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A Performative Exhibition: Strijd ∞

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Publication date

2015

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

The Nomos of Images

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Lerm Hayes, C.-M., Benus, E., Breugelmans, T., Eckenhaussen, S., Kerchman, A., Rhodes, E., de Smalen, J., & Sperling, F. (2015). A Performative Exhibition: Strijd ∞. *The Nomos of Images*, [259]. <http://nomoi.hypotheses.org/259>

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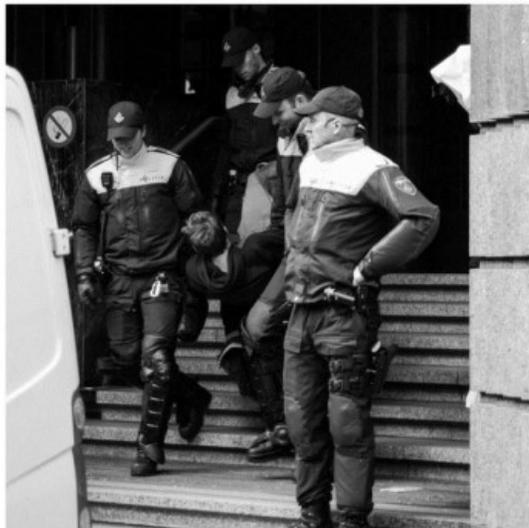
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A Performative Exhibition: Strijd ∞

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Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, Ezra Benus, Tamara Breugelmans, Sepp Eckenhausen, Astrid Kerchman, Emily Rhodes, Jeroen de Smalen, Frederike Sperling

Contemporary art at times intervenes directly at crucial times of protest or historical change. The ways in which it accomplishes this are as diverse as the contexts to which it responds. We would here like to point to just one ongoing project, *Strijd* ∞, Amsterdam and further afield, 2015.

A group of students and staff at the University of Amsterdam established the experimental exhibition project *Strijd ∞* to support and complement the visual culture at Maagdenhuis (seat of the Board of the University of Amsterdam), which was appropriated by staff and students in response to severe cuts to the Humanities budget, the eviction of students from a previously occupied building, and generally the more and more managerialized and financialised university – in Amsterdam and elsewhere.

The art-historical undergraduate module out of which this initiative grew, had as its main case study discussed the Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven's and the International Art Academy Ramallah's *Picasso in Palestine* project, 2011, and was thus borne from an appreciation of what one can broadly call performative exhibition-making. There was no canonical artwork to be “used” in Amsterdam, however, and we wished to act quickly and create a professional, but also a cheap and ultimately “removable” Exhibition.

The material that constitutes the exhibition includes historical documentary photographs, (reproductions of) visual art, (reproductions of) historical protest posters, wall texts and installation shots. We drew on the experience and sources of a photo exhibition curated ten years earlier for an anniversary of the founding of the university's student union. The images were all copied on A3 paper (on university photocopiers) and the edges were surrounded with red and white “building site”-like tape.

From a rather documentary exhibition that sought to mobilise an important and successful history of protest for present and future democratic changes in the university, *Strijd ∞* soon developed into a self-reflecting research project examining the possibilities of contemporary curatorial practice. For *Strijd ∞* not only gives a visual overview of the Maagdenhuis' history of protests, other student and staff protests, but also of the creativity involved in all such protests (singing, poster-design, organizing lectures and cultural events). It now extends to showing *Strijd ∞*'s own proliferating exhibition history. As an open-source and ever growing exhibition, *Strijd ∞* has been on display at several locations of the University of Amsterdam; the Freie Universität, Berlin; and the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. We used the lectures *The Art of Protest*, generously skyped to us from FU Berlin, as occasions when to tape up more photocopies and generate “care parcels” for other institutions.

The exhibition lives on its tumblr page and can be added to and / or printed /

installed by others. It is possible to discern similar forms of protest and gestures (e.g. locking of arms) in various times and locations. As an art-historical initiative, *Strijd ∞* thus shows its rootedness in Warburgian thinking, combined with contemporary solidarity. In Amsterdam, it now also encompasses a table of literature on art and politics (as teaching resource), as well as artistic curatorial interventions in similar contexts. As the committees that were set up with the agreement of university management to make binding recommendations for the democratisation of the University of Amsterdam are nearing the conclusion of their work, the (hopefully) positive outcomes of the protests need to be represented, too. We hope that the exhibition will continue to function as a reminder of the immense intellectual and creative energy expended in protesting and reforming education, that it may travel further and have encouraging, or even (however obliquely) tangible positive effects elsewhere.

Website: www.strijdinfinity.com

Tumblr: strijd2015.tumblr.com



The Maagdenhuis occupation of 1969: locked in by police, students built a bridge from

the neighbouring church to access supplies, enter and Exit.



