

# SINT-LUKAS GALERIE BRUSSEL

TIJDSCHRIFT NUMMER 3 | JUNI - JULI - AUGUSTUS 2008

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## Digitale Poezie | *Digital Poetics* Kathleen Herbert - Lisa Jeannin - Christiane Wittig

Tentoonstelling van woensdag 18.06.08 tot vrijdag 04.07.08 ;  
Vernissage: dinsdag 17.06.08 van 18u tot 21u ;  
Open: dinsdag tot vrijdag: 10u - 17u ; zaterdag: 13u - 17u ;  
uitzonderlijk open op zaterdag 28.06.08 en zondag 29.06.08 van 14u - 18u



## Kathleen Herbert In Conversation with Ele Carpenter

**EC** Your proposal to bring horses into the Cathedral of Gloucester is extremely exciting - a colliding of potent historical moments through creating one of your own. Can you describe how the idea came about?

**KH** When I first arrived on the Cathedral's Residency I had no pre-given ideas about what I was going to make. I spent a lot of time sitting in the Cathedral, watching, and talking to the guides. Quite early on in the residency, I spoke to a guide about which areas of the Cathedral were public spaces and which areas were private throughout different historical periods; just as I was leaving he made a passing comment, "There have even been horses in the Cathedral." It was strange, as I didn't quite hear the comment although it was interesting.

Over the next few months this image was at the back of my mind until, in another conversation with a friend, I mentioned that horses had been kept in the space and thought how visually interesting it would be to see them there again. It was really the verbalisation of this image that concreted the idea.

**EC** It strikes me that what constitutes private and public is mirrored back and forth in terms of church and state, depending on how their power is aligned at any given moment. But I'm sure it's more complex than that. Can you say a bit more about the historical shifts between private and public use of the Cathedral?

**KH** I researched the period when horses were most notably kept in the Cathedral, and found out that it was suspected to be Lord Levens' army during the civil war of 1645.

To bring this into context, in the years leading up to the civil war

there were mounting tensions between the Royalists and Puritans. The citizens of Gloucester were influenced by the Parliamentary/Puritan way of thinking, whilst the Cathedral remained sympathetic to the Royalist cause. In 1642 Thomas Pury, the MP for Gloucester, proposed to parliament the abolition of The Dean and Chapter and this marked the end of the existing clerical authority and form of worship. So the act of stabling horses within the cloisters by Lord Levens' army appears to be a clear statement of the new political and religious power of the Puritans.

In contrast, during the medieval period knights would hold all night vigil in churches and cathedrals prior to battle. They would bring their horses, swords, armour and page to pray and be blessed. In this context, the intention of the horse being brought into the space is very different.

As an artist I am intrigued by the political, social-economic history of the Cathedral. I am very interested in how the work treads a fine line between historical and contemporary functions of the space, exploring blurred boundaries. Lord Levens' decision to stable horses in the Cathedral was a different symbolic act than that of medieval knights or my project today. My artistic intention is to introduce something visually and acoustically incongruous into the Cathedral to reveal new aspects of the space. The work aims to examine how we question, highlight or engage with political concerns in such a rich historical context.

**EC** Is there uneasiness in the present Dean and Chapter about bringing horses into the Cathedral due to the historical resonance with the call for their abolition?

**KH** When I first proposed the idea there were a few concerns that I was focusing on what was seen as quite a negative aspect of the



Cathedral's history. However these questions were based on a misunderstanding that I was making an accurate re-enactment of an historical event, which is something I am not interested in. The Cathedral is always open to discussion and once I explained my intentions for the film, they were happy to support the project and have been tremendous.

When I first started developing the idea, I did not know that it referred to a turbulent period in the Cathedral's history. I had been thinking more about the role of horses in the construction of the building, and about the visual aspect of having them in the Cathedral again. Recently I found a quote from the artist Francis Alÿs, which for me sums up the project: 'Sometimes doing something poetic can become political and sometimes doing something political can become poetic.'

**EC** I agree with your reference to Francis Alÿs. Art has the ability and the opportunity to reveal the relationship between poetic and political complexity - by deconstructing the form of something, rather than searching for a message. I like the way your project references all of these historic moments - and the final film edit will either bring out or play down certain moments in time. The disruption of the usual protocols of the Cathedral as a sacred space has many layered romantically radical overtones. Can you describe how you are setting up the individual shots of the film?

