of Post-Artistic Practices.

Another important element that deconstructs conservative discourses and influences the shape of the Polish art scene is the increasing migration of artists to Poland from other countries – in recent years mainly from Belarus and Ukraine. Their presence significantly sensitised the local art scene to the situation of neighbouring countries, influenced our attitude towards migrants, and revealed the colonial clichés that rule the Polish imagination.

I got hate for the fact that, as an immigrant from Ukraine, I dare to change the Polish language.

- Yulia Krivich

Importantly, this is rather a new phenomenon. Until recently, the Polish artistic community was quite closed and self-centred. Only city galleries operating in the eastern part of the country, such as Galeria Arsenał in Białystok or Galeria Labirynt in Lublin, tried to work with artists from across the eastern border to a greater extent. The situation changed with the increasing economic migration of people from Ukraine and Belarus to the centre of Poland, which started in 2014. This phenomenon slowly began to be noticed in the art scene. For example, the [10th edition of the Warsaw Under Construction festival](#) (2018), organised by the Museum of Modern Art, was held under the slogan Neighbors, and its co-organisers were curators from the Center for Research on Visual Culture in Kyiv. In 2019, the exhibition [Foreign artists living in Poland](#) was held as part of the Biennale Warszawa, curated by Janek Simon. It was an important gesture that became an impulse for further actions.



**A Solidarity protest by Jana Shostak and other Belarusian women next to the seat of the European Commission representation in Warsaw, June 2021. Photo: Jakub Jasiukiewicz**

## Foreign artist

In 2020, Ukrainian artists Yuriy Biley and Yulia Krivich, and Belarusian curator Vera Zalutskaya, members of ZA\*Group created [ZA\\*ZIN](#) dedicated to foreign artists living in Poland – ZA stands for Zagraniczni Artyst, meaning foreign artists. The aim of this publication was to problematise the experience of migration and the life of migrants in Poland. ZA\*ZIN also acts as a guide for migrants and is a place where foreign artists can share their experiences. Through their activities, the founders of ZA\*ZIN also want to combat prejudices against migrants in Poland. Migrants from Ukraine or Belarus are most often perceived as cheap labour. However, they are often highly qualified people such as doctors, nurses, technical specialists and finally artists, educated in good academies in their home countries. They often come to Poland permanently and co-create Polish society, in spite of nationalist narratives. "This country is changing, people of different nationalities come, they are new Poles. In our project, we are talking about Poland, which is changing on many levels," [says Yuriy Biley](#), describing the ZA\*ZIN mission.

## Linguistic stigma

The importance of changing the attitude of Poles towards migrants was demonstrated by the action *W Ukrainie* (In Ukraine) by Ukrainian photographer and artist Yulia Krivich in 2019. As part of the action, Krivich went to the West Railway Station in Warsaw – the end station of many Ukrainians traveling to Warsaw – with a flag with the words "In Ukraine". There she took a symbolic photo of herself, later published on the internet. She repeated her actions in Wrocław, where she handed out stickers with the words "In Ukraine". By this action, Krivich wanted to draw attention to pronouns that are used in Polish in relation to Ukraine. When describing events in Ukraine, Poles usually use the pronoun *na* (i.e. *na Ukrainie*, meaning on Ukraine), which is a reminiscence of the times when the territory of Ukraine was part

of the Kingdom of Poland. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, some linguists have started to use the preposition *w* in relation to Ukraine to emphasise its independence, but this is not a common practice. Krivich's actions, disseminated by the media, gave rise to a public debate that still arouses emotions today.

"I got hate for the fact that, as an immigrant from Ukraine, I dare to change the Polish language. The holy Polish language is like John Paul II," comments Krivich. Despite these controversies, the phrase *In Ukraine* is becoming more and more common in Polish media and in everyday use. Krivich's appeal to emphasise the independence of Ukraine in linguistic form is particularly relevant in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Not only Krivich tried to work through problematic phrases and terms in Polish. In 2017, Belarus artist Jana Shostak launched the media campaign *nowacy* by introducing the word *nowak* (a homonym of one of the most popular surnames in Poland, derived from the words *new* or *newcomer*) to the public space as an alternative word for refugee. Shostak popularised the term on television, the internet and radio, gaining a lot of media exposure. In order to promote the idea of *nowaks*, she also took part in local beauty contests – she even won the title of vice miss of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship. She documented this in the film *Miss Polonia*, produced together with Jakub Jasiukiewicz. The term *nowaks* has not caught on in everyday Polish so far, but the Shostak campaign drew attention to the problem of linguistic stigma.

