

david gosker



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De-collage, or the papier collé of the 21st century

By Vincent Blok

Since Nietzsche's observation of the death of God we have learned two things. First, we now have an experience of nihilism. That is to say that there is no fixed orientation for the organization of our society. In our world people and things, arts and sciences derive their meaning from the extent to which they are conducive to the *struggle for existence*. 'Fixed' anchor points such as 'God' or 'freedom' are only allowed for in so far as they serve this struggle.

Saturated by this experience, the true theme of present-day philosophy and arts is an effort to provide an *answer* to this nihilism. This answer should not be thought of lightly. For, as it happens, our second experience is that every answer to nihilism is in danger of being nihilistic itself. For Nietzsche has taught us that nihilism controls the history of western civilization. We do not only speak of nihilism when a fixed anchor point – Plato's horizon of the *idea* – has been erased. As long as our answer to nihilism shows a search for a new fixed anchor point, a new transcendent or rescendent *idea*, this answer will also show nihilism. For such a search for a fixed, static identity of things would show evidence of the *nihil* of earthly existence, with its creation and decay, and deny the dynamic nature of life.

Nietzsche's diagnosis of the search for the IDEA is that it shows evidence of a *desire* for truth. The desire for truth wants to make life with all its contingencies and fickleness [becoming] permanent [being], by the design of a static category or idea, in the light of which things have a fixed orientation and meaning. If we want to arrive at an answer to nihilism, it will have to be dynamic instead of static, and it will have to admit the world of creation and decay. Within the realm of philosophy this ambition is shown in that it demands attention for categories that are permeated by unconcealment [Heidegger], differance [Derrida] or desistence [Lacoue-Labarthe]. It is all right to forget about such notions, as long as we keep in mind that this is about categories that are not absorbed into the bright light of the present, but carry their own finiteness, fickleness or alterity within themselves and will always be surrounded by darkness.

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The question is: Who can design categories that carry their own finiteness within themselves, when they no longer originate from a god or are in any other sense GIVEN? In fact, there is a growing tendency to rely on the possibilities of art to create such dynamic categories. In this, too, Nietzsche played a decisive role, for he saw art as a countermovement to nihilism: It is 'Anti-nihilistic par excellence'. This is the true task of present-day art, from the beginning of the twentieth century.

Have the arts shown any interest in this task? In other words, do we see the representation of such categories on the street, for instance, in works of art?

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In 1906-1907 Pablo Picasso paints *Les demoiselles d'Avignon*, the first work of twentieth century art, according to many art historians. It is one of the first works of his cubist period, in which five prostitutes are depicted. In this painting the theme of the image explodes. Because of the changing point of view the women are continually shown from various perspectives, collected and accommodated within one image. Each recognition of the women will always be finite, mobile, and permeated by alterity. Are such *open forms* of cubism the concrete representation of the dynamic category, or do they pretend to accommodate every possible view of the women into an all-inclusive perspective, and thus bringing it forth into the present?

About a hundred years later – in 1999 – Daniel Liebeskind designs the Jewish Historical Museum in Berlin. In this building exhibition rooms are created around empty rooms with no public access. The alternation of accessible and inaccessible rooms represents the unconcealment of Jewish history, that is, the representation in time and space of the history of the Jewish people that is present and available in the museum, as opposed to the concealment of this irrational history itself. Is this design truly capable of allowing for concealment or darkness, and thus for a concrete *representation* of the dynamic category, or is this impossible as long as this concealment is confined by walls or gates – as in a reserve – within which it is allowed to reign, that is to say, it is taken into account and thus brought forth into the present?

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If the visual arts want to create *open forms* that are not absorbed into the presence of the image, but carry their finiteness within themselves, its images will have to show evidence of a certain *indirectness*. After all, a *direct* shaping of finiteness or darkness brings the form forth into the present, and so destroys the finiteness or alterity. This is shown clearly in Liebeskind's work. How can the visual arts hold on to the creation of images without lapsing into *direct* representation?

An answer to this could be found in the untruthfulness or mask-like quality of the image. The mask shows something, yet at the same time it hides or masks things. The visual arts are capable of allowing for alterity by the creation of such lies and masks. This masking occurs in two different ways. Either the image is unsaid in such a way that we can only say that it is, or in such a way that it pretends to be something else, that it is a simulation. In these two ways works of art with a mask-like quality carry their own alterity and finiteness within themselves and represent the dynamic category.

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If we follow this suggestion, it means that we have to dissociate ourselves from our commonplace understanding of the achievements of the arts. As it is, we tend to think that the artist wants to call attention to things that he deems important – which can be his feelings, his vicissitudes, social-economic relations or wrongs

– and clarify them for the spectator, bring them closer. But if we are to allow for alterity and finiteness in a work of art, the objective of the image is not only to bring it closer in the light of presence, but at the same time, to put it in the distance; not only to clarify the image, but also to hide it; not only to make it common, but also, to retain it as strange. The visual arts achieve this by hiding or masking the very things they intend to express.

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If we recall before our mind's eye Picasso's women of Avignon, we see that the painting not only shows cubist qualities, accommodating the women in an all-inclusive perspective, but also that some of them are wearing masks. In the Trocadero Museum in Paris Picasso was confronted for the first time with African masks. He believed that the Africans made these masks and other items for magic purposes, that is, to overcome unknown and hostile powers that surrounded them – the world of fickleness and contingency – by providing them with a shape, an image. Picasso says about this: 'That very instant it became clear to me that this was what painting was all about. Painting is not an aesthetic activity; it is a form of magic, meant to mediate between this strange, hostile world and ourselves, a method to seize power by giving shape to our fears as well as our desires. When I gained this understanding, I knew that I had found my way.'^[1]

Please note: What Picasso says here should not be confused with Plato's metaphysical efforts. The power is not seized by giving shape to a life permeated by fickleness [Platonism], but to our *fear* of the world of becoming. So Picasso does not give shape to the world; he creates the person that is capable of enduring this world of contingency and fickleness without fear. This is an extremely modern notion, for since René Descartes [1596-1650] man has been the determining factor in the control of the world, and the purpose of art has been to depict this new type of man. So Picasso's intention is not the depiction of the world, but the self- or auto-construction of man with a view of his control of the earth, and as such it is *modern*-metaphysical by nature. Is it still possible at this day and age to consider such an auto-construction a task of the arts?

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As it is, David Gosker's basic experience is a very different one. When we look at his self-portrait [p.17], it is impossible to see a distinction between man and world. Gosker says about this: 'I am nothing but a compilation of circumstances, a void shaped by what surrounds me. This is the experience of a complete differentiation and fragmentation of man and world.' When there is no distinction between man and world, no mediation is needed anymore between 'this strange, hostile world and ourselves'; there is nothing left that calls for the creation of a new identity of man.

Why? This can be seen in *Het goede leven* [*The Good Life*, pp.10 and 11], where the distinction between fore- and background has completely disappeared and the naked woman is absorbed completely into the background, in a painless way. The self-portrait also shows that there can be no question of emptiness, let alone of an emptiness that asks to be filled in and filled up with a new identity of man. The self is considered sufficiently filled in when it is filled out with the packaging materials of food and body care, that is: it is filled up by the world itself.

This being filled up shows that it is an unnecessary enterprise to construct a new type of man. It is true, Gosker calls the emptiness 'suffocating' and 'destructive', but he adds immediately: 'It is not clear anymore what it is that is being destroyed'. At this moment in time there is no need for the creation of a new destination of man, as there was at the beginning of the twentieth century. In our time there is at the most a need for needlessness, that is, the need of the inability to attain an experience of the dubiousness of the destination of man.

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This experience is a fundamental reason why Gosker's work is not painted. The art of painting belongs in the nineteenth century, the era in which the individual and the biographical aspect are the focus of attention. When the individual, the personal and the biographical aspects lose their power of expression, there is no place any more for the art of painting. These days we penetrate so deeply into life that the individual-personal aspect is masked – or unmasked – in favor of a genetic encryption that denotes 'nature's genetic cut and paste job'. The art of painting is not at all appropriate for representing these phenomena. On the contrary, what we need is heightened precision and tools that are exact: photography, the scan, the print, photo-shop. The happy-go-lucky organic constructions entitled *Bye bye Darwin* [pp.15, 20, 21, 22 and 23] are striking examples of this.

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Yet the question is whether the meaning of art can exist in an organic construction, that is, the *repetition* of the organic structure of nature and its identification with it. If Gosker's artistic collage is identical with nature's cut and paste, that is to say that they have become identical in the 'ennaturation' of man [struggle for existence] and the humanization of nature [struggle for existence], there are no opportunities left for the indirectness of art. The distinction between man and world is neutralized completely when they merge into each other. For instance, consider the modern businessman who blends in with his car and equipment in such a way that they become seamlessly intertwined and form a new unity – an organic construction – in which no distinction can be made between the controller and the controlled, and it is impossible to say where re-animation begins and animation stops. Thus merged into each other, man and world are omnipresent in their mutual reflection of and in each other.

