

LandEscape meets

Marloes Aben

Wandering in the world with my eyes wide open inspires me to start the process of creating my work. During this process I reflect on contrasts like flat versus spatial, universal versus unique, shapes versus residual shapes. These tensions interest and challenge me. Focusing carefully on my subject allows me to create my own visions of what I see around me in my paintings and drawings. In my opinion the most beautiful and interesting things can be found right in front of you on a daily basis. I like to imagine and cherish this in my creations. I gladly invite you to take a closer look.

An interview by **Josh Ryder**, curator
and **Melissa C. Hilborn**, curator
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Hello Marloes and welcome to *LandEscape*. Before starting to elaborate about your artistic production and we would like to invite our readers to visit

<https://www.marloesaben.nl> in order to get a wide idea about your artistic production, and we would start this interview with a couple of questions about your background. You have a

solid formal training and you hold a Bachelor of Fine Arts, that you received from the Royal Academy of Art, The Hague: how do these formative years influence your evolution as an artist? Moreover, how does your *cultural substratum* address the direction of your current artistic research?

Marloes Aben: Thank you very much! At the Royal Academy of Art I learned to explore the space of idea and execution, to reflect on my work, to perfect through iteration and to learn how to





Ode aan de natuur (ode to nature)

Construction with chalk on cardboard 40x40x210 cm

have a 'dialogue' with my work and at what point in the process to do this. I learned to get started with an open mind about my own restrictions and to reflect critically later. I developed an investigative, explorative and critical attitude to exploring an idea and to the use of materials and then iterate further to get to the core of the idea without knowing the end point yet. For me a fixed endpoint is not a good starting point, it is all about the process of exploration, like peeling an onion. The feedback from the teachers helped to form my own view on the process and the work I was doing.

I try to embrace all the beautiful things I encounter in my process and that gives my work layering. I learned to capture the essence and leave the noise out. After taking a bit of distance and time to assess my unfinished work together with my teacher we would either decide what needed to be done, or he would say: "Sometimes you can finish your work by just looking at it..." The work was done. At that moment I found it just a funny quote, but it turned out to be quite valuable to me... in my current artistic research I still have this attitude and I still think about and discuss the core of the work.

The body of works that we have selected for this special edition of

LandEspace — and that our readers have already started to get to know in the introductory pages of this article — has at once captured our attention for the way it explores the relationship between details and the image as a whole within theme of landscape, with such unconventional aesthetics. When walking our readers through the genesis of your works, would you tell us something about your usual setup and process? In particular, what role does intuition play in your process?

Marloes Aben: Intuition plays an important role in my work. Often I find out during the process why I am doing it. During the LandEspace series I made during Covid Lockdown I noticed I had the urge to go outside and experience nature. Don't just walk by, walk through, but really be here and think about it. Trees and woods really appealed to me. I have had a fascination with trees for a long time, I am drawn to their shape, their character and their comfort.

I used photography to capture what I saw, on the spot and back in the workshop I would select what to use for drawing. When making the drawing I do not change the scene as such, I project the photograph I made and I hold onto that, it takes me right back to the woods so to speak. From there I

