

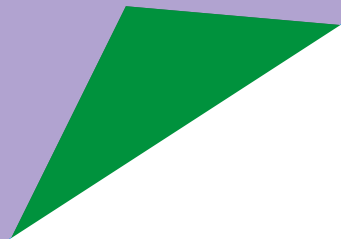
Leading up to an exhibition the artist engages in conversation with a previously unknown correspondent.

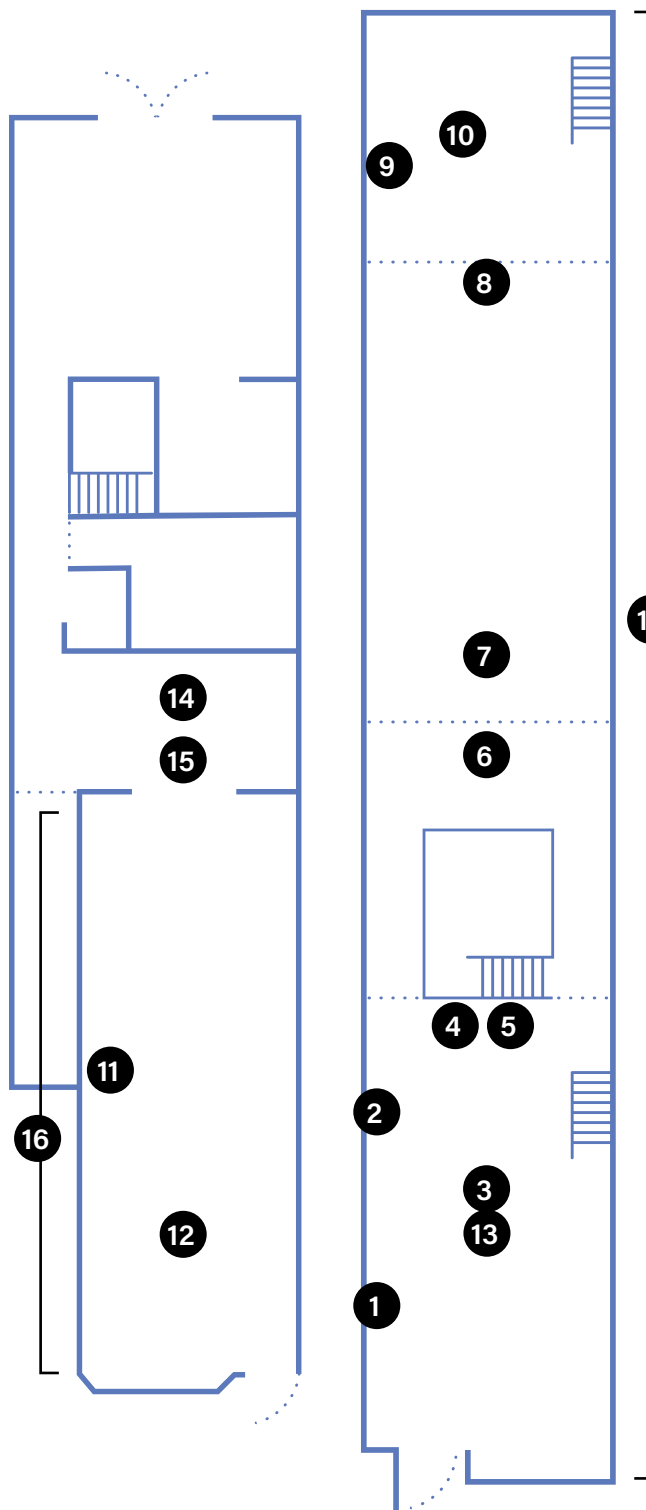
The conversation aims to get an insight on how the initial ideas for the project develop, to paint a picture of the otherwise untraceable choices in the artist's process, practice and the making of this exhibition.