If man and world have merged into each other in this way, the possibility of an experience of finiteness of alterity is sure to be destroyed and neutralized. In Gosker's terms, this destruction of alterity cannot exist, and it is suffocating. This is no invitation for us for a renewed question of the personal, but the 'suffocation' motivates the artist to make a *de-collage*, to a countermovement against the directness of life, a masking of it. If there has to be something called the personal in our day and age, then this personality can only *exist* in its masking ['person' is derived from 'persona', which originally means 'mask']. What is the nature of the de-collage?

■

In his conversations with Françoise Gilot Picasso mentions the *papier collé*. This means that the artist pastes bits of paper or cloth on to a canvas as in a collage, but the difference is that the bit of paper itself depicts an object. A well-known example is the piece of newspaper in the shape of a bottle. About it, Picasso remarks: 'A piece of newspaper was never used to depict a newspaper. It was used to make a bottle or something. It was never used literally, but always as an element that deviated from its original meaning and acquired a new objective, with the intention to create a conflict between the normal definition at the point of departure and the new definition at the point of arrival. If a piece of newspaper can become a bottle, this will give us food for thought, about newspapers as well as about bottles. This transported object has entered a universe for which it was not created and in which it will in a certain sense retain its displacedness. And this displacedness was what we wanted the public to contemplate, because we were highly aware that our world was becoming extremely peculiar, and that it was not exactly reassuring.'^[2]

The world is *reassured* when the distinction between man and world is neutralized in the organic construction of art and nature; then you only encounter yourself, and the world no longer appears to be peculiar, it no longer shows alterity. Picasso's basic experience is that of displacedness, and it is this displacedness that incited him to paint. By presenting the newspaper as a bottle, 'newspaper' as well as 'bottle' is masked. Indeed, this incites the question of the bottle as bottle and the newspaper as newspaper, but does not lead to its design. Such a *gestaltung* of the essence of newspapers and bottles is Platonic-metaphysical and leads to a static category, while Picasso, on the other hand, wants to retain his basic experience of misplacedness, e.g., the experience that the newspaper is *never* a newspaper, and that the bottle is *never* a bottle. The important thing for Picasso is the experience of misplacedness or alterity, which shows itself in the newspaper as a bottle.

This also shows that Picasso's artistry is ambiguous. On the one hand he wants to create a person that can *endure* this misplacedness. On the other hand, the experience of misplacedness – and consequently, the misplacedness in the essence of man – dictates that the search for a new destination of man should be stopped. Man *never* is man. Perhaps the experience of misplacedness requires from us that we defile or even undermine this search. In fact, Picasso's artistry

turns out to be of an educational nature, i.e., not an auto-construction of man, which irrevocably leads to a static category, but the generation of an experience of alterity for the public, for us. This is the true achievement of the *papier collé*.



We find a modern variant of the *papier collé* in Gosker's work. The clippings in his collages do not generate conflict because the shape denotes a different object, but by the image depicted in the clipping; For example, clippings of pink children's toys combine to form the entrance to a cell on death row [cf. 'Game over 1', pp.34 and 35]. Here too, we see that the toys as a cell on death row create a conflict that gives us food for thought. Of course this is not meant to be a concealed protest against executions in the United States, by filling up the violent image with the comfort of children's toys. If anything catches the eyes, it is not the contrast, but the hygiene and the comfort that surround the world of the children's toys *and* that of the cell on death row, but this is just a thought. The toys as a cell only create a conflict, a conscious or unconscious masquerade.

We said before that the masking can be done in two ways. Not only can the image present itself differently from what it is: a simulation of the moral indignity about executions in America. It is possible that the image is denied to us in such a way that we can only say that it is. There is only one thing that we stumble upon: the displacedness of the de-collage itself. Then the image will confront us with the displacedness of our humanized world and worldified man, and thus it incites us to contemplate this alterity.

[1] Françoise Gilot, *Leven met Picasso* [Bruna 1966], blz. 246

[2] idem, blz. 67

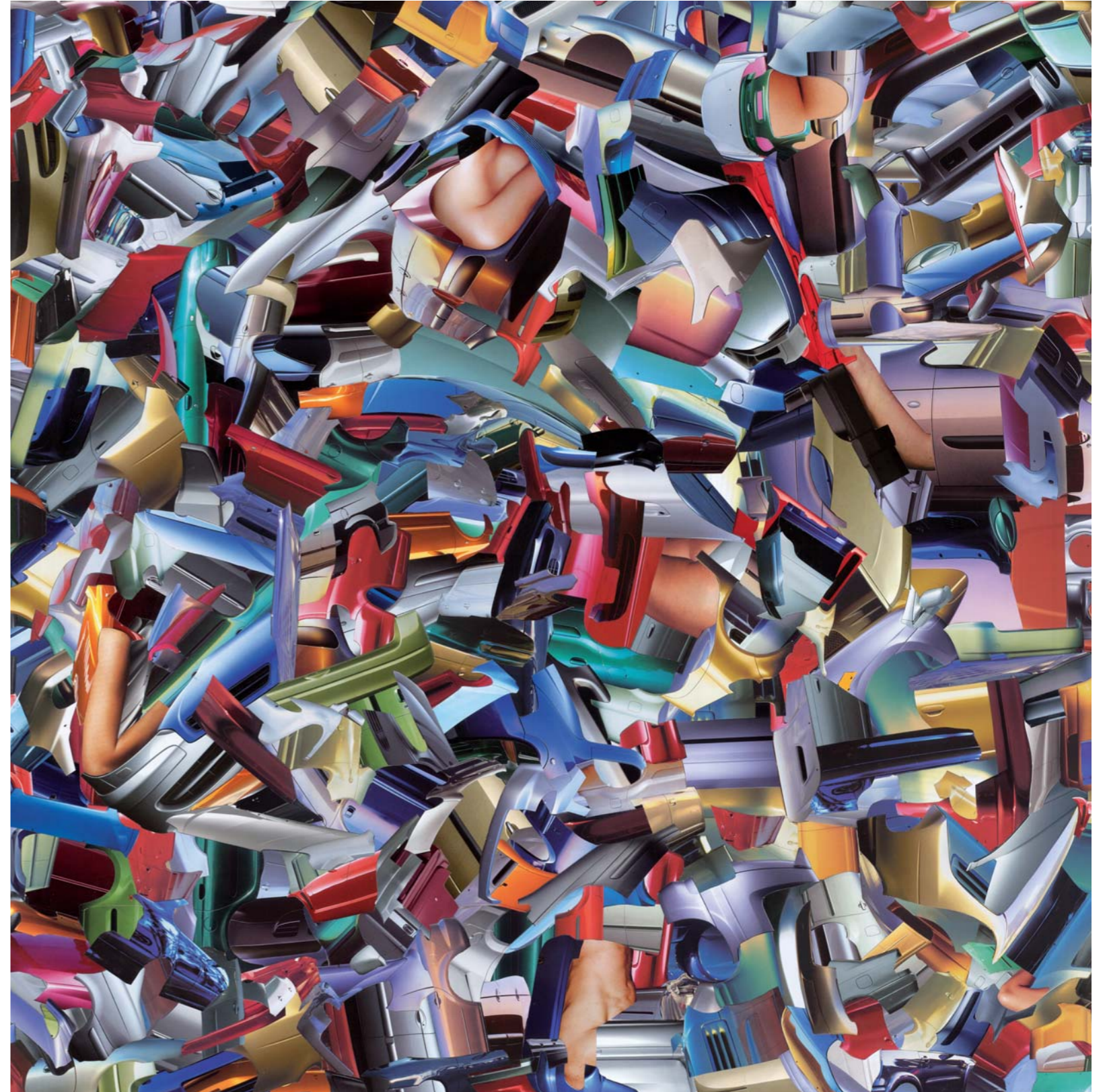
Consuming London, 2000,
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print: inkt op papier, 100 x 100