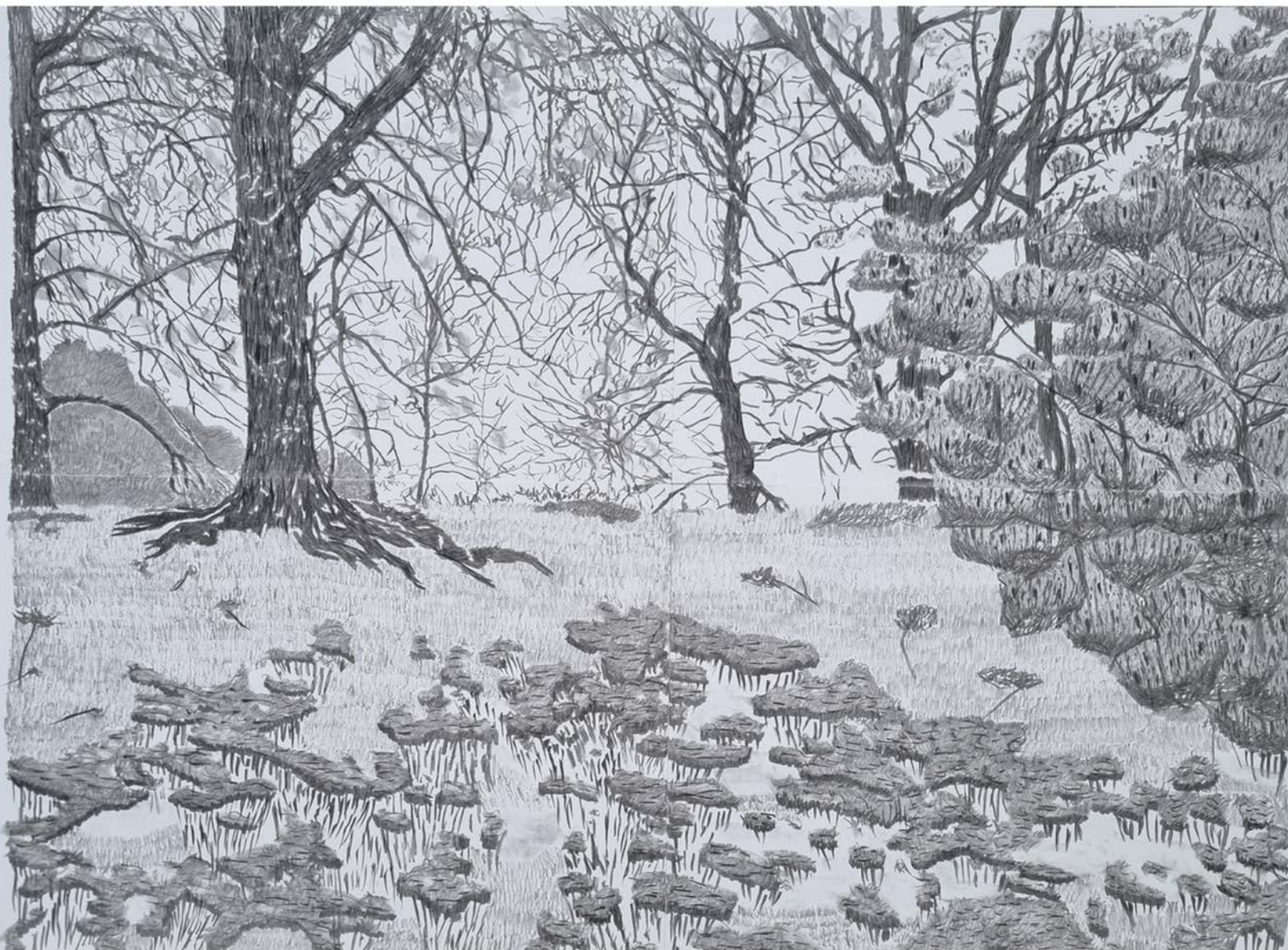
have the freedom to explore the details of the scene and my fascination with it. The white is as much part of the drawing as the black. An edge on the side of the paper remained white because of the projection. At first it was just there, during the process I decided not to cut off the strip, a conscious choice, the strip takes the romance out of it, which works for me. So the strip became part of the work.

Your works feature such captivating *Black and White*: would you tell us something about your aesthetic choice about it? What does fascinate you of *Black and White*?

Marloes Aben: I actually wanted it to be big. It felt logical to draw in conte chalk in black and white. I discovered this way it did not need any colour. The black and white makes it even more about form, contrast and structure. Heather was the first piece I made. Colour was just not the first thing that fascinated me at this point. So in that case it would just distract me. The other thing about black and white is that you instantly know it is not representing real life. Black and white is strong and is always an edit. It keeps you aware that you are not looking at the real thing. The tension between this and the projected and recognizable



Heather. chalk on cardboard 100x140 cm



Trees. chalk on cardboard 100x140 cm

actual place appealed to me. Like it's real and not real at the same time. The second piece I made was *Trees*. I discovered that the feeling of this piece was totally different, like they have their own identity. That made me excited to make more.

With their essential quality on the visual aspect, your works capture the essence of place: how do your memories and your everyday life's experience and your memories fuel your creative process?

Marloes Aben: I take a lot of photos that I use for my work. Sometimes it comes back much later and sometimes right away. I wish I could use my eyes as a camera! To keep the moment, but that may actually be what you do while making a piece of art, to capture the experience of what you saw. It's a combination of looking, thinking and feeling. Sometimes I look out for something specifically, like in the *Nature Series* and sometimes I just notice something on the street, in magazines, on the internet.