**KH** The image and feel of the film is very important, and I'm sure parts of it will be romantic and nostalgic. But for me, as an artist, it also has to do something else, something slightly ambiguous, uncanny and questioning, so there is an edge to the romance and nostalgia of the subject. The positioning of the camera, framing, lighting, number and types of horses are crucial for the film. My selection of horses was not based on the most regal or attractive because I wanted everyday looking animals. Having more than one horse in the space makes the event more deliberate and conscious. A single horse might appear as if it had wandered in by accident. I want to create a more

Orwellian feel: that we are voyeurs intruding in a private moment where the space is no longer ours, and there is a reversal of power. To achieve this I will use a mixture of static shots; some looking down from above at an angle across the space, which have associations with CCTV and the all-seeing eye of authority. I also hope it brings a slightly documentary feel to the work. Other shots will be filmed at the same level as the horses, but they will be obscured by parts of the Cathedral's architecture - a feeling of hiding behind pillars. I made a conscious decision to film at night, firstly again to heighten the feeling of uncanniness, and also to emphasize the space empty of people. The only direct visual reference to a human presence will be in the tombs and memorials housed within the Cathedral.

I have been studying Rembrandt's paintings and his use of chiaroscuro, using extremes of dark and light. He is interested in the effects of darkness, not as sharp contrast, but in terms of how painting reveals an image. He plays with the edges of characters so elements are lost in the matching darkness. In a similar way, the horses in the film will not be lit continually; sometimes light will be used to illuminate the space and in the darkness subtle flickering shadows may indicate the presence and movement of the horses.

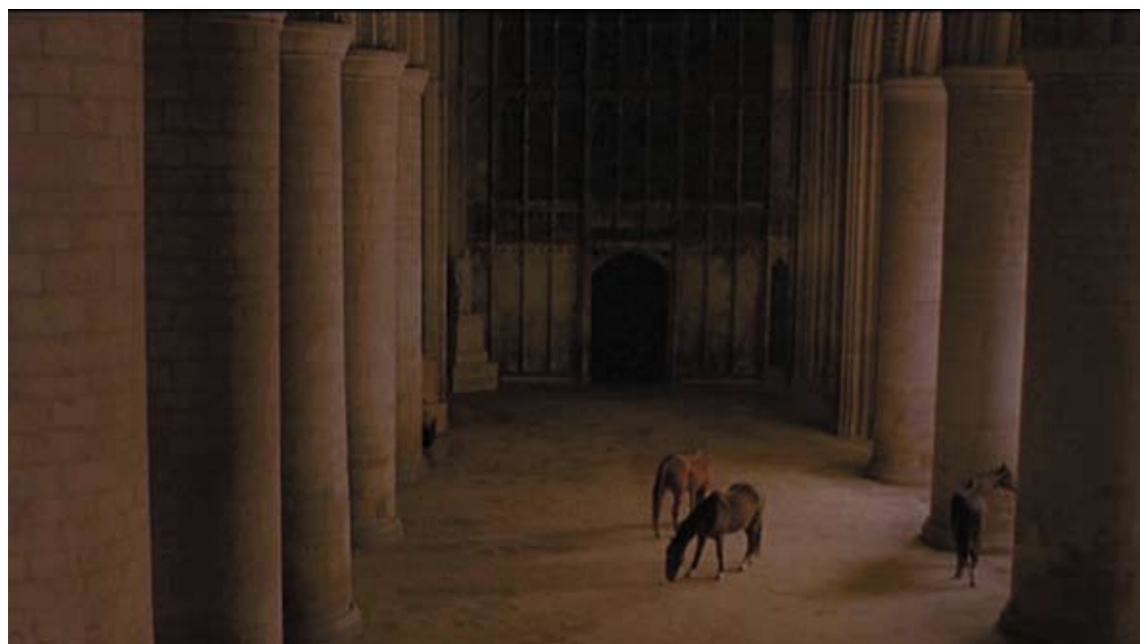
We experience the Cathedral as a powerfully religious building, which affects our mental and physical responses to the architecture. We each bring knowledge from a range of sources that has an impact on our behaviour. However the horses will be innocent to this, and I want to be quite free and open, allowing the horses to navigate and react to the space in their own way.

