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HADASSAH EMMERICH  
/ FONS HAAGMANS  
/ RIK MEIJERS  
/ MARLEEN ROTH AUS

BONNEFANTEN



Hadassah Emmerich  
Fons Haagmans  
Rik Meijers  
Marleen Rothaus



## **Beating Around the Bush #7: *False Flat*** **Forms of painting in and around the Bonnefanten collection featuring Hadassah Emmerich, Fons Haagmans, Rik Meijers and Marleen Rothaus**

*Beating Around the Bush* is an exhibition programme in which the Bonnefanten presents its collection in an explorative way. In different episodes, both the fixed values and the ‘quiet reserves’ of the collection are brought into dialogue with interventions from outside, which function as mirrors that offer new content-related insights and perspectives.

### **The multivocality of painting**

The flat surface has the magical quality of being able to transform itself into any representation the human spirit can imagine. Armed with painting materials, people throughout history have made pictures. They have depicted their impressions of the world, whilst also enriching that world with new forms and symbols produced by their imagination. Painting can give a view of a landscape, depict loved ones or be a likeness of yourself. A painting can be a snapshot in time or tell a whole story. Through painting, people can drift off into the realm of fantasy, but also reflect on reality and shape their vision of the world.

*False Flat* forms a new step in the train of thought behind *Beating Around the Bush*, with everything revolving around painting this time. With regard to both form and content, painting can assume many different guises. *False Flat* celebrates this multivocality by spotlighting various painterly approaches, whereby we do not restrict ourselves to art on a flat surface, but also pay attention to more experimental and cross-disciplinary practices, presenting formalist examples alongside engaged and activist works.

### **A dynamic collection presentation**

There is a special focus on four exceptional artists, who are participating in small solo presentations: Hadassah Emmerich, Fons Haagmans, Rik Meijers and Marleen Rothaus, each of whom take their own approach to painting and show the breadth of the spectrum of the medium. The art of these spotlighted artists enters into dialogue with the work of artists in the collection and outside it who play with the concept of painting, whether stretching it or getting to its essence from a different angle. These artists search for the link between word and image, explore the materials that can make up a painting or demonstrate that a painting is not necessarily just a single static picture.

The Bonnefanten's collection includes numerous examples that show this multivocality of painting. There are too many to exhibit in a single, static collection

presentation. So for this edition of *Beating Around the Bush*, we have opted for a dynamic approach, alternating the 'chorus' of voices from the collection and outside it a few times over the space of a year, so that the four 'soloists' are shown in a different light each time. This changes the nature of the exhibition every couple of months, thus displaying the wealth and diversity of painting, in the most dynamic version of *Beating Around the Bush* to date.

In order to do justice to the exhibition's dynamic quality, this exhibition booklet will focus on the four 'soloists', who can suddenly be regarded as the fixed values of the presentation, in an apparent reversal of the exhibition series concept. Information about the other works that link up with the theme will be provided as the selection changes.

## 1. Rik Meijers

The paintings of Rik Meijers (Rotterdam, 1963) have a magnetic effect. One minute they're sucking you in and the next they're spitting you out. This constant process of attraction and repulsion builds up an almost electric tension that hums through the space and around the visitor. Meijers gained international recognition for his sculptural paintings, in which he incorporates unconventional materials. He finds his characters on the fringes of society: tramps, punks, weirdos, hippies, gurus and strippers, but also martyrs, mystics and prophets. These extraordinary figures and their quest for the frontiers of life form the heart of Meijers' work.

This presentation is called *I know where Rik Meijers lives*. Looking around, you immediately see that the artist lives in his paintings. Meijers says that when he paints he enters a new world that has its own rules and logic, where every tiny detail can make a difference. Meijers continually challenges himself by imposing small dogmas on himself and then breaking through them again after some time has elapsed. His oeuvre thus forms the tangible remains of his quest for freedom and improvement. Valuable art, in the words of the artist, arises from the battle with yourself and your own preferences and opinions. You have to keep on surprising yourself.



