

# herman de vries:

## my poetry is the world

*Artist herman de vries writes his name and all language connected with his work without capital letters and often without punctuation "because hierarchies do not exist". Active as an artist since 1953, his work underwent a transformation around 1975 – a pivotal importance as far as contemporary discussions around the interplay of art, biology, and philosophy are concerned. The transformation has its roots in the 200 km<sup>2</sup> of the Steigerwald forest (Northern Bavaria, Germany), next to the house where de vries lives; he refers to the woods as his "studio".*

text: **Cees de Boer**

images: **herman de vries**

In the morning of 31.10.1975, herman de vries laid down three sheets of paper, each 86 x 118 cm, under an apple tree in his garden. Between 9.45 and 12.45 he kept one sheet there for one hour, another for two and the third for three hours. He then glued the fallen leaves on the paper on the exact locations where they had fallen. Presented as a triptych, the sheets constitute a powerful image of natural processes happening around the apple tree, even if we realize that this work only makes some and not all processes visible. However, what we see suffices to create an awareness of the complexity of what is going on: temperature, wind, gravity, humidity and other aspects of the encompassing process going on there and then. The dynamic and aesthetic result created by the leaves and especially their material, physical character, together with the title of the triptych *1, 2, and 3 hours under my apple tree. 31-10-1975*, suggest that what we see here is part of a bigger whole.

The triptych overall has a predominantly metonymical character; the sheets function as probes that catch materials and register traces without interfering with them. The suggestion is that nature itself 'draws' on the paper. Also the work's title avoids symbolism and gives just factual information. The only symbolic elements seem to be the three paper sheets that have been inserted into the garden situation for the natural process to leave its traces. It is the paper that introduces the artistic context; the paper sheets bear the signature of the artist and the program which describes what could be interpreted as the cause of what we see here, while at the same time inviting the public to interpret the program as the title of the work. The paper sheets also make it possible to frame these works, show them in a gallery space, and add them to a museum's collection (which actually happened quite recently).

The probing of time, space, and cause in nature is performed by herman de vries within the context of some symbolic elements



**herman de vries**

*1, 2, and 3 hours under my apple tree.* 31-10-1975, 1975. leaves on paper, (3x) 73 x 102 cm. Collection: Stedelijk Museum, Schiedam/NL & Private collection (pledged donation). Acquired with support of the Mondriaan Fund and the Vereniging Rembrandt © Stedelijk Museum Schiedam/Tom Haartsen

from the art system. In a sense one could say that he transposes a natural process as a readymade into the context of art. (I will come back to this.) Citing Paul Klee's famous words, de vries is not representing something but is 'making visible.' (Note that Klee does not assign any object to the verb 'making visible.')

The medium that made this possible is unobtrusive in that, seemingly, nature herself is creating art. The artist harvests and presents.<sup>1</sup> Representation – focusing on an object out there – stands corrected and is effectively scaled down to presentation.

Every element of the triptych engages in relations to every other element. And even though a complex network is suggested, the totality of the work is primarily a testimonial, in a physical and *pars pro toto* way, to a much bigger complexity and intelligibility. The latter qualification may be a surprising one, as it is we who perceive, understand, conclude and know things about nature. One of the fascinating aspects of this work is that it is a presentation of an immensely complex process that is beyond our grasp, and that it simultaneously renders the sensation that we witness the process for what it is: real, complete, complex and beautiful, all of which we are ready to interpret as 'intelligent'.

One last remark about the title of the triptych. The signature of herman de vries, in comparison with the fact that it is "my apple tree", creates a focus of attention on two spaces at the same time: a personal space and the space of nature. Because of the predominantly material and metonymical character of the triptych, de vries inscribes himself (as a human being, as an artist, as the owner of the apple tree) also as part of a bigger whole. Most of the time the artist's signature is meant or read as a symbol; but here it is not Van Eyck or Dürer saying 'I' and inscribing this 'I' onto the work. In this case the possessive element in "my apple tree" refers to the harvester; the artist identifies with a production process he could never call his doing, never appropriate.

