

Honey Biba Beckerlee

DIPLOPIA

2nd July - 17th August 2011

The theme of the exhibition programme in 2011 is *IMAGINE* – towards an *ecoaesthetic*. *IMAGINE* suggests that art is a critical but at the same time positive, fruitful option that makes allowances for the surroundings and the environment. With this focus *IMAGINE* wants to put discussions of representation and negation issues on a back burner in favour of a more 'healing' aspect.



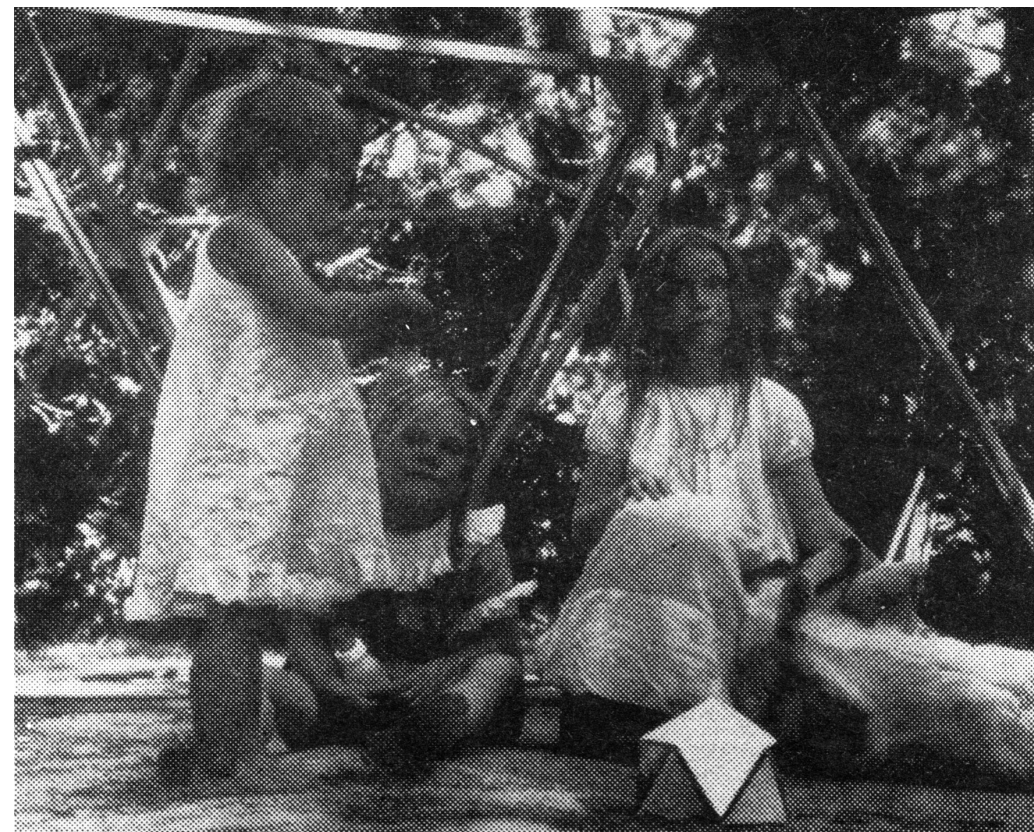
The point of departure for this year's theme is the manifesto *Ecoaesthetics* by the artist, writer and curator Rasheed Araeen, which was published in the art and culture periodical *Third Text* in the autumn of 2009. In this text Araeen mounted a frontal assault on the modern ego and the recuperation of the avant-garde. He advocated a collective artistic imagination that would function as the way forward towards "lakes and rivers with clean water, collective farming and the planting of trees all over the world".

The manifesto rejects – albeit in a slightly one-track masculine way – previous artistic attempts to step down from the pedestal of the bourgeoisie in favour of a collective commitment to the surroundings and the environment. While Araeen can be criticized for his slightly narrow aim of denigrating artistically committed experiments, this does not detract from the relevance of a debate that goes behind the current 'acuteness' one experiences today in relation to ecological and environmental issues in art.