Kathleen Herbert is an English artist who lives and works in London.

Recent exhibitions include: Big Chill Festival (UK), Elsnor Castle, Herefordshire, 2008 ; Thinking of the Outside, Bristol (UK), 2005 ; Auckland Triennial (New Zealand), 2004.

Film & Video Umbrella, Development Bursary Award, 2008

Courtesy: Kathleen Herbert



Stable, 2007  
Super 16mm film  
Duration 8 mins



## Lisa Jeannin De spin en haar web

*No home like space.* Dat is een doordenkertje uit Lisa Jeannin's gelijknamige video en tevens de titel. Een spin beweegt door haar zelf geweven web, terwijl ze zich inlaat met huishoudelijke bezigheden als koken, kaas raspen, een plant begieten, televisie kijken, musiceeren en teksten intikken. Hangende voorwerpen worden verplaatst en gemanipuleerd. We herkennen onder meer een gitaar en een geluidsversterker, een gieter, een kookpot, een rasp, stukjes kaas en een kompas. Door het gebruik van animatietechnieken lijken de handelingen sprookjesachtig eenvoudig, maar bij Jeannin zijn het telkens metaforen voor een breder referentiekader in tijd en ruimte. Het tweede ingetikte doordenkertje luidt immers *"Lately I have been travelling in time."* Er is hier meer aan de hand dan het verhaal van een sympathieke spin.

Het schilderij, de gitaar, de schrijfmachine en de muzikanten op televisie verwijzen naar de positie van de kunstenaar, alsook het web dat het insect zelf weeft. Het spinrag kan eindeloos uitgesponnen worden, wat niet wegneemt dat het een territorium is. Het grillige wandelpatroon van het dier is niet vreemd aan die webarchitectuur. De spin put inspiratie uit andere ruimtes en tijden. Bewust komt de gelaagdheid van draden in beeld. Het spinrag is een nomadische structuur dat naar andere oorden kan verlegd worden en andere standpunten kan innemen. De bewoonster bekijkt de wereld vanuit een hangende positie. Die andere dimensie levert een grondig verschillende blik op van dezelfde realiteit, waar de normale tweevoeter

weinig besef van heeft. Tegelijk zit de spin gevangen in haar eigen web en is ze deel van de gebeurtenissen die ze zelf ontrafelt. Dat tijdelijk onderkomen toont zich als een zeer kwetsbare structuur die voortdurend aan verandering onderhevig is.

Het medium animatie neemt zowel afstand van de handelingen als dat het de maker (en kijker) de verhaalstructuur binnentrekt. De beeldstijl heeft veel weg van de naïeve atmosfeer uit prille films. Op het televisiescherm paraderen clowneske muzikanten uit lang vervlogen tijden en de schrijfmachine lijkt al even gedateerd. De spin bekijkt zelf haar verhalen op televisie en voorziet ze op de schrijfmachine van filosofisch commentaar. Tussendoor tokkelt ze op de gitaar de soundtrack voor de film, terwijl het hangend schilderij de omgeving reflecteert. De animatie brengt het dagelijks leven van de spin/kunstenaar in beeld, haar nood aan voedsel en een thuis. *No home like space* is een emblematisch werk voor Jeannin's kunstenaarspositie. In haar video-installaties hanteert ze meestal in en buiten beeld meerdere waarnemingsniveaus die zowel de vaste positie van kijker en kunstenaar als van de beelden aan het wankelen brengen. De verschillende thema's en media, het productieproces en het standpunt van de waarnemer zitten in elkaar vervlochten als in één groot spinrag.

Filip Luyckx



Still from  
The crossing  
2-channel video installation  
7 min 10 sec X 2  
2006



Still from  
No home like space  
video 8 min  
2006



Photo from the making  
of The crossing  
2-channel video installation  
7 min 10 sec X 2  
2006  
Photo by Beata Fransson

Lisa Jeannin is a Swedish artist who lives and works in Hakebo, Sweden and Antwerpen, Belgium.