**random objectivation**

To understand some of the reasons why de vries' apple tree triptych has pivotal importance in the artist's oeuvre, we first go back in time

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a little. The works with fallen leaves which he made in 1975, and after, are as much a continuation and transformation of as well as a break with the so-called *random objectivation* works he made before 1975.

herman de vries was born in 1931 in the city of Alkmaar in the province of North-Holland, The Netherlands. From an early age he developed a lively interest in nature. His parents were great lovers of the outdoors, made long hikes with their children and for long periods in summer rented a cottage near Schoorl, a small village bordering the vast area of natural sand dunes that protects the Dutch inland from the North Sea. herman de vries as a young adult became an active member of the NJN (Dutch Youth Society for Natural History Study). Later he trained as a horticulturist and eventually was employed as a scientific research assistant, first at the Institute for Research in Plant Diseases (Wageningen), then from 1961 at the Institute for Applied Biological Research in Nature (Arnhem).<sup>2</sup> His move to the second institute was partly inspired by a pressing issue around 1960, namely how in agriculture to change from a regime of weed and pest control based on chemicals to a more ecologically based strategy. The Arnhem institute at that time developed several initiatives towards adopting these alternative methods.<sup>3</sup>

At both institutes, de vries worked as a practical researcher of population dynamics in plant and animal communities and the conditions influencing these dynamics: the effects of rodents and predators, the consequences of the use of weed killers but also the role of rodents and birds in the distribution of specific plants and trees in a landscape. Practical research, realized with materials and data collected outdoors, was greatly favored by de vries because he detested carrying out experiments on animals to test new medicines. Researching ecological communities was a great incentive for him personally: it enabled him to observe and analyze micro and macrostructures within ecosystems, their interaction, and detect the involvement of and interference by human activities. It was a continuous reminder of the Law of Baas Beeking: "everything is everywhere, but, the environment selects."<sup>4</sup>

At the Institute, materials collected by de vries were subjected to tests. One test would be performed on a selection of the relevant material and a successive test on another selection, to increase the objectivity of the results as well as to check them. Each selection from the material was made randomly and independently from personal preferences or decisions by the researcher. This needed strict protocols and a meticulous administration, linking the performed tests with the collected materials. Samples had to be identified before and after each test, e.g. by color coded stickers. Performing the random sample selections, de vries used the random numbers table from Fisher & Yates, *Statistical Tables for Biological, Agricultural and Medical Research* (1953).<sup>5</sup>

Since 1957, herman de vries had been hesitating between his work as a biological researcher and taking the leap to become an artist. His very first notebook testifies to his doubts: his love of nature, his scepticism towards science, his thorough research into what art is said to be, what art could be, what he himself wanted from art, and how he could contribute to society by becoming an artist. However, de vries kept his job till 1968 but from about 1958 his life combined the two worlds of science and art.

Despite his critical attitude towards science, in 1962 de vries started making artworks inspired by the random numbers tables