With *IMAGINE* the Aarhus Art Building wants to take a closer look at alliances between art and sustainable development. The themes emphasize the origin of the concept of sustainability and the linkages between environmental and social problems which have been characteristic of thinking about and the development of this particular concept since the beginning of the 1970s. Through important movements that have consistently had sustainability as their primary starting point the concept has furthermore been linked conspicuously with an ethical imperative and a determined ambition to overcome inequality – understood as the concrete and symbolic construction of power relations.

The exhibitions on the programme in 2011 try to embrace this complexity in the concept of sustainability and its history from two different angles. One approach to the theme focuses on artistic views of alternative energy. The other focuses on oppressive mechanisms that affect various minorities, women and the environment on the existing premises of inequality and power relations.

ÅRHUS KUNSTBYGNING
J.M. MØRKS GADE 13 DK-8000 ÅRHUS C
www.aarhuskunstbygning.dk



Video still from *Diplopia*, 2011

Diplopia, which means double vision, takes us on a journey both backwards and forwards in time. The exhibition examines the early eco-movement's visions of the future and uses this examination to create a science-fiction. The installation consists of a sensory space where the body's interior, and the universe's exterior are turned inside out in an examination of the role of the image in our understanding of ourselves and our surroundings.

Repetition and copy are employed in order to illustrate the repetitive constructs and common structures of the universe, challenging our idea of the original. With thematic threads of modern stem cell research and cloning, *Diplopia* places the relationship between original and copy into perspective by asking questions about human individuality.

DIPLOPIA
is sponsored by:



GROSSERER L.F. FOGHTS FOND

SIGMA



dreyersfond

ÅRHUS KUNSTBYGNING
is sponsored by:



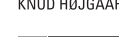
BIKUBENFONDEN



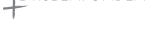
IMAGINE 2011
is sponsored by:



KNUD HØJGAARDS FOND



BIKUBENFONDEN



Nordisk Kulturfond

THE EARTH AS SEEN FROM SPACE

The inspiration for the exhibition at The Aarhus Art Building (Århus Kunstbygning) comes from the American magazine *Whole Earth Catalogue*. The catalogue ran from 1968-71 and was one of the seeds of the eco-movement. It was based on NASA's first image of the entire planet (from 1967), which was thought would start a sustainability revolution. The editor of WEC, Steward Brand, said that if NASA released their image of the earth, people would realize just what a fragile and isolated sphere it was, and that our resources were not limitless. The *Diplopia* exhibition picks up on the expectation of this photograph in a study of the importance of images for our cultural self-understanding.

WHAT WAS THE *WHOLE EARTH CATALOGUE*?

When asked why she has chosen to work with the WEC, Beckerlee replies: "WEC was a movement that had a very positive take on the future, and was not hostile to contemporary technology. Instead, they took on board the new knowledge and thought, how can we create a better society in the future?" The catalogue contained descriptions of scientific systems right down to the micro level, as well as manuals for how to build houses and tools for a self-sufficient lifestyle.

TWO GEOMETRIC SPHERES

Two large geometric spheres positioned in the middle of the room are *Diplopia's* central objects. These two spheres represent two different conceptions of the same architectural structure, namely the dome, based on five and six edges. The first dome was developed after the First World War by German engineer Walther Bauersfeld (1879-1959) and the second by the American architect Richard Buckminster Fuller (1895-1983) after World War II. The installation thus points towards a double invention separated in time and space. *Diplopia's* domes differ from both by completing the structure as an entire sphere. It draws attention to the origins of these inventions, namely the heavens and the earth. In addition, they refer to the carbon molecule, which is built on the same principle; a principle that recurs again and again in the structures found within nature and the universe.

WEC took the dome as an ideology reflected in concrete form. The structure was considered to be the ideal sustainable housing, and the catalogue's housing-editor published a series of dome-books that contained manuals on how we could build our own dome.

ORIGINAL OR COPY?

