

# observant

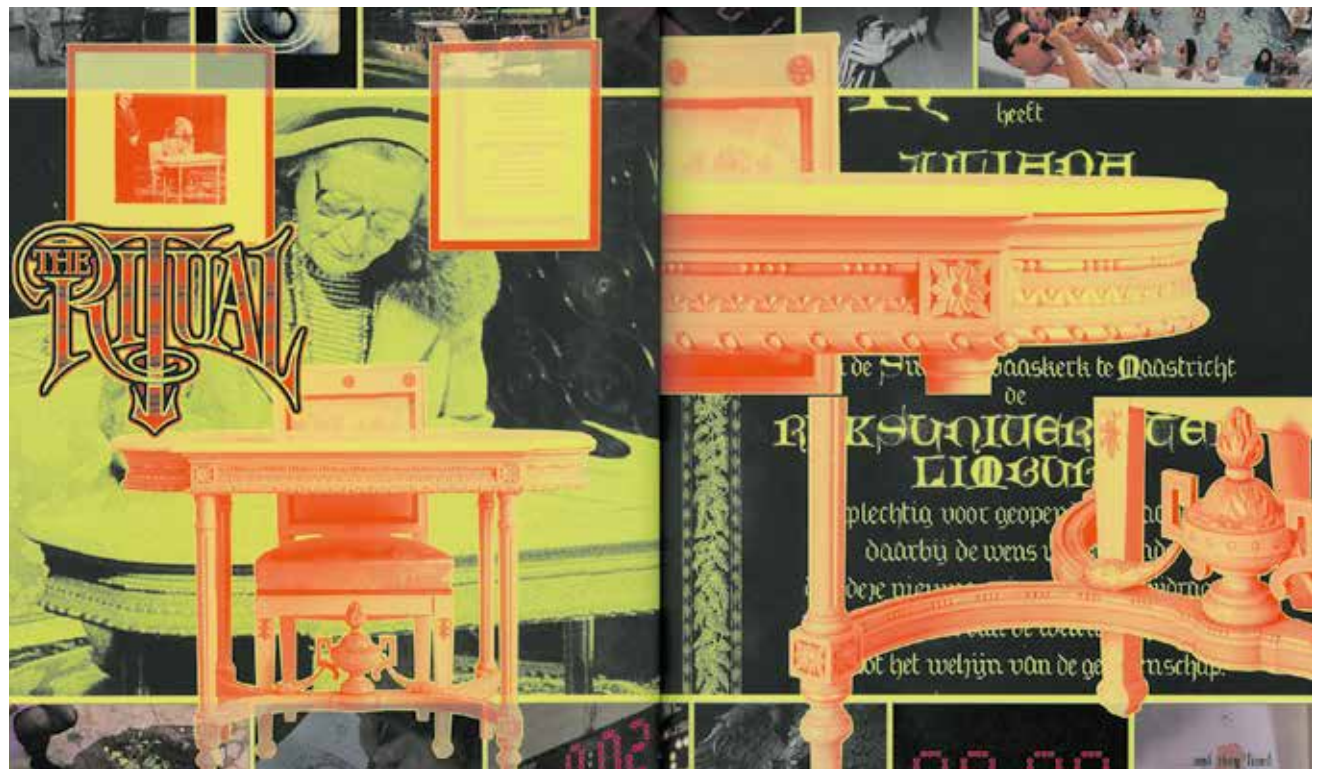
INDEPENDENT WEEKLY MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY

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## Lemonade and stroopwafels

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Photo: Pierre Mettes Fotografie

UM coach leads North-Holland women's handball team VZV to national title

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# No litany of complaints

“Try not to grumble too much”, was the advice my predecessor Riki Janssen gave me. Writing in this space about what goes on in the office shouldn’t become a litany of woes about whatever we happened to find unfair or frustrating that week. But it’s hard to resist when the topic dropped in your lap is press freedom. Next week, we will meet up with colleagues from higher education media outlets across the country for a conference on democracy and journalism in Rotterdam. The organisers have dubbed this week “Press Freedom Week” and asked us to write about issues like uncooperative press officers, unforthcoming representative bodies or unreliable university administrators.

But what if things aren’t actually all that bad here, and we’re not dealing with the kinds of conflicts our counterparts in Eindhoven and Delft are? Sure, we’ve had to navigate the issue of persistent students – like a few years ago, when a discussion with a student group called Feminists of Maastricht spun wildly out of control and they demanded we amend an article about free menstruation products. If we didn’t, they would “mobilise [their] community”.

In today’s polarised debate about the Gaza conflict, student protestors are noticeably wary of the press. They tend to withhold their names and cover their faces with scarves. “Everything online is traceable”, they point out. But the fear of speaking out extends even to harmless topics. My colleague Deborah Blekkenhorst recently asked students how they feel about UM’s internal communication, like faculty and university newsletters. Several interviewees asked to remain anonymous, saying, “I don’t want this following me for the rest of my life.” But named sources matter; they give an article credibility. Or take the student we recently interviewed for a personal story. As a courtesy, we sent her the article ahead of publication. She panicked and emailed back: “I’m sorry, it’s too personal – I’ve changed my mind, I don’t want it published.” Full stop. And she wasn’t the only one in the past six months. It seems many young people in particular don’t quite realise that’s not how things work in journalism. Will we need to start bringing consent forms to every interview?