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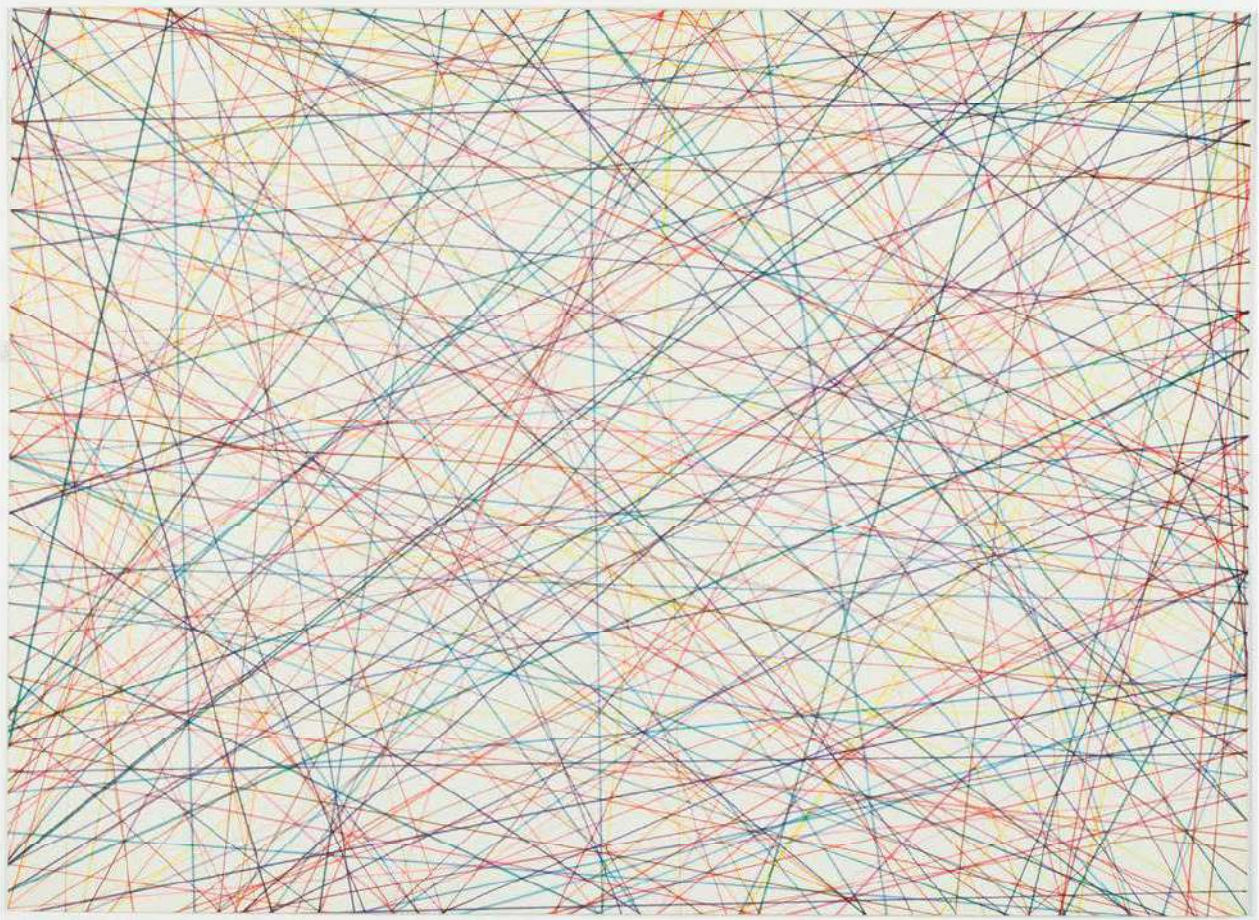
#### herman de vries

Right: Research samples, Institute for Applied Biological Research in Nature, Arnhem/NL, 1962  
© herman de vries Archive









**herman de vries**

n.t. (random distribution of coloured lines), 1967. felt-tip pen, paper, 43,5 x 61 cm. Current location unknown  
© herman de vries Archive

he used in his biological research. One day at work, he suddenly noticed that the patterns and structures emerging from the color codes, number codes, and punch cards he was using were like cross-sections or condensations of the natural processes he was analysing. Although abstract, they communicated information coming from the dynamics of nature. First, he started making collages and drawings; soon reliefs and sculptural objects followed, and also random distributions of scientific and philosophical texts which, with hindsight, bring to mind the principles of deconstruction.<sup>6</sup>

From an art-historical perspective, it is possible to conclude that these works follow the principles of *art concrète* or *concrete art* as defined by Theo van Doesburg in his 1930 manifesto: non-symbolic art, built up exclusively using the abstract elements of mathematics and geometry. The name *random objectivations* de vries gives to this group of works seems to underline this interpretation. However, the question is: what exactly is objectified in de vries' works? de vries explicitly mentions their impersonal character, their non-subjective and non-expressive essence, their democratic outlook because they do not imply any distinction between good or bad works, and their open character – each work could have looked different and is there-

**herman de vries**

Right: n.t. (random objectivation. wittgenstein: die welt ist alles was der fall ist [the world is everything that is the case]), 1967, rub-off letters, paper. Size and current location unknown  
© herman de vries Archive

Postmodernist  
a e s  
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fore an icon of creative freedom to de vries. As such, these qualifications are still within the parameters of concrete art. The difference is that de vries interprets the defining concepts I just mentioned in another way: he links the information communicated by these structures to the information that can be found in nature. In this de vries was equally inspired by the books on Japanese Zen philosophy by Daisetz Suzuki and by Alexander von Humboldt's famous *Kosmos* publications and his statement "Die Natur aber ist das Reich der Freiheit" [But nature is the domain of freedom].<sup>7</sup> de vries increasingly identified the domain of freedom as created by art, especially modern art freeing itself from all constraints of representation and ideology, as identical with the freedom and autonomy he finds in nature. Relatively speaking of course, art is the freest form of life and action humans have ever come up with. In other words, for de vries every random objectivation is a non-intentional, open artwork, functioning as a visual parallel to the open and dynamic character of nature. Distinguishing the more from the less personal, beautiful, expressive, or meaningful artworks was irrelevant to him; no landscape is more or less beautiful or interesting than any other. Every moment it is what it is, autonomous and independent of human appreciation or evaluation. No beginning, no end. Or, as he would say later: "every thing is all ways significant for all."<sup>8</sup>

