

SPIKE

SONSBEEK 20→24: FORCE TIMES DISTANCE

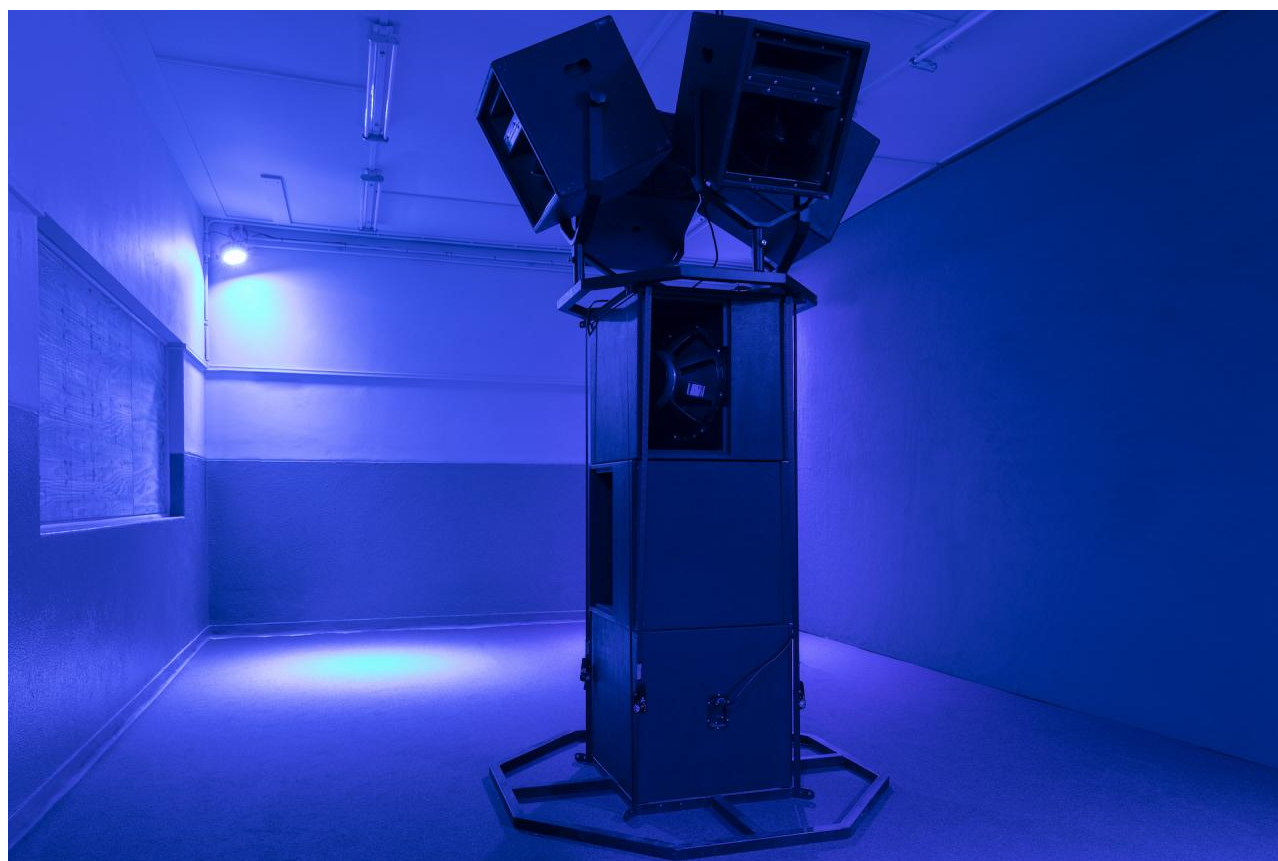
by Eva Scharrer



Keti Koti parade at Sonsbeek 2021. © Django van Ardenne

Listen up! That's the sound of resistance. Eva Scharrer visits Sonsbeek, where the weight of history echoes and resonates across Arnhem and beyond in an expansive exhibition.