Back to the subject of press freedom. While *Observant* isn’t subject to top-down censorship, we do operate in a social climate where fear, vulnerability, privacy concerns and anxiety about digital permanence all play a role. These concerns are valid – but if people are too afraid to speak their minds on the record, our ability to report the news is under threat.

A litany of complaints? Hardly. I’d call it critical reflection.

Wendy Degens

Every week, the editor-in-chief writes about what has been happening at the *Observant* office



Photo: Ellen Oosterhof

## “What once felt overwhelming now feels like home”



Rebecka Stetter, a third-year Psychology student from Germany, shares her favourite spot in Maastricht: the part of Stadspark near Hoge Brug bridge and the old city wall.

“I think this bit of Stadspark is my favourite place because it’s where everyone comes to celebrate their birthdays. As soon as the weather warms up, it becomes the default picnic spot. There’s something lovely about that. Even though it’s just a small area near the bridge, it feels like the start of something – the beginning of the ‘nicer’ side of Maastricht.

“I don’t go to that part of the city all that often, as I study Psychology in Randwyck, on the other side of the Meuse. So it feels like a little gateway. You cycle through the park, past the walls, and suddenly it’s like you’ve entered a different version of Maastricht – one with cosy film nights at University College and quieter, more charming streets. I’ve got a lot of good memories there. One time I was cycling through the park with my housemates on our way to a film night at UCM and everything just seemed to fall into place – the people, the light, the sound, the summer.

“I think I discovered this spot in my very first week at uni. I was walking towards Tapijn for INKOM week, through the park, and I was overwhelmed by how big everything felt. When I first moved here, I walked everywhere because I didn’t

have a bike yet. Everything felt huge and unfamiliar. I was constantly getting disoriented. Now, I walk through those same places and remember how confused I used to feel. It’s funny how things change. What once felt overwhelming now feels like home.

“I really love the little stream. There’s this tiny bridge over it that leads into another part of the park, right by the big wall. That wall makes it feel like you’re

entering an old town. I remember once, there was a guy just standing there, singing old folk songs. It felt like something out of a film.

“Would I recommend it to others? It’s not a secret. Everyone kind of already goes there. It’s not even the prettiest spot in Maastricht, honestly – it’s right next to a road. But the park has a certain vibe, a mix of cultures and ages.

Line-Marie Eichhorst

In this series, *Observant* asks a student or staff member every week about their favourite spot in Maastricht

## news

Neighbours fed up with nuisance students on Herdenkingsplein

# “They made this alleyway uninhabitable for us”

*Housing corporation Servatius is leaving student housing on Herdenkingsplein temporarily unoccupied. A striking measure aimed at ending the problems – excessive noise, rubbish in stairwells – caused by a number of students there. Surrounding residents are happy, according to them the nuisance is lessening.*

There may not be an actual student housing crisis in Maastricht, but when a housing corporation deliberately leaves rooms unoccupied, it does raise questions. What is going on in the complex (55 rooms) on Herdenkingsplein, on the little street that leads to Brusselsestraat, the Maastricht chapter of the CDA asked the mayor and councillors last May. Councillor Johan Pas enquired with Servatius. Referring to the housing corporation in his answer, he said that this was an exceptional case. For a long time, residents of the complex were allowed to propose new residents, which, Servatius said, means the complex now houses “more than fifty students from eight different student associations”, who cause “significant disturbance” with loud parties and the like. According to the housing corporation, the solution lies in a greater mix of tenants. In order to achieve that, Servatius has stopped accepting new proposals, rooms are left unoccupied until all the residents of a particular hallway have moved out. A drastic measure, a spokesperson for the corporation agrees, but nuisances had been occurring “for more than a decade” and talks with residents of the complex were not helping. And in the council documents: “We are choosing habitability over student associations who want to use our property as a club house.”

The surrounding residents wrote a letter to the council in which they say they are delighted with the measure. Their neighbours – “Frat boys. A whole building full of them,” said the letter – have made the alleyway leading to Herdenkingsplein “uninhabitable for a few years now”.

What about talking to the students, or calling on community officers or even the police? That didn't make a difference, Marcel and Antonie

de Beaumont, a married couple who signed the letter, told *Observant*. They have lived opposite the housing complex for years and until about 2020, there were no real issues. A party every now and then wasn't a problem – “we're not anti-student, we were students once, too” – and if there were complaints, then the students would generally quite happily accept being spoken to about it.

That all changed with the pandemic, they said: when student clubs were closed, parties moved to the flats and never really left. “It is now a problem three or four times a week. The community officers and the police show up regularly, hand out a few fines. That puts a stop to it for a little while.” The noise in the narrow street doesn't stop during the day, either; those who wish to work from home or read a book are forced to keep their windows closed. The Beaumonts, along with one of their neighbours, had

their windows replaced with soundproof glass. “That cost a lot of money.”

And the students? Two of them, busy loading a car parked outside the housing complex, were curt when questioned about the noise. It's possible, they said, but not on their floor, the fourth, where they have been living for about 18 months. Any noise from that floor would blow over the other houses. They believe there is a different motivation behind Servatius's measure: money. The housing corporation, they claim, is more interested in renting to internationals, who, according to the two, have more money than Dutch students. According to Servatius, there is no such thing: “We rent according to the housing valuation system. That does not differentiate between tenants.”

