

participate in a social sculpture

EXCHANGE VALUES - ON THE TABLE



Frans Hals Museum | De Hallen, Haarlem

In the exhibition **THE GLOBAL TABLE**

23 Sept 2017 - 7 Jan 2018

made possible by the Van Toorn Scholten Stichting



EXCHANGE VALUES ON THE TABLE

A SOCIAL SCULPTURE

by Shelley Sacks in collaboration with
producers of the Windward Islands

All welcome. www.exchange-values.org

Unmasking the global economy

There might no longer be enchained slaves in colonies producing fruits and mining minerals for all the microchips in phones and computers, but the global economic conditions continue enslaving millions. The social sculpture *Exchange Values on the Table* unmask the hidden side of contemporary global trade by making absences present: sheets of blackened banana skin on metal frames speak of the suffering behind the pleasurable things we buy and the invisible human beings involved in getting delicious foodstuffs to our table.

The Story of the Project

Exchange Values has been at 12 venues round the world since 1996. Developed with independent Caribbean farmers it creates an interface between producers and consumers and explores the role of imagination in transformation. Working with NGOs and farmers cooperatives, it contributed to the UK Fair Trade movement in the 1990s. In 1970, holding the skin of a banana she had just eaten, and wondering who had grown it, Sacks began to collect banana skins and explore the exploitation in globalization and 'free trade'. In 1996 she received 20 numbered boxes of bananas from a St. Lucia cooperative; gave out these 4000 bananas on the streets with a sign that read '*Free bananas in exchange for your skin!*' and went to St. Lucia with the 20 numbers to search for the growers. The 4000 skins were dried and stitched into 'sheets of skin' matching each farmer's number. The voice recordings of the farmers that you hear with the skins are not interviews: they grew out of imaginative 'picturing processes' and exchanges between Sacks and each farmer on the plantations. The installation creates an arena for our own picturing processes and imaginative work as consumers. For full project story see: www.exchange-values.org

Beyond the Dead Zones

There are many dead zones on the Earth: some are radioactive, others poisoned. In many places even the living topsoil has disappeared. But the biggest dead zone is in human beings: in our numbness, blindness, lack of concern and care. We are the only creature that makes decisions and plans whose consequences often cause unnecessary suffering to a myriad of life forms. We need only look at a few corporations for this destructive behaviour to be clear: in mining, fossil fuels, weapons, pesticides, agriculture, property, textiles, clothing, food. The list is endless. But our globalized system has destroyed less tangible things as well, like confidence, creativity, community and trust. It has also caused whole cultures to disappear. Technical solutions might fix some of the physical damage caused, but they won't transform attitudes, values, and how we think about the world. *Social sculpture* is an expanded concept of art that works with the 'invisible materials' of discussion and thought. Its understanding of 'aesthetic' as the opposite of 'anesthetic' or numbness it has given rise to forms of enlivened thinking and practice: to enter the dead zones of prejudice and outmoded ideas, for new insights, and for 'coming to our senses!' *Social sculpture* creates public engagement arenas like *Exchange Values* for entering the 'dead zones' through experience and imaginal thought. Beuys described this as 'warmth work' and enlivened, activated will.

What is Social Sculpture?

Social Sculpture is a radical, expanded conception of art concerned with freedom. It sees 'every human being as an artist' working with the 'invisible materials of speech, discussion, thought', values and attitudes. Joseph Beuys developed the concept 'social sculpture' in the early 70s, drawing on Schiller's aesthetic ideas, Goethe's phenomenology and the 'social art' of Rudolf Steiner. Building on Beuys' ideas, his influences, and many others, including Paulo Freire, Joanna Macy, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi, Ivan Illich, David Bohm and Eastern philosophy, the contemporary field of social sculpture has been further developed over 3 decades by Shelley Sacks, working with colleagues, students, citizen researchers and project participants. 'Imaginal thought' (bildhaftes Denken) is central to this transdisciplinary field of connective thinking and practice, which is committed to all exploring alternative systems, forms of engagement and consciousness work to overcome unnecessary suffering. In this work with the invisible materials that include thinking, values and ideas, people also become aware of their 'agency' and role as 'artists' in shaping democratic, ecological ways of living that support all life. See www.social-sculpture.org

Becoming Agents of Change

Human beings are Earth's only creature with the freedom to make choices. Sartre said we are 'condemned to freedom'. This freedom and creativity makes us the most dangerous of all Earth's creatures. We not only create music, art and new inventions that support life. We also make decisions that cause unnecessary suffering. We make weapons that destroy each other, and economic systems whose constant need for profit enslaves millions, devours the precious minerals and destroys myriad life forms. But we can and must act. We cannot simply say 'this is just how things are'. One thing we can do is look more closely at the world and discover our spheres of potential influence. There is a personal sphere, a social sphere and a world of bigger systems. Becoming an agent of personal change links to social change and system change. *Fair trade* is an example. *Exchange Values* invites us to encounter the global economy in our own lives and together; to develop more empathy, solidarity and 'care at a distance'. Being internally mobilized is a step toward a wider mobilization. As consumers we have some agency to accept or reject what is produced and how. In this we are the 'artists' of a new de-growth way of life.

FRANS HALS MUSEUM DE HALLEN

IN 'THE GLOBAL TABLE'

a trans-historical exhibition
curated by Abigail Winograd

23 Sept 2017 - 7 Jan 2018

Another world is possible!

