

## Magazine

05 January 2021, Flor Linckens

# The Book of Disquiet: a mind-altering source of inspiration



Rens Horn, "Detour", Albada Jelgersma Gallery.

**Rens Horn:** "I often add text to my photographs. I usually do that at home, in the evening, after a glass of wine or a beer. Then I gradually dim the light until there is only one place left to work, with a kind of spotlight on it. That place becomes a kind of universe on its own, that contains me, writing in small letters, with a pen, ink and a small glass." [Albada Jelgersma Gallery](#) recently presented the work of Rotterdam-based photographer [Rens Horn](#) in the exhibition "[Detour](#)". Until January 20, this exhibition can only be seen online on GalleryViewer, after that you will also get the chance to explore the exhibition live in the gallery (until February 13).



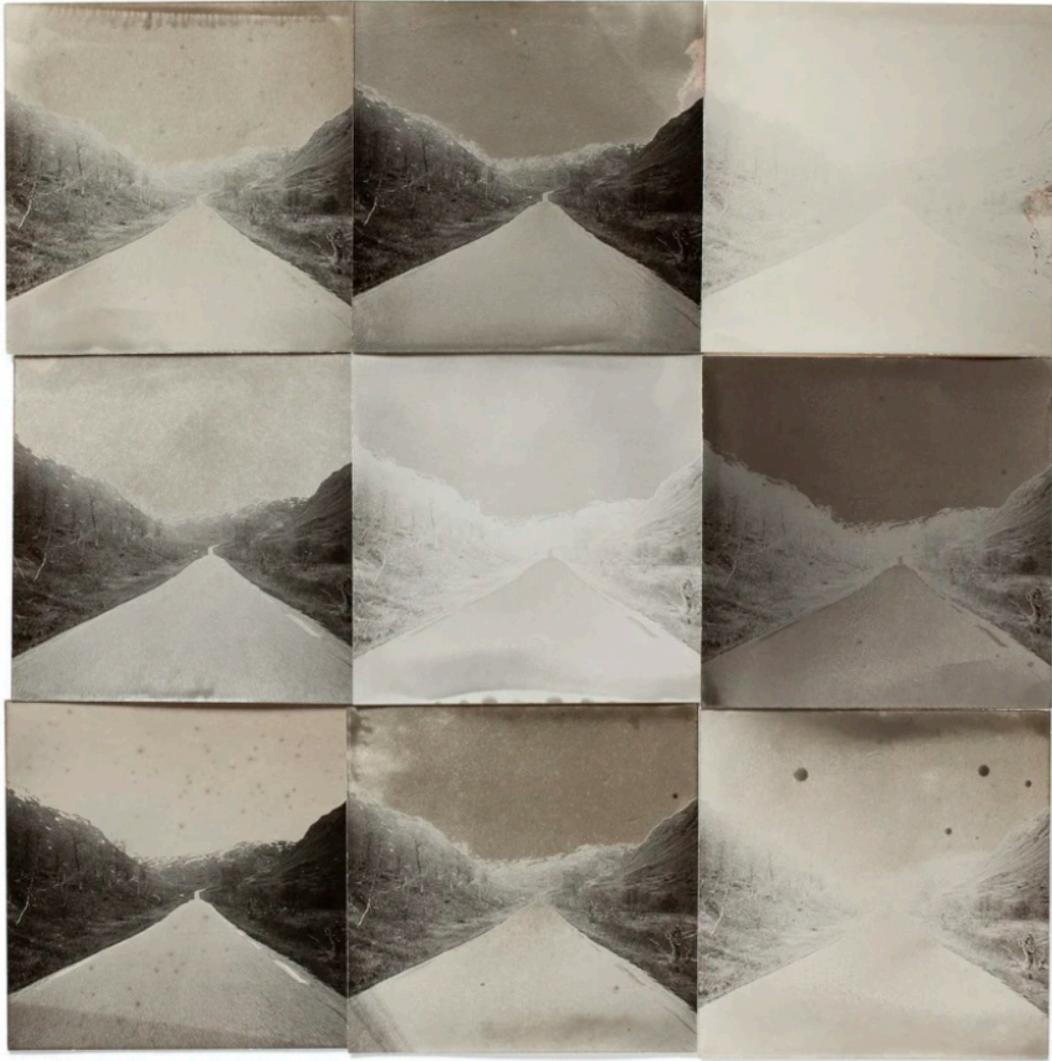
*Rens Horn, Telkens als ik reis reis ik mateloos, 2019, Albada Jelgersma Gallery.*