These are the reflection of my memories and everyday life's experiences. The works I make belong to a certain time and place for me, if I were to live in India or Normandy for instance, I believe my work would



landschap rond met avondrood, (round landscape with afterglow) mixed media. 40 cm

change. But it is always something that touches me, it touches a nerve.

We highly appreciate the way you draw from real places to address your audience to dive into the dreamlike dimension, helping them to discover its connections with ordinary life. Scottish painter Peter Doig once remarked that *even the most realistic paintings are derived more from within the head than from what's out there in front of us*, how do you consider the relationship between reality and imagination, playing within your artistic production?

Marloes Aben: I see that as an interplay between the two and it is perhaps the essence of why I make art. Art gives room for imagination.

Real life is the reason for that, what I see around me is the reason for that. It helps me look at the ordinary or real world with a wider view. At the same time, this wider view helps me understand real life better. The world in my head is perhaps just as essential as the world outside and I find the combination fascinating

You are a versatile artist and many of your artworks, as the interesting *Rood jasjemet hoofd* and *zwart jasje met hoofd*, convey such stimulating visual



365 drawing 27 may. marker on cardboard 14,8x21 cm text Fieke Ypma Een heel, heel vol leven met een heel, heel leeg gevoel (a full full life feeling so empty)



ambivalence, able to walk the viewers to develop personal visual grammars. In this sense, we daresay that your artistic production aims to urge the spectatorship to a participative effort, to realize their own interpretation. Austrian Art historian Ernst Gombrich once remarked the importance of providing a space for the viewers to project onto, so that they can *actively participate* in the creation of the illusion: how important is for you to trigger the viewers' imagination in order to address them to elaborate *personal interpretations*? In particular, how open would you like your works to be understood?

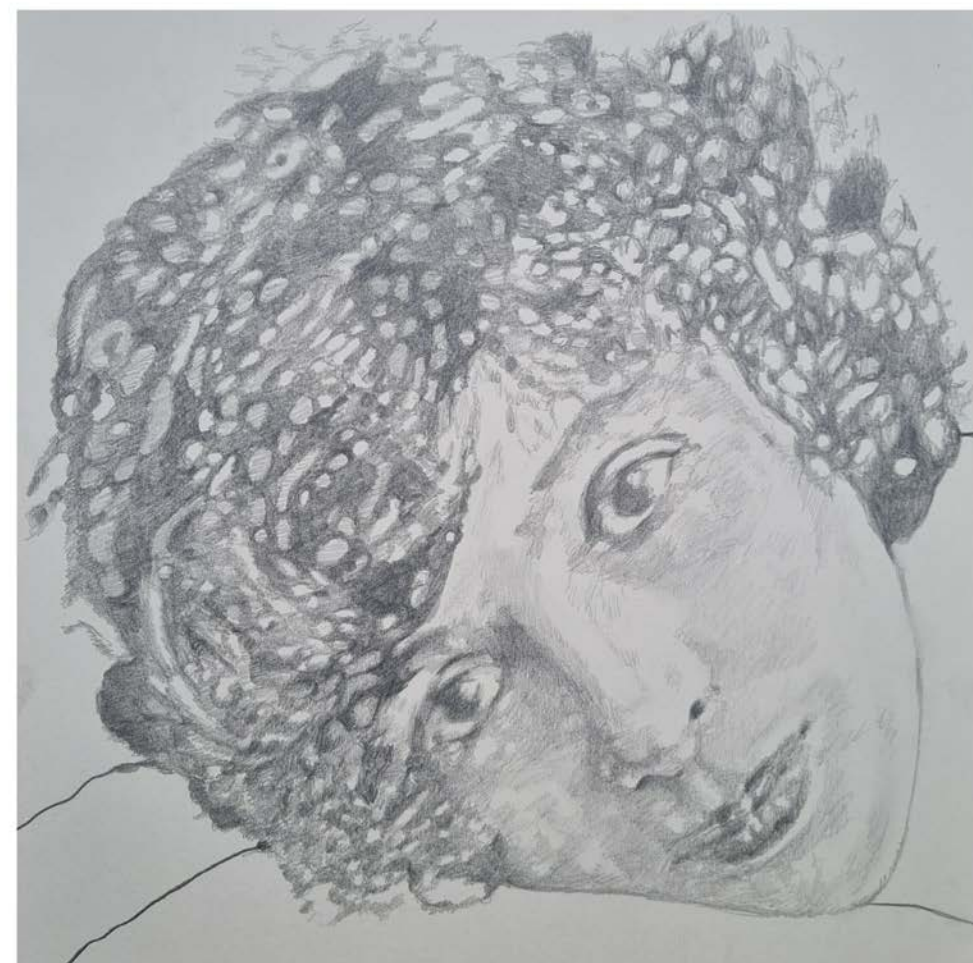
Marloes Aben: I am in dialogue with the work until it is finished, then it enters into a dialogue with the viewer, or not. If the viewer is stimulated by thinking about the work, that is not necessarily what I have put into the work. It is always interesting what the angle of someone looking at it is.