*Blanket (three)*, 220 x 200 cm, mixed media on canvas, photo: Bert Janssen



The dark character of Meijers' work is partly due to his unorthodox use of materials. His paintings are composed not just of paint, but also of things like shards of glass, buttons, beer bottle tops, tar, feathers, beads and beans. These materials give the works a pockmarked skin that exudes a certain rawness. But the materials also have a protective function. The naked figures on *Blanket (three)* (2020-2021) are embedded with feathers, whereby you can almost literally feel the softness of their skin. A few stray feathers provide a barrier between their vulnerable nakedness and the eye of the beholder.

In his work, Meijers depicts figures that society cannot get to grips with, who are therefore declared outlaws or choose themselves to live outside the rules and boundaries of society. The characters and titles in Meijers' work often appear biblical or mythical. Take, for instance, the series *From the place that is the world* (2020-2021), which includes dances with death and ritual masks that blur the borderlines between people and mythological figures. The works are partially inspired by, or taken directly from the alchemy books and texts of gurus or other spiritual leaders.

The artist succeeds in giving his characters an impressively varied range of emotions. They are on a quest. But for what? Maybe they don't even know themselves. But they long for something new, for a better or different world than one they inhabit at present. As Meijers says, you don't have to just accept everything around you. Fearfully and awkwardly, yet also hopefully and determinedly, his characters go on their way towards the unknown. The unrestrained excitement of this urge for innovation pervades each painting. It is infectious, yet also nostalgic in mood. It is as if viewers are transported



*This that*, 2020, 265 x 190 cm, mixed media on canvas, photo: Bert Janssen



*Diagram*, 2021, 220 x 200 cm, mixed media on canvas, photo: Bert Janssen

back to a time when they went on a similar voyage of discovery themselves, in their uninhibited youthfulness.

The characters in the *Blanket(three)* series are inspired by a book from the 1970's about discovering your sexuality. The sexual experiments of the hippie era may not always have been successful, but these revolutionary times were all about breaking through dogmas and creating a freer way of thinking, and that is where their value for society lies. It was one of the rare occasions when 'outsiders' suddenly became an influential section of the population. The power of these works lies in the fact that they are not simply provocative. Meijers also imbues them with an almost domestic tenderness. Desire is mixed with shyness. The socks worn by some of the figures have particularly poignancy. Together, the characters tiptoe into a new era in stockings feet.

Whether the paintings are menacing or tender, and whether they attract or repel, it is clear that Meijers' works contain great energy that reverberates long afterwards in the visitor's belly, like a deep bass note.



## 2. Hadassah Emmerich

Hadassah Emmerich (Heerlen, 1974) is regarded as one of today's most important Dutch painters. She makes exuberant, sensual paintings that stimulate the senses. Her creative process has a cyclic character, in which shapes and patterns keep recurring in a different composition or context, so that her works are in continual dialogue with one another. Emmerich thus spins an ever bigger and denser web of themes and associations. Her long, laborious creative process demands great physical and mental effort and concentration, which lends extra overtones and meanings to each detail. The ensuing monumental and generous works have a profound effect on the viewer and can evoke feelings of ecstasy.

The power of fusing is a central feature of Emmerich's oeuvre. In her work, she mixes together figures and patterns of flowers, plants and the female body, resulting in ornaments with an erotic appearance. The alluring images clearly refer to a fundamental life force and fertility, which are essential to both nature and mankind. Emmerich's blends, which in itself already suggest reproduction and sexuality in themselves, give rise to new life forms that are stronger, more colourful, more energetic or sometimes more virulent.