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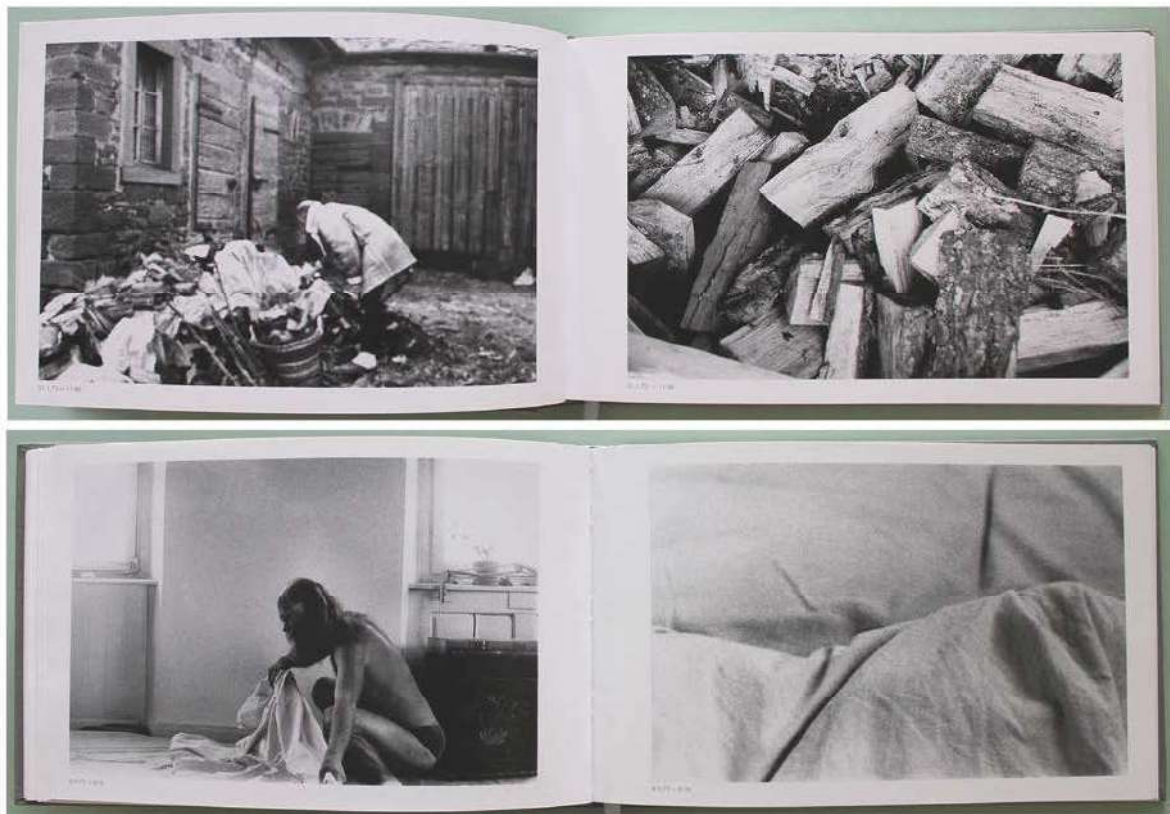
In 1968 de vries decided to become a full time artist; in 1970 he moved to Eschenau, a rural village at the entrance of the immense Steigerwald forest that would become his studio more and more. In the years until 1975 every now and then he created works that physically sample the landscapes he was living and travelling in (Southern Europe, India, Asia, and North Africa). One work he has consistently shown in exhibitions since then is *collected mahé* (1970); it consists of 24 shells from the beach of the Seychelles island of Mahé, presented in a grid-like pattern.

### **sampling the biotope**

Playing with open, structural models in the years 1970-1975 and at the same time travelling and seeing the world, collecting materials away from and at home, all of which shaped herman de vries' art practice and contributed to his decision to step into nature. The concept that all the elements in a random objectivation work are equally important was an idea he had directly deduced from his observation that in nature there are no hierarchies, that the fungi, bacteria and insects around its roots are as important as the tall tree rising up into the air. Not only did de vries apply this concept to the basically equal importance of every human being for society, but he also translated it into photographic projects in which he applied random programs to his own life and existential biotope.