**Fiona Lutjenhuis**  
in conversation  
with  
**Peter Forshaw**  
As part of the  
exhibition  
**ANKHMANIA**

1646.nl

1646





- 1 **Homesick, Window One**  
colour pencil, graphite, cotton paper, frame of wood laminated aluminium
- 2 **Homesick, Window Two**  
colour pencil, graphite, cotton paper, frame of wood laminated aluminium
- 3 **Family Trip**  
painted wooden bed, sand sculpture
- 4 **The Watchers**  
carved wooden dolls, pigmented casein, painted shelf
- 5 **Bench**  
painted wooden bench, 3D printed teeth, sleep song
- 6 **Flourish Into Chaos**  
cherry wooden room dividers (embalmed with St. John's wort esoteric oil), pigmented casein
- 7 **Braid Curtain**  
curtain of wholegrain wheat and spelt flour breads, edible paint
- 8 **Rotatable Doors**  
painted panels
- 9 **Pikachuu**  
colour pencil, graphite, cotton paper, frame of wood laminated aluminium
- 10 **Her Hair In The Wind**  
compilation of found/made wind chimes
- 11 **Hair Formations**  
colour pencil, graphite, cotton paper, frame of wood laminated aluminium
- 12 **Summer Sadness**  
nutwood room divider, pigmented casein, bread
- 13 **Agnus Deities**  
stuffed animal
- 14 **Agnus Dei**  
wooden triptych, pigmented casein (Collectie Museum Helmond)
- 15 **Creepy Crops**  
wooden panel, pigmented casein (table or painting)
- 16 **Hair Formations**  
pigmented casein
- 17 **Flourish Within Chaos**  
pigmented casein

# Fiona Lutjenhuis in conversation with Peter Forshaw

## As part of the exhibition **ANKHMANIA**

For more information about this and other projects,  
check our website or scan the QR-code.



# 1646.nl

## Fiona Lutjenhuis

Fiona Lutjenhuis (Zevenaar, 1991) lives and works in Amsterdam. She studied at ArtEZ University of the Arts, Arnhem (2010-2014) and since 2022 she has been a resident at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam.

Fiona Lutjenhuis makes illustrations, publications, paintings and animations in which she makes the religious heritage of her youth visible: from installations to artist books and from commissioned work to self-initiated projects.

Her speculative imagery fits perfectly into the contemporary discourse about a post-positivist society. In every image we can feel the humour and courage to delve into worlds without strongholds. In a sense you could say that she is ahead of us in being intimate with supernatural beliefs and also everyday knowledge.

Many many many thanks to the people that helped build up the exhibition. From painting, creating, cooking, kneading dough, giving advice to building sandcastles.

**Assistants:** Bas de Boer, Jerry Celie, Maud Dekkers, Dagmar Lutjenhuis & Ragna Lutjenhuis

**Interns 1646:** Yuzuki Aizawa & Leanne Ghesquiere

**Volunteers:** Berru Cihan, Yeraz Kortun, Vera Morge, Haeun Na, Sibel Omer, Margaret Petersen, Mariana Silva & Martin Stamboeliev

## Peter Forshaw

Peter J. Forshaw has a doctorate in Intellectual History and is Associate Professor of Western Esotericism in the Early Modern Period at the Centre for History of Hermetic Philosophy at the University of Amsterdam. He was editor-in-chief of *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* for 10 years (2010-2020), has edited several books, including *Lux in Tenebris: The Visual and the Symbolic in Western Esotericism* (2016), and is author of *Occult: Decoding the Visual Culture of Mysticism, Magic & Divination* (2024) and a 4-volume monograph, *The Mage's Images: Heinrich Khunrath in His Oratory and Laboratory* (forthcoming, 2024/2025).

October 8, 2024

Dear Peter Forshaw,

Nice to e-meet you. My name is Fiona Lutjenhuis. As you may have heard, I am an artist.

I was surprised to hear that there is a study on religion here in Amsterdam. So close and yet unknown to me.

Before I ask you more about the religious studies programme, I would really like to ask you the following: are you religious? If yes, how did religion come into your life?

I would love to hear your response.

Warmest,

Fiona

October 9, 2024

Dear Fiona,

Thanks for taking the initiative. I have had horrible publishing deadlines (still have) and then was ill the last two weeks. The joys of being a neurotic workaholic.