*Sunset Curve*, 2021, oil and ink on vinyl, 71 x 53 cm, credits: Hadassah Emmerich



*Oben Ohne*, 2021, oil and ink on vinyl, 71 x 53 cm, credits: Hadassah Emmerich



In her recent work, which is well illustrated by *Kiwi Kiss* (2021), Emmerich's visual idiom is more stylised. However, this does not lend an abstract detachment to what is depicted. On the contrary, a refined interplay of forms gives the whole work an undeniable physicality. Ambiguous shapes may suggest either leaves or genitalia, and foliage has the appearance of licking tongues. Viewers are continually surprised and challenged to use their imagination.

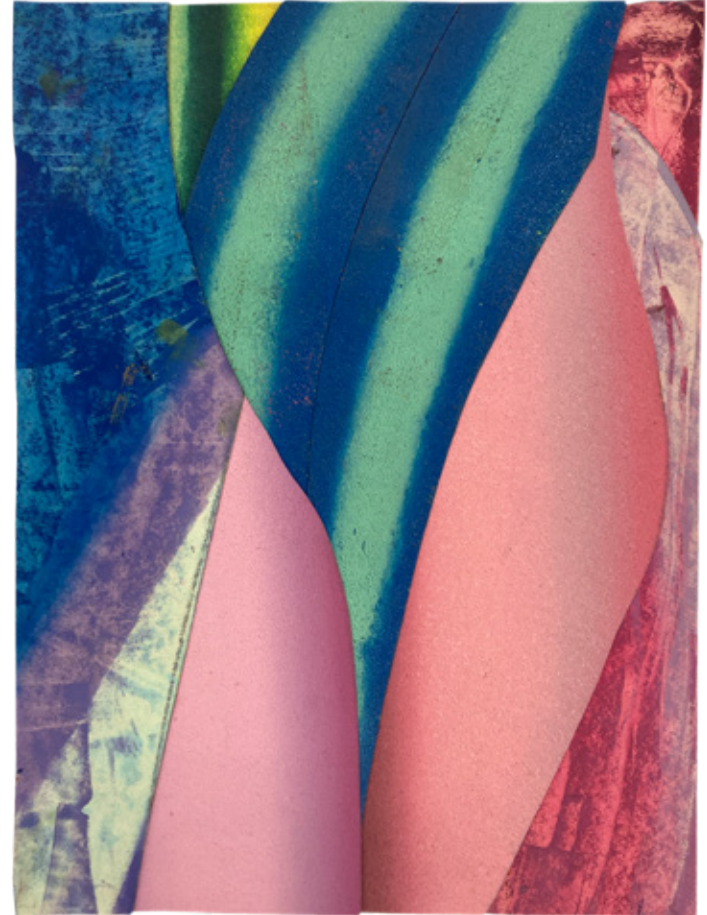
Emmerich's work is imbued with great urgency. With directness and self-awareness, it deals with the power relations between the various genders and feminism. In her themes, an important role is also played by power relations in the post-colonial era, which adds a raw, dark edge to her cheerful and luxuriant works. A good example of this

is the work *Rainbow Warriors* (2020). On the one hand, the hermetic composition is reminiscent of the coercive straitjacket in which we are restrained by today's physical ideals. On the other, the coloured, piled-up bodies of these warriors erect a barricade that protects and liberates us.

Repetition is an important element in Emmerich's creative process. She works with templates, stencils and printing techniques in order to keep using shapes in new ways in her work. It allows her to explore the reproduction and recontextualisation of knowledge and meaning. She also uses these methods when creating her murals, where their relationship to this place-specific art form is paradoxical. The necessarily one-off nature of a mural appears to contradict the idea of reuse, but ultimately it provides a

unique new context for the forms that appear, thus creating a new layer of meaning for the next time they are used. The mural *The Harvest* (2021), originally created for CENTRALE for contemporary art in Brussels, is an excellent example of this. Emmerich refers to the overwhelming work as a form of expanded painting: the work does not stand alone, but forms a total environment that transports the viewer. The erotic shapes are displayed grandly on the walls. This sensuality is not intimate, but overpowering. The viewer has to yield to it.