Peter Doorakkers



The alley with on the right the student houses Photo: Observant

Dutch and local language and culture during INKOM

## *Spijkerpoepen* and *ranja* for internationals

*INKOM, the introduction week for new students, which starts on 18 August, expects a maximum of four thousand participants. There will be a tour of the city, and a focus on culture, sports and careers. This year, there is a new event, 'Dutch Dimensions', featuring mini courses on the Dutch and Maastricht languages and culture, meant to foster a connection with 'ordinary people'.*

The third day of INKOM has been partly reserved for a new event, Dutch Dimensions, where international students will get to know the Netherlands, in word and custom. On offer are brief language lessons, *spijkerpoepen* (manoeuvring a nail into a bottle, hands free), milking a ‘fake cow’, and trying *ranja* and stroopwafels – “all typically Dutch,” Jeroen Custers, INKOM project leader, told *Observant*. For Dutch participants, there will

be small lectures on *Mestreechs* by Stichting Veldeke Maastricht, while carnival society the ‘Tempeleers’ will immerse interested participants in the world of carnival.

According to the organisation, this edition will also feature “the largest karaoke night in the low countries”, the INKOM sing-a-long at the MECC. Custers said it's not a ‘real’ karaoke, as in ‘small groups get on stage and sing along’, but “the whole room takes part”. The *cantus*, a typical student party which revolves around beer and (Dutch) music, was dropped last year and won't be back in August. Although the opening act will be a local singer, Maastricht's own John Tana. The opening on the Markt and ‘Live at the Museum’ on Tuesday will explicitly also be open to “welcoming neighbours, fellow citizens of Maastricht”.

For the first time this year, participants will be able to choose whether they want to walk

with a ‘group plus mentor’. Last year, Master's students were offered that choice and it was well received, Custers told *Observant* earlier. All first years fill in a digital decision tree, in which they select their preferences – do they like sports, parties, culture? Based on those preferences, they then choose their mentor. This ‘match policy’ does work on a first-come-first-served basis. The number of mentors is limited, said Custers, about two hundred at the moment. “We want no more than 20 students per group”. For many older international students (who could be a mentor), 18 August is very early, he explained. Many are not yet back in the Netherlands. The academic year doesn't officially start until September.

Wendy Degens

## column



## Why Language is Deeply Emotional

“

I have been living in the Netherlands for exactly half of my life, and have been enthusiastically learning and speaking Dutch since I arrived in Middelburg that first day. Yet, I still think in English, and when I am angry there is nothing better than the F word—rather than a Dutch equivalent. There's nothing wrong with that, of course, but one thing that troubles me is when I have social conversations in Dutch. I inevitably leave the situation with an uncomfortable feeling that I was not “myself,” compared to when I can speak English. Usually, I beat myself up about this. I think, why can't I become fully fluent in Dutch? Why don't I have the cultural nuances to really “be me” after 20 years?

The other day I was listening to a Hidden Brain podcast that shed light on my issues, and eased my self-doubts. Namely, their guest Prof. Ethan Kross explained that emotions are encoded early in life, in our native language. According to Kross, that means there is a “deep resonance” between our native language and our emotions. Applied to the situation I described, then, one reason why we might feel less like “ourselves” when speaking a second language in social situations (which often involve more emotions compared to work contexts), is because there is more distance between a second language and our inner emotional world.

Thinking about this reminds me of another recent situation. One evening, I overheard my dad on the phone with best friend Julio—both of whom share a native language of Spanish. Hearing my dad speak in Spanish, it somehow felt like he was even more himself. It reminded me of how much I enjoyed watching South American soccer with my dad and Julio. They would chatter away in Spanish, and nothing was funnier than hearing them curse at the TV. Prof. Kross explained that if we are lucky enough to speak more than one language, we can choose our languages strategically, turning emotional distance into a good thing. If we are speaking about something where it could be helpful to take some emotional distance—like looking at a work conflict more rationally—we can choose to speak in our second language. In contrast, if our goal is to fully engage emotionally with an issue or another person (or express our frustration during sports matches) we are wise to choose our native language.

”

Jessica Alleva, assistant professor at the Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience

## series sing, fight, cry, pray, laugh, work and admire

/ Catarina Maria Cussoca  
Ivens Ferraz  
(Lisbon, Portugal, 2003)

/ Third-year student  
at University College Venlo

/ relationship status:  
in a relationship

/ Lives in:  
Venlo



Photo: Loraine Bodewes

“  
My brother and I used to fight all the time,  
but now he’s my best friend  
”

### There’s nothing like student life in Venlo.

[Laughs] Maybe I wouldn’t go so far as to say that, but it definitely has its perks. The University College has around 150 students, spread across three years, so we’re a small, close-knit community. It makes it easy to organise events or find a workout buddy or just someone to hang out with. And there’s plenty to explore; it’s not as quiet as you might think. When I found out the programme wasn’t in Maastricht, I first looked up pictures of Venlo. I later visited the city with my father and brother. I could see myself living here – it’s pretty, and safe.