As one of the first large-scale art events to open after a year and a half of lockdown, the fourteenth edition of Sonsbeek introduced a new format suited to the newfound dilation of time. The elder but less famous “sister” of documenta and Skulptur Projekte Münster was established in 1949 as a biennial and cultural healing project in the Dutch city of Arnhem, which was destroyed when Allied Forces and the Wehrmacht battled over its famous bridge in 1944. It since took place without regular frequency, eventually relaunched as a quadrennial in 2016. After it had to be delayed several times due to the pandemic, Sonsbeek 20→24 extended its duration from the usual two months into an ongoing endeavour in five acts, with public programs over the whole four-year period around and beyond Arnhem. With this shift, it slowed down to make a more sustainable impact on the city, instead of landing and then promptly taking off again like the typical biennial UFO.



Louis Henderson and João Polido, *Composition* (2019). © Django van Ardenne

With thirteen locations spread over many kilometres, the exhibition also demands some time to take in; a tour by sound-artist and “sonic thinker” Sam Auinger asks you to stop, linger, and listen. The exhibition locations include spots in the spacious and idyllic Sonsbeek park; two churches; two cultural spaces; and the charming WALTER bookstore (which also hosts a pirate radio station) in the city centre. All these are complemented by a former military base with hangar at the edge of the Hoge Veluwe National Park and the

Kröller-Müller-Museum, located in the middle of the park, with its large sculpture garden.



The Black Archive and Yinka Ilori, Sound Waves of Resistance (2021). © Django van Ardenne

Directed by Berlin-based Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, the founder of SAVVY Contemporary and newly appointed director of HKW, with a team of four international curators – Antonia Alampi, Amal Alhaag, Zippora Elders and Aude Christel Mgba – Sonsbeek 20→24, titled *Force Times Distance*, centres in five thematic *Frequencies* “on

labour and its sonic ecologies”. In particular, it hones in on precarious, unpaid and invisible labour by way of its currencies, rhythms and sounds. That focus inescapably lead to reflection on the Netherlands’ heavy colonial history. After all, Arnhem’s prosperity, which is especially visible in the magnificent landscapes and estates of Sonsbeek park, is largely the result of colonial exploitation and the forced work of slaves from Indonesia, Guyana and Suriname – The Netherlands was the last colonial power to abolish slavery in those countries, roughly 160 years ago. Consequently, many of the invited artists come from postcolonial (as well as Dutch) backgrounds. Their work in Arnhem for Sonsbeek, then, contributes to what Ndikung refers to as a process of re-humanisation – a collective healing of shared trauma.

AFTER MONTHS OF FORCED STANDSTILL, SEPARATION, AND SOCIAL DISTANCING, ONE COULD ALSO SENSE A NEED FOR COLLECTIVENESS – FOR PARTICIPATING IN RITUALS, MOVEMENT, AND HEALING

The name of “Zwarte Anna” (Black Anna), an enslaved black woman from Suriname who was brought to Arnhem in 1727 and worked in Zypendaal Huis, the manor of a plantation owner’s family in Sonsbeek park, is one of many ghosts that haunt the exhibition. Her name only appeared when a doctor’s bill was found in the province’s Gelders Archief, which is now exhibited in *Sound Waves of Resistance* (2021) by The Black Archives and designer Yinka Ilorin on display in the Stadsvilla. Other than that, her fate remains unknown. Anna is also the subject of two other contributions: the paintings by Kudzanai-Violet Hwami and Belinda Zhawi, and a textile installation by Farkhondeh Shahroudi. Sonsbeek 20→24 is an attempt to make visible these erased stories; to amplify their many unheard voices.