Are you surprised that there is a religious studies course at a university? I would be quite surprised if there was not. I think you will find courses both at UvA and VU. To be honest though, I am sort of in the Department of Religious Studies by chance because the centre I work at, History of Hermetic Philosophy, is embedded in Religious Studies. My PhD is in Intellectual History, so I would feel at home in a History Department, although most are very conservative... that is certainly the case at UvA. I don't get the impression they are thrilled by my research into the history of alchemy, magic and cabala. I think they would prefer the history of the Amsterdam sewerage or something equally down to earth.

But, you asked me if I am religious. My answer is: definitely not in any conventional way. I grew up in an English village, attended a Church of England school, very moderate, but my grandfather was a follower of the Swedish mystic Swedenborg and my mother was in a philosophy group studying the mystic Gurdjieff. As a teenager I got interested in Tibetan Buddhism and attended a local Tibetan monastery in the Lake District, was taught to meditate and to question the whole concept of religion.

*The exhibition is made possible by the generous loan from Collectie Museum Helmond.*

In the end I studied Sanskrit, Tibetan and Indian Philosophy as my BA, at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. I lived in India and other Buddhist countries like Thailand and Japan, but could never really fit into being a follower of a guru or master. I appreciated a lot of the wisdom but was also sceptical about claims to truth, knowledge and authority... especially considering the status of women (this was in the eighties). So, returning to Europe I studied esotericism which I had always found fascinating but I never had the opportunity to study when I was younger. Courses just didn't exist. That satisfied me on other levels. I found it had a spiritual dimension, it felt more individualistic, I am attracted to figures who think beyond convention, who are hybrids, combining different practices and traditions. I love the research but don't always believe what they believed. I would describe myself as agnostic. I "don't know". I make no claims to privileged knowledge. I am sceptical of most religious leaders, but I am not so sure of my beliefs to say someone else is wrong for following their beliefs, as long as they don't harm others.

I hope this isn't too much of a wishy-washy answer, but it is a start (and we have not really met).

My question to you: my niece has just finished her art degree at Chelsea School of Art and is deciding what to do next. What does being an artist mean to you? How did it become the focus of your life?

Best wishes,

Peter

October 11, 2024

Hi Peter,

Thank you for your honest and thorough answer to my question. The background that you grew up in is also quite unconventional. I have not heard about Gurdjieff before (reading about it now). It is interesting to hear that you are doing research into alchemy, magic and cabala. I would love to hear more about this topic. Like what one of the things that you discovered that stuck with you?

It is quite coincidental to mention that I had a discussion with two friends of mine about being agnostic last week. I thought that I was atheist, but this didn't quite fit my opinion about gods and extraterrestrial life.

The concept of science has a moving sense of truth is what I prefer (with new findings the 'truth' changes). It is easy to fill in the blanks by having a distinct opinion. But it is difficult to leave it open.

The fear of not knowing can be overwhelming, but I find it thrilling to think that there could be more. It is more thrilling to fantasise and not let it be bound by my human understanding about what it could be.

What is it that your niece makes? Curious to know.

For answering your question of what being an artist means to me, I also refer back to being agnostic. I think art can flourish because there is no demarcated answer to that, like a playground without a fence.

If I would operate as an artist with rules on this playground, I can't be creative.

I started drawing when I was really young. I didn't have any other hobbies. Especially because our family was poor but other than that I really enjoyed telling stories and making drawings. Telling stories is still to this day what I do. The stories are based on the religious heritage of my parents, the cult in which I grew up and my own beliefs and fantasy. My parents were part of a cult called Malva. I was raised amidst theories about aliens and parallel worlds. To take control, I wanted to define my own storyline.

I am not sure if I would have become an artist without this background.

Have you heard about the book *The gods were astronauts* by Erich von Däniken?

Love to hear you reply.

Warmest,

Fiona

November 9, 2024

Hi Peter,

Hope everything is well. As you mentioned, you are engulfed in work. I am really curious to read some of the texts you wrote and I would love to join one of your seminars.

Maybe you can share a piece of text?

I wrote a little piece about bread. I am not really a good writer myself. That is why I became a visual artist. I hope you can find the time to take a little peek.