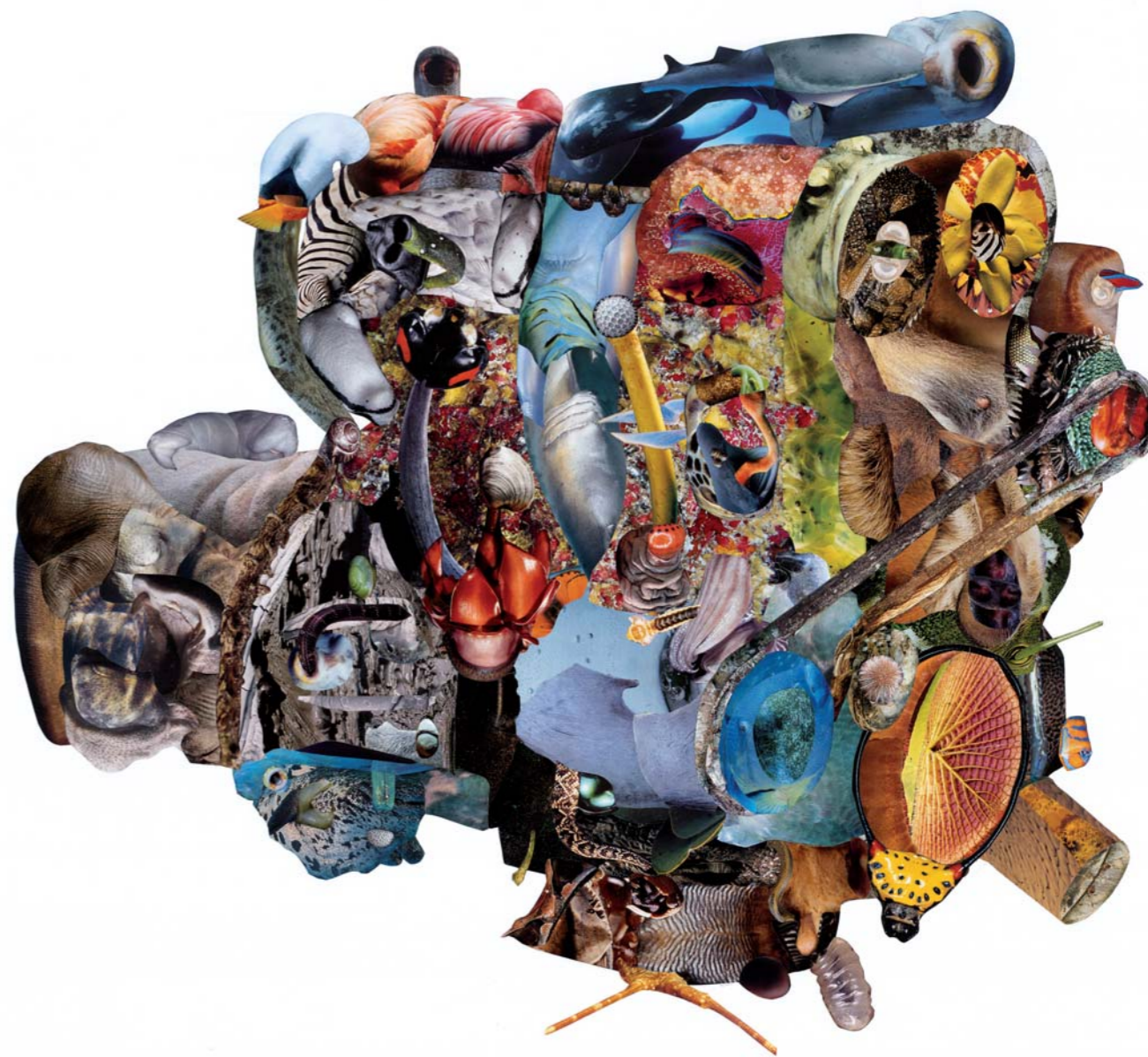
Het goede leven, 2002,
ontwerp: foto's uit glossy's en
modetijdschriften op karton, 109 x 59,
print: inkt op papier, 166 x 90



Autofysiek 1, 2003,
ontwerp: foto's uit reclame brochures van
autofabrikanten op karton, 87 x 87,
print: inkt op papier, 125 x 125



Bye Bye Darwin 1, 2004,
ontwerp: foto's uit tijdschriften op karton, 95 x 86,
print: inkt op papier, 125 x 125



Zelfportret, 2005,
ontwerp: verpakkingsmateriaal van voeding en
lichamelijke verzorgingsartikelen, toegangsbewijzen,
vliegtickets en plaatsbewijzen op karton, 67 x 89,
print: inkt op papier, 68 x 90





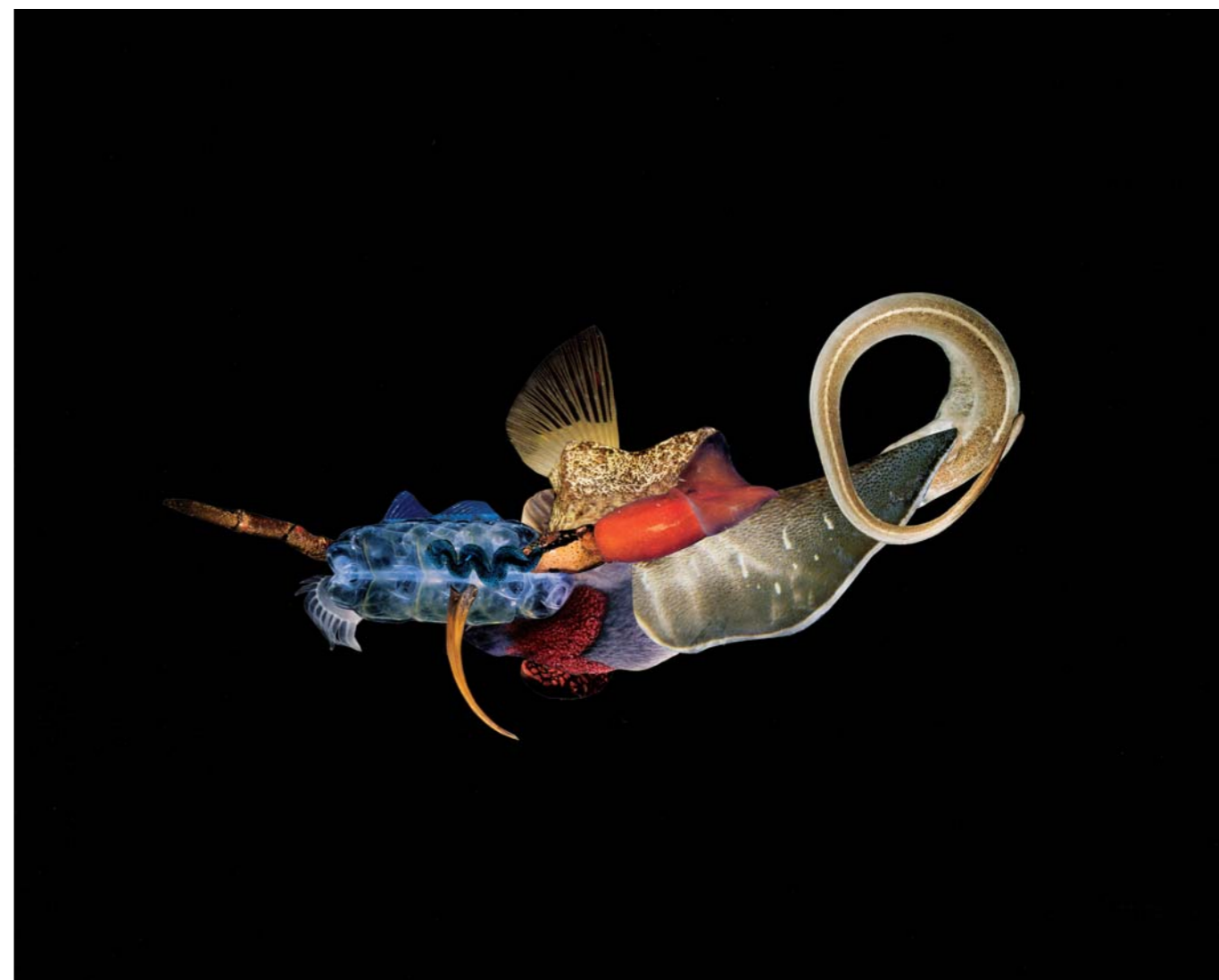
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autofabrikanten op karton, 49 x 68,
print: inkt op papier, 50 x 70



Bouwwerk, 2003,
foto's uit architectuurtijdschriften op karton,
ontwerp: drukwerk op karton, 58 x 85



Bye Bye Darwin 3, 2004,
ontwerp: foto's uit natuurtijdschriften
op wit glanskarton, 70 x 50,
print: inkt op papier, 70 x 50



Bye Bye Darwin 4, 2004,
ontwerp: foto's uit natuurtijdschriften
op zwart glanskarton, 58 x 46,
print: inkt op papier, 70 x 50