## Fuck the system

Thanks to her determination, Shostak also managed to become the voice of the Belarusian community in Poland. In 2020, she actively involved in anti-government protests in Belarus. In Poland, she initiated the action *A minute of screaming for Belarus*. In May 2021, after Roman Pietrasiewicz

was arrested by the Belarusian authorities, Shostak appeared in a white and red dress during a press conference at the Belarusian embassy in Warsaw and started screaming terrifyingly. Her protest received wide media coverage, not only because of the scream itself, but also because she was not wearing a bra under her white top. The artist decided to take advantage of this moral controversy: in order to draw attention to companies related to the Lukashenko regime, she wrote their names and logos on her own chest, like a tattoo. Other people, mostly women, joined her protest.

Shostak also tries to defend the rights of Belarusians living in Poland. For example, at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, Poland stopped issuing tourist visas for Belarusians. Even after the sanitary regime was relaxed, this did not change. On 8 September 2022, during the meeting of Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki with the leader of the Belarusian opposition Swiatłana Cichanouska, Shostak decided to shout at the Prime Minister to draw his attention to the problem of visas. Thanks to her protest, Poland has been re-issuing tourist visas to Belarusians since 17 September 2021. Shostak's actions may evoke associations with the actions of Russian actionists such as Petr Pavlensky or Pussy Riot but distinguishes herself by trying to act legally. "It's not hard to fuck the system, the trick is to manoeuvre it legally, seemingly being polite and obedient," [she says](#).

This country is changing, people of different nationalities come, they are new Poles.  
- Yuriy Biley

As Shostak explains, it is important for her to hack the patriarchal system from the inside. She describes his strategy as 'WTF activism', by which she means using unconventional tools to draw attention to problems. This kind of activism is followed by other artists. Take for example the charity calendar #dekolt dla białorusi (Neckline for Belarus) by the Laski collective. Female Polish artists and celebrities posed for the calendar without bras with cute kittens on their shoulders. Why? Because nothing draws more attention than boobs and cats. Sales profits of the project are donated to the families of Belarusian political prisoners.

Shostak is recognised in Poland for her activism. In January 2022, the Polityka magazine awarded her with the prestigious Polityka Passports award in the visual arts category (ex aequo with artist Mikołaj Sobczak). The artist appeared at the awards gala wearing a dress with images of 1,200 prisoners of the Lukashenko regime. In her own country, Shostak is on terrorist lists. In numerous interviews, she admits that activism is very exploitative, and she often feels exhausted. Despite this, she does not quit. Currently, she is one of the members of the informal and underground activist group Partyzantka, consisting of Belarusian women (recently also Polish women) operating in Warsaw. At this point, they help nowaks fleeing the war in Ukraine.

**Supporting immigrants and refugees**

Despite the increasing number of people migrating to Poland, the country does not have a substantial migration policy. The widespread prejudice against

migrants, especially those of dark skin colour and originating from Arab countries, is also a big problem. This was painfully demonstrated by the humanitarian crisis on the border between Belarus and the European Union, which has been going on since the summer of 2021. For this reason, more and more Polish artists are becoming sensitive to the needs and situation of migrants in Poland. Polish artist and activist Pamela Bożek is a good example. Since 2018, Pamela Bożek has been cooperating with people staying at the Centre for Foreigners in the city of Łuków close to Warsaw, organising workshops and aid campaigns. She is the founder of the project-collective Notebooks from Łuków, which is working together with the residents of the Centre in Łuków: Zaira Avtaeva, Zalina Tavgereeva, Liana Borczaszvilli, Makka Visengereeva, Khava Bashanova, and Ajna Malcagova. They produce blank notebooks – stationery items for sale, of which the profits support migrants who are waiting with their families to be granted international protection. Bożek is also the publisher and editor of the zine Wiza-Vis, co-created by refugees in Poland. Together with artists Ala Savashevich and Iwona Ogrodzka, she forms the Bezgraniczna Pomoc group, which organises art auctions, aimed at supporting people with migrant and refugee backgrounds in Poland.