Meet my new friends Agnus Deities! These will be part of the exhibition *Ankhmania* at 1646:



And meet my great uncle Jan Lutjenhuis in Tolkamer. He was a baker and built a church made out of sugarcubes. For the exhibition, I will recreate it as a homage to my heritage.

Hope to hear from you!

Warmest,

Fiona

### Take my sacrifice

The smell of bread has been the trigger to include baking into the showing of my works. The smell reminds me of my childhood. In our kitchen, we baked bread and used it for Easter and other religious traditions.

We sculpted the dough in the form of chicks or braided it into complex structures. Not only at home, but also at school, we were taught how to make it. The act of baking bread is comforting. It reminds me of feeling safe in a situation where there was only chaos.

My parents preferred living in a fictional world rather than the real one. This escape was based on anxiety, psychosis, and mental health issues. They connected in that shared worldview. I lived in their world for a long time. Even now, I re-enter this world through my art. As far as it is possible to make sense of it.

My memories of childhood have been vague, but by reenacting the baking of bread, they become clearer.

November 9, 2024

Hi Fiona,

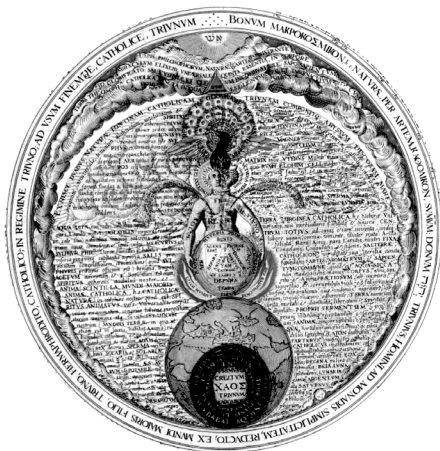
Thanks for your messages.

Recently, I was in London to give a talk about my book *Occult: Decoding the Visual Culture of Mysticism, Magic & Divination*. As an academic, I am not used to signing my work, so it was fun to actually meet members of the public and write something in their copy of the book. The talk seemed to go well, even though the bookshop was still in the 19th century and didn't have a proper projector or screen available for my presentation. I have been going to that shop since I was a teenager, so it was nice to be able to give a talk there and say positive things about the place. If you are interested in seeing some of my writing, here is a link to my [academia.edu](http://uva.academia.edu/PeterForshaw/Books) page: [uva.academia.edu/PeterForshaw/Books](http://uva.academia.edu/PeterForshaw/Books). You can't download books, but there are articles where you can, some with images. I am in the final stages of preparing indexes for the four academic volumes about Heinrich Khunrath, my main obsession for the last couple of decades. It will be a relief when the books are published and the monkey is off my back.

I am extremely interested in hybrid beings, such as androgynes and hermaphrodites, as well as hybrid practices, such as alchemists who also make use of astrology, or cabala, so I am extremely pleased to be introduced to your amusingly named Agnus Deities! So, rather than a Christian "Lamb of God", have you created a polytheistic "Lambs of Gods"? Is that a third eye that I see on their foreheads? I am also fascinated by mythological creatures like the Minotaur, half man and half bull. I even have a very cute felted minotaur that my mum gave me years ago.



I also like gryphons, like you see in Harry Potter, half lion and half eagle. There is a lovely image in a 15th century alchemical manuscript, *Aurora Consurgens* (The Rising Dawn), which shows the Sun and the Moon in a mediaeval tournament. He is riding a lion and she is riding a gryphon. They symbolise the two ingredients of the mediaeval alchemical Philosophers' Stone: fiery, male sulphur and watery, female mercury. When it is heated mercury evaporates and rises inside the alchemical vessel; this is why the gryphon has wings to represent the volatile nature of mercury. Fiery sulphur was believed to 'fix' the mercury, so that it didn't fly away, and this is what created the Stone.



Here is the Rebis or Alchemical Hermaphrodite from Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom* (1595).

Oh, how interesting it is to learn your great uncle was a baker. My grandmother Hilda was a confectioner and always made me amazingly imaginative cakes for my birthday. She was born into a fairly well-off Catholic family but was banished from the family when she became romantically involved with my grandfather, whom I told you was not just a Protestant, but a follower of the Swedish mystic Swedenborg. Her mother literally threw her out of the house and never spoke to her again, even on her deathbed! I find such religious intolerance horrifying and I am sad to see that it is all too common in the news these days.