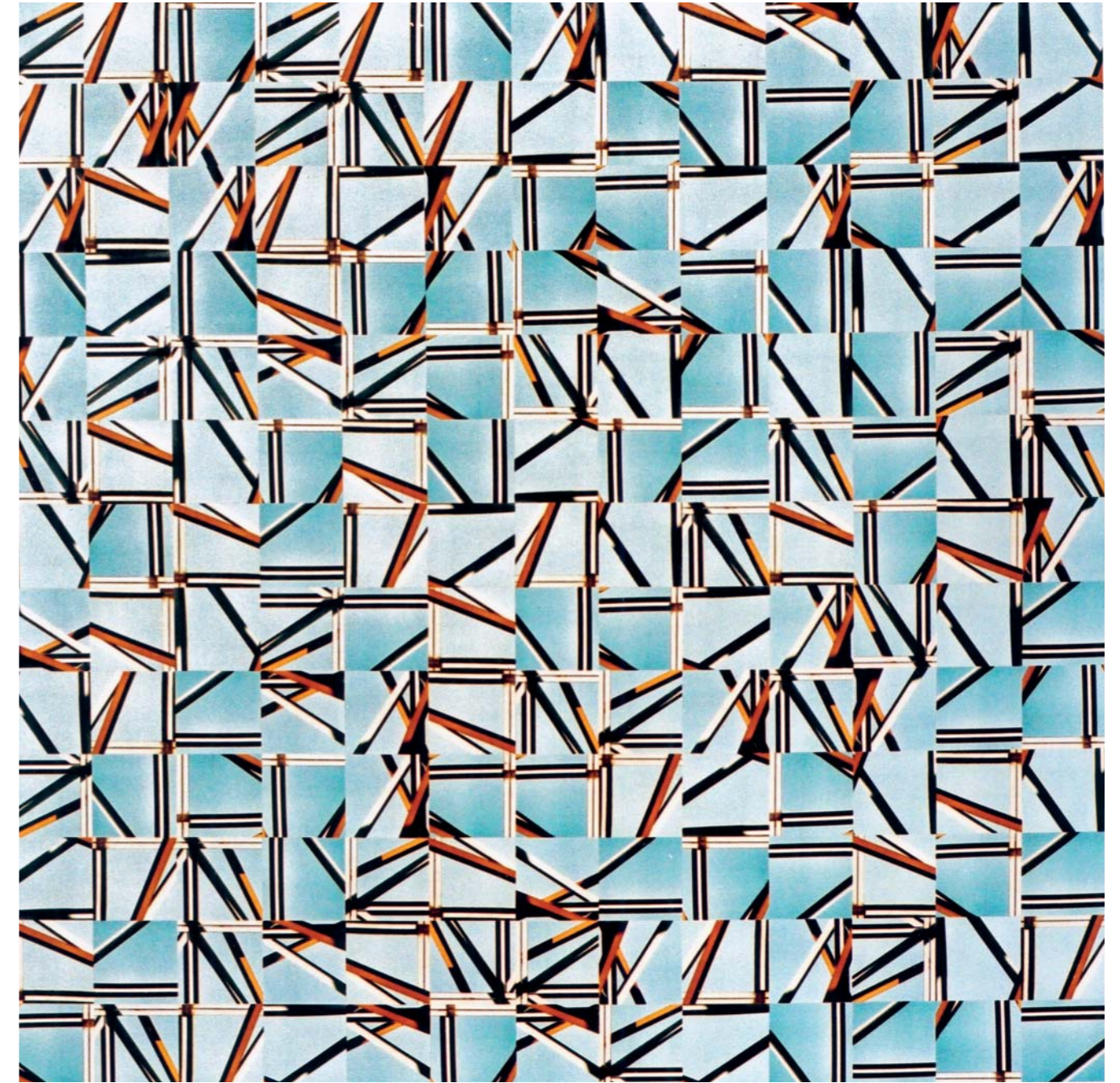
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op wit glanskarton, 28 x 27,
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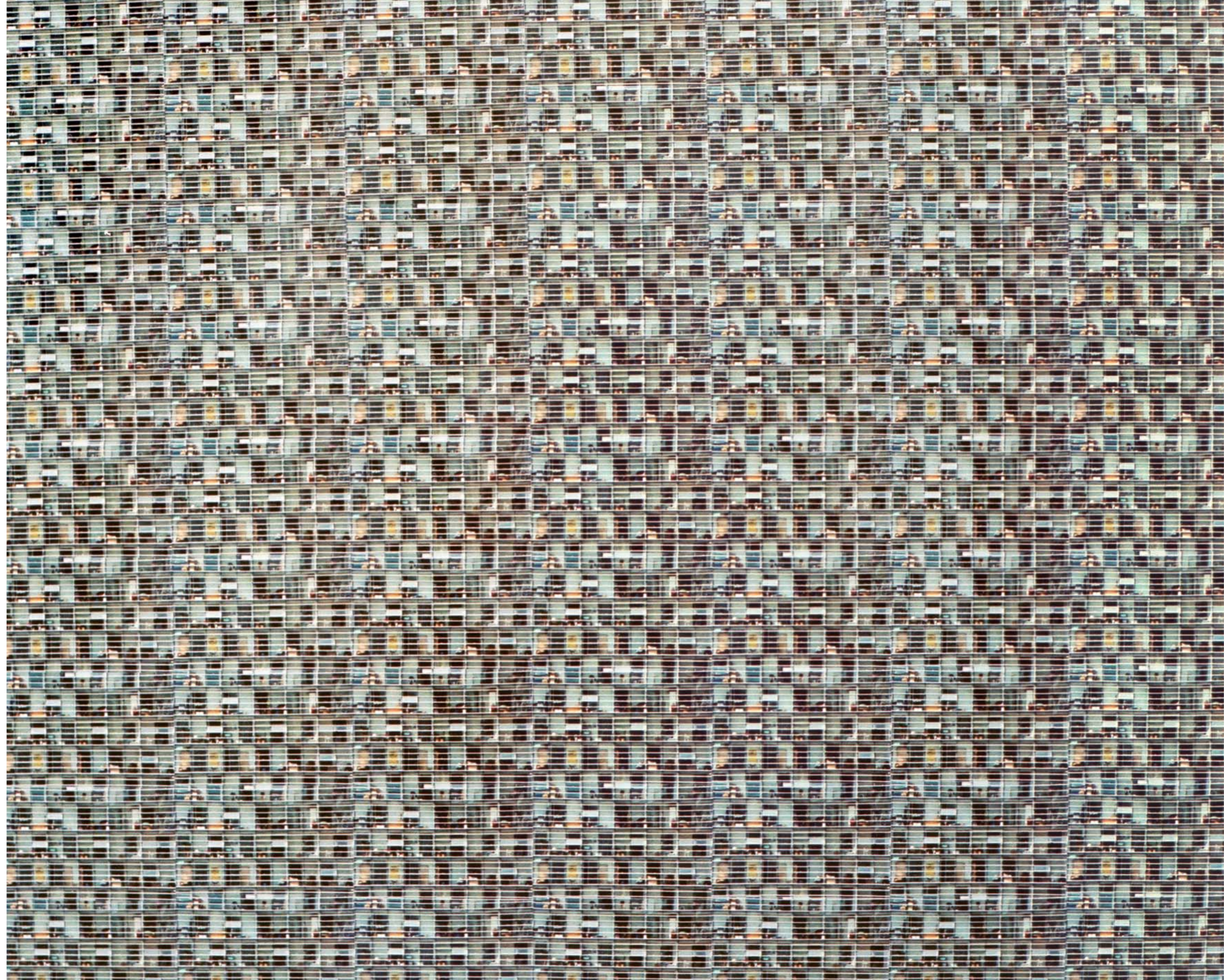
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op zwart glanskarton, 35 x 50,
print: inkt op papier, 50 x 70