In a 1970 notebook we find the protocol for a project to take pictures of Eschenau and the landscape around it. The protocol starts in the centre of the village and (on the basis of random numeric tables) projects directions and distances outward from there to arrive at points where de vries should go and take a picture. To present his biotope, any point and any direction would do. Although not realised, this thought experiment informs his most quoted statement: "what the artist sees (perceives) is as much part of his concept as what he makes."<sup>9</sup> From this project we can learn





**herman de vries**

*a random sample of the seeings of my beings*, date: 21.1.73 time: 11.46 and date: 8.9.73, time: 8.08

Saint-Yrieix-la-Perche: Centre des Livres d'Artistes, 2010

© herman de vries Archive

that the acts of seeing, interpreting, and conceptualizing were becoming highly physical and sensual activities for herman de vries.

This would become even clearer when de vries developed a protocol to sample his own existence through the medium of photography. The project *a random sample of the seeings of my beings* was realised between 1.1.1973 and 1.11.1974.<sup>10</sup> The random protocol decided on three main parameters: a. date, b. time, c. distance between the photographer (herman's partner susanne) and herman. This works out as: on a randomly determined date and time, susanne says "stop" and takes her distance to make a photo of herman; after that she gives the camera to herman and he takes a picture of what he was looking at, the moment susanne stopped him, taking the central area of his vision as the central area of the photo. So the result is a pair of photos: one of herman looking and one of what he looks at. All the pairs from 1973 and 1974 taken together, create a random sample of the artist's seeing and being-seen, in Eschenau, in Switzerland, and in Nepal.

The project's idiosyncratic title: *a random sample of the seeings of my beings*, follows a poetic strategy. The unusual plurals *seeings* and *beings* not only suggest strongly that being and seeing are equivalent activities, but also that they are multiple and multi-dimensional. Being and seeing both exist like a stream of places,



moments, and images. Contemplating all the pairs of photos, the viewer becomes aware of how both streams interconnect, and is left with questions like: Is being defined by seeing *and* being seen? Does my being imply many shapes of being, so I can see many things? Does my being change with every thing I see? Does seeing many things render my being multiple? Are there as many moments of being as there are moments of seeing? Is being caused by seeing, or the other way round? Who is 'I' and what is 'I am' when I state: I see and I am being seen, therefore I am?

In a small accompanying text, de vries wonders what the project would be like if he had concentrated not on his vision but on other senses: his hearing, his smell, his touch – which implies that consciousness is sensual being, is living within your senses, is being part of the world in the sense that one is seen (heard, smelled, touched) by the world. de vries' research project of "the seeings of my beings" goes beyond the notion that 'to measure is to know' and subverts the science of the objectifying protocol.

Another level of meaning in this project is de vries' refusal to draw a line between the private and the public aspects of his existence. He presents his existence as single and plural, specific and general, individual and public, intimate and unremarkable. None of the images have been staged for subjective or objective reasons; nowhere in this project is there a hidden I who refuses to be observed. *a random sample of the seeings of my beings* does not present iconic, but normal, everyday images of human existence. Zooming in on this specific aspect, we are surprised by the consequences of the protocol, which jump to a next level of significance. The protocol as such is impersonal and objectifying; however, the result embodied in the stream of photographic pairs, refuses the notion that to objectify is to know and to control. Objects turn into subjects and *vice versa*. herman de vries, a man who lives a life in art and in nature, appears as partaking in his world, equally as a subject and as an object. Within this man's biotope the distinction between object and subject is meaningless and of no consequence. The randomness of the images subverts categories like direction, intention, perception. The given that any image could have been different subverts the truth of what they show, except perhaps their 'truth' as being 'samples'. Like with the falling leaves from his apple tree, de vries identifies with a production practice that is impossible to own.

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### **tacit cogito**

All this comes very close to the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who strives to disclose and make visible the world that was sealed off by Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*, Kant's *Ding an sich*, and Wittgenstein's "Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen." [Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.] Merleau-Ponty turns to the *tacit cogito*, a space where the mind directs itself to the physical existence of the body, where the senses, embedded in the sensual existence that predates thinking, open up. I detect a parallel phenomenological turn, the moment herman de vries distances himself from structural models and steps outside into nature.<sup>11</sup> By focusing more and more on the physical aspects of his biotope – Eschenau as well as the worlds that touch herman and susanne de vries when they travel – he is able to transform his artistic practice, by placing the subject/object distinction to the

background and the identification of existence with acts and events of the senses into focus.