That does not have to correspond with my own intention. It can also inspire me. The jackets come from a fascination for the detailed clothing from costume dramas etc. in contrast with the person in them who conveys a feeling and not a show. Someone bought *zwart jasje met hoofd* because he identified with how the head feels, I





Portret serie females. graphite pencil on cardboard 50x70 cm

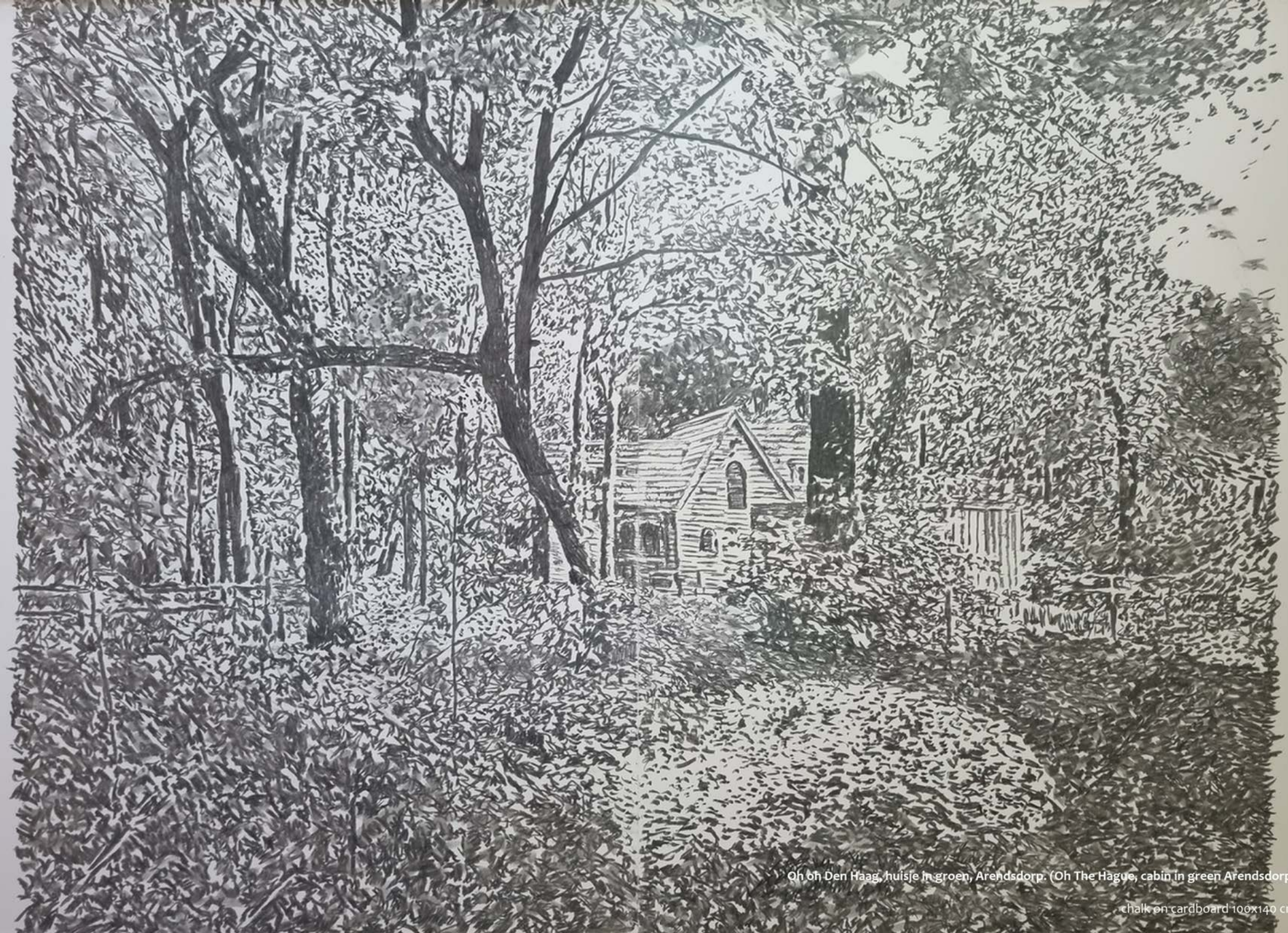


Females #2. graphite pencil on cardboard 33,5x36 cm

liked that again.