### What did you want to be when you were younger?

I went through a lot of different phases. For a time, I wanted to be a baker. Mainly because of my huge sweet tooth. I still love to bake and get creative with food, but it’s just a hobby.

**What’s the last book you read?** *Rebel Bodies* by Sarah Graham, about the gender health gap. Drugs are often only tested on men, women tend to be taken less seriously by doctors and we actually know very little about women’s health issues like reproductive diseases. I think it’s such an important topic, which is why I’m designing a module on women’s health for my thesis. We get to choose our own courses, but there’s no women’s health module, even though the programme focuses on health and nutrition and 95 per cent of the students are women. If one existed, it would’ve been my first choice. Hopefully, it’ll be introduced in the future – who knows, maybe thanks to my thesis.

**I take after...** my mother. According to my grandmother and aunt, it’s in certain facial expressions and gestures I make. I also have her strong will and her independent attitude. She passed away when I was thirteen. She had an autoimmune disease that suddenly worsened, causing complications. Maybe that’s why I’m so interested in women’s health care. It turned my life upside down. Fortunately, I got a lot of support from my family – not just my father and brother, but also my uncle and aunt. I moved in with them because my father had to travel a lot for his job with the United Nations, my brother had already started university.

**What were you like as a child?** Very curious. I was always asking my mother, “Can I ask a question?” I could be very shy, which sometimes made it hard to make friends as we moved often. But I was also happy and cheerful, always laughing – except when I was fighting with my brother, then I’d get very aggressive. I was very much his little sister – he’s six years older than me – and I was always getting him in trouble. We’re very close now, he’s my best friend, my protector. He also lives in the Netherlands; he’s doing a master’s in Groningen. I can always count on him, whether it’s for practical advice about living in the Netherlands or just for a good chat. But we’re still good at arguing. [Laughs]

**I’m a good friend because...** I’m very loyal. Once trust has been established, I’m there for you no matter what. I’m very protective. My friends say it helps to talk to me when something is bothering them. I think I’m a good shoulder to cry on.

**I still want to learn...** to become more confident and see my own worth and potential. I’ve faced a lot of racism, and those experiences have made me insecure at times. When I was younger, we often lived in predominantly white neighbourhoods – my brother and I were the only mixed-race kids. People would comment on my skin colour and hair.

**What’s the hardest part of love?** Truly opening up to someone else. My boyfriend and I have been together for almost a year now; this is my first relationship. My parents got divorced when I was very young, so I didn’t have an example of what a healthy relationship looks like or how to navigate the merging of two lives and cultures – he’s from Venlo, I’m from Portugal. It can be challenging, but I think we’re doing well so far. He makes me very happy.

**What’s your dream holiday?** I’m lucky to have visited a lot of places with my parents. I’d love to go back to Thailand or Bali. The scenery is stunning, and both places radiate a kind of spirituality that I find very peaceful. I was raised Catholic, but after my mother’s passing, I lost my faith a bit. Now, I do believe in a higher power, but not necessarily God. I don’t pray, but I do things that some people might do as part of their religion, like meditating, keeping a journal and practising positive affirmations.

**In ten years...** I hope to be making a difference in the world, to have a positive impact in whatever way I can. It would be wonderful if I could use my studies to do that. I’d love to have my own nutritional health business. I’m not sure exactly what it would look like yet, but I’d like to help people lead healthier, better lives. I also hope to be financially stable by then, with my own house. Whether that’s in the Netherlands or Portugal, I’m not sure yet – as long as I can see my family regularly. I’d especially like to build a stronger bond with my father. He was often away for work, but now that I’m an adult too, we can both put effort into our relationship.

Cleo Freriks

Weekly personal interview with a student or employee

North-Holland women's handball team VZV wins first national title with UM coach

# "It's taken blood, sweat and tears – but it feels like a fairytale come true"

Last week, for the first time in its history, the women's team of North-Holland handball club VZV won the national title – thanks in part to their coach Edwin Janssen from Limburg, building manager at UM SPORTS. In just two years, Janssen led the team from the bottom of the top league to national triumph. "I actually have a love-hate relationship with handball."



Edwin Janssen (with glasses and the flowers) celebrating with his team Photo: Pierre Mettes Fotografie

After a 2-1 win in the playoffs against six-time champions SEW, Janssen was handed the championship trophy last Sunday – the crowning achievement of his coaching career. "It's the biggest thing I've ever accomplished", he says a few days later, when the celebrations have quietened down and he has time to reflect on how it all started with the club from 't Veld, a village of just over two thousand people in North Holland.

"There were times early on when I thought, 'What have I got myself into?'" Janssen recalls – especially that first time he drove from his hometown of Stein in Limburg all the way to the northwest corner of the Netherlands to meet the team. "Over two hundred kilometres, nearly three hours on the road. I'd already signed with the club; they'd arranged a house in the village for me to stay in half the week to avoid the long commute. It was perfect. But it's the team you have to work with. So when I got in the car on a random weekday to go introduce myself, I did find myself thinking, 'It's such a long drive – I really hope we click.'"

And they did, as Janssen realised at that very first meeting. At the same time, he already knew he would be making decisions not everyone would like. "The previous coach relied on a small group of five or six regular starters with a big group around them. He was trying to keep everyone happy. I knew straight away that wasn't how I'd do things. I want to work with the best. That means disappointing people and explaining yourself – not just to the players, but also to the board that brought you in. I took that responsibility. Either you aim for the top or you don't."