It seems that not only artists, but also institutions are beginning to realise the importance of the problems of increasing migration and the value of alliances based on empathy and transnational solidarity. In 2020, as part of the 12th edition of the Warsaw Under Construction festival, artist Taras Gembik and educator Maria Beburia founded the Blyzkist group (*blyzkist* can be translated as proximity). Blyzkist operates at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw and is an initiative that aims to research the needs of the Ukrainian and Belarusian communities in Warsaw. After Russia's attack on Ukraine, when many refugees began arriving in the Polish capital, Blyzkist took the form of an aid initiative: people involved in the group's activities collect medicines, distribute sandwiches, hot meals, and hygiene products to aid centres, night shelters and information points in Warsaw train stations. Blyzkist is about to evolve into a community centre for people needing help.

A few days after the Russian invasion in Ukraine on 24 February 2022, I spoke with Asia Tsisiar, a young Ukrainian curator working in Poland at the Katarzyna Kozyra Foundation. She was touched by the help Poles are offering to Ukrainians at this critical time.

"Poland is now like one big Lviv," she said, referring to the fact that Lviv is now a refugee centre for people fleeing Western Ukraine.

However, I am not sure who should be thankful – them or us. Who is really saving whom? From

In the case of the Polish art scene, the Rubicon has been crossed. Now, we cannot take back the hand we have given to our brothers and sisters from abroad.

my perspective, migrants (or nowaks) are the real change that forces Polish society to re-evaluate. Thanks to artists from abroad coming to Poland, especially from Ukraine and Belarus, the Polish artistic community had to wake up from its own, not fully realised, nationalist dream and learn empathy and solidarity. We are, of course, at the



**1280 (2022)**, a dress made in cooperation with RISK made in Warsaw, based on the Infinity Dress model. The woven pattern is consisting portraits of 1280 political prisoners of the Lukashenko regime. Photo: Jakub Jasiukiewicz

beginning of this process. I don't know how long the enthusiasm for solidarity in Poland will last. Another problem is the segregation of migrants. While refugees from Ukraine are welcome in Poland, refugees of a different nationality or of non-white skin colour are not. But in the case of the Polish art scene, the Rubicon has been crossed. Now, we cannot take back the hand we have given to our brothers and sisters from abroad.

Karolina Plinta is an art critic, deputy editor-in-chief of the magazine *Szum*, member of The International Association of Art Critics AICA. She lives in Warsaw and Szczecin, Poland.



**Action In Ukraine**, at the Western Railway Station in Warsaw (bus station, which is the first stop for Ukrainian travelers coming to Warsaw), 2019. Photo: Yulia Krivich

# Portrait: *Indisch Zwijgen* takes shape in Swiss theatres

The short film *Indisch Zwijgen (Indo's Silence)* premiered on 6 May 2022. It makes audiences reflect on a collective aphasia experienced by many Dutch-Indonesian families. Co-director Sven Peetoom spoke about the coming together of *Making Memories*, a theatrical spin-off of the film that he made in Switzerland.

BY SIMON DE LEEUW

In *Indisch Zwijgen*, filmmakers Sven Peetoom and Juliette Dominicus follow three third-generation Dutch-Indonesian young artists who delve into their own family history. The three process their research in three new works of art in which they express what it means to them to be Indo today. In a documentary, they follow spoken-word artist Amara van der Elst (known for her reading during the Remembrance Day in the Netherlands on 4 May), DJ and visual artist Mei Oele, and filmmaker Juliette Dominicus.