Meticulously refinished in their details,

your artworks have struck us for the way you sapiently conveyed rigorous sense of geometry with such unique



Oh oh Den Haag, huisje in groen, Arendsorp. (Oh The Hague, cabin in green Arendsorp)

chalk on cardboard 100x140 cm

refined aesthetics: how do you consider the role of details within your artistic practice?

Marloes Aben: Attentiveness is especially important to me. Looking attentively makes so much more visible, both in the whole and in the details. Once I am aware of that I can use it, choose what matters, what is redundant, what needs more emphasis. I do not commit myself to including all the details, I prefer a somewhat loose approach to my work. That's how I create my own details. That is where intuition comes in again. Charles Eames said: "The details are not the details. They make the design." That feels right to me.

We would like to mention your *Portrait series*, as well. With their delicate narrative drive, they challenge the viewers' perception, inviting them to switch between a number of feelings and interpretations about the mood of the subjects: what's your philosophy on the nature of portraiture? In particular, how do you select the people that you decide to include in your artworks?

Marloes Aben: The feeling it expresses attracts me, for example because of a specific look that interests me, that fascinates me or that I can identify with. It



Shaped wood rood jasje (red jacket) mixed media. 54x48 cm



Shaped wood, grijs jasje (grey jacket) mixed media. 59x47 cm

must touch me, from there I start to work with it. Sometimes I just recognise what I am looking for when I see it. This question actually made me think about this a bit more. When I draw a tree it can also be seen as a portrait. So for me a portrait can be a landscape and a landscape can be portrait. I try to capture the whole experience.

You are an established artist and over the years your artworks have been showcased in many occasions: how do you consider the nature of your relationship with your audience? As the move of Art from traditional gallery spaces, to street and especially to online platforms — as *Instagram* <https://www.instagram.com/marloesaben123> — increases, how would in your opinion change the relationship with a globalised audience?

Marloes Aben: I find it interesting to show my work in different places. Online platforms provide new opportunities to show and view work from people all over the world. Or there could be a collaboration with an artist on the other side of the world that you have never met. I find that interesting. A few months ago, I participated in an exhibition with a “pedestal” theme. I normally never use a plinth in my work,



Shaped wood zwart jasje. (black jacket) mixed media 52x49 cm

but I do work with shaped canvas, for example. In that project, the work called for the omission of place and time. In the case of the pedestal, a fixed shape was given as the starting point. I used a huge drawing that I cut

into pieces into three pedestals and made a three-dimensional work from it. In this way the pedestal became part of the work. That also inspires me to something new. A drawing could stand in the middle of space and take on any



Rood jasje met hoofd. (red jacket with head) marker on cardboard 50x70 cm



zwart jasje met hoofd. (black jacket with head) marker on cardboard 50x70 cm



Bird of prey, chalk on cardboard 70x100 cm

shape I want...

We have really appreciated the multifaceted nature of your artistic research and before leaving this stimulating conversation we would like to thank you for chatting with us and for sharing your thoughts, Marloes. What projects are you currently working on, and what are some of the ideas that you hope to

explore in the future?

Marloes Aben: At the moment I am working on a series of 365 drawings in the year 2022. The format is A5 and I make a drawing every day. I also did this six years ago. This time a collaboration has formed with Fieke Ypma, with whom I attended the Academy. I make a drawing every day and Fieke writes a short text to go with it. We work independently from each other, but the text and image go together and this often creates special outcomes. At the end of this year, we want to exhibit the whole collection and make a book from a selection of the best pieces. I am also working on a new work based on the theme “home”, for an exhibition in Schiedam next August. In addition, some ideas are developing about new, large works based on landscapes. I also want to work on portraits of dead animals, I am in contact with my cousin who is a Ranger in New Zealand. I’m actually quite curious myself about what this will develop into.

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