## Shaking things up

That, he says, is where his strength lies – being clear, making

decisions, not compromising. "On the court, there's no room for emotion. Everything must bend to my will. I've always been brought in to shake teams up and bring in fresh energy." And he's been doing just that ever since landing his first head coaching job at ESC in Stein when he was 21 years old. Since then, his career has taken him to clubs like Margraten, Meeuwen in Belgium, the Dutch youth team, V&L in Geleen (where he's coached both the men's and women's teams) and Manos, the student handball association of Maastricht that introduced him to the university.

"I came here to coach Manos. Not long after, I also started working with V&L. Things were tight financially in Geleen, so I decided to teach strength training myself. I asked UM if I could earn my certification at the sports centre. They said yes, but asked if I'd be willing to work there as well. So I started teaching fitness classes while still coaching handball."

## Small farmhouse

For a long time, he managed to keep those roles separate – teaching students the basics while "diving into pro sport" at V&L. But eventually, he realised he was too driven for amateur university players, and teaching fitness classes no longer fulfilled him either. "I was ready for a change." The job as building manager at UM SPORTS came at just the right time. When VZV came knocking, Janssen had just stepped down from V&L and thought he was done with handball. "The fire had gone out."

But the offer from the North-Holland club was too good to pass up: "financially attractive, and a chance to do things my way." He and his wife Rilana ("her coming with me was non-

"There were times early on when I thought, 'What have I got myself into?'"

negotiable") were invited to the club one Saturday and welcomed with open arms. That same day, they were shown the small farmhouse where they'd be living. "It all felt a bit surreal, but my wife immediately said, 'I want this.'"

## Love-hate relationship

UM SPORTS allowed Janssen to rearrange his hours and work more remotely – "I do a lot of paperwork, so I don't always need to be on site" – so he could focus on building a title-winning team. He spent Wednesday afternoons through to Saturdays up in the northwest, coaching, watching and analysing matches. "When I started, we were fighting relegation. It's taken blood, sweat and tears – we've played so many matches, had players out with injuries. But now we've won the title. It feels like a fairytale come true."

Janssen's contract with VZV runs for another year. The club would like to keep him on longer and put him in charge of overhauling their youth academy. Janssen is flattered, but unsure about what the future holds for him. "I usually get a feeling around December about whether I want to carry on. Are all those long drives still worth it if we're losing? I have a love-hate relationship with handball. I've felt sick with nerves before matches, always wanted more and often felt like throwing in the towel. But something new always comes along and pulls me back in. Only in the past few years have I found a bit more peace and become better at taking things as they come. So we'll see."

## background

## Another student house gone

# “WE DIDN’T WANT TO ARGUE WITH THE LANDLORD, SO WE JUST LEFT”



No one knows how many *dispuutshuizen* – student house shares affiliated with specific student societies or associations – there are in Maastricht, but one thing is clear: more and more are disappearing as landlords look to raise rents or put the properties to other use. *Observant* interviewed members of three student associations and one former resident of a student house – who, it turns out, often have more power than they realise.

TEXT: Riki Janssen ILLUSTRATION: Simone Golob

An 18-square-metre room with a shared living room, kitchen and terrace, all for €460 per month. In 2022, Bas (not his real name; all student names in this article have been changed to protect their identities from former landlords) was thrilled to secure a spot in a student house near Onze Lieve Vrouweplein. The house had been home to his fraternity since 2011. “The landlord didn’t want the hassle of finding new tenants all the time, so we took care of it. He dropped

by twice a year to shake our hands and tell us how pleased he was with us. We weren’t total slob. My mum might disagree – it could be messy when she visited – but it was never filthy.”

### Friendly landlord

Then came spring 2024, and their friendly landlord announced renovation plans. The rooms would be turned into six self-contained studios, each renting for about €890 per month. The

students were welcome to stick around after the renovations – but only if they paid the higher rent, and they’d lose the freedom to choose who they lived with. The landlord even offered to help them find alternative housing. “He told one of us by text. We felt cornered. We’d have to live through the renovations, the rent would skyrocket, and we’d no longer be allowed to pick our own housemates. Technically, he didn’t force us out, but it didn’t feel like we had much of a choice.” Bas and his housemates turned to Huurteam Zuid-Limburg, which assists tenants with rental issues, but they quickly concluded they “didn’t have a legal leg to stand on”, says Bas. “We didn’t want to argue with the landlord, so we just left.”

### Cash for keys

Robin Janssen, a legal adviser at Huurteam Zuid-Limburg, wasn’t involved in this particular case and can’t comment on it directly. But she notes that students often reach out only after they’ve moved out. “At that point, there’s very little we can do.” She urges students to contact Huurteam Zuid-Limburg *before* leaving. “We can often do something to help. Tenants have rights.” If you’re on an open-ended tenancy, like Bas was, your landlord can’t just evict you – on the contrary, says Janssen. “The law says tenants have the right to stay in a property, even if it’s sold. The same applies in most cases of renovation – landlords must prove that the tenant can’t stay in the house, and that’s a difficult case to make. That’s why landlords often offer ‘cash for keys’, a negotiable amount that can run to as much as €10,000 to €20,000 if you live in a self-contained unit with its own front door, bathroom and kitchen.” Many tenants don’t realise that under Dutch law, fixed-term tenancies automatically become open-ended when the term ends. “Tenants often agree to sign three back-to-back fixed-term contracts and then move out because they think they have to. If they come to us after moving out, when the tenancy has ended, there’s nothing we can do.”