**Could you tell about the origin of the documentary, what caused you to investigate these family histories?**

"The documentary all started with my grandfather – who passed away some time ago. I felt such an urge to investigate who he was and what his life was like. I found out that I really did not know anything about what he had done in Indonesia. This started a very personal quest – it was still far from being a movie – but then after speaking to my father, I found out that he didn't really know that much either. I found it so strange that you can live with a man who's been through all kinds of things, for he had scars and fits of anger. It was obvious there was something that we couldn't get to grips with, but there was this deafening silence around his history. So I started interviewing other Dutch-Indonesian people. It turned out that a lot of second or third-generation Indonesians knew almost nothing about life there – the term *Indisch Zwijgen* appeared more and more. I found that extremely interesting. There is a whole history that is so collectively hushed up, what is behind it?"

"I pitched the idea to a producer I knew, who said: 'your idea is kind of vague,' but then she came back two days later and said there's someone who's thinking about doing the same. I thought "huh!?" – then sometimes a little voice goes and says: oh no! somebody else is going to do this too, she's taking my idea! That was Juliette Dominicus, who went on to become the co-director of the film. And when we spoke, it turned out that we wanted to do exactly the same thing. Let's go do it together. Then followed two years of pitching everywhere we could pitch – the Dutch Film Festival, Vice, Cinesud – everywhere and nowhere – and we got a lot of "no" back. In the end, we decided to produce it ourselves through crowdfunding. We brought in €12.000 and received support from the Prince Bernhard Cultuurfonds, Amarte Fonds, and ZOZ fonds so that we could do it ourselves. So in that period we also threw out a lot of lines to blogs and such – and in particular, one called [Indisch4ever](#) – a webpage that's a bit of an online relic from the early 2000s, but still quite well visited. Someone had put down a press release about *Indo's Silence* on there."



Sven Peetoom. Photo: Moritz Schermbach

"So there came Sebastian Gisi from Switzerland who was making a play about his grandmother, and the silence hidden inside her stories. She would talk about history as if it was made up of adventure comics, telling stories of tiger hunts and snakes falling into pools – which were always a bit too surreal to be truthful. Sebastian's grandmother lived in the Dutch East Indies but has no Indo roots. He received some justified criticism for his draft of the piece because his stories only came from the coloniser's perspective. Then he was researching the internet on his laptop, and just by chance came across me and my crowdfunding page on the blog [Indisch4ever](#). He came to me through that site, and then we Zoomed. There was an instant click. I was already in the middle of the movie's production, and he had already done a lot of research himself. He wanted to add my perspective to the performance and that there was more of an Indo viewpoint. At first, he suggested I get called into the theatre via Zoom during the performance. Then he came to

the Netherlands and I met with the entire crew. When they were here, I went off on a tirade about everything I felt and found, an hour-long rambling monologue about the Dutch East Indies and everything I thought of the play."

**What do you mean when you say tirade? Is there a layer of frustration too?**

"I feel a lot of wonder and frustration about the facts that have happened, for example about slavery in the Indies. And the United East India Company VOC (1602-1799) was the largest company in the world. Nothing has ever surpassed that, the trillions of dollars they made off the backs of all kinds of people. My amazement and annoyance at what happened there, and who my grandfather was in it, is a very strange combination. The Dutch are the colonisers of course, but there was a huge in-between societal layer of a mix of natives and Dutch, to which he belonged. I think I expressed that fascination and those mixed emotions through my long ramble. And they were clearly impressed somehow."

**So then did Sebastian propose to make a play together?**

"Sebastian was already making it his theatre version, it was literally in the scaffolds (the scaffolds play an important role in the

There's this whole history that is so collectively hushed up, what is behind it all?  
- Sven Peetoom

scenography ed.) and he was finding the right shapes to structure his research. I, representing the voice of a Dutch-Indonesian person, was a bit of a missing ingredient.

The director of the play Anne-Kathrine Münnich and Sebastian called me at one point. After a while, they thought it would be fantastic if I came to Basel. We still had to develop the role. I initially would be doing some live camera work; I am a filmmaker and have done a lot of camera work. But there is also room for more interaction. I was able to also tell a story. We slowly figured out that I also had to say things. I've thought about that because it's actually outside my field. Every hour I spend on this, I don't spend on a movie. Difficult choice, but then I thought: I started with the idea of one film, but now I notice that the subject is much too big. I'm going to make different movies and different things. But with one film alone I am not going to grasp the multiplicity of this subject. *Indo's Silence*, of course, the film has gone in a certain direction, about third-generation kids and the silence in their families. But the play is more about family history than a personal story about the search for grandparents. The impossibility of knowing this history, but at the same time everything you encounter, and the change from victim to perpetrator, and everything in between. And also my own role in this whole history.

