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### Ger van Elk: The wider the flatter, 1972

Stigter, S.

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Ger van Elk, **The wider the flatter**

# Ger van Elk, **The wider the flatter**, 1972

Kröller-Müller Museum; Sanneke Stigter

This work consists of 10 identical chromogenic colour photographs mounted in aluminium strips in front of one another, each describing a wider angle from 90° in the rear to 180° in the front, which is flat. This triangular structure is horizontally positioned in a specific corner in front of the very same spot on the wall that is depicted in the photograph, generating a visual doubling. Because of discolouration and physical damage, the photographs were in bad condition and the artwork could no longer be displayed. The site-specificity of the artwork was questioned or actually prompted by the artist as well as the museum while discussing the case. Van Elk shows how a real angle in the corner of the museum is visually straightened out by the artwork, replacing reality by its depiction and at the same time transforming it. The idea of the artwork lies within the visual impact that is generated at the moment of perception. It is clear that the image must be in excellent condition in order to achieve the proper effect. The work was first created for the Van Abbemuseum. Then the photo showed the white painted textile covered walls the work was positioned in front of. The Kröller-Müller Museum acquired the work shortly after this show. The former director of the museum had chosen a new location in agreement with the artist. New photographs were made and replaced the old ones in 1973. A year later the work was lent out to the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and exhibited with a picture on the side explaining the context in the Kröller-Müller Museum. After the show the work got damaged. New prints from the old negative did not satisfy the artist and a new picture was made that was used to restore the artwork. Further loan requests were not granted any more. It was stated that the work was made for this specific site in the museum and thus could not be exhibited outside of this context.

What can be concluded from the artist's interview is that the specific wall that **The wider the flatter** is made for is irrelevant, but that it is the visual relation of the wall and the object that is essential to the artwork. This means that **The wider the flatter** can be characterized as 'site-related' rather than 'site-specific' because, to the artist, the work could be installed anywhere, as long as the photographs on the aluminium structure correspond to its surroundings. This means that the functionality of the artwork will not be damaged when the architectural setting changes as long as the photographs are changed to correspond with it.

The site is still there and it was decided not to consider a different location. Because the site had been repainted and the photographs were in such a bad condition that even after conservation they would never be able to generate the desired effect, a new photo was made for the work that was authorized by the artist. The photo was taken with a traditional technical camera, enlarged in an analogue way and printed on chromogenic paper, all similar to the original techniques. Matte paper was chosen, as the silkscreen pattern that characterized the original prints is no longer available. The new photographs are adhered in a reversible way on top of the old photographs of which the gelatine layers were first cleaned and consolidated. Only the most damaged photograph on the front strip is removed, as well as the one on the rear strip so that the original signature is saved. Because the photographic industry will eventually stop processing analogue photographs it was decided to make an extra set of chromogenic prints that are now authorized by the artist. The final conservation treatment is designed around the essential visual balance between the image and reality that is so crucial for the experience of **The wider the flatter**, in combination with the history of the artwork and the intention of the artist.

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EDITORS Tatja Scholte (ICN), Paulien 't Hoen (SBMK)

TEXT EDITOR Helene Reid (Subtext Translations)

DESIGN Ariëne Boelens

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Phil Collins, **they shoot horses**, 2004

© Phil Collins, Courtesy Kerlin Gallery, Dublin | Tate Collection (T12030)

Tacita Dean, **Disappearance at Sea**, 1996

© Tacita Dean, Courtesy Frith Street Gallery, London | Tate Collection (T07455)

Olafur Eliasson, **Notion Motion**, 2005 | Photo: Hans Wilschut

Carlos Garaicoa, **Letter to the Censors (Carta a los censores)**, 2003

© Carlos Garaicoa Manso | Photo: Tate Conservation | Tate Collection (T11864)

Pierre Huyghe, **Two Minutes Out of Time**, 2000 | Photo: Peter Cox

Greg Lynn & Fabian Marcaccio, **The Predator**, 1999 | Photo: Gregg Lynn Studio

Gustav Metzger, **Liquid Crystal Environment**, 1965-66 (Remake 2005)

© Gustav Metzger | Tate Collection (T12160)

Bruce Nauman, **MAPPING THE STUDIO II with color shift, flip, flop & flip/flop (Fat Chance John Cage)**, 2001

@ ARS, NY and DACS, London 2005 | Photo: Tate Photography | Co-owned by Tate (T11893), Pompidou Centre Paris, Kunstmuseum Basel

Nam June Paik, **One Candle**, 1988 | Photo: Axel Schneider

Tino Sehgal, **This is Propaganda**, 2002

No photograph available as the artist does not allow any documentation of his installations.

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