Metropolis M

Review | 2 x Amie Dicke
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Amie Dicke, All Ears, 2012. Photograph by Erik and Petra Hesmerg

Amie Dicke exhibits in two places in Amsterdam, at Looiersgracht 60 with new work and at Castrum Peregrini with the results of her long-term residency at the home/studio of Gisèle van Waterschoot van der Gracht.

With a small group of people, I climb the steep Amsterdam canal house stairs until we reach the upper apartment and enter a different world. The heavy orange curtains, old wallpaper, bookshelves full of books, personal photos, walking sticks, figurines, vases, and a writing desk still set up as if someone could sit down to write a letter, give you the strange feeling of visiting someone who's not home.

Artist Amie Dicke agrees that she finds this a challenging starting point for her tour of the former home of artist Gisèle van Waterschoot van der Gracht (1912-2013). This is the apartment Gisèle rented in 1940, where a group of German, Jewish, and Dutch youths eventually went into hiding during World War II. The decor has remained 80% the same.

Since 2009, Amie Dicke has been involved with Castrum Peregrini and has created multiple site-specific artworks. Over the past two and a half years, Dicke was an artist in residence at the house. Coincidentally, Gisèle passed away just as Dicke received approval to start her project. After the war, Gisèle had the opportunity to buy the entire building, and while standing in her impressive studio overlooking the neck, bell, and frame facades of neighboring buildings, Dicke tells how she entered the studio for the first time without Gisèle. It was uncomfortable because the place is so personal. She found a note from Gisèle that read, "Do not touch, I am sorting important souvenirs."

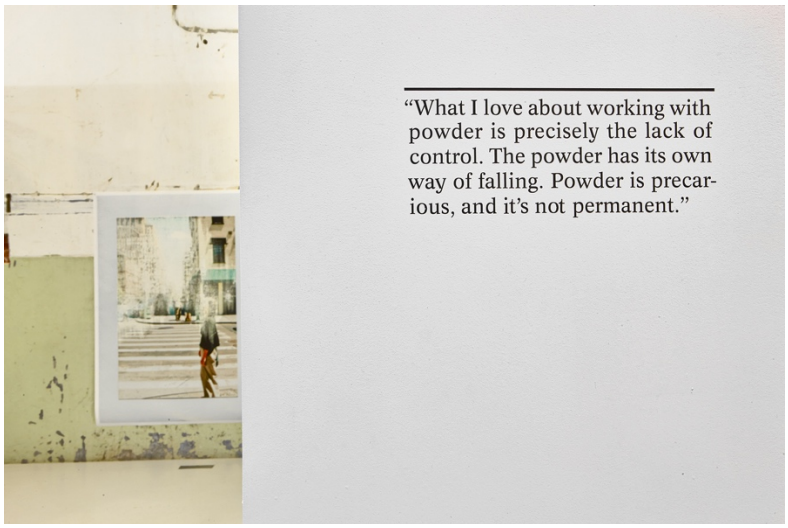
Exhibition view Sucking Stones – Amie Dicke at Looiersgracht 60.

Dicke's approach as an artist is to first look, look again, and look once more. She sits in a chair at Gisèle's desk in her home the same way. "Then you lower your perspective," she says as she lovingly picks up a younger version of Gisèle in a photo frame. This is how she discovered the etched text: "THIS IS GISELE," on the back. But when you lift the leg, it says, "THIS IS ME." The confusion, what am I doing here, what am I trying to find, overwhelmed her.

Dicke explored the house, lifting and turning everything. As is typical of her work, she ultimately uncovers things by covering them, revealing them, or simply moving them. When she removes a framed map of old Amsterdam from the wall, various sizes of dark spots become visible on the wall underneath. Different things have hung there. Dicke primarily looked at the interior's items and Gisèle's collections instead of her paintings.

In her studio, Gisèle labeled everything with small notes that Dicke uses as navigation and then elevates them to art by isolating them and presenting them on small pedestals. I can imagine that Gisèle wouldn't have liked this, after all, they're just notes, not art! But maybe she would eventually smile because she must have had a sense of humor. For instance, when I see the photos that Dicke collaborated with a photographer on, including a videotape labeled "Nothing To See – here," and a binder with "EMPTY" written on it, which was indeed empty. Dicke reveals the conceptual artist that Gisèle never tried to be.

Dicke took over 1,500 photos, and a selection of these has been compiled into a large book and the website important-souvnirs.com. The website doesn't show names, effectively removing the work from its heavy history. The book is more like an object due to its thickness and size. The front and back of the book show the hand gesture for placing something in quotation marks. She's saying, 'everything is a quote.'



Exhibition view Sucking Stones – Amie Dicke at Looiersgracht 60.

That the book is an object becomes even clearer when I see it in the Temporary Bookshop at Looiersgracht 60. It's not possible to flip through the book, and you're kindly asked to visit the exhibition Important Souvnirs at Castrum Perigini to see the book. At Looiersgracht 60, you can now see Amie Dicke's solo exhibition "Sucking Stones." The place is relatively new and run by curators Nadine Snijders and Soraya Notoadikusumo. When I enter, I'm pleasantly surprised by the space. The building used to be an old cardboard factory and has been transformed into an industrial exhibition space. Dicke's work fits the space so well that I briefly doubt if the old posters on the walls belong to it. But Snijders explains that this was the canteen of the former factory. It was the architect's choice to keep some of the building's history visible.

Dicke's attitude becomes clear when I see the work "Worktable" (2016) in the basement, which is related to the installation "Cosed Eyes" (2016). A selection of books from her private collection lies open, but the pages have become mostly unreadable. Dicke covered them with a thick layer of foundation in various house-tone colors. The work is made on location, as becomes evident in the basement.

Exhibition view Sucking Stones – Amie Dicke at Looiersgracht 60.