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Nest in collaboration with the Migration Museum
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Artists:

Quentley Barbara, Sara Blokland,
Lebohang Kganye, Anaïs López &
Amber Toorop.

Guest curator:

Manon Braat

What does it mean to feel at home? What is the role of family, origin and genealogy for the shaping of your identity and to feel at home somewhere, even if you are far away from home? **The bricks that build a home** focuses on this universal theme: home. Home can be a geographic place, a village or a country that unites shared cultural values and history. But moreover home is the place where you feel safe, get to be yourself, are acknowledged and recognized, the place where you do not have to explain why you are there. For many, perhaps most of all, home is the personal environment, the place where family members come together with all their specific behaviors and share the same histories and stories, speak the same language.

The current political debate in the Netherlands on migration is dominated by words like 'crisis', 'border surveillance' and 'migration deals'. Lack of knowledge and fear of the unknown not only cause misunderstandings about migration but also ignore the complexity of the displacement and detachment of the individual. More than half of the population in The Hague has a migration background. The city has been co-shaped by the many groups of migrants who have settled in the city. They made The Hague their home. Migrants in the Netherlands are often asked where they come from. A better question would be "Where are you at home?"

Ever since people exist, they move around the earth. In the 21st century, more people than ever before flee and migrate all around the world. People who are trying to find security, freedom, more opportunities or a better future; a new home. Houses, jobs, possessions and loved ones are being left behind, an uncertain future lies ahead. In the new environment newcomers are not infrequently received with suspicion and mistrust, or even outright hostility.

Yet people manage to make a new life for themselves and after a while the new place will also become a new home.

Migrants carry stories and languages with them. These languages are both a means of communication and a carrier of histories, collective memories, values and aesthetics of a culture. Migration is often accompanied by a partial loss of language and identity, because one is constantly confronted with the complexity and the power dynamics between the languages and cultural traditions of the former and the present home. Sharing the old cultural traditions with the family, the mother tongue, the confession of faith and the memories of the motherland play an important role in making the new place a home. Learning a new language and living in a new cultural reality results in the emergence of a multiple cultural identity. At the same time, the new living environment is also being reshaped and enriched by adding elements from the old culture.

The artists of **The bricks that build a home** — (inter) national artists with and without a migration background — in their work reflect on issues related to migration, belonging, displacement and colonial history, which has contributed greatly to the current demographics in the Netherlands. They often use genealogical research and personal family histories and stories to investigate their own identity and their own 'home'. In the exhibition they present both various forms of family portraits and scenes as well as works that relate to the theme of 'belonging' in a more abstract way.

The artworks clearly show how family lives and environments can differ, but at the same time emphasize the universal meaning of being 'at home'. Family as a social unit is a concept. The members of the family lead their own lives, make new connections and create new families. And when they come together they share something that, because of their common experiences and memories, does not need words and is as inscrutable as it is recognizable to an outsider.

Quentley Barbara (Curaçao) graduated from the Royal Academy for Visual Arts in The Hague (KABK) last summer and won the Jan Roëde Award with his graduation work *The Foreigners*. In this work, Barbara wants to represent the relationship that he has with my family, and which, according to him, is a strong part of his biography. With apparently inferior materials such as cardboard and gaffer tape, he has shaped portraits of his family members. For the presentation in the Migration Museum Barbara added several portraits of family members to *The Foreigners*.

On Curaçao, according to Barbara, material is treated differently than in the Netherlands. Here a lot of valuable material that could easily be reused, is thrown away. When Barbara found a large batch of storage boxes on the street that were still in excellent condition, he decided to work with the cardboard. He collected photographs of his family members and modeled the cardboard with scissors and tape as much as possible to their resemblance, just like other sculptors would do with chisels and stone or wood. The motivation to portray his family members stems from his conviction to stay close to himself in his practice. At the same time, he feels an outsider in his family – the only one not becoming an electrical engineer, but an artist. This exceptional position has not always been easy, but in the end Barbara says he owes a lot to his relatives, especially his parents. While working, Barbara was guided by the emotions he felt towards every individual family member. Moreover, the dynamics between the family members become somewhat clear on the basis of the positioning, glances and viewing directions of the individual heads.

Quentley Barbara studied at the KABK and followed the orientation course in Visual Arts at the Instituto Buena Vista, Curacao Center for Contemporary Art in Willemstad. This fall Barbara's work has been on view at AFSLAG BLV, the annex of Museum Belvédère in the Heerenveense School, in the exhibition *Nieuwe Oogst*.

Sara Blokland (Netherlands) is a visual artist, researcher and curator. As an artist she is mainly engaged in photography and film. In her work she reflects on the complex role of this medium in relation to social histories, the histories of individuals, the concept of 'family' and cultural heritage. Blokland comments on both the medium and the content. Her works have a strong focus on portrait and landscape as part of identity and memory. She makes connections with broader themes such as migration, colonial legacies and cultural detachment.

Reproduction of Family (part II) consists of a landscape of family memories and social relations in the form of family photos printed on porcelain plates and books on how exotic plants thrive best in cold Western countries. This is the second chapter in a continuous story about photography, family history and migration. With text, video and photographic images by and from the Blokland family, the artist reflects on the way photography in (ethnographic) museums has often been used: white, Western people are usually portrayed individually, people of color from other parts of the world, mainly as a group. This installation is a renegotiation with regard to the representation of (Bloklands) identity and heritage.

