

Metropolis M

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BREDA, STEDELIIK MUSEUM RBEDA



Marenne Welten, *double take*, 2021

The entrance to the Stedelijk Museum Breda has a sturdy gate. An old clock and stone walls are traces of the long history of the building, which served as an 'Oudemannenhuis' (Old Men's Home) from the late eighteenth to mid-twentieth century. It was a time when there was no such thing as a retirement plan. Single old men who could no longer work had to apply for a place

in the house. The men had to live in Breda, have proof of good behavior and money, and write a motivation letter. For artist Marenne Welten (Ulvenhout, 1959) the Oudemannenhuis is closely intertwined with her own history and memories. Her father's side of the family lived close to the museum for a long time, and her aunt, now in her 90s, remembers the old men well. This prompted an intensive collaboration project with the museum, an investigation into the history of the building, its residents and the religious climate in Brabant.

For the exhibition House of Men (on display until May 5, 2022) at the Stedelijk Museum Breda, Welten realized several new works, including the gouache collage double take (2021), which was acquired by the museum. From the center of this work, an old man peers into your eyes, while things are happening around him. The room he is in has an eerie green color. Next to him is a table and a life-size voodoo-like doll. A horde of skeletons dance around it. At the top of the room, loose body parts and relics dangle like a festive garland. Like Welten's other collages, Double Take harks back to a long and subtle working process that can roughly be divided into two stages. First of all, there is the phase in which a project starts, the research phase. In this phase, Welten immerses herself in the subject for an indefinite period, focusing on the history of the place and the people who live or have lived there. The archive she creates is then moved to Welten's memory, where it mixes with personal associations and memories. This is where Welten's imagination gets going and the creative process begins.

It is this imagination that immediately caught the eye of the curator of modern and contemporary art Marjolein van de Ven. Her attention was grabbed by two publications that the museum had previously received by mail. After seeing these paintings and collages, she visited the Amsterdam gallery Albada Jelgersma, where Welten exhibited at the time. 'It was an incredibly beautiful presentation,' says van de Ven. "The paintings have so much color and texture that you can't imagine that from a photo. You have to experience the work in real life, stand in front of it, be able to almost touch them.' When I stand in front of the work, I understand what she means. The collage feels playful and at the same time orchestrated. The cut-out skeletal figures may have hurled over Welten's studio floor for weeks, only to find a place in this collage. The table did not end up there by accident either, it may seem to have been placed haphazardly, but it was placed very deliberately.

House of Men is a special project for the Stedelijk Museum Breda because it is directly linked to the history of the museum building. 'This project is about the city's past, the religious climate and the physical place you walk through when you visit the museum. It fits in well with our collection, precisely because it provides an opportunity to look at this history from a new perspective', says van de Ven. The museum is currently working hard on a collection plan for the contemporary art collection. Van de Ven explains that the museum is still relatively new and that the design of the collection is actively being considered. 'If you look at the acquisition of Welten, you see an artist who has a link with the city. An artist, but also a way of working, can be closely linked to the city in all sorts of ways. We have our own museum collection here, but there are many more collections of visual art in this city. In the context of our collection policy, it is interesting to think about how these can be offset against each other in an urban-regional context, for example by making them more visible.'

The life-size fictional portraits of old men, collages and objects that are brought together by Welten from the city archive and the museum collection, fit in well with the course of the museum: looking at history from a contemporary perspective and reflecting on it. The work can be read as a novel, in which memories based on reality intersect and the author tells a new story on the verge of past and present.

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