In 2021, Emmerich took a new step in her oeuvre. She decided to incorporate the pieces of inked vinyl that previously served as printing templates for her paintings and murals into a new series of vinyl collages. The used pieces of vinyl are reminiscent of leather or hide, and bear traces of use like scratches and scraped layers of paint. The playful placement of the material creates a painterly, illusory space. Once again, the fringes of painting are explored in the series, which weaves a new thread through the fabric of Emmerich's oeuvre. By spotlighting the working materials of previous projects, all the preceding works are given a new layer of meaning. In this way, Emmerich says, the collages help her to gain new insights.



*Aussendusche*, 2021, oil and ink on vinyl, 71 x 53 cm, credits: Hadassah Emmerich

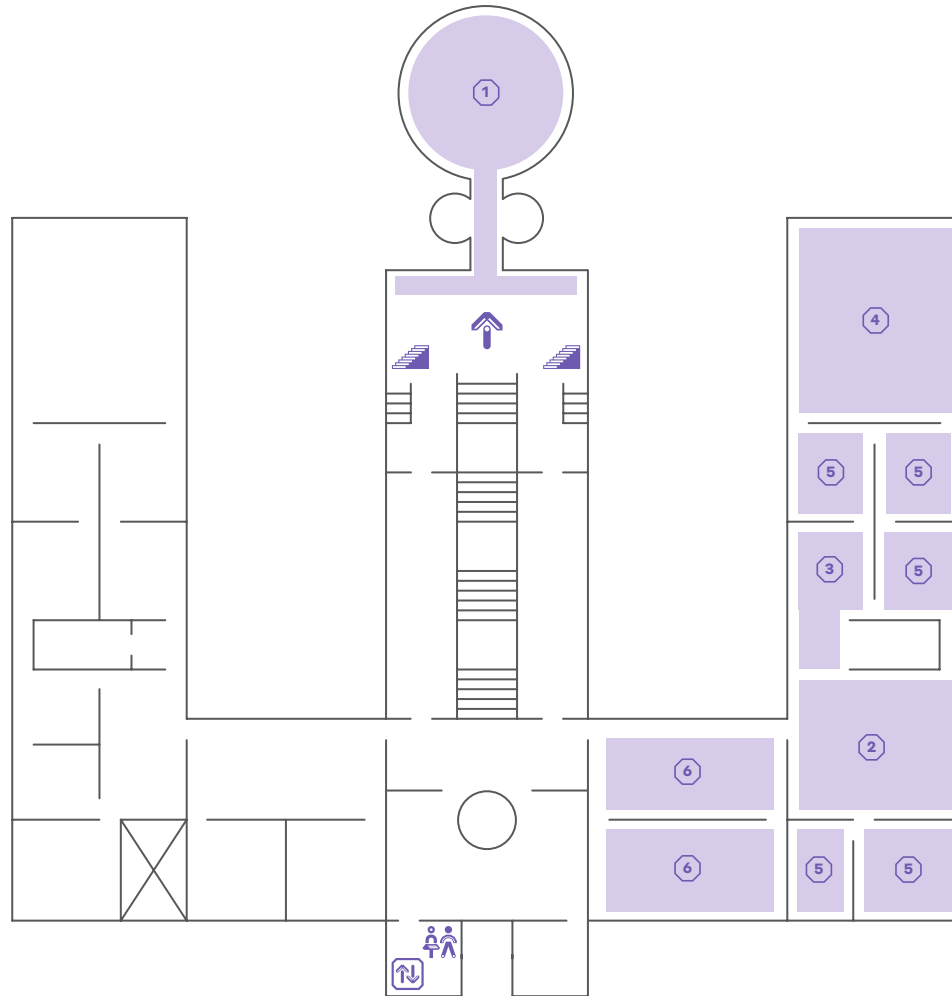
← Exhibition starts here

- ① Rik Meijers
- ② Hadassah Emmerich
- ③ Marleen Rothaus
- ④ Fons Haagmans
- ⑤ These works are always explained on site
- ⑥ As ⑤ after March 20 2022