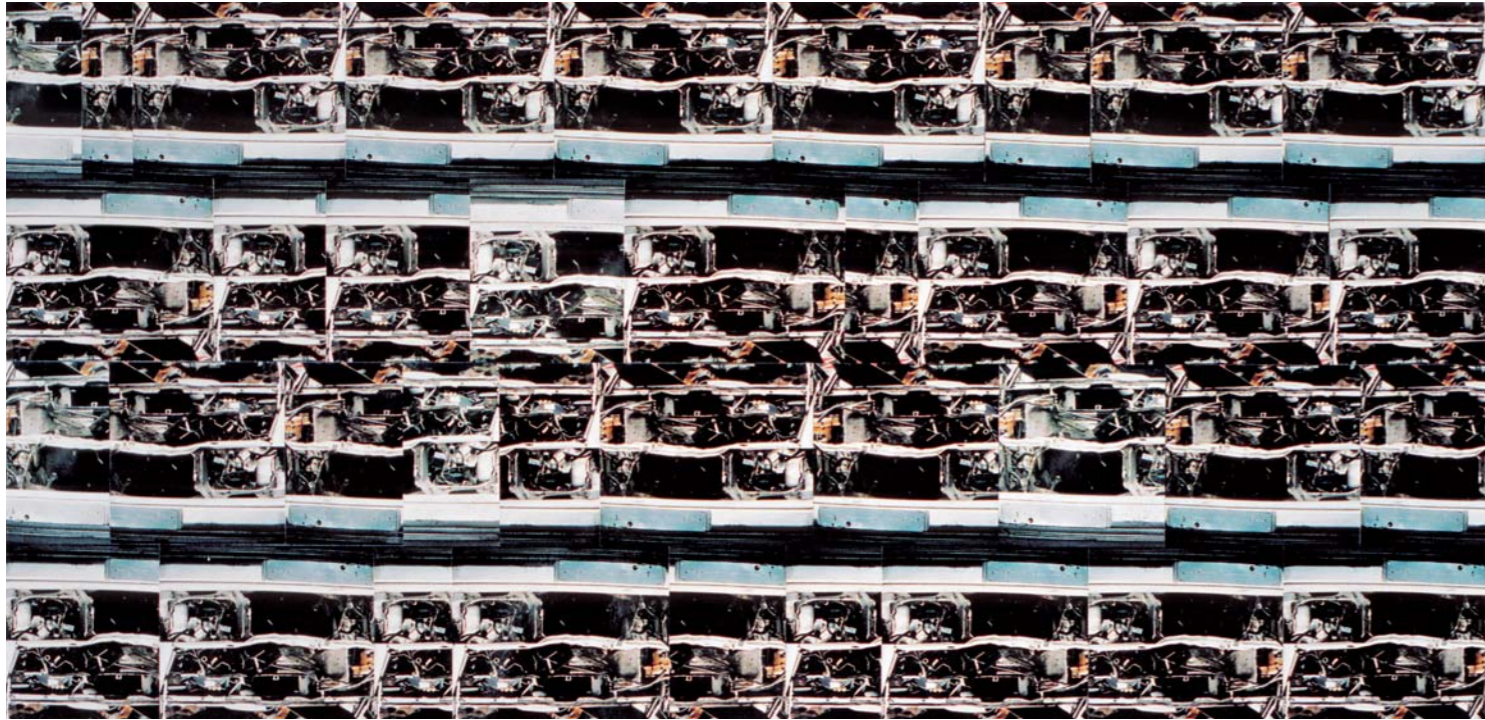
Reconstructie 1, 2000,
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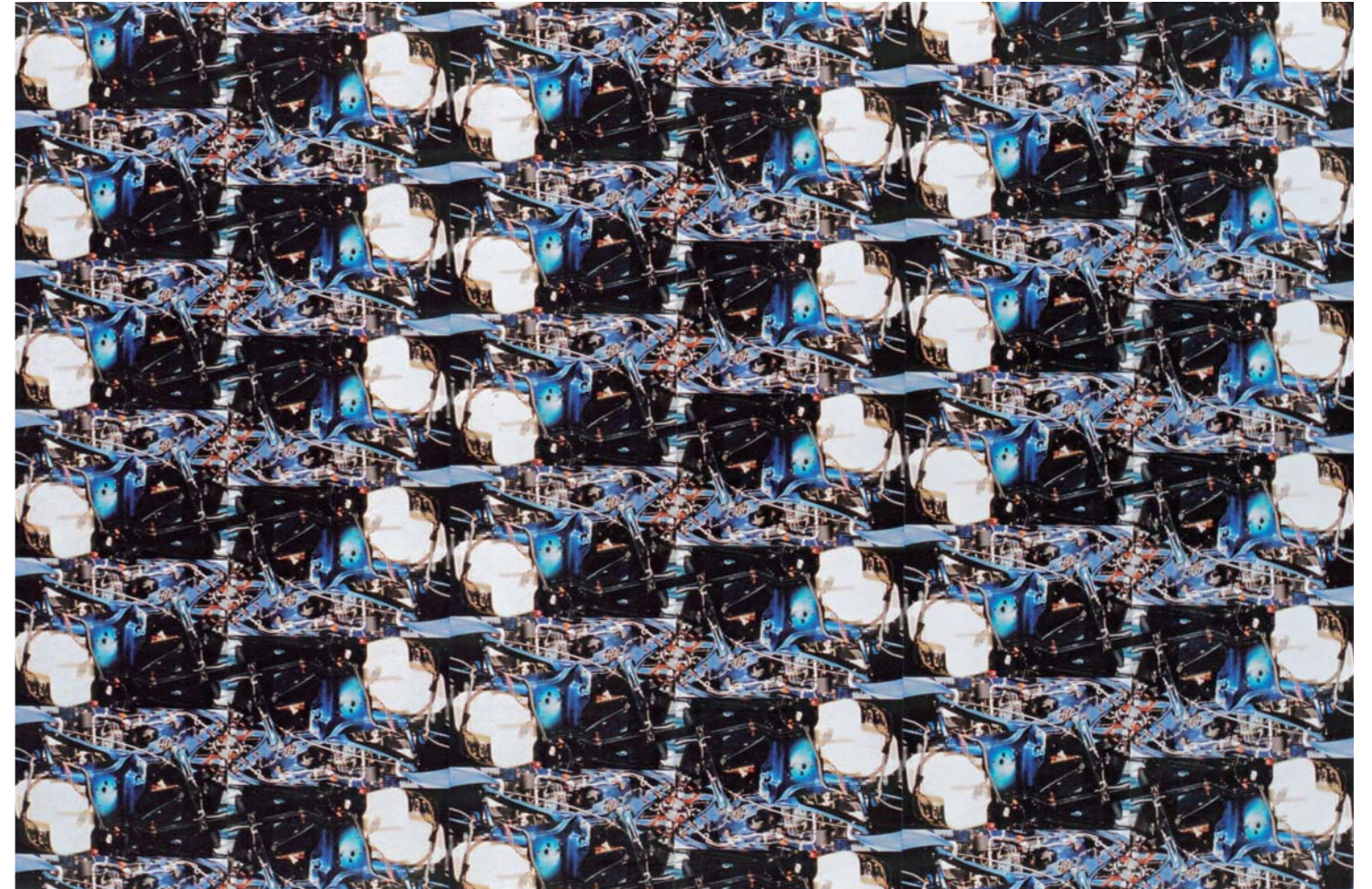
Reconstructie 2, 2003,
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Reconstructie 3, 2003,
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op karton, 91 x 75



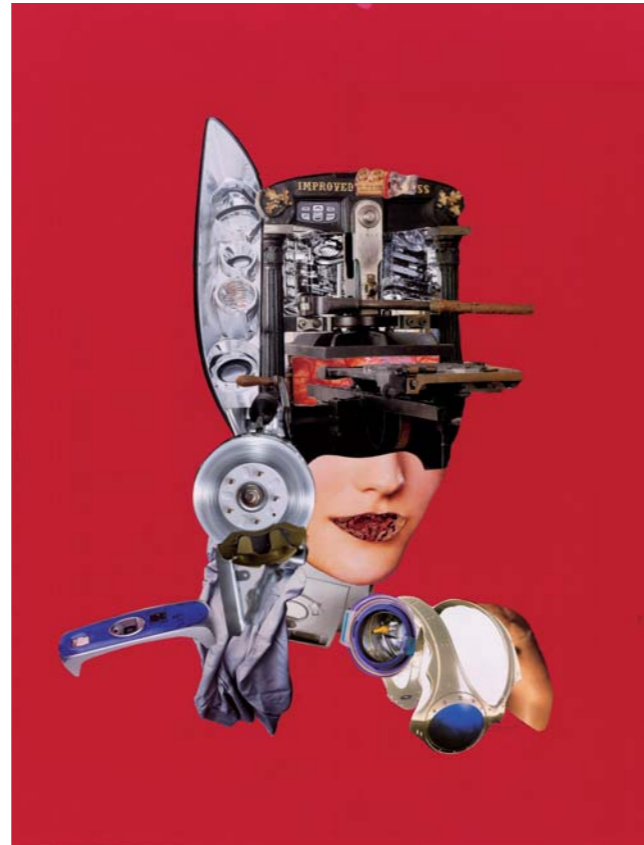
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Reconstructie 7, 2005,
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De dader 1, 2006,
ontwerp: foto's uit diverse tijdschriften
op zwart karton, 50 x 56,
print: inkt op papier, 62 x 70



De dader 2, 2006,
ontwerp: diverse foto's
op rood karton, 32 x 39,
print: inkt op papier, 41 x 50



Stilleven 1 met telefoon, 2006,
ontwerp: diverse foto's
op zwart karton, 34 x 17,
print: inkt op papier, 70 x 35



Stilleven 2 met waterpistool, 2006,
ontwerp: diverse foto's
op zwart karton, 41 x 25,
print: inkt op papier, 82 x 50

Hèdonè, 2006,
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print: inkt op papier, 100 x 140

