

Ans Volkers

Lives and works in Leiden, the Netherlands

I am an independent Dutch video artist. In 2003 I have completed my studies at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague. For my graduation exhibition I am awarded with the Encouragement Prize 2003.

Since 2007 I travel to Berlin twice a year to film there.

Berlin is a city that inspires me beyond measure.

I like to wander through the streets of this city and travel to different districts. Sometimes I meet along the way a special moment, that I then capture on film and edit to a video work of art.

An interview by **Francis L. Quettier**

and **Dora S. Tennant**

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Hello Ans and welcome to *WomenCinemakers*:

we would like to introduce you to our readers

with a couple of questions regarding your

background. You have a solid formal training and

**you graduated from Royal Academy of Art in
The Hague: how did these experiences address
your artistic research? Moreover, hoe does your
cultural substratum direct the trajectory of
your artistic research?**

First of all, thank you for introducing me to your readers.



Even though I wanted to be an artist at a young age, I went to art school when I was 34 years old. I thought I wanted to be a painter. When I made my first video, I realized that this is the medium in which I can capture something that fascinates me. As can be seen in my first video work of art: ' I almost fell into the sky ' (1999).

From that moment on I started to experiment with video and I realized that the medium itself fascinates me. It still does that to this day.

For example, how something I film enters the frame and leaves again. Like in my video art work ' Round the corner ' (2012). You can see various buildings on the corner of a street. The way each building enters the frame looks like a rising sun. Not that I had figured this out in advance, but it was the result of how I have filmed these buildings and edited the footage.

If there's anything I've learned in art school, it is watching with an open mind to my work in process. That this is more important than the goal I want to achieve. I could sometimes be so focused on the idea I wanted to materialize, that I didn't see what was happening underneath my hands.

For this special edition of *WomenCinemakers* we have selected *Weerspiegeling*, a stimulating experimental film that our readers have already started to get to know in the introductory pages of this article and whose trailer can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/131779208>. Wold you walk





our readers through the genesis of *Weerspiegeling*? In particular, does your artistic research respond to a particular cultural moment?

For your information: what you see of 'Weerspiegeling' (2018) on vimeo.com/ansvolkers is not a trailer but essentially the entire video work of

art. I present this video work offline as a loop (without titles).

I love to travel and to wander through Berlin. Sometimes I come upon a certain place that makes me stand still and watch. It is not a conscious choice, but an intuitive one. So actually, I do not know exactly why I choose to film at a certain place. When



I look back the footage, then I can see if I can do something with it or not.

In 2011 I filmed at different stations in Berlin. Then, this footage remained unused for 7 years. Until I read about it in my own log and I decided to review the footage. It was then that I realized I could do something with it.

It brought me back to the moment I was there. The station was renovated at that time. You see that the bench on the platform is built-in until the middle. I sit on another platform, also on a built-in bench. At the time I started filming a train stopped before me on the platform. But as the train drives off I see the bench on the other platform in front of me. I was

aware that I could be seen by the other people on that platform. And in the reflection of the windows of the train, I saw what they could see. While you can see the people on the opposite platform, between the wagons of the passing train.

The video is edited in a mirror symmetrical way; the beginning is the end, and vice versa.

***Weerspiegeling* has drawn heavily from the specifics of the urban landscape of the city of Berlin: how did you select the location and what does fascinate you of Berlin?**

I don't know how I've chosen the location, intuitive probably. Mind you, ' Weerspiegeling ' is created from the location and not the other way around. I mean, first I found the location and filmed there, and during the editing process ' Weerspiegeling ' emerged. So there is no idea in advance.

In 2006 I fell in love with Berlin. It is as with romantic love, a mystery, I can not explain. Actually, I don't want to know, because then I break the mystery. One day I thought that the video works of art I create can be a way to understand that mystery better. But it can also be, it is still the reason why I go back to Berlin year after year to create video works of art. So it's good that Berlin remains a mysterious city to me.



What I can say is, I see the city of Berlin as a living being. The houses and the buildings have absorbed a lot of experiences. Some streets are filled with memories and sometimes I try to capture that atmosphere on video. But usually there is something with a particular location, which I can't explain. That intrigues me so, that I try to capture it on video.

As you have remarked in your artist's statement, you are fascinated by *the fact that you can see the world from more than a point of view*: are you particularly interested in structuring your work in order to urge the viewers to elaborate personal associations?

I mean it literally, that you can look at something from different points of view. This is a fascination that I have for a long time. When I for example sit in a train, I imagine I am at a certain spot in the (urban) landscape looking at the train. Like in the video work of art ' When moments meet ' (2003 - 2008).
Actually, I do that often, imagine how the environment looks like from the point of view I am looking at. I just love that kind of imagination. When I film, from one and then from the other point of view, and those images combine, I disappear from view. What remains are the two different points of view. As you can see in ' Wanneer momenten samenvallen ' (2010).
Except for ' Weerspiegeling '. I have filmed from one point of view, but due to the reflection you can see, at the same time, a different view, in which I am also

visible. This is not intended, but a starting point.

It is up to the audience to have their own associations.

I think I just let the public watch how I look to the world.

I like making a video diptych. With that I can show two different points of view separately, and at the same time.

