

Flanders, the early nineties. The number of fatal victims of road traffic accidents connected to nightlife is at its peak. Emergency doctor Beaucourt assembles a slideshow and tours secondary schools on a mission. He seeks to highlight the risks and shows harrowing, brutal images of victims. These images become part of the collective memory of a generation. Twenty years later, visual artist Tim Bruggeman decides to invite Beaucourt in his studio and begins to research his controversial archive. This research leads to a few different works that form his graduation show (2016) at KASK in Ghent. Later that year, he shows a couple of those pieces in the installation *De Harde Naakte Werkelijkheid* (A Harsh Reality) during *Currents#4 Running Time* at Marres.

## *A Heavy Context*

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LIENEKE HULSHOF

Were you exposed to that particular presentation about the traffic victims as well?

TIM BRUGGEMAN

Dr. Beaucourt showed his slides during the nineties, to final years students in technical education. I was still young during that time, so I never got to see them. But I do vividly remember the fuzz in de media around those showings, which made me very curious about the images. And as a teen, I was intrigued by those discotheques that were so popular in Belgium at the time. It was a world I couldn't be a part of, but that did speak to me.

LIENEKE HULSHOF

What made you decide to research this archive?

TIM BRUGGEMAN

After having worked with digital archives for a while, I was looking for a physical archive that had clear parameters. Different things came together, that made me choose the slides from Dr. Beaucourt. I invited him to my studio for an interview and asked him if he would allow me to work with his archive. When he came over, he handed me a CD-ROM with images, because he couldn't find the original slides anymore. And then when I looked at them – they really did shock me. After some time, the material became more familiar, but it's still tough to look at them.

At first, I printed all the digital images and photographed them again using slide film. In that process, I managed to create a lot of works because I did not just reproduce the imagery, but I also made cutouts. That's when I started focusing on specific elements from the series. The transformation into the original medium and the reframing helped me create new pieces.

LIENEKE HULSHOF

What were the specific elements you focused on within that archive?

TIM BRUGGEMAN

It took me a long time before I had found a way to capture the trauma in this archive. One of things I did, was focusing on the blankets that appear in the images. I noticed that the horrific elements were often removed from sight because of those blankets. The corpses were covered to keep voyeurs at a distance. But those blankets don't just cover up the horrific parts, they amplify them at the same time. Within that same process, I looked at antique paintings to understand how blankets had been used then.

I reproduced the cut-outs of those blankets by making etchings. I didn't choose this particular technique because I wanted to make several copies, but because of its inherent qualities.

*“It took me a long time before I had found a way to capture the trauma in this archive.”*

The harshness of the imagery is exemplified by using only cyan and magenta. The final black layer finalises the work and adds depth. The series *The Beautiful Sight II* has some flaws that ended up in the etching plate and therefor also in the works.

In preparation of *Currents#4*, the curators encouraged me to redo the work '92 03 02 – '98 06 17. I created a series of slides in which I made new cut-outs of the original images, right around the dates. The development of newer cameras enabled me to also burn the date into the diapositive. I've found those dates in forty of the slides from the presentation, the first photo was taken on March 2, 1992, and the last one on June 17, 1998. These two dates mark the timeframe in which the series was created. By reframing the images while focusing on the dates, the attention switched to the photographic moment. In some cases, the dates also align with the date of death of the person in the photo. The abstract details that are still visible show a glimpse of the reality in the frame and of the context of the archive.

LIENEKE HULSHOF

Does the archive reveal something about that particular time in Belgium?

TIM BRUGGEMAN

The archive reflects on many aspects of that specific zeitgeist. Belgium was the breeding ground of electronic dance music in the nineties. Young people from all over Europe came to dance at Belgian clubs. New Beat, House and Techno emerged. And the cars became more affordable, like the popular Golf GTI, that created more mobility amongst young people that would move from disco to disco over the course of one weekend. There also was a pretty big generational gap at that time, the excessive partying that young people were doing was far removed from the garage parties their parents had been going to. There was a lot of frustration, a huge lack of understanding, and the idea

that the youth had completely lost it. As the nineties progressed, the authorities put a target on drug dealers. A lot of those mega discos were closed, then.

LIENEKE HULSHOF

What was the core question of this specific research?

TIM BRUGGEMAN

In the end, the work is about questioning the role of imagery in our society. Even though I don't want to impose a point of view, the work also dealt with the deontology of certain images.