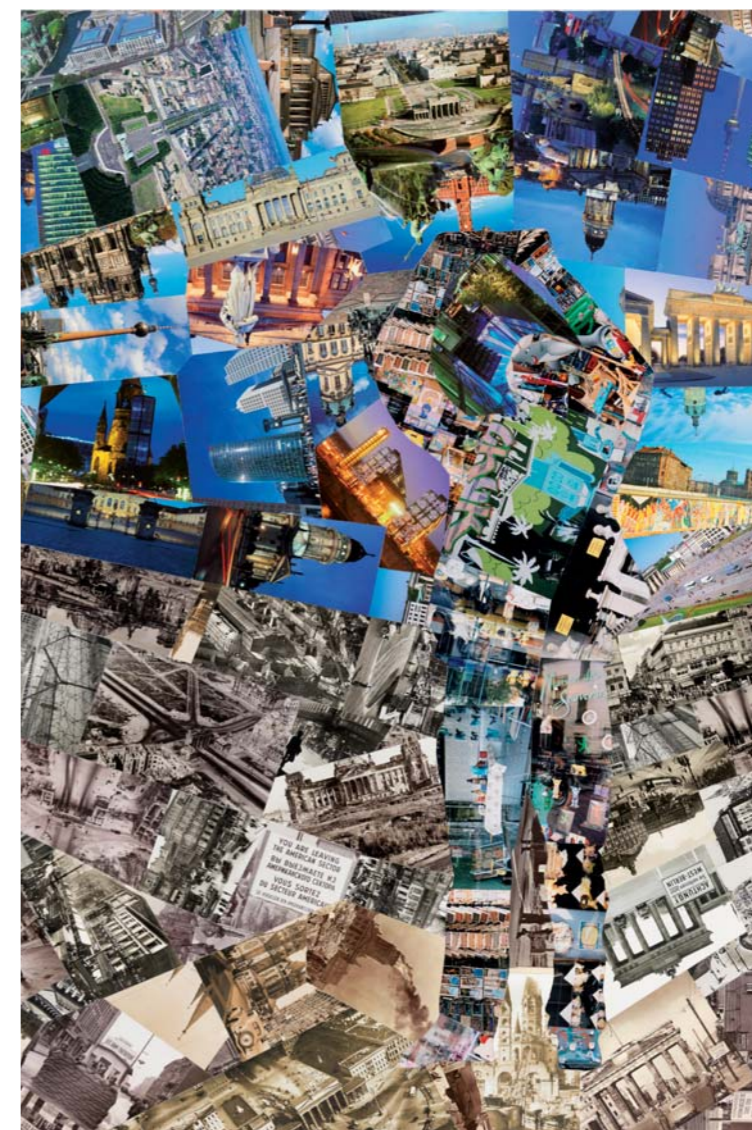




Game over 1, 2007,
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print: inkt op papier, 120 x 80



Game over 2, 2007,
ontwerp: foto's uit speelgoedfolders op karton, 37 x 50,
print: inkt op papier, 51 x 70



Tourist, 2008,
ontwerp: foto's en ansichtkaarten van Berlijn, 64 x 93,
print: inkt op papier, 64 x 93



Natuur 1, 2007,
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print: inkt op papier, 190 x 80

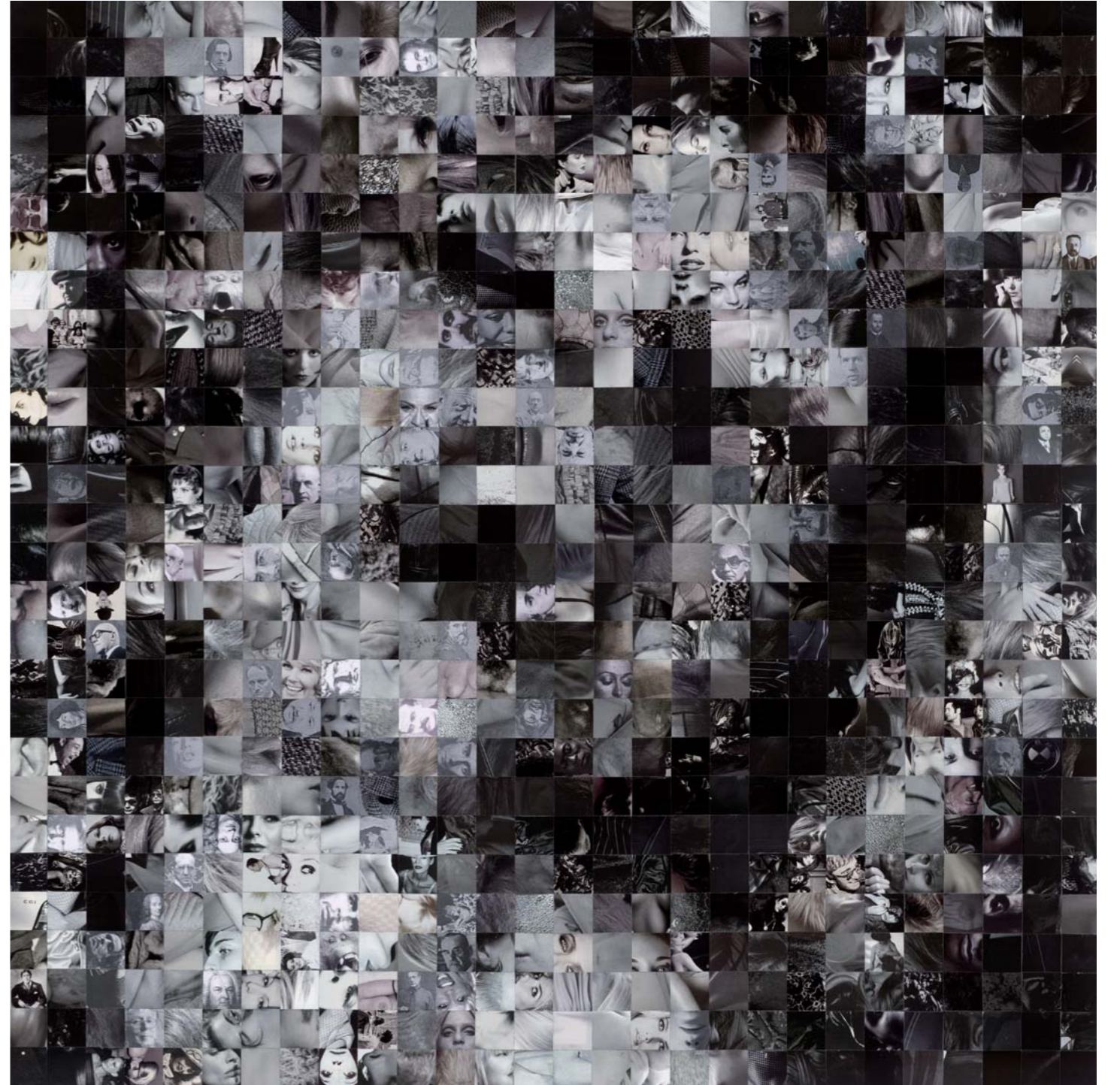


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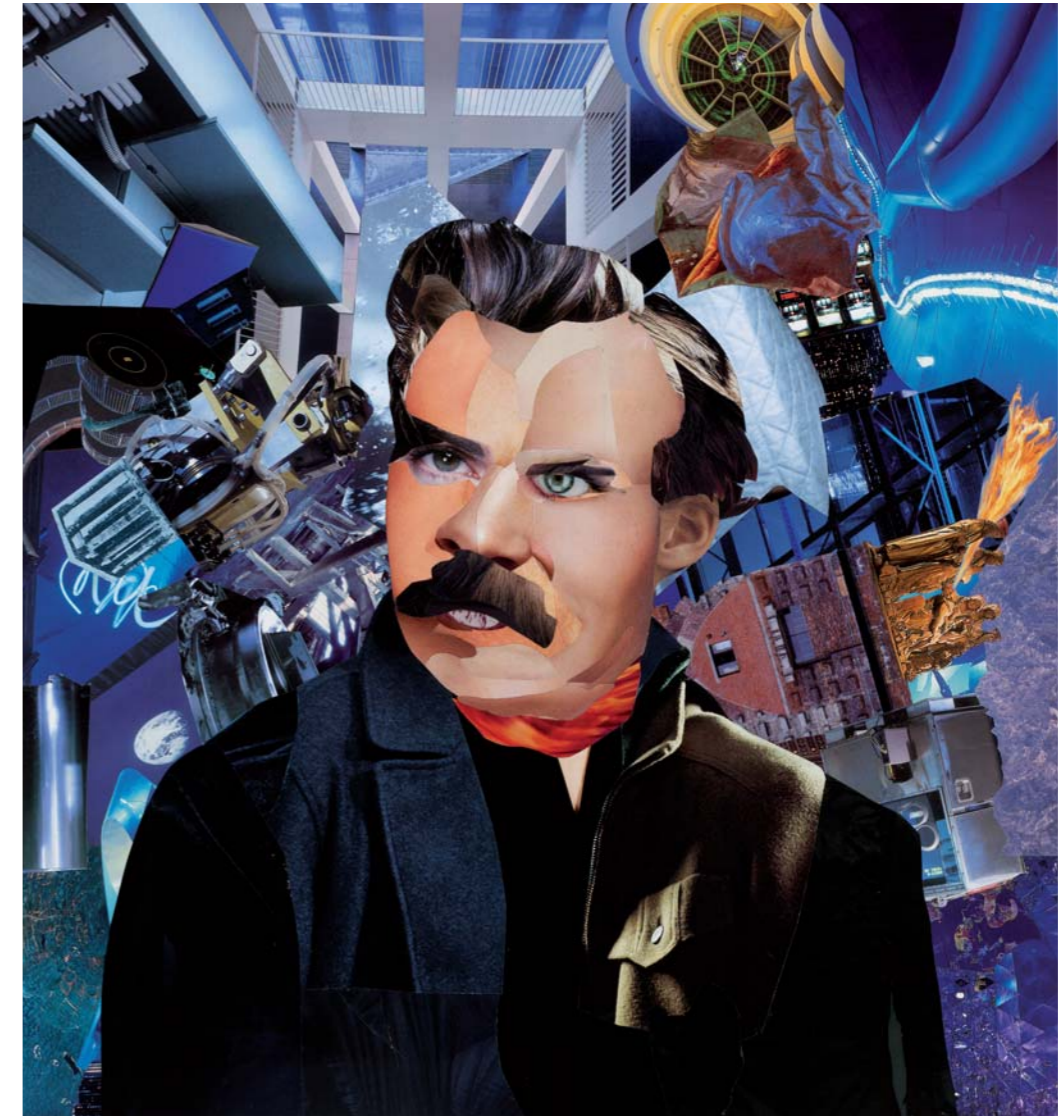
Natuur 3, 2007,
ontwerp: foto's uit diverse natuurtijdschriften op karton, 26 x 6,
print: inkt op papier, 30 x 7