Horn is known to undertake exciting journeys: he drove his Harley Davidson from Rotterdam to the most northern part of Norway and traveled via the Trans Siberian railway to the capital of Mongolia - smuggling Ural motorcycle parts along the way. He visited the southernmost part of the African continent and climbed the 800 meter high granite wall of the Tsaranoro Massif in Madagascar. He explored the Amazon River from its estuary (at the sea) to its source and even herded sheep in the Andes in the meantime. On his travels, the road serves as a metaphor for freedom and adventure, but also for life itself: from the unexpected events on your path and only being able to see part of the road ahead, to the choices you have to make. The exhibition in Albada Jelgerma Gallery shows the work that Horn made in the North Cape in Norway and in Mongolia. You see, for instance, how he visually describes how the steppe landscape, which has remained virtually unchanged for centuries, is changing ever faster.



*Rens Horn, "Detour", Albada Jelgersma Gallery.*

Central to his travels is "The Book of Disquiet" by Fernando Pessoa. Horn always takes the book with him on his travels, which leaves an important mark on his photography. Both in a figurative and a literal sense: Horn provides the photos in this exhibition with pieces of text from this remarkable book. Pessoa's work is famous for being one of the best, but also one of the strangest modernist texts that was ever written. The Portuguese poet never published the - in his own words - "fact-less autobiography", but the book was printed 47 years after his death and is still a bestseller. The book describes the life of accountant Bernardo Soares (the author's alter ego), and delves deeper into the ways in which we shape memory, identity, time and narrative. The work consists of a series of fragmented texts, aphorisms, diary excerpts and poetry that are occasionally connected, but more often not. Over the years, the book has been interpreted in various ways by experts. It forms a timeless mosaic full of dreams, hopes and despair, set against the background of the streets and cafes of 1930s Lisbon. The thought process of the protagonist is central in all of it. Pessoa's work has also been described as the 'autobiography of someone who never existed'. It's been deemed enchanting and hopeful (The Guardian wrote an article in 2016 entitled "Books to give you hope: The Book of Disquiet by Fernando Pessoa"), but at the same time, the book is also deals with fears, restlessness and melancholy. A writer from The Paris Review read the work during lockdown and compared reading the text to taking mind-altering drugs.



*Rens Horn, The point at which we stand to view, 2019, Albada Jelgersma Gallery.*

Horn: "It's a text that really made me gasp when I first read it. It's beautifully worded." During his travels, Horn reads a few pages every day, which influences his thoughts and the way he observes things. He then tries to convert that feeling into something tangible. Horn: "What I'd really like to see in my own photographs is that an experience I had has settled onto a piece of paper." The photos in the exhibition are printed on different types of photo paper, on different materials that are occasionally very old and rare. This variety represents the fragmentary aspect of the book and the photographic process in itself. For the frames, Horn often uses found pieces of wood.



*Rens Horn, Born again on the road, 2019, Albada Jelgersma Gallery.*

But Horn has been providing his photographs with a layer of text in the margin for much longer, using a wide variety of inspiration. These texts might emphasise the poetic aspect of the image, or offer the viewer a new train of thought — but above all, they offer room for multiple interpretations. The words are usually poetic in style, sometimes just prosaic or humorous. For example, in one of his older photos, you can read “Entering La Paz is like riding on the edge of a soup plate” and he’s referred to page 209 of the "Guide to Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance". But Horn also shares his thoughts, descriptions of what he sees and cut-out snippets of text from newspapers. You will also find references to texts by Cees Nooteboom and the Argentinian poet Jorge Luis Borges — who beautifully stated: “I don't want to die in a language I don't understand”.