Werker Collective, *Textiles of Resistance: Growing, Weaving, Printing, Archiving* (2021). © Django van Ardenne

During the preview days, the labour that went into the endeavour, following a year of challenging circumstances, was very much visible. In Sonsbeek park, workers were still laying the last hand-fired bricks that would form Jennifer Tee's earth sculpture *Respire, the world begins with trees* (2021), a large tree of life motif, referring to the fractal geometry of plant rhizomes, embedded in the ground. The Amsterdam-based Werker Kollektive were setting up by mooring the rods on which they hung their work *Textiles of Resistance: Growing, Weaving, Printing, Archiving* (2021), an installation of naturally-dyed fabrics

printed with pages from the Werker Archive on labour issues. raumlabor's floating pavilion *Deep Encounter* was similarly still to be finished when I arrived, not yet taken off to its final destination in the lake. But in these cases, the visibility of the working process didn't spoil the experience – rather, it illuminated the efforts that made the whole thing possible.



Oscar Murillo, *Human Resources* (2021). © Django van Ardenne

After months of forced standstill, separation, and social distancing, one could also sense a

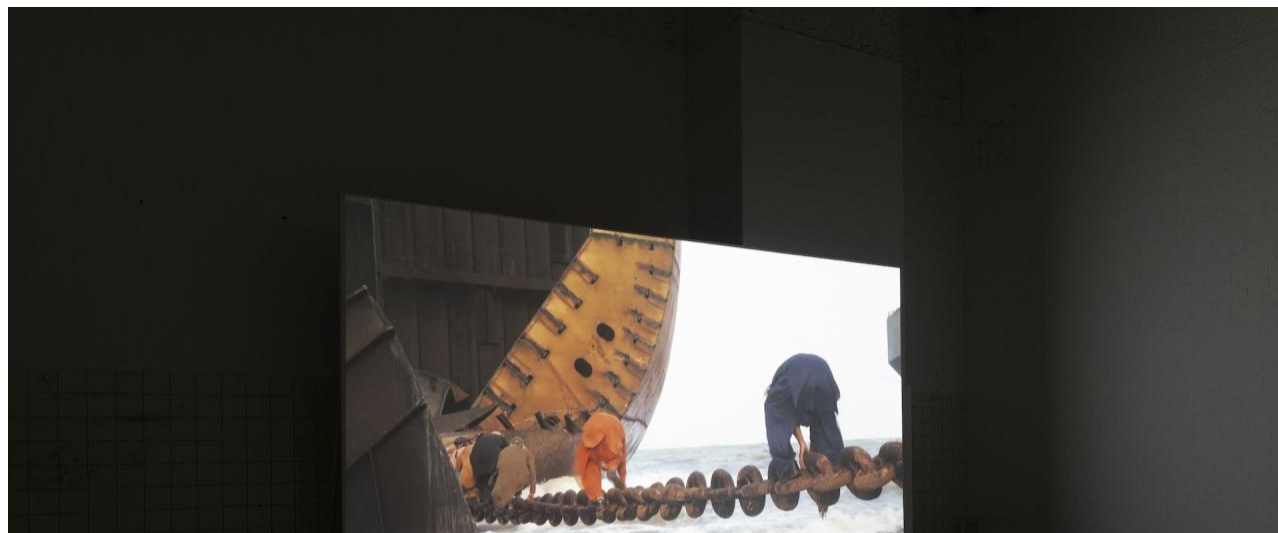
need for collectiveness – for participating in rituals, movement, and healing. On 1 July, Ketí Kotí – “Breaking the chains” in Sranantongo; Dag der Vrijheden (Day of the Freedoms) in Dutch, the day that marks the end of slavery in Suriname – was celebrated as the drum and brass band Ritmo Entertainment marched *A Noisy Ballad For Freedom* through the park. The next day, Antonio Jose Guzman and his team lead a dance procession into St. Eusebius church, where their Indigo-dyed, block printed banners and sound cubes formed a sonic counterpart to the church’s massive organ.

St. Eusebius could be described as the heart of the exhibition. In its main hall, Ibrahim Mahama installed a kind of podium constructed out of discarded building materials from Ghana’s dismantled railway system. The former colonisers’ brutal manifestation took centre stage – a *Parliament of Ghosts* (2019) transformed into a platform for conversations and “sonic lectures”. The church also houses Oscar Murillo’s installation *Human Resources* (2021), constructed of Shabaka windows made by Azerbaijani artisans, along with a large wall drawing on Japanese Kozo paper across ten lightboxes by Mithu Sen, *UnMYthU: Unquantize* (2018–2024), whose evocative figures make wild references to the church’s layered history.