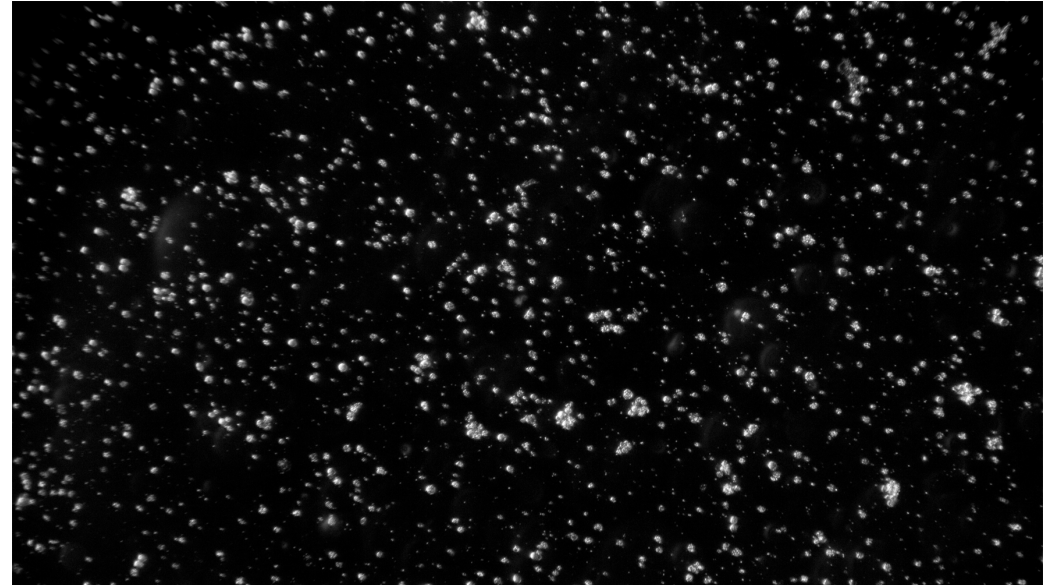
With the exhibition *Diplopia*, which means double vision, Beckerlee challenges the relationship between original and copy. The exhibition's two domes put into question the principle of originality and show how our concept of originality is closely bound to the existence of the copy. As the artist says: "We all imitate each other. There is nobody who can sit on a deserted island, without input, and create. It often happens that one thing is developed simultaneously, just as the photograph was developed in England and France at the same time." The exhibition's title *Diplopia* also refers to the dual perspective that lies in working with both past and present perspectives of the future.

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE FUTURE

The *Diplopia* exhibition uses historical imagery to create a scenario of the future. The artists calls this idea the archaeology of the future, and it is based on thinking past aspirations into the future: "What if NASA's photograph of the earth had had the desired effect? What if a picture could change the world? Archaeology of the future is one way to think outside the box, because it accumulates new association sequences that would not occur if you just took today as your starting point. What I find interesting about visual art in general, is not to rely on existing symbols and understandings of concepts, but to try and give them new meaning. This is what archaeology of the future can help one to do."

THE PHOTOGRAPHS

Diplopia's geometric universe is developed throughout the exhibition. Not least in the two photographs on the wall where the photographs mirror the round form and mimic two planets. But closer attention reveals the subjects to be, respectively, cell division seen under a microscope, and an image of the sky as seen from earth



Human blod cells, phase contrast microscopy photography, 2011

taken with a fisheye lens. In this way your attention is diverted, and the subject turned inside out.

The sky as seen from Earth alludes to WEC's repeated insistence on the planet motif's potential. In all WECs releases the front page displayed different perspectives of the earth as seen from outer space. In one of the last issues one such photograph of the sky was taken with a fisheye lens. In this way it is the pastiche, the bad copy, that becomes the focal point in *Diplopia*.

THE VIDEO

Based on a photograph of three girls, the video displays an unprejudiced future scenario of contemporary technology: stem cell production and cloning. The video is based on an image in one of WEC's catalogues from 1970. It is a photograph of three small girls sitting in a structure that could be the skeleton of a dome. The video's voice-over attempts to decode the image and present various scenarios in which the three girls could have several mothers, originate from the same cell, be triplets, but born years apart, and represent one and the same person. The science-fiction tale challenges human individuality and focuses on the image's potential to create new meanings.

ABOUT HONEY BIBA BECKERLEE

Beckerlee was educated at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in 2008. She has an MA in Contemporary Art Theory from Goldsmiths College, University of London 2005-2006 and Städelschule in Frankfurt 2003-2004. She expresses her art through audio-visual installations, performance art and text, examining the development of identity and recorded history between fiction and reality. In her works she often deals with already existing material by adding new layers and contexts.