I-con-fusion, 2008,
ontwerp: foto's van modellen, filosofen,
acteurs, schrijvers, wetenschappers
uit diverse tijdschriften op karton 94 x 94,
print: inkt op papier 125 x 125



stof	haar	krijtstreep	oksel	vagina	bont	stof	ruitstof	wenkbrauw	bont	hand	stof	wol	stof	haar	hand	kraag	haar	navel	oog	leer	haar	hand	haar	haar	haar	zwart	haar	
zwart	haar	haar	stof	huid	chopin	hak	frons	tepel	owog	stendhal	strik	huid	huid	rever	plooi	stof	wol	stof	stof	haar	wol	gezicht	galilei	leer	stof	kant	haar	
weefsel	kant	tepel piercing	ceintuur	acteur	armani	laurent	elleboog	huid	bont	kant	huid	rouches	haar	oog	haar	kruin	voorhoofd	stof	haar	stof	haar	model	haar	lagerfeld	kraag	haar	haar	
stof	zwart	plooi	fitzgerald	haar	breisel	huid	huid	huid	huid	oog	lok	oog	haar	plooi	manchet	cher	model	hepburn	huid	haar	stof	beethoven	naakt	huid	haar	stof	stof	
kant	bont	sex	strop	kant	stof	oog	stof	bont	breisel	huid	haar	stof	haar	vrouw	haar	neus	plooi	o keefe	van gogh	haar	haar	haar	neus	kiefer	haar	stof	mond	
guggenheim	hoofd	stof	stof	tepel	kant	huid	haar	breisel	lus	bont	gezicht	mond	blond	stof	huid	beckett	arm	arm	van der lubbe	haar	huid	haar	bont	strop	arm	oorbel	borst	
dietrich	stof	model	leer	mond	plooi	hand	haar	leer	huid	huid	zwart	kraag	bont	wenkbrauw	blond	porno	marilyn	mond	kant	balzac	corbusier	plooi	huid	richter	stof	ring	matisse	
blond	f l wright	haar	lok	gaultier	aap	huid	huid	haar	darwin	oor	kralen	weefsel	stof	slang	oksel	huid	gezicht	schneider	micelangelo	haar	haar	breiwerk	stof	haar	model	duimring	oog	
porno	new york	gezicht	hand	gezicht	flemming	stof	stof	hendrix	stof	stof	proust	simone	huid	kant	model	kant	stof	huid	haar	toqueville	haar	machiavelli	haar	stof	stof	stof	neger	
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vrouw	mond	stof	oog	haar	stof	haar	benjamin	bont	stof	madonna	heissenberg	huid	shonberg	huid	stof	stof	stof	stof	stof	haar	plooi	haar	stof	leer	stof	rietveld	stof	
haar	leer	marilyn	stof	stof	huid	lippen	schiffer	huid	stof	fellini	stof	stof	mond	newman	stof	stof	stof	stof	the factory	stof	leer	haar	stof	stof	haar	al capone	kant	
hand	hawkins	leer	stof	bardot	arm	stof	ortega y gasset	heidegger	bont	stof	stof	stof	huid	stof	stof	haar	haar	stockhausen	bont	leer	stof	stof	stof	stof	stof	jurk	stof	leer
haar	huid	stof	stof	hand	stof	stof	haar	huid	kant	stof	stof	stof	stof	huid	leer	leer	haar	huid	huid	michael jackson	haar	stof	stof	stof	automobiel	leer	rever	
haar	haar	haar	model	harrowitz	stof	oppenheimer	leer	zola	bont	stof	stof	stof	stof	stof	stof	haar	huid	saramago	stof	stof	stof	stof	leer	kant	dostojewski	haar	haar	
plooi	grootvader	mode	gezicht	auto	huid	huid	mond	huid	huid	huid	stof	stof	mozart	huid	stof	gesp	kant	kant	huid	stof	stof	kant	juwelen	haar	sleutelbeen	netkous	sigaret	
huid	factory	corbusier	haar	bont	haar	model	stof	huid	leer	huid	micelangelo	kant	stof	haar	stof	stof	haar	huid	stof	stof	stof	ruit	haar	haar	haar	warhol	doek	
kant	armen	bont	stof	kant	huid	baudelaire	model	plato	stof	hand	porno	huid	leer	stof	paris hilton	stof	haar	huid	stof	stof	arm	billen	neusgat	bloem	mond	vinger	schouder	
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oor	ellington	stof	stof	jagger	huid	aap	stof	bont	goethe	haar	kafka	leer	kant	miles	huid	stof	model	kant	stof	stof	stof	haar	porno	model	einstein	bmw	kant	
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stof	sartre	model		model	newton	taylor	mond	arm	rilke	model	hand	stof	stof	haar	krijtstreep	stof	stof	stof	stof	stof	model	arm	stof	stof	leer	oog	stof	haar
horde	factory	stof	huid	mondriaan	haar	astaire	model	arm	vingers	model	stof	haar	huid	kant	stof	leer	haar	stof	stof	the factory	terrorist	hand	garbo	huid	aap	leer	kant	
mercedes	netkous	stof	voltaire	stof	arm	warhol	kant	che	stof	haar	pollock	bont	stof	stof	haar	buik	stof	kant	the factory	haar	leer	oog	haar	tepel	oog	stof	huid	
bont	zijde	celine	bont	huid	model	stof	loren	aap	kin	haar	thomas mann	haar	mond	oog	huid	oog	model	stof	haar	stof	haar	porno	haar	mond	stof	stiksel	stof	
oscar wilde	haar	stof	huid	huid	bach	model	haar	model	porno	rothko	pamela	haar	model	stof	haar	stof	arm	stof	kant	stof	haar	haar	horde	haar	kant	stof	stiksel	
huid	kant	bont	polke	haar	bergman	lok	huid	hak	niki	huid	model	huid	haar	stof	huid	schiffer	neus	haar	kant	stof	haar	huid	stof	haar	stof	stof	stof	
stof	leer	model	haar	piaff	model	huid	bont	hepburn	neus	bont	bont	model	arm	arm	huid	hand	bont	stof	stof	stof	stof	stof	stof	stof	stof	stof	stof	

Nietzsche, 2007,
ontwerp: foto's uit diverse tijdschriften op karton, 42 x 45,
print: inkt op papier, 46 x 50



Interview with David Gosker

By Heleen van de Poppe

In 2000 you started making collages. What made you decide to choose this form?

It all started after a stay in London. During the length of my visit I had an experience of being enveloped in a mechanism or system that covered up and enclosed each individual experience. It was an experience of complete differentiation and fragmentation of man and world, that is, the continually changing identity of man as an individual. That is to say, man is not free, but bound to a world with given meanings. Everything has a meaning that coincides with the context. We only live in context, and within the limitations of our senses, language, knowledge, images, judgments. The world changes in accordance with the amount of information you have; you literally en figuratively have to adopt a point of view to be able to see perspective. It is no coincidence that perspective in the art of painting evolved as late as the Renaissance.

So the world is not unequivocal, but ambiguous, composite and of a variable identity. I myself am nothing more than a compilation of surroundings and circumstances, a void that is shaped by that which surrounds me. We give shape to reality from existing images, information and words that we know and recognize.

That all sounds very philosophical, but how do you work this out in a concrete way? What has this point of view got to do with London and with your collages?

This point of view is the basis of the form as well as the content of my work. The experience in London incited me to start making collages. In that city I recognized that in the myriad images you look for those images that are familiar or advantageous to you. Like an animal in its habitat sees its berry or its prey among all the other things that surround it. Apart from that, I experienced not being seen as a human being, but as a consumer, an economic entity that can be considered to bring in money. You are continually expected to know about certain brand names, and to identify with them. You become an individual thanks to Diesel or Mercedes, while at the same time any differentiation is neutralized, because all these brands operate worldwide, making one human being the same as another.

