



# The Dark Side

**Relying heavily on the power of shadows, Germaine Kruij creates voids for her audience to fill.**

WORDS *Jane Szita* PORTRAITS *Anne Claire de Breij*



**DUTCH** artist Germaine Kruijff began her career in the theatre after studying scenography. Later, a residency at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam kick-started her work as a visual artist. Her pieces - from mechanized sculptures to collaborations with Raf Simons for Jil Sander stores - invite audience involvement through their unresolved ambiguity, an effect often achieved with shadows. Kruijff lives and works in Amsterdam and Brussels.

**How did you start working with shadows?**  
**GERMAINE KRUIJFF:** *Counter Shadow* was the first piece I made that explored the subject. In the work, a sculpture casts a shadow that is fixed like a stage prop, in contrast with a moving light. Like *Counter Composition*, a kinetic piece I made afterwards, the object is deconstructed into light and shadow. The shadow presents itself like the ghost of a work. It's like a meditation on appearing and disappearing, or a search for a moment

between the two. A shadow is a void, and that's not entertaining or pleasing; for some, including me, it's vaguely threatening. Shadows always represent something else; they trigger the imagination.

**Why did you make the switch from theatre to art?** The question was: *Why do I have to imitate life in the theatre, when life is already so theatrical?* Instead of adding things, like you do as a scenographer, I wanted to subtract - to arrive at another view. My art is a kind of reverse process. At Art Basel, for instance, I made a reverse spotlight using a gobo [a lighting stencil]. I made a point of *shadow*, not light, on the floor - like an absent person. It's about creating an emptiness that the audience can fill with expectation.

**In your current exhibition at the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam, one work involves removing all the lights. *Oude Kerk Untitled* involves a kind of negative art direction. Taking all the**

Photo: M. van Dam



**In 2014 *A Possibility of an Abstraction* appeared at the Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center in Troy, New York. During the performance, which will be part of Kunstfestivaldearts in Brussels this May, a large shadow emerges from an empty stage.**

**‘I create an emptiness**

**that the audience can**



Photos: Gerrit Jan Koedeen



*The Wavering Skies* saw an ominous shifting cloud loom over the entrance passage of London's Frieze Art Fair in 2005.

“I take the lights away from the church allows the shadows to return, and they are constantly changing. When I begin any installation, I always start by removing everything, including the light sources.

**Is there an element of confrontation in your work?** Sometimes. For Frieze Art Fair I did a piece called *The Wavering Skies* in which a dark cloud moves over the entrance hall. Art fairs are constantly bright, like a casino. I wanted to add a different, slightly alarming, reality.

**Your work calls for active observation.** That's why the titles don't have a message - I am not telling people what to see. In *Simultaneous Contrast*, it's about a mental shadow, a kind of optical illusion. Two half circles move very fast, and you start to see a dark shadow spot. It's done with very detailed programming - very technical - but the whole point is to highlight the process that occurs in the gap between the eye and the brain.

**How do people react to your pieces?** They get involved. They sometimes ask: *Why is this art?* I don't consider that a negative remark at all. Art is about questioning things, not providing answers. Anyone is qualified to look at art. I don't make a distinction between art critics and tourists. I believe in the public.

**Theatre seems to be returning to your work.** After 15 years as a visual artist, I do have one foot back in the theatre. In May I'm showing *A Possibility of an Abstraction* at Kunstenfestivaldesarts in Brussels. People sit around an empty stage as a big black shadow - a void - appears. They then see a diamond floating and changing shape. They have to actively *look*; in fact, they end up on the edge of their seats. I worked with a theatrical team and we had rehearsals, but there are no actors. It's about the collective gaze - the audience creates the work by looking. X

Germaine Kruij: *Geometry of the Scattering* is on show at the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam until 27 March 2016  
germainekruij.com

# fill with expectation'