

# IN REVIEW

## At Home, 2020 Paper Biennial

Museum Rijswijk

June 28–November 15, 2020

Leiden, The Netherlands | [museumrijswijk.nl](http://museumrijswijk.nl)

*Reviewed by Monika Auch*

**Museum Rijswijk** in Leiden, The Netherlands is well known for its Textile and Paper Biennials, international shows with monumental, and subtle works displayed in their stately 18<sup>th</sup> century mansion and a modern, spacious annex. The theme of the exhibition is “home” defined as home in a global world, where your place of birth might not be equal to feeling at home

or carrying any significance at all. The exhibition shows work by 23 artists and is roughly categorized into sub-themes including feeling like a stranger in your living environment; about exploring the roots that define identity; and about leaving home in search of adventure, a wider horizon or a better life. How do artists define “home” in a rapidly shifting world?

**Lebohang Kganye** (b. 1990), a young artist from Katlehong, Johannesburg, plays a leading part in her animated cardboard installations, a combination of photography, sculpture and performance. Her work resonates with the history of South Africa, of families uprooted and resettled because of apartheid laws and the amendment of land acts. She tells of families moving around during the apartheid era, creating temporary homes and finding refuge in different spaces. Land expropriation by white Boers caused an exodus towards cities in anticipation of a better life. Kganye illustrates the dark

**Lebohang Kganye *Pied Piper's Voyage*** (animated film) 2014. Music by Auntie Flo and Esa Williams, 3 min 26 sec, film still 1.1. © The artists and Museum Rijswijk for publicity purposes *At Home* exhibition.







**Pim Palsgraaf** *Ashes 06 Wood* 2019, stained wallpaper, carton 38" x 27". © The artists and Museum Rijswijk for publicity purposes *At Home* exhibition.

reality of poverty and violence in townships and the bitter disappointment of not being at home in one's own country.

Dutch artist **Pim Palsgraaf** (b. 1979), investigates the spirit of abandoned spaces. He is the initiator of a project in which a group of artists travel to industrial ruins in places such as the former East Germany where, living temporarily, they make art out of whatever the buildings have to offer. Artists then present the results in a free-for-all, multi-media exhibition throughout the ruins. For the Rijswijk exhibition Palsgraaf exhibited a collage of reclaimed materials including wood, wallpaper and cardboard which reflect decay, erosion and a lost atmosphere.

For the Biennial, **Marianne Lammersen** (b. 1984), will build a site-specific work about her home community. She grew up in a rural municipality in the Dutch province of Friesland. For the artist, familial roots define an identity, a feeling of self worth and of being grounded, thus laying the conditions for feeling at home in any other place. Lammersen speaks about how she feels overwhelmed by sky-scraping offices, the speed on highways and of modern communication. She is looking for a contemplative moment in her work and



**Marianne Lammersen** *Carrier of All* 2014, paper, photo print, inkjet print, newspaper image, 15" x 12" x 4". © The artists and Museum Rijswijk for publicity purposes *At Home* exhibition.



**Quentley Barbara** *The Foreigners* (installation view) 2018, cardboard, gaffer tape, wood, approximately 120" x 120" x 200". © The artists and Museum Rijswijk for publicity purposes *At Home* exhibition.



**Darja Esser** *Leichtes Gepäck (light luggage)* 2018, ink, thread, Japanese paper, approximately 25" x 9" x 4". © The artists and Museum Rijswijk for publicity purposes *At Home* exhibition.

challenges the viewer to question his position in our ever-changing world. She uses contrasting elements and various materials like paper, glass, ceramic and wood to underline the physical experience of the work.

**Quentley Barbara** (b. 1993) was raised in Curaçao and graduated from the **Royal Academy of Art**, at The Hague in 2018. He won the **Jan Roëde Award** for his installation *The Foreigners*. The emotional bond with his family was the starting point for an overwhelming, three-dimensional family portrait made from seemingly worthless materials such as cardboard and gaffer tape. Feeling like a stranger in both parts of the "Dutch kingdom," i.e. the islands off the coast of South America and on the European mainland, Barbara sought ways of connecting with his family. "Most of my family are electrical engineers. They initially rejected my choice to become an artist because they wanted more financial stability for me. I wanted to make a work of art that my family would understand and be proud of. Because I am so far away from home, I am also a bit homesick. I need to be in contact with them and using them in my work is a way of doing that." Barbara is making new site-specific work for the Rijswijk exhibition.

In contrast to these large-scale, sculptural pieces are the fragile works of **Darja Esser** (b. 1987). She addresses the subject of migration and human fragility in the quest for a better life through delicate travel backpacks, child-strollers and suitcases constructed out of transparent paper. These forms suggest the constant movement involved in searching for a place to call "home."

The interview with curator **Diana Wind** took place shortly before the full impact of the Covid-19 pandemic hit us. Writing this article only two weeks later, the concept of "home" had taken on a more complex meaning. Home has become a container and shelter against an invisible virus. The title of the exhibition, *At Home* also indicates a locked-in survival state of being and a necessary mode of deprived social interaction. The powerful messages in the Rijswijk exhibition—some whispering, others shouting out loud—make the humble everyday material a carrier of meaning that surpasses its mere functionality. In the last twenty years paper as material and means of communication has been outmoded by digital tools. Yet paper has been with us for a long time. The show at the Rijswijk Biennial is an eye-opener and celebration of this longtime companion of humanity in quite unexpected, mind-provoking forms.

—Monika Auch has a background in medicine and textile design with a focus on weaving. A hybrid of science and art, she set up *Weeflab* in Amsterdam as a studio practice and place of research. [weeflab.com](http://weeflab.com) | [monikaauch.nl](http://monikaauch.nl) | [stitchyourbrain.com](http://stitchyourbrain.com)