To come close to the levels of complexity in nature, de vries had to make his random objectivations more and more complex, intricate, and multi-dimensional. By trying to do just that, the hierarchy between model and nature came back in through the backdoor of de vries' studio. The more complex the models became, the more they tried to mirror, represent or even emulate something outside them. When herman one day complained that his random objectivations became unworkable and impossible to finish, susanne said "but nature *is* the perfect model." The spell was now broken, de vries immediately abandoned that line of work and instead started to catch leaves on paper sheets under trees, of which the triptych *1, 2, and 3 hours under my apple tree* is a prime example: not *mimesis* but presenting *this* process. Making the works with falling/fallen leaves, de vries was able to redefine his biotope as a body of interlocking circles, each one having a unique *this* as a centerpoint.

### **nature honored as subject**

de vries' works with fallen leaves – leaves from the apple and plum trees in his garden, from many trees around Eschenau – present nature in a concrete, physical way as the ultimate work of art. And then of course there was the sheer joy of making these works in such an abundance. Each of them turned out unique *and* was linked to any other. Previously de vries had explored the possibility to deduct several artworks from one random program, which did not generate any special outcome. But now, working within and along with nature, not even the 'program' was a constant; the program itself changed all the time and from moment to moment; chance is infinite, change is happening everywhere. de vries' leading concept evolved into *chance & change*.

On the one hand, this came with a tendency to reduce artistic means and ends. One plant, presented on a sheet of paper like a botanical specimen in a herbarium, already constitutes a case of *change & chance*: it is *this* individual with *this* unique shape, ready to be perceived or enjoyed by the senses of animals and insects, maybe even aesthetically perceived by a human being. This one plant shows that its identity is uniquely determined by its growth process – a complexity that de vries started to call "being the document of itself." In one of his artist's editions, de vries presented one plant on a sheet of paper and added the caption *no title (no-name or no name)*.

However, the denial of the link between nature and language did not entail the denial of the link between nature and art. On the last page of a collection of his language manifestos, de vries added an actual *poa annua* (annual bluegrass) and called it *a poem*.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, the possibilities of the principle that to present is more important than to represent were limitless. A series of images of the artist naked in nature is called *the poet in his poetry*. Just the word *this*, or just pointing to something, opens up a space filled with bodily, physical meaning. Not space as a parameter of empirical observation, but space that *tacit cogito* has "always already" been happening.<sup>13</sup> This type of space honors the subjectivity of nature.







**herman de vries**

*16 dm<sup>2</sup> - an essay*, 1975 (detail) 476 parts, 473 plants on paper, pencil and pen on paper, photographs. Appr. 2,10 x 12,80 m. Collection herman and susanne de vries © herman de vries Archive

I propose now to look at three works of de vries which explore presence and presentation. The first work called *16 dm<sup>2</sup> - an essay* was realised during two days in September 1975 and, in my opinion, is one of de vries' most important works. The starting point is, again, a protocol along precise, scientific principles. In the landscape around Eschenau, a 40 x 40 cm piece of meadow is randomly chosen. From this piece of turf – deliberately the size of a city sidewalk tile – all the 473 plants are taken out and classified. The location of each plant is marked on a 1:1 scale map by a number. Each plant is pressed and dried and then fixed to a sheet of paper, mentioning the coordinates where it was found and put in a transparent folder.

The next step is the presentation of the collected materials. de vries decided to show all 473 plants as individual items. The plants occupying 40 x 40 cm in the meadow now need approximately 2.10 x 12.80 m of wall space, which makes it impossible to take them in at one glance. In other words, the presentation is not about how many species there are in the piece of turf; it is about how many individual plants there are. This counters the botanical and taxonomic principles of how plants are conventionally collected and

**herman de vries**

Left - a poem, from: *five language manifests [...] - and a poem*, Bern: Artists Press, 1975 (edition of 195 + XV), 29,5 x 21 cm. Collection herman and susanne de vries © herman de vries Archive





systematized. The final shape of the work creates the experience that a complex, living universe can be found in the space of a sidewalk tile. The white wall of the gallery, welcoming readymades from nature presented as artworks, celebrates the mutiny of 473 individuals against the rules of plant taxonomy.<sup>14</sup>