### Stressful

Anna and her four housemates were on fixed-term tenancies ending on 1 July 2024. They knew the landlord was considering selling the property, but had been told it was unlikely to happen anytime soon. Then, in spring 2024, the landlord decided to sell after all, leaving the sorority members scrambling to find somewhere else to live. It was a stressful time, especially as most of them lived too far from their parents to move home temporarily.

Albert has a similar story. He was paying €450 per month for a 16-square-metre room in a house near Markt square, sharing a kitchen and living room with five other members of his student association. He’d been living there for a year when his landlord announced plans to convert the property into more expensive units. “He said we were trashing the place and he was fed up. Sure, we threw parties, but we weren’t total slob – I wouldn’t want to live in a dump, either. But he wanted us out.” Everyone eventually found new housing, though some had to move back in with their parents for a while.

### Housing association

Willem’s situation is a bit different. His building, owned by a housing associa-

tion, has effectively been in the hands of his student association since 2002. For years, they chose new housemates themselves – but things have changed. “I’m on an open-ended tenancy, so I get to stay. But once I move out, no one will take my place.” He currently lives with just one other housemate; one room has already been vacated. It’s only a matter of time before this student house is gone, too. Why? Several residents of the four-storey building, located in the city centre, have been a nuisance in the neighbourhood – and the housing association has had enough. “It’s a specific group of students”, explains Willem. “They’re a nuisance to us, too. We’re older students who don’t cause any problems, but we’re still losing our house. We’ve already lost the rooms below ours; the kitchen has been renovated, and international students live there now. A friend of mine heard that the housing association wants the building to be ‘a better representation of the student population.’”

“It’s a shame that there’s less and less housing available for the average Dutch student”, says Bas. “Those more expensive places are aimed at international students, who tend to have deeper pockets. And Dutch students usually prefer living in a student house rather than on their own in a studio flat.”

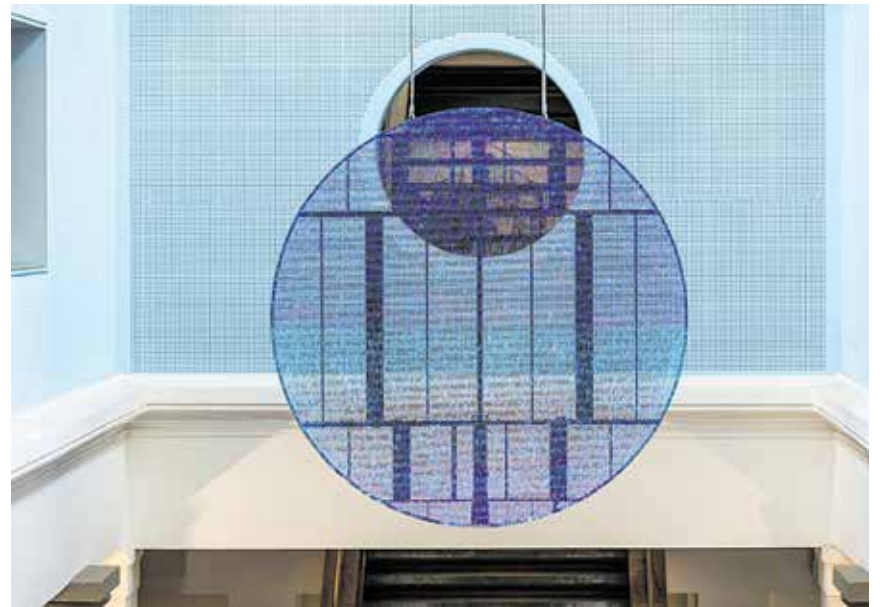
### Compensation

None of the students interviewed for this article demanded or received any compensation for the inconvenience they suffered. “There’s often a lot we can do, but you have to come to us early”, says Robin Janssen of Huurteam Zuid-Limburg. “In our experience, Dutch students are far less likely to reach out than international students. The latter can’t just go home or rely on their parents, whereas Dutch students often can. So they tend to sort it out themselves and just find a new place, even though things might have turned out differently if they’d come to us sooner.”

## HOW MANY STUDENT HOUSES ARE LEFT?

How many student house shares affiliated with specific student societies or associations are there in Maastricht? Neither Maurice Evers, head of Maastricht Housing, nor Robin Janssen of Huurteam Zuid-Limburg knows, as there are no hard figures available. They also don’t know how many have disappeared in recent years. Evers explains, “These houses don’t appear on Maastricht Housing [a platform listing student housing offers in Maastricht from social housing providers and most private landlords], as tenants take care of finding new housemates themselves.”