Exchange Values not only makes invisible realities present. Through its dialogue processes and imaginative work 'at the table', we are no longer passive observers of the dominant view of reality. We are invited, as active participants in the global economy, to 'come to our senses': to explore the phenomena of global trade, to recognise our power as consumers that give the 'contract' for production and our role as producers of values, ideas and the social fabric, and to experience the imaginative potential that human beings have, as artists, to create new narratives and ways to live in the world.

Transhistorical Awareness

Beginning in the 15th c., European colonial trade initiated an interchange of peoples, cultures, flora and fauna. Imperialism transformed the world, establishing global networks of trade. In the process, the European table transformed through the introduction of products such as tea, sugar, coffee, potatoes, and corn. These new products appeared in the still-life painting of the golden age. In recent decades, artists have increasingly explored the socio-economics of food. In Winograd's curation of *A Global Table*, still-lives are juxtaposed with contemporary art. This promotes a transhistorical awareness of developments from the 1700's till now, in which the golden age paintings, like historical texts, reveal Dutch colonial history and its role in the growth of global trade. *Exchange Values* is a contemporary social sculpture that sharpens our understanding of the politics of food and trade, and the persistence of discrepancies in wealth and power initiated by colonial relationships. Alongside the voices of invisible growers and millions of unnumbered skins, Sacks' *Exchange Values* creates an arena for *dialogue on values* and socio-economic views, contributing to *The Global Table*'s unpacking of the webs of power and oppression in the world.

Re-thinking 'Progress'

In earlier times human beings made and used tools. In the process of colonization and industrialization they became the tools of others. Gradually humanity itself became a tool: a giant factory for limitless production and profit. Now we stand at the point where robots can replace human beings in a great many areas of life. With 'artificial intelligence' beginning to provide alternatives to human work, people need to look carefully at what this might mean. Are robots mainly a way to free humans from mindless and dangerous work? Or might they also sideline human beings, enabling a few to extract more profit from the world, without human beings getting in the way? Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian author, said that to overcome the destructive legacies of colonialism and the dominant exploitative mindset 'we have to develop new stories'. This means we need to recognize not only what has happened and what is happening now, but to develop new 'imaginaries': new scenarios and ways of thinking about work, wages for labour, and shaping a future society. *Exchange Values* invites us to look at our values and ideas: to rethink what is meant by 'progress' and to consider the future of the human being and the future of 'work'.

Imagination + Transformation

Human beings live on two continents: the outer physical continent and the inner continent of thought, imagination and desires. The outer world of actions and the inner world of ideas and values are usually seen as separate: the outer field more real, the inner 'subjective'. But both are as significant. The thoughts, attitudes, impulses and values inside us shape our actions and shape the world. This is why the inner continent is so important and why we need to go there! *Exchange Values* like many of Sacks' social sculpture practices highlights the 'inner workspace' we all have: the space in which memories appear. This *space of imagination* is so common that it is easily taken for granted. In this space we also see the present, and imagine what might be: the future. When we notice what we see - past, present and future - we begin to see *how* we see and to encounter our thinking and attitudes. In this moment of reflection, we can think about what we think and make choices. *Exchange Values* is a workplace to encounter oneself and work with others, to experience why system change needs personal change, and explore the art of changing ones mindset! Here we discover something about freedom... about 'the inner dimension of sustainability', and why Sacks says: 'Sustainability without the I-sense in nonsense'!

About the artist and the field

Shelley Sacks works internationally as an artist, activist, writer, educator and thinker. She develops social sculpture approaches that link imagination and transformation, enabling people to develop connective capacities and ways of responding to the eco-social challenges. Like Joseph Beuys, her teacher, with whom she collaborated for years, Sacks's work makes accessible what Beuys' statements 'every human being is an artist' working with the 'invisible materials of speech, discussion and thought' have to do with 'sculpting' an eco-social future. Her work includes over fifty actions, site-works, installations, essays, books and social sculpture processes with thousands of people- farmers, ecologists, pupils, artists, decision-makers, educators, citizens groups, NGOs and activists from many countries: South Africa, India, Germany, Holland, UK and China. She sees projects like *Exchange Values*, *UOT: Lab for New Knowledge* and *an Eco-Social Future* and *Earth Forum* as 'instruments of consciousness', linking inner work and outer action. As Professor and Director of the *Social Sculpture Research Unit* she leads a research programme at Oxford Brookes University. <http://arts.brookes.ac.uk/staff/shelleysacks.html>

Encounter the Global Economy and its view of the Human Being

IN THE SKINS AND IN THE DIALOGUE PROCESSES AT THE TABLE

Fellowship in Transhistorical Curating / This exhibition has been compiled by Abigail Winograd (Israel, 1983). Her area of research encompasses Pre-Columbian, modern and contemporary Latin-American art. Holding the new Fellowship Transhistorical Curating, she is the first curator to stage an exhibition in the Frans Hals Museum | De Hallen Haarlem in which the focus lies on finding meaningful and surprising ways of linking old and contemporary art.

The Curatorial Fellowship and the exhibition are made possible exclusively by the generous support of the Van Toorn Scholten Foundation.

De Hallen Haarlem, Grote Markt 16, Haarlem | www.dehallen.nl