The work *atropa belladonna* (1999) consists of a deadly nightshade plant, collected in the Steigerwald forest, pressed and dried, and presented on paper within a frame. Names are written by hand around the plant. Above the plant in a central position we see the botanical name *atropa belladonna*. Note that de vries does not conform to the taxonomical convention by which the name should be mentioned as *Atropa belladonna* L. (genus with a capital letter, species with a small letter and the letter L. for Linnaeus, the first to scientifically describe and categorize the species in 1754.) The names float around the plant like an aura; the plant itself seems to speak the names to us. They are European folk names like *tollkirsche* (crazy cherry), *giftkriesi* (poison cherry), *rattenbeere* (rat's berry), *wolfsauge* (wolf's eye), *raging nightshade*, *deadly dwale*, and others. de vries collected these names from dialect dictionaries, ethnomedicine and ethnobotanic studies, and by interviewing local historians and experts. The cloud around the plant turns out to be a conglomerate of unofficial names which store and preserve centuries old knowledge: folk tales and myths about witches (belladonna is part of the famous ointment that enables witches to fly), the wolf as the evil animal in the forest. Some names memorize how to use the plant's powers as medicine or poison, or how to enhance female beauty with eyedrops or by using the plant in rituals. de vries presents the plant communicating with us from within its identities and histories.

### the natural readymade

The physical presence of nature is highlighted by one of the few direct references to the history of art in herman de vries' oeuvre. Through its title de vries' *das große rasenstück* (1979) joins an earlier monument of art history: Albrecht Dürer's *Das Große Rasenstück* from 1503, the first ever depiction of a plant community. de vries presents a readymade piece of turf, brushing aside all aesthetic and stylistic experiments with representation and observation in classical as well as in modern art. This work states less a renewal of, than a farewell to this tradition. de vries' *rasenstück*, his actual piece of turf, has the same revolutionary potential as Marcel Duchamp's *Bottle-Rack* (1914) or *Fountain* (1917). Of course, de vries could build upon Duchamp's genius chess move to present nature as the ultimate readymade. However, de vries' irony is gentle if intense: he places a community of plants in the *locus* that during a long and complicated history had been reserved for the best *representations* of plants (humans, buildings, landscapes, gods, ...). To place a cultural object there, such as Duchamp's readymade, leaves nature outside of the discussion; to place a piece of turf there is to put both art and nature under a critical scrutiny of fundamental categories. When herman de vries adapts the Latin quote *natura artis magistra* (nature teaches the arts) into the context of his work, the meaning of 'teaches' is redirected from the metaphysical to the physical, redefining both the conceptualization of nature and of art.<sup>15</sup>

Also in herman de vries' *skizzenkoffer I* (suitcase for sketches, 1977) I detect a fine and sharp irony aimed at Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise* (1935-1940) in which he presented his works as a portable

### herman de vries

Left: *atropa belladonna*, 1999  
plant, pencil, paper, frame, 144 x 103 cm.

Private Collection

© herman de vries Archive





**herman de vries**

*das große rasenstück [the big piece of turf]*, 1979 plants, paper, frame, 96 x 149 cm.

Collection Schloss und Park Benrath, Düsseldorf © herman de vries Archive

museum, exhibition, and library all in one. de vries' *skizzenkoffer* is filled with plants, stones, earth samples, documents, artefacts (which in his case are man-made items, found in nature and to a certain level 'digested' by it), all neatly botanized, identified, described, packed and labelled with the dates and places where they were collected. It is ironic to call these samples of reality and nature sketches, suggesting they will later be worked upon and developed into artworks. Each sample has a more undecided status: readymade before it can be called a readymade. The travelling case is an in-between space like the artist's studio is an in-between space where all kinds of valuations may still happen. Used for travelling, the case itself stands for an in-between space, a significance Duchamp will also have thought about for his *valise*. But herman de vries takes the whole game a step further, and travels into the uncharted territory where (the work of) nature is (the work of) art.