Mithu Sen, UnMYthU: Unquantize (2018-2024). © Django van Ardenne

Other gems are to be found across the farthest corners of the widespread show. One is the captivating thirty-minute film *All That Perishes at the Edge of Land* (2019) by Hira Nabi, housed in a small space named Machinery of Me in the former military barracks at Buitenplaat, recently redeveloped as a cultural enclave complete with studio apartments. In stunning images, the film tells the story of migrant workers trapped at the Gadani shipbreaking yard in Baluchistan, Pakistan, where condemned vessels are beached and taken apart by blowtorches wielded by workers doomed to hazardous physical labour. Speaking in their own words, the workers give testimonies that let a glimpse of hope shine through even under the most desperate conditions, while the camera pans across rusted shipwrecks. Similarly haunting is Willem de Rooij's slide installation of photographs by visual anthropologist Pierre Verger, taken during a trip in Suriname in 1948. Between each change of slides, the screen turns into a black mirror where, for moment, the viewers' own reflections appear and merge with the images, interspersed with the colonizing gaze.

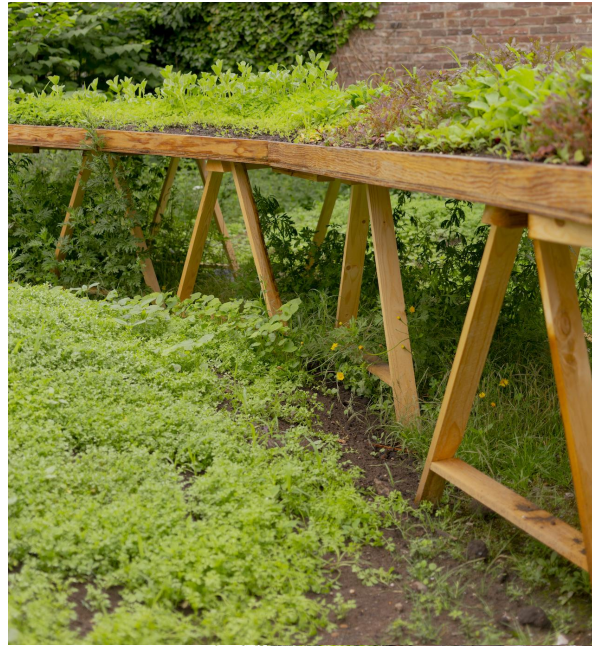




Hira Nabi, *All That Perishes at the Edge of Land* (2019). © Django van Ardenne

The results of non-human labour are honoured in Anne Duk Hee Jordan's *Living Plant Archive* of imported or immigrant plants in the garden of the Collectie De Groen, or in Mee-ling & Gustavo Crembil's pavilion constructed from cylinders of mycelium fungi in the park. Deep down in the Kröller-Müller Museum's sculpture garden, a half-buried whale skeleton rendered in granite becomes a monument to death as a creative force in the intergenerational life cycle by way of Julieta Aranda's *Time will tell: an unreadable script takes shape and then destroys itself* (2021). The Kröller-Müller also houses a room with personal measurement units by Suriname-born Fluxus and conceptual artist Stanley Brouwn. Through the collection and juxtaposition of these disparate works, Sonsbeek 20→24 addresses complicated, troubling histories with sincerity. Impressively, it does so without didactics, opting instead for a poetic and sensual approach resonating through sound, oral histories, and music.





Anne Duk Hee Jordan, *Living Plant Archive: All My Hands are Labour* (2021). © Django van Ardenne

Sonsbeek 20→24

Force Times Distance: On Labour and its Sonic Ecologies

Arnhem, The Netherlands

EVA SCHARRER is a curator and author. She lives in Berlin.

SONSBEEK

BONAVENTURE SOH BEJENG NDIKUNG

ARNHEIM

THE NETHERLANDS

THE BLACK ARCHIVES

OSCAR MURILLO