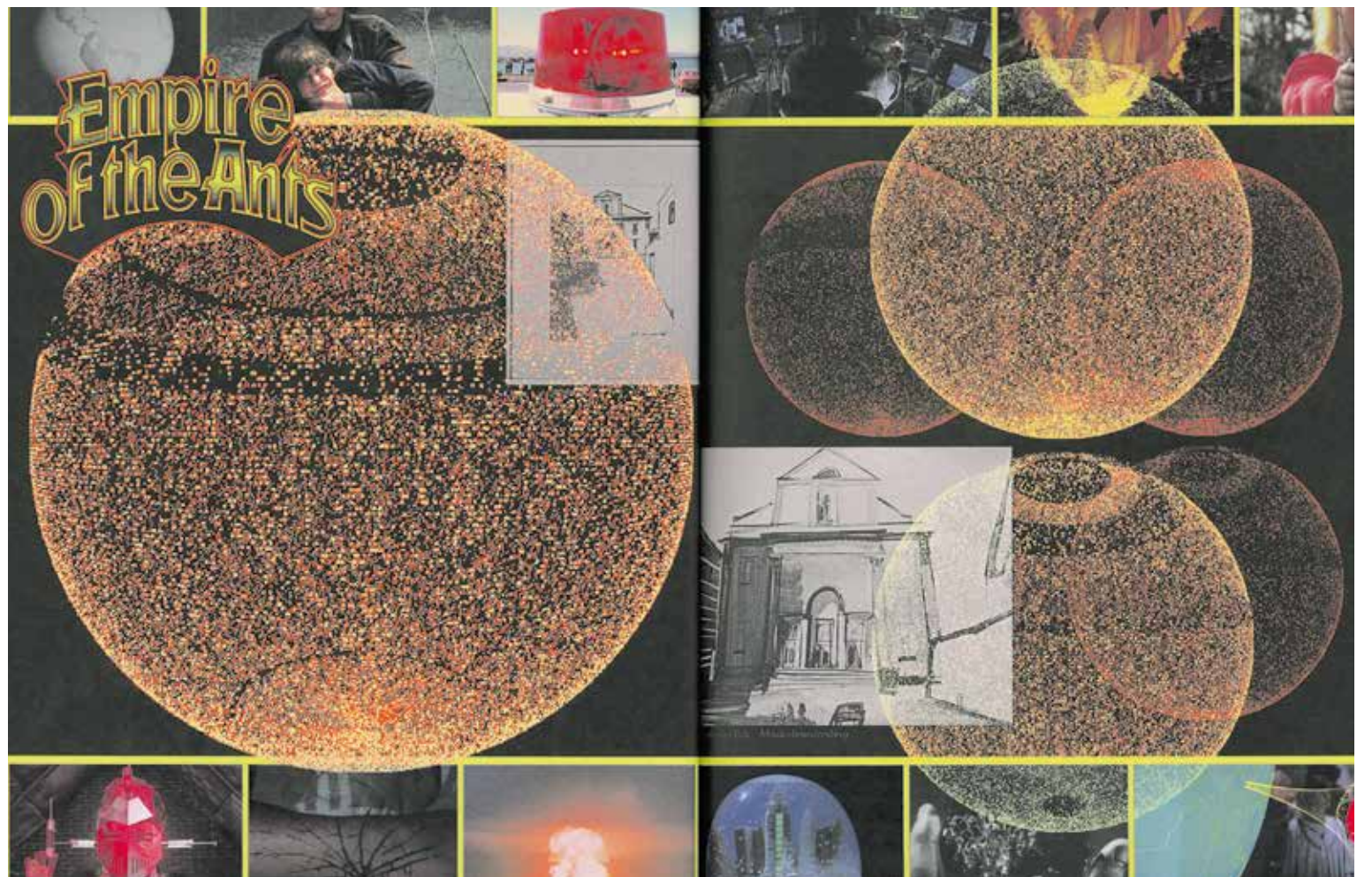
# How an eclectic book brings an art collection to life



*Eternal Blue* by Richard Vijgen as it can be seen in the hall of the Minderbroedersberg  
Photo: Philip Driessen

Last year, Barbara Strating, art curator at Maastricht University, and Yannick Nuss, graphic designer, walked through the hallways of the university like “two secret agents”. Their mission? Creating a book about the art collection, as a surprise for former vice-president of the Executive Board Nick Bos, without him finding out! On 6 June, the book will be presented to the public, and it will also be included as a gift to PhD candidates who successfully defend their thesis.

TEXT: Cleo Freriks



*Eternal Blue* in *THIS IS NOT A MUSEUM/THIS IS NOT A CATALOGUE* through the lens of Yannick Nuss Photo: Yannick Nuss

When Strating was asked to help come up with a gift for Bos, who also served as the head of the Art and Heritage Committee, she quickly concluded that she didn't want a traditional catalogue: white pages with a picture of the artwork and some information. “It had to tell a story, be an artwork in and of itself.” Not to mention that the UM art collection was built up very differently than one in a museum might, she said. “Those often have a predetermined theme. In our case, whenever there was money, people commissioned an artist. Often for a particular building, which makes the art collection very location specific. You can't turn it into an exhibition, or even see all of it, as some works are in areas that aren't open to everyone.” The title of the book says it all: *THIS IS NOT A MUSEUM/THIS IS NOT A CATALOGUE*. In Nuss, Strating found a like-minded person. “A traditional art book is, of course, of great archival value, but from a visual point of view, it feels very much like homework,” he said over Teams.