Current shows: "The Real Thing" at Malmö Konstmuseum, Sweden ;

"GGG & G" at Museum Het Domein, Sittard, The Netherlands ;

Upcoming show: the Busan Biennale, South Korea, September

Courtesy: Milliken Gallery, Stockholm and Lisa Jeannin

[www.lisajeannin.nu](http://www.lisajeannin.nu)

[www.myspace.com/lisajeannin](http://www.myspace.com/lisajeannin)

[www.millikengallery.com](http://www.millikengallery.com)



## Christiane Wittig

Born into a mechanical IT-orientated environment, but very much aware of the traditional roots and ideas of different art genres, Christiane Wittig actually succeeded in using the contemporary means like computer, photo and camera, to translate a thorough aesthetic understanding of complex philosophical and metaphysical issues into highly sophisticated art objects.

Some of the interactive installations, Christiane Wittig has produced until now, centred on the theme of the body and technology including the concepts of preservation, endurance and fragility.

One example: The "Pustebox" = "Breathing box"

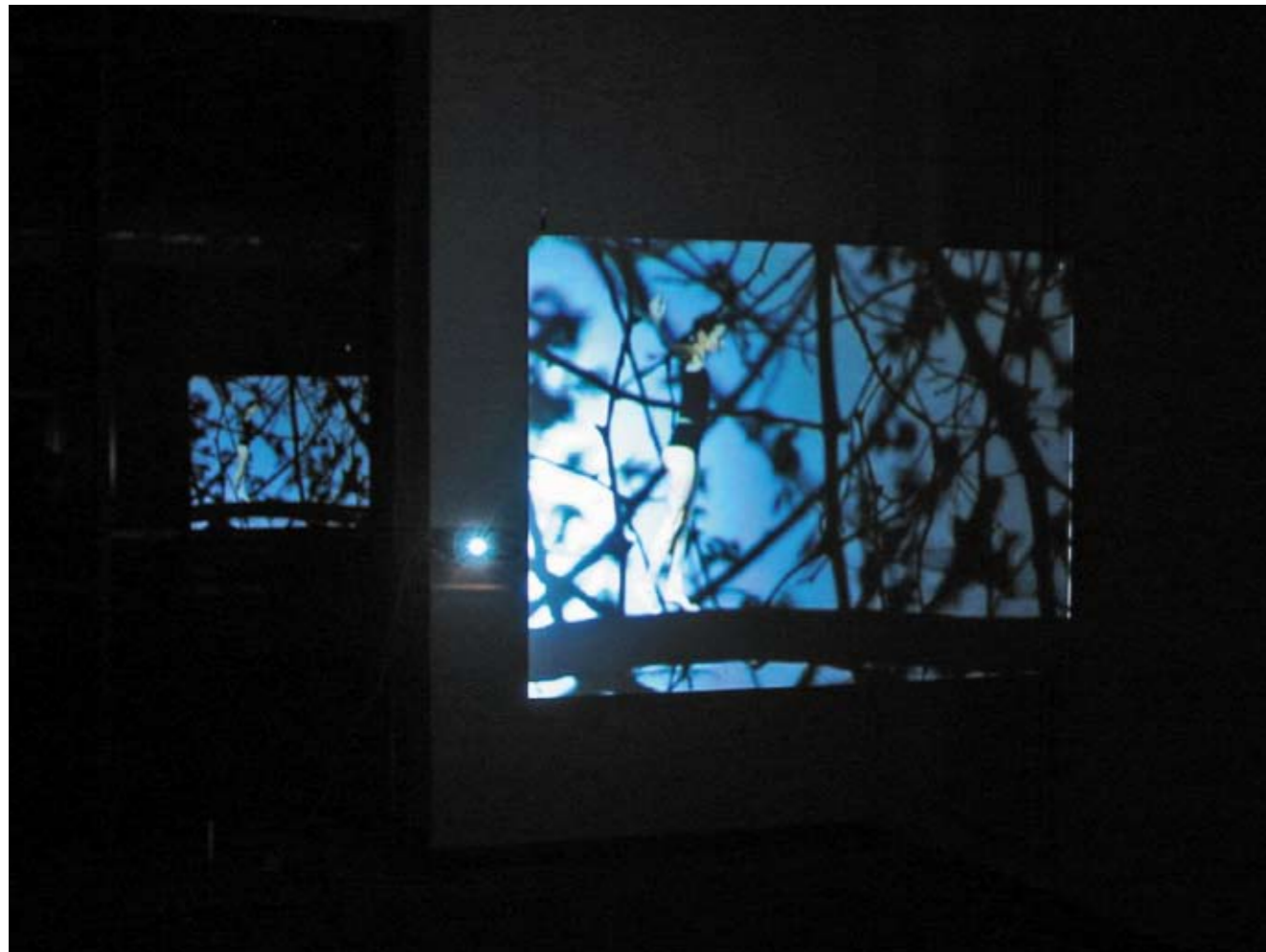
"...The work is a subtle reminder of the fragility of our own existence, the oxygen, which keeps us alive, and the carbon monoxide, which constantly shifts the world around us. Christiane Wittig often integrates screen media into found objects, cleverly charging them with paradoxical informations. In her "Pustebox" it is the very breath of