How far he is willing to go can be seen from the work *from here* (1982) that consists of a little catalogue of not very clear plant images and an invitation card. On the image side of the card we read the Spanish version of de vries' pivotal statement/poem *my poetry is the world* (1972):

my poetry is the world  
i write it every day  
i rewrite it every day  
i see it every day  
i read it every day  
i eat it every day  
i sleep it every day



**herman de vries**

*skizzenkoffer I [suitcase for sketches I]*, 1977, suitcase, paper, pencil, natural materials, artefacts  
collected on journeys 1970-1976, 46 x 76 x 26 cm. Private Collection © herman de vries Archive

the world is my chance  
it changes me every day  
my chance is my poetry

On the address side we read:

invitation / exhibition: herman de vries, 'here'  
la gomera, islas canarias  
visits: every day continuously  
the exhibition will never be closed

Asked about his biotope and his collecting of plants, stones, earths and artefacts as carriers of his perceptions, observations, desires, contemplations, and thoughts, herman de vries replied: "my experiences here in the steigerwald i receive from the tree, the stone, the plant, the stream, the earth. sometimes i take these items with me and show them, present them. as an artist my function is to present the real world – which is a modest function. taking into account that very few artists work in this way, i think it is a meaningful function".<sup>16</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>[1]</sup> Cees de Boer, *herman de vries. Overal stroomt mijn oog* [herman de vries. everywhere streams my eye], Zwolle: Uitgeverij de Kunst, 2014, pp. 29-49

<sup>[2]</sup> Both institutes merged with WUR - Wageningen University & Research.

<sup>[3]</sup> Example of the influence in The Netherlands of Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, first published 1962.

<sup>[4]</sup> Lourens G. M. Baas Becking, *Geobiologie of inleiding tot de milieukunde*, Den Haag: Van Stockum, 1934, p.15. Translation by Rutger de Wit and Thierry Bouvier. See: *Environmental Microbiology*, 2006, 8(4), pp. 755-758; accessed through <https://sfamjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com> - accessed 1.11.2019). herman de vries in his *notebook 0*, 8.3.1957: "baas becking's law: 'everything is everywhere, but the environment selects' also applies to beauty. (and as a consequence also to art)." (Archive herman de vries; my translation.)

<sup>[5]</sup> herman de vries, *to be. texte – textarbeiten – textbilder*, Ostfildern: Cantz, 1995, pp. 30-37

<sup>[6]</sup> See [www.hermandevries.org](http://www.hermandevries.org) for an extensive online catalogue of works by herman de vries, searchable by year.

<sup>[7]</sup> Alexander von Humboldt, *Kosmische Naturbetrachtung*. Sein Werk im Grundriss herausgegeben von Rudolph Zaunick, Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1958, p. 318

<sup>[8]</sup> Note 1, p. 34

<sup>[9]</sup> herman de vries, *notebook II*, 15-24.2.1971. (Archive herman de vries; my translation.)

<sup>[10]</sup> The project was published as an artist's book in 2010 by the Centre des Livres d'Artistes, Saint-Yrieix-la-Perche (edition of 300).

<sup>[11]</sup> Note 1, pp. 14-19, 67-71. For each of herman de vries' artworks discussed here, names and titles come to mind from contemporary discussions about phenomenology, non-human others, non-human entities, (dark) ecology, semiotics and anthropology. However, impressed by the clarity of de vries' works and statements, I chose not to burden the artworks with theory, with a few exceptions.

<sup>[12]</sup> herman de vries, *no title (no-name or no name)*, Bern: Artist's Press, 1977 (edition of 50). herman de vries, *vijf manifesten over taal - fünf manifeste über sprache – five language manifests – – en een gedicht. - und ein gedicht. - and a poem.*, Bern: Artists Press, 1975 (edition of 185 + XV)

<sup>[13]</sup> herman de vries is the author of the manifesto "nul=0" (1961) of the Dutch Nul-group, a movement parallel to and contemporary with the German ZERO group. de vries states that art strives to liberate space, to shape "a reality that has always already existed." (my translation). I detect more than just a surprising parallel of words with Eduardo Kohn, *How forests think. Toward an anthropology beyond the human*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: UCP, 2013, chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>[14]</sup> The material was also published as an artist's book (edition of 50): herman de vries, *16 dm² - an essay*, Bern: Lydia Megert, 1979

<sup>[15]</sup> Cees de Boer, Colin Huizing (Eds.), *herman de vries. to be all ways to be*, Dutch Pavilion, Venice Biennale Arte 2015, Amsterdam: Mondriaan Fund and Valiz, p. 51

<sup>[16]</sup> Note 1, p. 36 (my translation)

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