↕ Lift to other floors

↗ Stairs to other floors

♿ Toilets





### 3. Marleen Rothaus

Marleen Rothaus (Bielefeld, 1991) is an artist, feminist and social worker. She is a fierce advocate for the rights of people who deviate from the cisgender, heterosexual male. Rothaus often refers to this group as 'women', as European culture has long seen women as the only 'other' to the male norm. Rothaus has gained international recognition for her oil paintings, which she carries around as banners at feminist marches, protests and interventions in the streets and public buildings. Rothaus' work is characterised by a flamboyant visual idiom, and is inhabited by colourful, cartoonish figures. Behind the relatable and attractive scenes lies a broad scope of philosophical, historical and activist meaning. Her oeuvre thus gently and cheerfully coaxes the viewer into a world of complex emancipatory concepts.

By using her paintings as props for feminist protests, Rothaus stretches the traditional boundaries of the medium of painting. They are not just self-referential artworks that flourish in the institutional, art-historical context of the museum. They can be seen as tools or instruments for a larger activist goal, and as such also have historical value. Through her artworks, Rothaus removes the medium of painting from its elite ivory tower and places it at the heart of society. Her presentation at the Bonnefanten highlights this aspect of her artistic practice, and shows how the paintings function in a context that is wider than just the pictorial.

Rothaus' work, she states, is heavily influenced by Silvia Federici, a scholar and activist from the feminist Marxist tradition. Federici researches the structures and beginnings of capitalism in relation to feminism. Among other things, she argues that the beginning of capitalism coincides with, and builds upon the structural discrimination and exploitation of women and 'female labour'. With the invention of a 'feminine nature' in the early modern era, women were forced into unpaid work that was often related to reproduction and care - activities that at the same time experienced a strong devaluation. Rothaus poignantly portrays her own take on Federici's ideas. For instance, in the painting *we call it work* (2020), fiery flames come out of the oven while Rothaus dryly remarks that this is not an allegory for a woman's burning love.

Many of the works by Rothaus are inspired by early modern woodcuts depicting so-called witches. In these images, she explains, women were demonised for not conforming to societal expectations. In Rothaus' vision, witches were mostly women and probably also queer people who did not fit into society's patriarchal conception. They often lived self-determined lives, practiced an active and unproductive sexuality, and possessed practical knowledge of nature and the body. This independence and their refusal to bow to normative demands made the witches a threat to patriarchal capitalism. In early modern times, thousands of women were hunted down and executed for allegedly being a witch. Rothaus pays tribute to these resistant women from the past and pulls the subject into the present. The work *coven* (2020), for example, clearly refers to women of



*coven*, 2020, oil on canvas, 130 x 208 cm, photo: Lucien Liebecke

today's society. In her work, Rothaus playfully shows us self-confident, autonomous women and queers, who create their own communities and stories.

Rothaus' practice of compiling and connecting many different meanings, histories and teachings in a single image lies at the core of her oeuvre. Her paintings have strong connections to history and art history, and often engage in intertextuality. It is important for Rothaus to retell and reimagine history. Everything that has happened is important, she says, because today's world is an accumulation of its history. In order to break cycles of discrimination and oppression, we need to remind ourselves of things that happened in the past. But her works also function without this historical context. The humour and light-heartedness of the paintings draw you in, regardless of your level of expertise. Rothaus' paintings create a bonding experience and show that politics and activism can be joyful and exciting, even though they are difficult subjects.



*we call it work*, 2020, oil on canvas, 180 x 155 cm, photo: Lucien Liebecke



left:  
*fight back*, 2019, oil on canvas, 210 x 50 cm, photo: Lucien Liebecke

right:  
*notification*, 2020, oil on canvas, 210 x 52 cm, photo: Lucien Liebecke

## 4. Fons Haagmans

Fons Haagmans (Schinnen, 1948) is one of the protagonists of painting from Limburg and the Netherlands. He has had a great influence on the Dutch art scene and on younger generations of artists. Over his long career, he has proved that painting lends itself equally well to abstract work and to figurative representation. In the 1980's, Haagmans gained international fame for his monochrome paintings that depict rhythmic series of motifs and numbers. Later in his career, he focused increasingly on representing the world around him and reflecting on it, taking inspiration from the traditional cultural life of Limburg, for example, as well as from rappers and pop stars.