What I also think is extraordinary about this archive, is that it came about during the transitioning between old and new media. It was created around the final stages of the slide projector and the beginning of the beamer, the end of analogue images and the arrival of digital imagery. The internet and the mobile phone arrived during that same time. It marked the arrival of a new, faster world.

LIENEKE HULSHOF

In what ways did this project influence your practice as a whole?

TIM BRUGGEMAN

While I was working on my graduation project, I've developed a way of working that I still lean on today. That means I immerse myself into an archive, which I select very consciously. When I start, I want to become close to the material and the context it has. Through unraveling the imagery, by zooming in, creating selections and reproductions, I created new pieces. Selecting an archive often is an excuse to lose myself in a topic I find fascinating.

*“In the end, the work is about questioning the role of images in our society.”*



TIM BRUGGEMAN  
*The Beautiful Sight II, 2016*



TIM BRUGGEMAN  
*De Harde Naakte Werkelijkheid* - dia from original archive

LIENEKE HULSHOF

You've recently created new work around Hitler's Berghof.

TIM BRUGGEMAN

I'd found some copies from interior design magazines that were published right before World War II. Hitler's holiday home on the Obersalzberg in the South of Germany, the Berghof, was pictured on one of the covers. National socialism was emerging at that time, and this was obvious looking at the choices the editors made. The attention for Bauhaus gradually diminished and it was replaced with a newfound appreciation for traditional, conservative interiors.

The article is a romantic ode to the homeliness of 'the Berghof' and is illustrated with some images of the empty interiors that are only inhabited by a variety of floral arrangements. The photos were shot by Heinrich Hoffmann, Hitler's in-house photographer who played an important part in the propaganda machine surrounding him. While I was working with those images, I realised that I saw the same bouquets that had been moved from one room to the next. I scanned the images of those flowers using a very high resolution and I printed them on the size of the original magazine. The final series holds twenty-five bouquets and a publication with a translated version of the article.

The title *Het behaaglijke huis* (The comfortable house) is the Dutch translation of the magazine's title *Das Behagliche Heim*. The term 'behagliche' has a certain double meaning, there is something threatening attached to it. The floral arrangements are disguised as interior object, they manage to fool the viewer who doesn't look twice. The contrast between the bouquet as an innocent interior object and the horrible history that is connected to the home leads to some kind of short-circuit.

LIENEKE HULSHOF

You're currently working on an archive that belonged to Albert Kahn, another historical archive. Why does this appeal to you?