'Message from the Maagdenhuis: Everybody, join us. We will persist. The 500 occupiers, May 17th 1969', Protesters' poster of 1969.



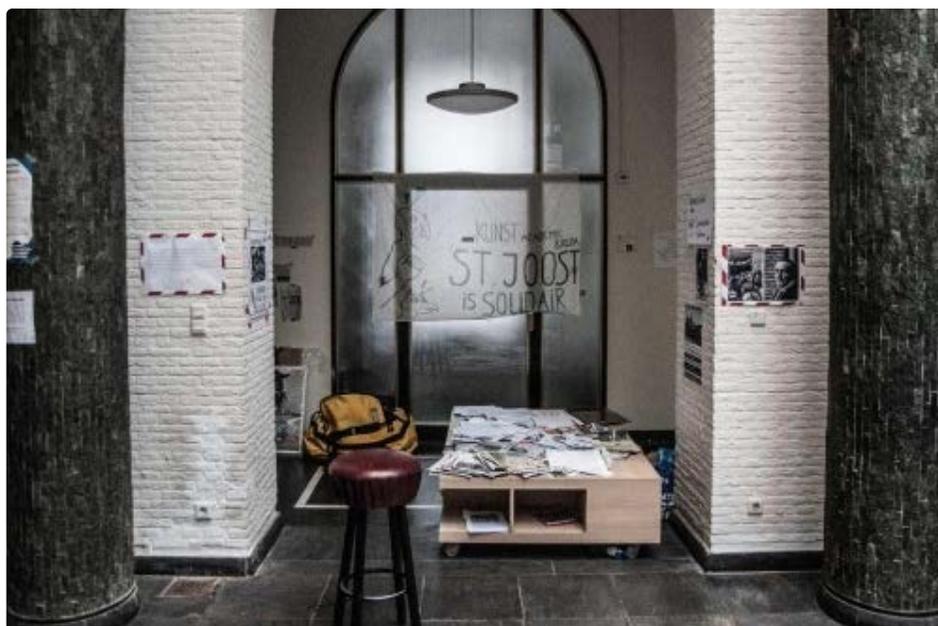
Untitled, John Robertson, 2015. These photographs were taken on the day of the eviction of the Bungehuis, a building of the University of Amsterdam, which was occupied by protesting students and staff.



Installation view of Strijd ∞ at the appropriated Maagdenhuis, March-April 2015. It was added to the visual culture of protest all around.



Installation view of Strijd ∞ at the Van Abbemuseum, where it featured in the 'learning room' of Ahmet Ögüt's solo exhibition *Vooruit!*, May-June 2015.



Installation view of Strijd ∞ at the appropriated Maagdenhuis, March-April 2015.



Installation view of *Strijd ∞* at the Freie Universität Berlin during the lecture series *The Art of Protest*, April-June 2015, removed by cleaning staff.



Installation view of *Strijd ∞* at Turfdragsterpad 15-17, the building housing the departments of Art History and Cultural Studies of the University of Amsterdam, August 2015 and ongoing.

About the authors:

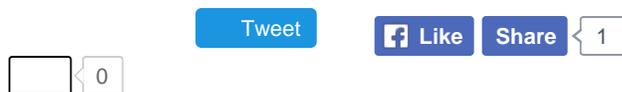
Ezra Benus, Tamara Breugelmans, Sepp Eckenhausen, Astrid Kerchman, Emily Rhodes, Jeroen de Smalen and Frederike Sperling are members of the Strijd ∞ group, as well as undergraduate Art History students, University of Amsterdam, whose activities include photography (Jeroen as John Robbertson) and internships at art institutions such as de Appel (Tamara), Witte de With (Frederike).

Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes is Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art History, UvA. She researches / writes / curates on word and image studies, Beuys, social practices, post-War histories and artistic research.

We have received images and assistance from Demelza van der Maas, Janna Adriaanse, Ahmet Öğüt, Susan Legêne and others.

Reference / Quellennachweis:

Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, Ezra Benus, Tamara Breugelmans, Sepp Eckenhausen, Astrid Kerchman, Emily Rhodes, Jeroen de Smalen, Frederike Sperling: A Performative Exhibition: Strijd ∞, in: Aesthetics of Resistance, Pictorial Glossary, *The Nomos of Images*, ISSN: 2366-9926, 3 December 2015, URL: <http://nomoi.hypotheses.org/259>.



Dieser Beitrag wurde am [03/12/2015](#) von [kaaphen](#) in [Bildwörterbuch des Widerstands](#) veröffentlicht. Schlagworte: [Amsterdam](#), [Ausstellung](#), [Exhibition](#), [Maagdenhuis](#), [Strijd ∞](#), [Student Protest](#), [University](#), [Van Abbemuseum](#).

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