De dag dat mijn vader een Surinamer werd consists of prints of pages from the diary that Blokland made together with her father during a trip to Surinam. It was the first time after 25 years that her father visited his mother country to say goodbye to family members. It would turn out to be his last trip to Surinam. The prints of the diary consist of texts and photos by Blokland and her father communicating their feelings about the journey.

Sara Blokland studied at the Rietveld Academy and the Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam, and she also holds an MA in Film & Photographic Studies from Leiden University. Her works have been exhibited in various places, such as the Kumho Museum (Seoul, Korea), Gallery Lmak projects (New York), the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, MMKA (Arnhem) and the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag. Her work is also part of a number of private and public collections, such as the ABN-AMRO Collection, the Rabobank Collection, Museum of Fine Arts in Houston and the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague.

Lebohang Kganye (South Africa) is a Johannesburg-based artist, whose young oeuvre stems from her research into her own family history. After her mother passed away, Kganye began attempting to trace where her family originated. The quest was hampered by the apartheid regime, that had forced black people to move to different homelands all the time. Homelands were places where black people and people of colour were forced to live during apartheid. Moreover, Kganye found different versions of her own surname. When registering in yet another place to stay, last names were often misspelled by the officials of the apartheid regime.

The animated film *The Pied Piper's Voyage* is the result of a long search along uncles and aunts Kganye did not know before, and through countless family albums. In the film, the artist can be seen herself, dressed in the suit of her grandfather, followed by all kinds of family members. Her photographic journey seems to be a deep response to loss and mourning – not just of different individuals, but of history, language and oral culture. Her work is a re-construction of her identity by reconnecting with family members both alive and dead.

Lebohang Kganye studied photography at the Photo Market Workshop in Johannesburg and did Fine Arts at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. Her works have been exhibited at various locations, such as the Pretoria Art Museum and IZIKO South African National Gallery in South Africa, Kunsthal KAdE in Amersfoort, Huis Marseille in Amsterdam and Somerset House in London. Her work is also part of a number of private and public collections, such as the Walther Collection in New York, National Museum of Mali in Bamako and Standard Bank in Johannesburg.

Anaïs López (Netherlands) is an artist and documentary photographer. She works with still and moving images. In doing so, she consciously chooses to step outside the well-known paths of presentation methods and platforms. Her work starts from life in the city and the place that people occupy in it. She captures the interactions between city and people: she alternates a close-up on the individual with an image of the city. This way, she connects private with public reality. Very often her projects are not only about how we deal with our immediate environment, but also about the way we deal with 'the other'.

The Migrant is a multi-media project, produced by Prospektor, about a bird López saw when she was in Singapore. She dived into the special history of the small songbird who came to Singapore from Indonesia and ultimately was hated in the noisy city. In *The Migrant*, the consequences of rapid urban development and the position of the unwanted stranger come together. The little bird, the Javanese Myna, aptly portrays the association of people with unwanted elements in the makeable world. The story of a hunted songbird is poignantly told by López as a metaphor for 'the migrant'.

Anaïs López studied at the Royal Academy for Visual Arts in The Hague and did a master Narrative documentary structures at the AKV / St. Joost Academy in Breda. In 2016, López and Marga Rotteveel founded Docking Station, an initiative that helps photographers develop and advance socially engaged stories. Her work has been shown in various places such as the Krakow Photo festival in Poland, the Stedelijk Museum and the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam and at Fotodok in Utrecht. *The Migrant* was nominated this year for a Golden Calf Award for best Interactive.

Amber Toorop (Netherlands) investigates the way in which people feel connected to a home. For her it is not self-evident that everyone automatically feels at home in another country or in a strange environment. To what extent do expressions of the original culture influence the sense of feeling 'at home'? She investigates this by seeing how connectedness is expressed in interiors, everyday actions, symbols and rituals. By combining her art with archival material and family photos, she creates new meanings. The past merges with the present. Toorop's photos evoke the feeling of a memory of a forgotten home.

G'lijk weleer, mijn lieve schat, centers around four generations of Indonesian Dutch people in the Netherlands. This group is characterized by a strong identity and is shaped by a traumatic history. With the aid of a family archive and new visual material she intimately tells the migration story of her own family and her personal search for her Indonesian origins. Indonesian Dutch are connected to each other through a country that they knew as the Dutch East Indies and that is now Indonesia. In the work *Toorop* focuses on a world that only exists in memories and associative details. In a metaphorical way she visualises a lesser-known period in Dutch history that is difficult to put into words. Although that history is related to a place in a time that can not be returned to, the longing for that 'home' plays a major role. At the same time the work addresses a broader theme that relates to a larger group of migrants and their descendants.

Amber Toorop studied Graphic Design at SintLucas in Boxtel and Documentary Photography at the Royal Academy for Visual Art in The Hague. She has participated in exhibitions in, among others, Pulchri Studio and at Art The Hague in The Hague, Melkweg Gallery and Kers Gallery in Amsterdam and WORM and the Nederlands Fotomuseum in Rotterdam.