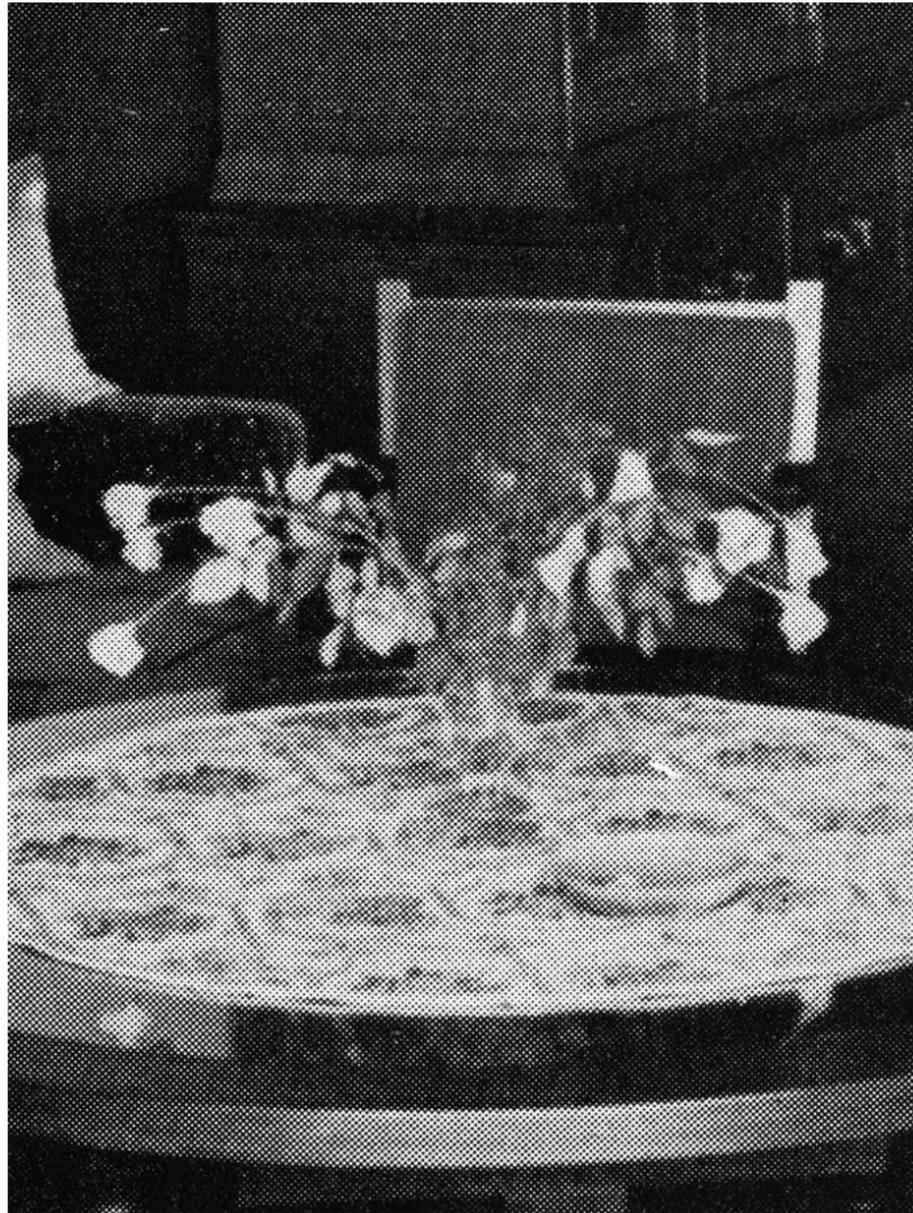


TIM BRUGGEMAN  
*The Beautiful Sight II, 2016*

TIM BRUGGEMAN

I stumbled upon Albert Kahn's *Les Archives de la Planète* last year. At the start of the twentieth century, he sent photographers around the world to create autochromes, the first form of colour

TIM  
BRUGGEMAN  
*Het Behaaglijke  
Huis - n°10, 2020*



*“The contrast between the bouquet as an innocent interior object and the horrible history that is connected to the home leads to some kind of short-circuit.”*

photography on glass plates. He was convinced that exchanging knowledge of different cultures would encourage freedom and respect. There are almost 70.000 autochromes available through open source on the website of the Albert Kahn Museum.

ALBERT KAHN  
*Les Archives  
de la Planète,  
Auguste Leon*



One of the photographers, Auguste Leon, created quite a few autochromes of the Parisian inner city during the First World War. Some of these images are tagged 'anti-bombardment'. On those images, you see a lot of store windows that have been taped so that if a bomb hits, the glass wouldn't fly around. The striking thing about those images is that the tape is lined in these aesthetically satisfying patterns. A kind of beautiful work that had to have been visible around Paris, during that time of deep misery.

Creating those autochromes demands a pretty long shutter speed. That's why there are no people present in those images, it's just an empty cityscape that is awaiting disaster. From these pictures, I created an index with all the patterns that were visible on the street windows. Right now, I'm working in my studio to find a way to translate that index into visual work.

LIENEKE HULSHOF

Those printed scans picturing the floral arrangement reveal some kind of innocence, just like the blankets in Beaucourt's images and the windows in Paris do. But once you know the context of these settings, the story becomes a lot more intense.

TIM BRUGGEMAN

I am hesitant to show explicit imagery. It's not my goal to shock the viewer. The archives I decide to relate to, often have a heavy context, but the images I create don't show that directly. If my work comes across as innocent, that is a very conscious decision.

LIENEKE HULSHOF

When you're working with archival content, you inherently work with a time frame that has passed. Why is history so relevant to you?

TIM BRUGGEMAN

I sometimes wonder whether I should relate to more contemporary image culture. But those old archives simply intrigue me

and come to me in a very natural way. I don't want to create work that is disconnected from today, but I do feel that stories from the past form a good way to look at today's world.

There is this velocity when it comes to today's imagery that could use some kind of counterweight. Pausing at events that have happened a long time ago, is a way for me to slow down. I also find a materiality in those old pictures that is lacking in contemporary imagery. There are scratches, dents, damages that I can work with.