So Sebastian eventually just said: 'come to the theatre,' ([Roxy](#), in Birsfelden, Basel ed.), and lo and behold, now I have an apartment in the theatre, I walk down the stairs and hop on stage just like that. It was paid, and it was all well... yes, that's the adventure of life again; to work with an international crew, with German and Swiss people. And I just really want to tell the story, that tirade is now taking form on stage. Since I've been here, my

role has grown into an equal co-performer. We are both performing and playing. And Sebastian, as a dancer, involves a lot of movement, but it's the personal stories that bring everything together."

**As a filmmaker, what does the theatre allow you to express or do?**

"Fortunately, I am not afraid of all that audience, but it remains exciting of course. In theatre it is a snapshot – in film, you can do everything over and over and now everything has to be done in one go. Wham! You have to speak and then you're there all of a sudden.

The first thing that comes to mind that's completely different from my usual practice is that personal, direct contact with the audience, is directly the place to tell stories. There is literally room to move, it scares you when something falls over. You also want this effect in film, this physical direct aspect, but you succeed much less often. Film as a genre is a bit more structured, you have to take the audience more on a certain journey that has been mapped out and theatre can be a bit more abstract. The theatre crowd is a little more used to being more abstract.

What's more: direct feedback from people whether they find it exciting or dull when they have to laugh or sigh, you can immediately respond to it, because it is a flexible medium. The film is already there, like a kind of sculpture. Our theatre director also tells me: 'Sven, if you're tired, or you find it exciting or weird, use that especially in your playing and in the piece!' Real emotions that are directly seen by the audience. Every now and then, I have to laugh on stage if I think something is crazy if I make a mistake or something. That works very well, and it's unlike film where you try to make everything final and definitive."

**What has been the added value of the international dimension of this experience?**

"In Switzerland, there's something called The Free Scene, that's what Sebastian is part of. It's basically carried by smaller theatres and is also much more improvisational, while the Swiss state theatre is more traditional. So our process was like fishing for ideas in a pond. We were experimenting and looking for building blocks for the piece, which was quite a new process for me. In the film, I actually know in advance what the scenario will be. For films, I am making all kinds of plans, and I am mainly eliminating surprises, you have to know 'what' you are going to find. I found it very liberating that I could work from the unknown. It has become completely different from what we rehearsed a month ago, completely different. It developed on a sense of trial and error, rather than rationally. I liked this, but it was also frustrating. My filmmaker brain sometimes goes like: this is act 1, 2, 3, and then the actors and director looked at me and said: 'can you say that again? What?' There's this bit of Dutch efficiency in me, and I sometimes clashed with them, but I could also take on that role in terms of clarity: 'why are we doing this?' On the other hand, I have also become charmed by playing while searching, which I have not experienced before in any of my other creative manifestations.

I have read the funding plan for the theatre piece, and it's basically a plan that only has the research questions and the purpose described. I hope film funds would do the same, leaving a little more room for openness, not to know what it's going to be yet. I think it would be great if I could make a film like this. More risk, I think, leads to the more exciting theatre, it arises instead of you inventing it."



Still from *Making Memories*. Photo: Moritz Schermbach

Sven Peetoom and Sebastian Gisi have completed a tour of *Making Memories* in various theatres in Switzerland and Germany in 2022. The documentary *Indisch Zwijgen* is screened in cinemas across the Netherlands.

# | Young artists in Paramaribo making a name for themselves

**Although some of the young Surinamese artists have limited or no access to professional education, it doesn't stop them from pursuing their dreams.** BY AUDRY ROLETTI-WAJWAKANA

PARAMARIBO. "Suriname seems a bit limited in terms of opportunities, but that shouldn't stop you from pursuing your talents. Especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, I started using more social media to be seen," says video director Shellen Arga (23). The massive developments in technology and digital fields have sparked a notable trend worldwide over the last two decades. Many young people, especially in Suriname, are involved in various art forms. Does it automatically mean that it is easier for this generation of young creatives to collaborate and pursue their passion? How do they deal with the challenges that come their way, such as a lack of formal education? These questions are answered by some rising young artists in their twenties from different disciplines striving to make a name for themselves.