the viewer which, when blown into the box, stimulates and distorts the image. However, it is the image of the viewer's own face which, like narcissus, appears and disappears with the wind from the viewer's mouth."

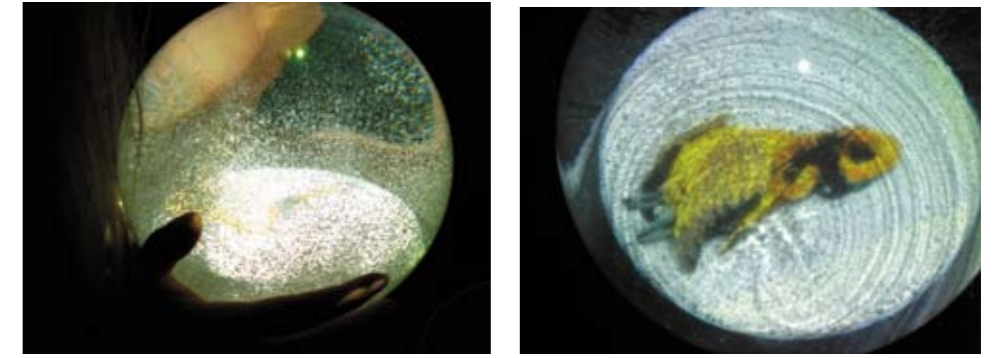
Other installations express the interactive relation between the individual creature and its perpetual continuously changing daily context of living (like her installation "Schnee ist weiss" = "Snow is white").

Christiane Wittig's foremost talent exists in her capacity not to fall into the trap of an artificial artistic interpretation, but to express an authentic humanistic orientated interpretation of today and tomorrow.

*Prof. Dr. Jill Scott, media artist and Dr. W. Ballarin, art historian*



"elf", videoinstallation



"schnee ist weiss", interactive installation

What happens when we go to the movies?

There is a tactic engagement with all the elements of cinematic technology, its architectures, its history, its articulations of subjectivity, our own bodies directed perception and history of apprehension.

The configuration of physical space, ambient light, projection apparatus, and bodily disposition, together already constitute an interface. We do not have to learn a new grammar every time we go to the movies.

We interact with the one that is already there, and that pervades subsequent media.

The meaning of a camera is both extrinsic and intrinsic- a consequence both of its placement within a larger social and historical field and of narratives, for example in spectatorship. In the movies, the difference between oneself and the projected character with which one identifies or interacts does not hinder the fantasy of involvement.

Rather, it is naturalized. While we never entirely forget that difference, it continues to circulate as an element of what one might all a technological unconscious such that, under certain circumstances our relation of these shadows is recuperable, not by opposing what

is present to its representation, or in opposing effect to simulation, but in the recognition of the temporalaporia by these categories are already spectral.

As when we suddenly recover ourselves in that moment when the phantasmatic is no longer sustainable, or it simply ends.

And even though it might come back to haunt us in memory, and we may not be entirely space of the dream, of technical reproducibility, and of lived experience coincide as both incommensurate and permeable, and we inhabit them all. What we are, when we walk into a movie, or a turn on television, is already virtual.

Christiane Wittig constructs installation singular and alternative cinematic machines, which constitute variant subject positions, interfaces, between the spectator's unconscious and sensory experiences of film. Wittig presumes a technical unconscious for the cinema, shared common field of signs, grammars, effects.

*Thomas Zimmer is a scholar, writer, artist and curator*



"glück", interactive videoinstallation

Christiane Wittig is a German artist who lives and works in Brussels, Belgium

Courtesy: Christiane Wittig