As in the video art work ' Stil_leven ' (2013) where you see the front of a church and at the same time you can see what's going on at the back of the Church. In 2002 I created my first video diptych, I was still in art school. It has the title ' (...) ' and this video work art was part of my final exam exhibition. For that I am awarded with the Encouragement Prize 2003.

***Weerspiegeling* is a silent film: could you tell us something about this decision? Did you aim to capture the essential quality of the images?**

I am first of all a visual artist.

Sometimes sound adds something to the video images and expands the imagination. Sometimes you are just distracted by the sound and then I remove it, so you can focus on the video images.

The trajectory of your artistic research reveals your interest in *exploring innovative strategies*

in visual and narrative expressions, in order to create such a proficient synergy between the liveness of performance art and the chance of condensing and enhancing such expressive potential, through the medium of video: the relationship between performance practice and video as a medium?

Since the time I was in art school, I have a heightened interest in exploring the boundaries of art. Together with a group of young art students, I have researched different borderlines. For example, the boundary between art and science.

At one point, we wondered: can art emerged in the world around us, without the hand of an artist? Can something that is not intended as art, yet be art? I think it can but I don't know what it takes. At least, not exactly. Sometimes I see something in the public environment that looks as if it is staged; a play in reality.

Like in my video work of art ' City observations ' (2011). It is extraordinary in all its details; A man and a woman sticking advertising posters in the tunnel of a S-bahn station. He wears the pants and she wears the vest. Gradually you see how much they are attuned to each other, while in the foreground trains and people pass by. It's almost like performance art, but this is not intended to be art.





I'm actually on the way when I see this happen. I decide to sit down on a bench on the platform, choose the frame and start filming. I move my camera along with the event. The only thing that I do with the footage is cut at the beginning, somewhere in the middle and at the end. I'll give it a title. Is this art? Maybe. What I do know is that it is worth to be seen and I like to draw attention to something that for most people remains unseen.

Like in my last created video art work ' Five scooters, a shopping cart and a bicycle ' (2018). It looked as though someone had put down these objects specially in this way. The only thing I had to do was capture this on film. Actually it's something more than that, I have chosen for a certain way of filming and lifted it from reality, so that it has become in its own right.

Deviating from traditional filmmaking, we daresay that your artistic research *subverts* the notion of *non lieu* elaborated by French anthropologist Marc Augé, to highlight the elusive interstitial points of convergence and *mutual influences* between human interaction with environment. What are you hoping *Weerspiegeling* will trigger in the audience?

That is an interesting question. I think Marc Augé

and I share the same fascination for, as he calls them, *non lieux*, not places. During my final exam year at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague I have filmed a shopping street. It has something melancholic, such a place where many people come together, but not really meet each other.

Over the years I see that I have often filmed on stations. I have actually never really wondered why. But now you show me Marc Augé's ' *non lieu* ', that could be an answer.

How much importance does play *the roles of reality and direct experience* in your practice? And how does *daily life* fuel your creative process?

In 2007 I went to Berlin to film there. This definitely had a reason: I wanted to work from my intuition and not from a conceived idea. To do this, I first had something to let go and be confident I would find it in the reality around me. Somehow I knew that this is the way to do it.

It's very important for me, not to search for something, but to try and find it. I can explain this: When I am in Berlin, I stay in the apartment of friends, they are also artist. In that apartment is a cabinet with drawing materials. One day I was looking for a pencil sharpener and I searched in the

cabinet. I could not find one and stopped searching. I realized that I had formed a picture in my head of how the sharpener looks like: small and made of metal. And then it occurred to me, there are different types of pencil sharpeners. When I returned to the cabinet, I saw the sharpener immediately.

So if I observe the world around me open-minded, I am able to create art that I didn't figured out in advance. That gives me an enormous freedom.

Berlin has become my muse.

I know it will happen again and again, that I come across something that will eventually develop into a video work of art.

Over the years your work has been showcased in several occasions and one of the hallmarks of your practice is the ability to establish *direct involvement* with the viewers, who urged to *evolve* from a condition of mere spectatorship. So we would like to pose a question about *the nature of the relationship with your audience*. Do you consider the issue of audience reception? And what do you hope to trigger in the spectatorship?

I am an independent video artist. I love to create something that intrigues me. During the creative process, I am not concerned with the possible reaction of the public.

I think it is important that the video work of art has been given its own reality, which is slightly different than the reality that I have filmed.





Thanks a lot for your time and for sharing your thoughts, Ans. Finally, would you like to tell us readers something about your future projects? How do you see your work evolving?

The word says it all: evolve is a natural process. I leave that to happen and I will see it.

Links to other video works of art to which I refer in the interview:

' I almost fell into the sky '

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E7JXxi81jbI>

' Round the corner ' <https://vimeo.com/226281607>

' Wanneer momenten samenvallen '

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9iVw32LxTRo>

a 10 seconds video clip of ' When moments meet '.

' Stil_leven ' <https://vimeo.com/276417054> and
<https://vimeo.com/276422814>

' (...) ' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0NVEkju6wU>

' City observations ' <https://vimeo.com/278303486>

' Five scooters, a shopping cart and a bicycle '

<https://vimeo.com/265150522>

Website Ans Volkers: <https://ans-volkers.exto.org>
<https://vimeo.com/ansvolkers>

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