## Creative Development

There are various private organisations that stimulate creative and artistic development among children and youngsters through creativity labs in the various neighbourhood centres. However, this is not yet sufficiently accessible to all young people, particularly those from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Still, this doesn't stop many from discovering and further developing their talents, such as urban dancer Travis Nandalall (27). I find him in [CoD@nCo](#), a well-known dance studio in North Paramaribo, where he is practising with another dancer. The exercise is interrupted for the interview.

where I was allowed to attend lessons by foreign trainers." Now he also gives dance lessons to children. He develops and participates in various art projects and events through the studio. He is also connected to [@TeamMMPROD](#), a group of individuals who are each on their own journey but are bound by a mutual passion to create.

dance schools had to shut their doors, Nandalall continued to exercise with Panamanian dance trainer Joel Cordoba, who was stranded in Suriname following the outbreak of the pandemic. However, Joeroeja, who has been in the fashion business for seven years and has won several fashion awards, admits that she misses the whole

Suriname seems a bit limited in terms of opportunities, but that shouldn't stop you from pursuing your talents.

- Shellen Arga

## Self-study

Like Arga and Nandalall, fashion designer Meredith Joeroeja (25), visual artist Winston Vola (26) and musician Shavero Ferrier have immersed themselves in their passion through self-study. Others went to formal art schools, like Maggie Peneux (23) who completed her four-year study at the [Nola Hatterman Art Academy](#) in 2020. Her friend Fabio Nojoredjo, who completed his art education in the same year, assisted the well-known artist André Sontosoemarto (60) in various projects. As one of the few and older generation street artists, Sontosoemarto wants to retire – but not before transferring his knowledge and experience of street art to young people. Peneux and her friend

energy of fashion shows and travel. "But you can't keep focusing on something you can't change, otherwise you'll get stuck. I just continued in what gives me pleasure: creating. My motivation is to always work on improvement," she says. During the pandemic, the fashion designer shifted her focus to photography to create more content for her social media platforms. For her latest collection *Sunset*, launched in early February 2022, she photographed the models herself. She also did a fifteen-minute behind-the-collection video. She finds her inspiration in nature and her culture. Joeroeja is a mix of Afro-Surinamese and indigenous descent, which is reflected in her unique designs. Having built up a strong network in recent years, for the past three years she has been able to share her knowledge by giving workshops to indigenous and Maroon women in the country's inlands. International funds finance these training courses.

You can't keep focusing on something you can't change, otherwise you'll get stuck.

- Meredith Joeroeja

## Collaborations

For artist Vola, art is a form of meditation. Alongside his studies in architecture, he has developed an artistic practice in painting and graphic design. Before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, he had also expanded his creativity by launching the fashion design brand [Makandi](#). *Makandi* is a Saramaccan (a Maroon community in the interior of Suriname) word meaning 'together'. "An outsider who enters the village will always receive a warm welcome," explains Vola. *Makandi* is a cultural translation of helping each other, which he experienced in his native village and brought to the city. For his fashion designs, he uses tembe art, typical for the Maroon tribes: geometric patterns in artistic expressions with specific meanings, used as motifs on doors, combs, cloths, but also on calabashes. He prints these patterns on calabash bags and T-shirts, as well as his own graphic designs. By promoting art products from other creatives on his social media under the *Makandi*



The band members of Luguber, from left to right: Shavero Ferrier, Akeem Smith en Regillio Padma. Authors: Jomara Roletti. Photo: Jomara Roletti

"Dance is more than a hobby for me. I really enjoy it and want to make it a full-time profession," says Nandalall. He discovered his passion for dance around the age of eleven when hip-hop, dancehall, breakdance and other urban dance styles became popular, and formed a dance group with friends. They followed the moves of older dancers or copied them from music videos, where they made it their own through various dance battles and events. "When I got a little older, I came into contact with the dance family of CoD@nCo

were eventually accepted by the senior artist as his protégés. "Despite the financial-economic situation in our country and the pandemic, things are going surprisingly well for us. André is a good teacher and friend," she says. Peneux is grateful for his professional guidance; everything she learns from him helps build a strong foundation to continue as an artist.