Haagmans' distinctive painting style emerged early on his career. He tells of how, as a recently graduated artist, he was so averse to the academic methods that he deliberately made paintings that looked 'awkward', dispensing completely with the sensual, expressive brushstrokes taught to students at the academy. Instead, he worked with templates of series of numbers for his paintings, and in other works, too, he avoided any hint of the pictorial. Later in his career, he invented a method of making 'very clumsy' pictures, as he describes them, which were nevertheless constructed in a very rational way.



*Jäger*, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 200 x 150 cm,  
credits: Fons Haagmans



left:  
*Custard Cup*, 2008, acryl op doek, 100 x 80 cm, credits: Fons Haagmans

middel:  
*Doppelhankel Vase*, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 100 x 70 cm, credits: Fons Haagmans

right:  
*Zwei Kannen*, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 100 x 80 cm, credits: Fons Haagmans

This presentation revolves around the *Barok series*, in which Haagmans depicts various forms of Meissen porcelain. The German porcelain factory Meissen is known not just for its elaborately painted services, but also for its small romantic porcelain figurines. The Meissen style became so popular in the 19th and 20th century that imitations were found in nearly every drawing room, which has led to many people regarding it as kitsch nowadays. By depicting the porcelain on monumental works and thus placing it on a pedestal once more, Haagmans is toying with popular opinion, in a provocative, yet light-hearted way. He confronts the viewer with objects that are hugely popular, as well as being branded as 'bad taste'.

Haagmans' work is not so much a window on another world, but rather a means of communicating succinctly. Not only do his paintings speak to our fundamental imagination, but they also look at how we order and shape the world around us from childhood on. The iconic *Doré Cow* (2008) is probably the most striking example of this. The cow is a textbook example of the animal. The same applies to *Pair of Lovers* (2008), which presents us with an archetypal, almost sugary picture of what love should look like.

Haagman's visual idiom does not shirk the singularity of the medium, and the artist does not try to hide the fact that a work is a flat surface with paint on it. His depictions thus





*Wild Boar*, 2008, acrylic  
on canvas, 100 x 130 cm,  
credits: Fons Haagmans,  
collection Peggy en André  
Terlingen.



lend the work a figurative one-dimensionality. In Haagmans' universe, everything appears simple and clear. But this simplicity is deceptive, which is probably demonstrated most strongly by the heads of the porcelain human figures. The affected expressions conceal intangible associations, which give the works a moving, cheerful, melancholy and sometimes menacing feeling. Reality is not in the least bit simple, is what Haagmans seems to be saying, laconically. His works form a distorted, critical and frivolous view of the world around us, which provokes thought in the viewer.

In his work, Haagmans also appeals to a bygone collective memory. The works *Café Polonia* (2011) and *Schön, portret von Leni und Ludwig* (2007) both refer to the past of South Limburg. *Café Polonia* refers to the café on the corner of Heksenberg, in Heerlen, where the Polish miners' association used to meet. The singers' duo Leni und Ludwig, from Limburg, had a big hit in the late 1950's with the number *Schön ist die Jugend*. Through a few choice examples, Haagmans succeeds in portraying the colourful folk culture of South Limburg. Like all his works, these paintings are filled with meanings and associations that invite you to look further, to remember and to reflect.



*Schön, portret von Leni und Ludwig*, 2007,  
acrylic on canvas, 200 x 160 cm, credits: Fons  
Haagmans





# Beating Around the Bush #7: *False Flat*

23.01.2022 – 08.01.2023

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