

*Toos Nijssen (born 1961) explores the universal, yet increasingly difficult question of identity. The subjects are unknown to the artist before they are invited to participate, either personally or through hand-outs explaining the project.*

*Over the past 10 years, Toos Nijssen has assembled an archive of video portraits of 1000 individuals in silence that range 5 to 60 minutes long. All of these portraits were taken in a specially designed booth that she set up in different places in India, Belgium, Italy, Turkey and the Netherlands. The latest portraits were made at the van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven during her solo-exhibition in 2006.*

*The videoportraits take on different forms depending on where they are shown. In a gallery, they can either be projected or screened on monitors. Sometimes, stills from the videos accompany the presentation. The scale in interior exhibitions never exceeds human scale, but when shown in outdoor public spaces, the work is usually larger. In one of her latest projects in Eindhoven the videoportraits taken in a market place were projected onto window panes of the surrounding buildings.*

*Although in her latest project in the van Abbemuseum all of the portraits were taken in Eindhoven, the national identity of Nijssen's subjects are deliberately unclear, and makes one question what a Dutch person might look like today, and whether one can even ask this question. The only common feature is Nijssen's technique of portrayal.*

*It's a new form of portraiture. These video recordings are not idealized, realistic or expressionistic portraits. They do not claim to represent national values. They do not accuse social circumstances, nor, do they investigate psychological patterns.*

*They are straight forward portraits of men and women of all races, yet taken in specific places. Mankind is looking at us, the viewer. We are struck by the immediacy of the encounter. We sometimes cannot stand the glaring, the gazing. We do not want to see the embarrassing insecurity, the macho-like invitations, the self-promoting gestures, the shy and anxiously opened eyes. Nobody talks; the language is purely visual. Ideas on national, racial and ethnic categories are blurred. There is no unified global world; the world consists of humans with individual features, as manifold as the number of people living on earth.*

*It's the process, more than finishing and completing the project, that drives the artist.*

*The potentially never ending labour of communicating, recording and showing is the contemporary and humanistic answer to the aristocratic and bourgeois portraits of the past.*

**Text by**

**Eva Meyer-Hermann former Curator van Abbemuseum Eindhoven**