Surprisingly, the Covid-19 pandemic did not influence the artists that much. Even though



Collection **Sunset** by Surinamese fashion designer Meredith Joeroeja. Photo: Brian Sloote

brand, he hopes to build a platform for new kinds of collaborative ventures between artists.

Joeroeja recently started an unplanned collaboration with the popular Surinamese-French singer and business-minded Ray Neïman, who lives in France. Her latest designs are included in his newest music video. The collaboration was so pleasant that they are determined to carry on. Arga's approach during the pandemic was to follow other filmmakers on social media and engage in dialogue about their work. Thanks to these media, all artists were able to share their creativity with the world.

#### International ambitions

Another thing the interviewed artists have in common is their ambition to develop an international career. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Arga released her debut documentary titled [Evie's Story \(2021\)](#) about a woman who died of breast cancer, together with Roger Kadir (24). To their great surprise, but thanks to many positive reviews, RBU TV (Rukun Budi Utama TV) invited the makers for an interview and arranged to air the documentary on Den Haag TV in the Netherlands.

For local fame, Ferrier went around to various bars and cafés asking if they could perform there. He is a member of the hardcore band [Luguber](#), which was founded in 2014 and further consists of Akeem Smith (23) and Regillio Padma (33). As the only Surinamese participant, the band stood out during the first Wacken Metal Battle Caribbean 2016, organised by Unkie's Open Air Rockfest. "We worked hard to be noticed, and as a result, we did stand out. We were then approached by the Dutch record label [TCBYML](#) to release our first EP *Het Pad*," he says. This collaboration gave the band some name recognition in Europe.

#### Challenges

Joeroeja is not discouraged by the fact that Suriname currently has no fashion industry. She sees her country as a base, where she can make mistakes and learn from them before venturing out into the big wide world. "Especially since I haven't had a formal fashion education, and I don't even know how the fashion industry really works." One challenge she now encounters is that, although it's easy to send her designs to the Netherlands and the USA, distribution is very difficult in the Caribbean region, simply due to the lack of regional flights. Another obstacle is that many fabrics are of low quality in Suriname.



Artist Winston Vola painting a gourd bag. The sweater he is wearing is his latest design from the Makandi brand. Photo: Jomara Roletti

Because Joeroeja is a lover of all things natural, she takes the environment into account when designing, preferring to manufacture sustainable and environmentally friendly products. She often has to import them herself.

Nandalall misses a wider appreciation for art in Surinamese society. Everyone is enthusiastic about every performance, but the financial reward leaves something to be desired. "People often see a dance performance of a few minutes, without realising that it required a lot of time and hard work to create such a rock-solid choreography," he says. According to Peneux, the general public is still insufficiently aware of what art means. Joeroeja: "The fact that I am still in the industry has everything to do with my ultimate goal. I believe that if something is cut out for you, it will work out in the end. I experience that over and over again."

#### Necessity

Most creative development in Suriname is driven by necessity: by young people taking the initiative to improve their situation. Art education, which is currently offered only briefly at school, should therefore be approached more broadly. Although some private and governmental initiatives have taken place, such as the creativity labs mentioned above, none of them were of a long-term nature. One example of such a lab is the [Mission 21](#) pilot project by artist and coach Miguel Keerveld, which took place in 2018. Together with other artists from various disciplines, Keerveld offered art practices to more than 130 young people to help them discover their own talents and thereby encourage them to actively participate. Setting up permanent initiatives with the help of private and public funding will not just raise the art level in Suriname, but also contribute to cultivating an appreciation for art.

*Audry Roletti-Wajwakana is a Surinamese journalist and creative writer specialising in art and culture. In her writings, she brings art, culture, entertainment and history to bear on everyday life. Although some of the young Surinamese artists in this article have limited or no access to professional education to develop their passion the way they would like, this doesn't stop them from pursuing their dreams. Still, a wider approach is called for to give everyone equal opportunities.*

