

# Galeria Estrany-de la Mota

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## Gerard Ortín. Vijfhoek

Opening: Thursday, June 30th 2016, 18.00 p.m.

Exhibition: 30.06.2016 – 16.09.2016. Monday to Friday from 10.30 p.m. to 7.00 a.m.

The Estrany-de la Mota Gallery is pleased to present the latest exhibition of the season, the first solo exhibition by Gerard Ortín (Barcelona, 1988).

The exhibition *Vijfhoek* shows the homonymous project performed by the artist during 2015 at Diemer Vijfhoek, an artificial peninsula at the East of Amsterdam. In the sixties, during the extension of the dike that protected the Electric Power Plant of Diemen, the dredging of sand originated this pentagonal peninsula that, as time passed, became a green area. During the seventies, the surroundings of the peninsula were used as a chemical dump.

Gerard Ortín's project consisted of a walk-performance through this territory, a "tactile" walk across the stinging nettle fields filling the peninsula. A guide walked the participants through the area, giving some directives, contextualizing the place and its surroundings and evoking the toxicity of the land. Participants were dressed with overall boiler suits, provided in order to isolate them from the contact with nettles. Thus, the suits referred to the plastic foil installed at the bottom of the dike to isolate the surface from the chemical waste.

The artist refers to these projects, developed in the last years, as "walk-performances". Designed for small groups that follow a route in silence, these performances suggest an introspective and individual experience through a collective ritual. At the same time, they try to generate affective connections between the participants and the place.

With this line of work he introduces a way of exploring landscape that avoids the bucolic and romantic representations of nature to insist on its elusive essence. The encounter with nature is always an incomplete one, as described by philosopher Timothy Morton: "Nature, that reified mythical thing over yonder in the mountains, in our DNA, wherever; that dissolves when we look directly at it". The experience of walking across these natural areas with the artist's interventions highlights the fact that any perception of the landscape is eminently cultural, and suggests both poetic and dystopic interpretations of the places.

The project *Vijfhoek* (pentagon in Dutch) was performed within the program *A Festival of Choices* of the Sandberg Instituut and took place in two sessions on the 18th and 21st of June 2015. In this exhibition at Galeria Estrany-de la Mota the artist presents five works that are both vestiges of the performance and triggers for a new proposal. On the one hand, a new work that consists of an installation of plants and a sound work. On the other, the invitation to the performance and a work that consists of a slideshow, a sound work, and its script.

The script explains the protocol for the route and articulates each of the five stages that define it. In the first stage (*Conduction*) a van with the windows darkened drove the participants to the peninsula where the walk would take place. There, they were given a stinging nettle tea while receiving the directives for the performance and got dressed with overall boiler suits in order to isolate them from

the vegetation. The second stage (*Urticaria*) consisted of walking across the peninsula, outside the pathways, entering the most wooded and lush areas. Then the guide initiated the third stage (*PEN-eland*) where she would describe the story of the place reminding the dike's past as a chemical dump, adding a geopolitical and symbolic layer both to the territory and to the walk. After leaving the densest area and finding the main path, the fourth stage (*Transect*) introduced the concept that gave its title: a method whereby a portion of land is marked off for study. Tracing a straight line upon a map and experiencing the tension between it and the physical place it occupies. Thus, the whole walk across the peninsula could be understood as a "transect", as a geometric translation between the virtual level and the physical experience of the performance. The group kept following a path leaving the peninsula behind and walking towards an empty parking lot of a shopping mall. There the fifth and last stage (*Re-turner*) started: a van drove the group back to the starting point. A soundtrack was played during the trip, activating a cinematic experience, almost converting it into an audiovisual product.

At the current exhibition, the installation with stinging nettles is juxtaposed with the sonic space of the *Soundtrack*, previously played at the van on the way back and now completely invading the space. A plastic foil separates the floor of the gallery from the sandy layer of the plants, evoking the foil at the Diemen dike. The nettles are presented as a fragment that refers to a whole, as an extract of the vegetal landscape of the peninsula. Thus, as the philosopher Michael Marder suggests in his book *Plant-Thinking*, "The cryptic life of plants stands for the synecdoche of self-veiling nature". In this case, the synecdoche is one of a nature displaced from its origin, if any, and artificially conserved to ensure its survival over the period of exhibition. The music suggests a faux temporality for the plants triggering an emotive feeling on the audience. Like in a film, this soundtrack is just another element that builds up a sweetened construction of the scene.

The artist suggests, thus, an approach to the concept of nature that inquires the way we relate to it. Through the negation of a tactile perception he refers to the impossibility of accessing the natural and, at the same time, interrogates about how to experience the place without affecting it.

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