“For me, images are like text, you can tell a whole story with them. This is not an objective book. There may not be a hierarchy – I wanted to celebrate all the artworks – but it is my perspective, my vision of the collection.” While Nuss was shown around by Strating (“I had to keep coming up with excuses why I had to show him things, so that Nick wouldn't find out”), he looked not just at how the work made him feel, but also how the people in the building experienced them. “I wanted to know as much as possible, I looked for interviews with the artists. Why did they make certain choices? What do they hope I think when I see the work? And how does it actually make me feel?” In the meantime, he gathered an enormous archive of movie stills and titles (both the name and the font) of horror and science fiction paperbacks from the 60s, 70s and 80s. They appear side by side with the artworks and take the reader on a cinematographic tour through the book, giving it the movie-like quality that Nuss was after. “If there

had been more time, I would have liked to create a soundtrack as well. That would have made it a true experience.” Enough copies of the book have been printed to hand out to PhD graduates for the next five years. That's one reason why the book neatly includes index pages listing exactly where the artwork can be found. “And because I wanted people to already be acquainted with the work before showing it to them from my perspective,” said Nuss. Strating also hands it out as a sort of business card. “Now I can show people what my work, what this collection entails.”

*The book will not be commercially available, but will be available in the city library at the Centre Céramique, the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven, and the University Library. If people wish to attend the book presentation on Friday, 6 June in Lumière, they should email [barbara.strating@maastrichtuniversity.nl](mailto:barbara.strating@maastrichtuniversity.nl)*

news

# Government fallen: what are the consequences for higher education?



Photo: Observant

Last Tuesday, Geert Wilders (PVV) pulled the plug on the government. It now has an outgoing status and new elections will be held. Is this good news for higher education and scientific research?

After a series of political crises and night-time negotiations, it has happened: within one year, the cabinet has fallen. Sometime in the autumn, the Netherlands will go to the polls again. Universities hope that policymakers will once

again allocate extra money to education and research. The effects of the cuts are already visible, says umbrella association Universities of the Netherlands: "Layoffs, discontinued study programmes and stagnated research. It is imperative that policymakers reverse this destructive government policy before it is too late", a response reads.

The Dutch Student Union has something similar to say. It hopes that the fall of the government "means the end of the horrendous cutbacks, and

that the next government will invest in education, that the basic student grant will go up and that enough affordable student housing will be created".

Will they get their way? And if so, how soon?

### Bruins to stick around

One thing won't change in the coming months: the government itself. It will continue to govern with an 'outgoing' status. The PVV ministers are stepping down, but Eppo Bruins is the education minister on behalf of NSC and is likely to remain in office until a successor takes over.

Furthermore, the cuts in education and research won't be gone just like that. After all, they've already been accepted by the Senate. CDA, ChristenUnie, SGP and JA21 had made a deal with the coalition to this end. This may only change in September, when the new State Budget is presented, but an outgoing government rarely, if ever, veers off course. Especially not in the field of education and research.

Meanwhile, campaigns are being launched, but what will be the stakes in the elections? Parties like D66, GroenLinks-PvdA and Volt would like to spend more money on education and research; that's one of their spearheads. Other parties are less convinced that additional money should go there.

The compromise could be: extra investment, but mainly in economically useful programmes or, for example, research for Defence. You can already see the political battle coming, because this will put the humanities in particular in a tight spot.

### Students

Recently, the student movement has proven to

## Strike Day on June 10

Under the slogan "Cabinet is out, now the education cuts", the nationwide strike day will go ahead as planned on Tuesday 10 June. However, the location has been moved from the Malieveld in The Hague to Dam Square in Amsterdam, as NS (Dutch Railways) will also be striking that day in the province of South Holland. Staff from Maastricht University will, as with previous demonstrations against budget cuts, be reimbursed for a second-class train ticket.

CF

be a major political player. In this government period, they stopped the slow-progress penalty and, at an earlier stage, fought hard for the return of the basic student grant.

The Dutch Student Union is already doing the warmup. It wants the basic student grant to go up and enough affordable student housing to be created. These are election promises that parties are easily tempted to make.

### Internationalisation

And what about the influx of foreign students and researchers? With PVV mainly intent on amplifying the 'asylum problem' and NSC all but decimated, it seems unlikely that the arrival of foreign students will again become a major issue in the elections.

Moreover, a bill is ready to 'balance' internationalisation. Now that the government has fallen, the House of Representatives can declare certain bills controversial, or postpone them until elections have been held or a new government is in place. But the Balanced Internationalisation Act will probably not be put on the backburner.

Its most controversial part has just been scrapped. The government actually wanted to subject all English-taught Bachelor's programmes to a test to assess whether there were legitimate reasons not to offer them in Dutch instead. This announced language test created uncertainty amongst higher education institutions and last week an overwhelming majority of the House of Representatives voted in favour of scrapping it.

Other parts of the bill enjoy strong support. For example, institutions will be given more opportunities to control the intake of international students into their programmes. They've been asking for this for years.

HOP, Bas Belleman

THE ANNOUNCEMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY, FACULTIES, SERVICE CENTRES AND STUDENT ORGANISATIONS CAN BE FOUND ON [OBSERVANTONLINE.NL](http://OBSERVANTONLINE.NL)



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## Agenda academic ceremonies

Aula Minderbroedersberg 4-6



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