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GARDEN TOOLS AND PELARGONIUMS

A PLEASANT PLACE PRESENTATION AT EENKAS

CURATED BY ERNST VAN DER HOEVEN AND LOU-LOU VAN STAAVEREN

Welcome everyone to One Work and One Greenhouse and thank you for this lovely invitation.

It's a pleasure to say a few words on the occasion of Ernst van Deurzen and Lou-Lou van Staaveren's EENKAS – One Greenhouse and to celebrate the exhibition **Garden Tools and Pelargoniums – a.k.a. geraniums**.

Ernst and Lou-Lou describe themselves as gardening friends. Though we could also describe them as magazine friends with Club Donny, MacGuffin and Pleasant Place. Or perhaps curatorial friends as this is not their first rodeo, nor their first exhibition curated together here for Een Kas.

Now Ernst, Lou-Lou and I share a fascination for gardens and gardening. Though in all honesty, my interest has remained somewhat platonic, somewhat a theory rather than a practice. I am momentarily in between gardens as my current garden has been taken over by other species and so at a certain moment I thought to give Donna Haraway's suggestion of multispecies cohabitation a try. Or in other words Amsterdam's pigeons and rats have won. So I pretend my defeat is an intellectual endeavor and instead of a practice, I find myself concerned with the metaphorical potential of the garden. The garden as a mirror for the times in which we live. A time of climate change, extinction, extraction. But also, as is so beautifully and affectively shown in the work and curation of Ernst and Lou-Lou, the garden as a collection, an archive, a biography even and also – and definitely not least – a commemoration.

Here, in the heart of Amsterdam South, at the top of this exhibition space, in a bit of an unlikely urban location under a glass roof, Julius Vermeulen created a small private domain to garden and grow tomatoes, cucumbers and flower cuttings. Over a longer stretch of time Ernst and Lou-Lou created several seasonal installations in a way as a commemoration of Een Werks original gardener.

This is also where the Pelargoniums step in: as I understood, Julius had been growing pelargonium cuttings he received from friends such as Rineke Dijkstra. Cuttings that have been lovingly cared for and slowly over time multiplied – and now today shared once again. Pelargoniums have this strange – kind of old-fashioned vibe around them but seeing them again in this installation today even theoretical gardeners desire for their cuttings.

Whenever I want to know (or say) something about gardens and gardening, and perhaps also their metaphorical potential, I always turn to Derek Jarman and his diary *Modern Nature*. Jarman, the gardening filmmaker and painter, who also loved to write - managed to create and cultivate a garden in South England, on the seaside on an improbable piece of landslide of pebbles and merciless sea winds. His way of gardening is free, without boundaries, experimental, collaborative.

The idea of the garden as a biography and site of memory is very present in his diary *Modern Nature*. Here he writes about his blossoming garden, his life and living with Aids and deteriorating health. He recalls memories of his childhood and adolescence sparked by thoughts of flowers and plants. And so thinking about garden tools and pelargoniums, I came across this citation:

On Monday February 6, 1989, Jarman wrote:

My father filmed my mother picking the pink cabbage roses on my grandmother's wall as they fell apart in her hands; and my sister and myself in the garden of Zuassa, standing in front of a bed of scarlet geraniums – 'Zonal pelargoniums' as my old book carefully reminds us. Zonal pelargoniums! Geraniums remain for me geraniums. Beautiful Flowers and How to Grow Them [the book] describes them as

'once the reigning Queen of the flower garden, the cheerful zonal has declined in favour'. But not with me – Jarman says – I have carefully nurtured them for years on my balcony in London, where they have bloomed continuously in the most adverse conditions.

Just like Jarman, this exhibition embraces the geraniums or actually pelargoniums: – almost the same – and often one is confused for the other. So here, too, we find ourselves in the midst of urban life – and here, too, the pelargonium blooms luxuriantly in the adverse conditions of the rooftop greenhouse where most plants demand extra care.

This collection of pelargoniums is in a way quite telling of how gardens most often develop: as a slowly growing collection of plants and flowers, inspired by the gardens visited, developed from plants exchanged, passed on from friend to friend or generation to generation. They become like an autobiographical archive, tracing friendships, encounters and interests.

Now the pelargoniums are surrounded by all kinds of garden tools. Tools and plants are in a way opposite categories. A means versus an end? Lifeless matter versus life itself? In English one is even an insult. And as I understood, for growing pelargoniums we do not actually need all that many tools. But anyone who knows our curating and gardening – and magazing – friends knows that objects and materials in their hands are never just objects, never lifeless. In their new order, bonds, connections, memories and affinities emerge. Bonds of which you were unaware of they existed but now seem so logical that you cannot unsee them.

In addition, on a perhaps more emotional level, these objects are not just objects. They harbor memories of their usage, of the original owner, of how they were passed on from parent or grandparent to child and grandchild for example. In the new issue of *Pleasant Place* I read about different gardeners love for their tools. Asked to select their favorite tool, topiary artist Michael Gibson immediately asks: "Can I talk about more than one?" And he writes: 'I'm ambidextrous [meaning being able to use both left and right hands with equal ease], and always have two shears in my hand at a time. In topiary cutting, with each cut, I'm making a conversation, and the next one has to respond. Different tools say different things. You have to be patient, and not force plants into anything they don't want to be.'



The artists and artisans involved – both in the magazine and here in the living exhibition or archive - show that not just the garden is a reflection of a life lived, but actually also some of these tools. There's the spade from Ernst's grandmother that emigrated with her when she moved to Australia and decades later back, there's the small carnation knife for cutting flowers from Lou-Lou, there's children's tools, and shovels and rakes and all you might need. And often objects that are so well crafted that they remain for generations. In addition, I would love to try out some of the tools Oscar Peters invented, even though I'm not quite sure what to use them for. Or try out the extra hands designed by Matilde Patuelli and Roberta di Cosmo. To name just a few.

So One Greenhouse is not just a collection of tools and plants, it's a way to trace relationships, chance encounters and friendly exchanges. I would like to end with the opening words of Ernst and Lou-Lou as they write 'The garden lives, dies, and remembers everything.' With these objects and cuttings, that message rings ever so true. So welcome to this botanical laboratory!