In response to your earlier questions, my niece Niamh mainly focuses on painting and drawing, though she has also done some textile work, in particular experimenting with weaving. I saw her when I was in London and enjoyed catching up with her news. I finally got to meet her very cool French boyfriend, Basile, who is a jazz musician and producer. I am rarely in London, so this was my first chance to see them both. I have invited them to come visit me in Amsterdam (as long as they don't mind sleeping on a mattress in the living room). A Dutch friend of mine, Lisa, who lives half the time in Florence, has a great Magazine Club project with artistic friends of hers. Every week they create a magazine together, each with a different theme, and then get it printed and sell it in shops in Florence. I saw on Instagram @hiphealthyhot that they now have distribution in New York! I had lunch in London with two of the editors from Thames & Hudson and mentioned the Magazine Club project, in the hope that they might be interested in commissioning a book.

I have never heard of Malva. Is it Dutch? Alternative religion and spirituality is, of course, a subject of interest in our Religious Studies department. I collect tarot decks and have three that belonged to another cult group, the Emin Society, which originated in England in the seventies but then moved to The Netherlands. It was also interested in alien beings and other worlds. I don't know much about them, but the cards are quite fascinating. I have been invited to write an illustrated book on the tarot, so I may include some details about them in the book. As for Von Däniken, yes, I remember his books from the seventies. I never actually read one then because I was very busy with Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese Taoism at the time but one or two students have been interested in his ideas; in fact his ideas about Nature and the Supernatural were briefly mentioned in yesterday's class of the Research Master.

I have been working on an index to volume 2 of my academic books, *The Mage's Images* and now it is time to make some dinner!

Best wishes,

Peter

November 12, 2024

Hi Peter!

Wow, I am mesmerised by the fight of the Sun and the Moon, being carried by the mystical creatures and representing aspects of alchemy!  
Then we have something in common, having a love for mystical/hybrid beings.  
I just watched the movie *The Ritual*, wherein there is a story of four men being lost in the woods of Sweden and coming across a demigod (an ascendent of Loki).  
The name of the creature is Moder. The visuals of this creature are mind blowing.

The reason for me being interested in these beings is because my father told me many stories of aliens on earth.  
He told me that when aliens appear on earth we sometimes can't even recognise them as such. Like for example when an alien from Venus came to earth they could only be on the bottom of the sea (because of the high pressure under water that equals the high gravitational pressure on Venus).  
And they appear as a triangle (I didn't make this up).  
So as a child I looked everywhere with the thought: "Could that be an alien?"



Meet: The Watchers.

The Watchers are a self made collection of wooden dolls. I based them on a mix of Kokeshi dolls from Japan and the statues you can find in tombs in Egypt.

It is amazing that your grandmother was a confectioner! How lovely those pies would have been. Sorry to hear that she had a ruff life. I hope that she found solace in your grandfather and in the baking.

I have never heard of the Magazine Club project, but such a fantastic way to create.

Malva is Dutch indeed, it was based in several places throughout The Netherlands, but during 1989-1999 they were based in a farm in the south. Only one newspaper article in the nineties covers the story. It was quite hidden.



Lovely that you collect tarot! I collect cards that I find on the street (one by one). I have already collected 37 cards so far. You can also do tarot with a regular deck of cards. Yesterday I found the 37th. It was a diamond ace. It is a sign of good fortune.

Thank you for the links to your texts.  
Is it possible to visit one of your talks? I would love to.

Have a lovely day!

Warmest,

Fiona

November 16, 2024

Dear Peter,

Thank you so much for your detailed responses. I loved to read your insights, interests and expertise.

I was not kidding, when I said I want to join one of your talks.  
I am reading your texts and I am super impressed.

For a closure: here a picture of the cards I found on the streets.  
I counted 41.

Thank you so much!

I hope you will have a nice weekend and good luck with all the work.  
Let me know when you have a talk in The Netherlands!

Warmest,

Fiona