I wanted to give shape to this phenomenon and to the way London presented itself to me, and so I was thinking about making a painting. But it would be impossible to achieve this with a painting, for it suggests an individual freedom which I definitely do not experience. By a painting I would get bogged down into an interpretation of my personal vision of the city, while it is exactly this personal aspect that is eliminated, hemmed in by the system that approaches me as a consumer. That is why the material would have to be operational by itself, and this I found in the materials surrounding me: commercial brochures, adverts and magazines. Cheap printed matter that fades with time, thus underlining the variable and transitory nature of any reality. In this way, by collecting, moving, cutting and pasting the world that surrounds me I create an individual image that presents a dynamic identity.

Consequently, ‘Consuming London’ became my first collage. From afar you see a colored, non-defined form, a monster or an amorphous stain. If you are familiar with the London street map, you can recognize the outline of the city. The closer you get, the more you can distinguish which line belongs to which thing, and it becomes clear that this is a composite work; a consensus that controls the chaos and gives shape to the city and its inhabitants. At very close range the words can be read. Words and slogans – buy, eat, enjoy! – that incite you to make a decision about your future now and benefit from it.

Is your collage ‘Het goede leven’ (‘The Good Life’) also about this consumerism?

Yes, in the sense that happiness and the manipulability of life seem to have become synonymous. Modern man is first and foremost the ‘user’ of his own life. His life should be arranged at his own discretion and enjoyed as much as possible. The example of the ideal human being haunts the world and is presented to us by magazines, adverts and other forms of communication. A smooth future is smiling at you, and technology will see to its realization. I saw a prelude to this at a fair in Milan, where electronics in clothing was presented. With a simple movement of the body the wearer could communicate wirelessly with his own bank account, other computers or other users.

By the presence of technology in our daily existence we are constantly assimilated by the world. The signs that confirm our identity penetrate the skin, and consequently the boundary that separates us from our surroundings. Technology enables us to see, hear and undergo events better and more easily than our physical qualities allow us to. And so the sovereignty of man changes.

At the same time this collage appeals to the classical image of beauty and the numerous depictions of a reclining nude. Images of body parts are totally wrapped up in each other to form a composite picture. The individual is assimilated into his surroundings by the appeal of those surroundings to comply with the ideal image. The prototype rules, but no-one can ever be that. Not the individual, but the general expression is normative.

Your collages ‘Autofysiek 1 and 2’ were compiled from brochures of car manufacturers. What is it that fascinates you in cars?

In our world there is no machine that takes up as much space in our daily lives as the car. This machine is not only a means of transport for mankind, it also defines his existence for a large part. You cannot imagine a world without cars any more. The natural ease with which we have surrounded ourselves with machines and equipment to make our lives more bearable or more pleasant formed the inspiration to this work. Technology and machines are no functional tools, but autonomous ‘beliefs’ in which mankind finds meaning.

People can enter a relationship with machines, attributing certain qualities to them. Cars and motorcycles are Darwinist survivors, they are the peacock’s feathers and the territorial attitude of mankind. Our perception of the world is completely functional: the glitzy, shiny, smoothly symmetrical bodywork on the outside, the unsightly functional parts on the inside and underside.

A car is not the opposite of nature, but a continuation of the natural physical condition of man. This can be seen in the coachwork of cars, which is shaped in a near-organic way. People find it safer, cleaner and more pleasant to experience nature from a car than to expose themselves to stench, crawly things and uncertainties. Nature is only clean when there is a sheet of glass or coachwork between it and our body.

You just mentioned Darwin. His name recurs in a series of works with the title ‘Bye Bye Darwin’. What do you mean by that?

Some day the Darwinist theory will pass away, just as all other scientific theories. They are all valid for a limited amount of time, they follow and replace each other. The ideas of Newton, Einstein and Darwin have their own existence, and they must have substantiated themselves, or we would not even have heard of them. They must be heard, that is what gives them life. Only that which is seen will survive.

Although I myself cannot see how I could coincide with nature, it is neither the case that I would be the opposite. The attempt to capture nature in a theory of cause and effect, according to the belief in progress, is an idea that cannot stand up, in my opinion. ‘Why’ and ‘because’ are words that only carry meaning for human beings, but it is very doubtful whether the progress of nature cares anything about that. Nature runs its own course and propels itself, and malignant tumours, raging hurricanes and sweet little elephants are only seen and heard as such by man. Technology is the symbol of our belief in progress. This can be seen in ‘Bye Bye Darwin 1’, in which the connoisseur will recognize an engine block.

These collages were compiled from photographs of body parts of various animals. We attribute functions and a logical right to exist to all these shapes, spots, colours, spines, structures, teeth, fins, etc. In this work this logic was essentially altered and abandoned. Consequently, a form of nature is created that does not fit into our known and recognized categories. The possibility of a different or changing order in nature thus becomes visible.

In the collages ‘Game Over 1 and 2’ you employ innocent children’s toys to depict a horrifying reality. Only by close scrutiny you can discern an American cell on death row and an automatic machine gun. What do you want to convey with this?

In any case it is not an indictment, I am only observing a phenomenon. I leave the moral judgment to others. Because of my cut and paste job you cannot hold on to existing images. Identification falters and I create a new evocative possibility. Is it the new world or the existing world? This remains to be seen.

What I perceive is that a distinction between a virtual and the real world is more and more difficult to make, and perhaps it has disappeared altogether. Everything appears to be an innocent video game. On the basis of available and processed information the rules for the execution of capital punishment are formulated in great detail. In that way people are removed from the game.

I am fascinated by weapons, just as by cars. Everybody knows the AK-47. It is known as a reliable, efficient machine, not expensive an easy to maintain. Apparently a hundred million of these guns are in circulation in the world, and in some countries they can be obtained for thirty dollars. A Darwinist tour de force.

On the other hand, you have created some pleasant landscapes in your collages ‘Natuur 1, 2 and 3’. Or are there any hidden layers, too?

Everyone has his own way of looking. Explanations change things, for the world changes for those with more information. Intentions are not important. But if you really want to know, I could tell you something more about these works. In this technological era nature is no longer seen as the unequivocal opposite, but as a potential that can be conquered and tamed. So it can be considered either a danger or a challenge that needs to be conquered, a provider of minerals or energy, or as a place to relax.

In a world that is completely contained in numbers, and in which we ourselves (as consumers, users, victims) are completely calculated in statistics, nature presents itself to us as something that cannot be calculated. Nature is a source of information that can be used at will. At the same time nature does not provide sufficient information at the surface, so we make profiles of the earth’s crust and do excavations to gain insight into the course of history, so that we can contain it in numbers for the future.

So nature carries a meaning that coincides with your own context. Does nature mean recreation to you? Then you will recognize a restful landscape, a pleasant place to be. If you have a scientific view of nature, you will see geological strata, vegetation and minerals, and the statistics of a rising energy consumption

How do you set about making a collage?

Each time is different. Sometimes I walk around for some time with a subject on my mind, but I haven’t the faintest idea how to work it out. Sometimes it is a thing or phenomenon that fascinates me, for example, cars, weapons, Barbie as an icon, or a still life. Sometimes I think of a philosophical text, sometimes I am inspired by observations or experiences.

I do not collect magazines and advertising brochures at random, I look for specific things when I know more or less what I am going to make. Then there is selection and grading, in colours, shapes, components and pictures. After that I start sketching, clipping, cutting, fitting, measuring and moving. It usually takes me several months to create a collage.

When the subject is finished, is it scanned, printed again and provided with a synthetic coating. Some works I reproduce a limited number of times, others are once-only.

With the ‘I-confusion’ collage I had a different I had a different approach. It is an extremely enlarged picture of Marilyn Monroe, the prototype of the icon. Icons appeal to me, from a cultural point of view they set the scene for an era. The primary aim of an icon is to communicate, with or without an interesting message. In the same way that fashion, scientific theories, books, music of other works of art present appealing pictures that displace other pictures, icons come and go.

For this work I started out by drawing a raster and indicating the dark and light pixels in each square. Then I collected hundreds of black-and-white photos of icons from various eras and disciplines – movie stars, models, writers, philosophers, scientists – and pasted them in the squares. Apart from that, many dark squares were filled up with photos of black fabrics, like those that cover large parts of the works by painters from the 17th century.

For the ‘Reconstructions’ I used photos made by myself. But here too, recycling is what it is all about: creating new possibilities with existing material, shaping existing images into a new, homogeneous image. For ‘Reconstructie 1’ I took a photo of the same rose for 25 days in a row. Full bloom and decay in a rearranged composition. For ‘Reconstructie 2’ I cut up photos of a temporary building construction and structured them in a mathematical raster. Reconstructions 3, 6 and 7 all show the same picture, of a flat in Paris, of a car wreck. By repetition of the same image context and recognition disappear. A new arrangement, a new structure, and therefore a changing image, is created.

Colofon

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