Do we ask as a first question

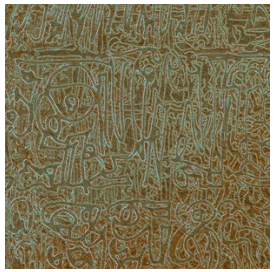
translation DeepL

Frans Huisman, December 2023

'Do we ask as first question', 90 x 90cm, print on brushed aluminium

Do we ask as first question this

In the 1865 cahier 'Onderzoekingen over den duur der psychische processen', Franciscus Donders asks an all-important and leading question:
"Do we ask as first question this: what takes place in the brain while we are thinking feeling, imagining or wanting something?"
This panel shows the question in its original handwriting. While writing it down, Donders corrects himself. He crossed out the word 'thinking' and replaced it with 'feeling'. The fact that we know about this correction comes from writing with crown pen on paper. The ink line recorded every hesitation or consideration in a literal thought-track. The 'first' question is relevant to this day and certainly the doubt contained therein. The title of this panel has become the title for the entire wall.



'Tribal', 145 x145cm, print on brushed aluminium

This print could sound like 'Houses in Motion' by the Talking Heads.

<u>Culture</u>
A coherent system of representations, beliefs, knowledge, habits, norms and values, expectations, that people from that society, continue in new generations.
Cultural appropriation, defined as the use of symbols, artefacts, genres, rituals or technologies of one culture by members of another culture, can be divided into 4 categories: exchange, domination, exploitation and transculturation. Transculturation: a process of change, with the aim of realising that everyone is equal, regardless of which culture each comes from.

In this panel, scripts have been superimposed and manipulated to blend into each other. They are evocations of cultures, past or yet to come.

'Writing', 90 x145cm, print on brushed aluminium

The notes from the handwritten research diary of Franciscus Cornelius Donders contain cryptic sentences that, retrospectively and with today's science, seem to contain all kinds of predictions and true observations about the world and science.
The yellowed paper and tarnished ink make the 1865 diary/research cahier look like a treasure map from a suspense novel. Hard to read, written in archaic Dutch and with a frame of reference from other times, incidentally a very international frame of reference extending across many disciplines in art and science.
The handwriting has a beautiful rhythm with long digressions at the beginning or end of a word facing both up and down. It was written with a crown pen by someone with a very steady hand. We know there were correspondences with famous contemporaries such as Charles Darwin (in French), Louis Pasteur, Hermann von Helmholtz and Johannes Brahms. In this print, several text sheets are intermingled, with an emphasis on rhythm.

Do we ask as a first question

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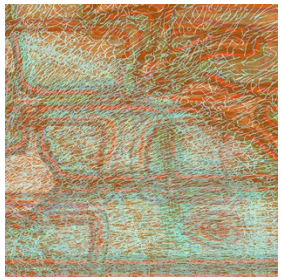
translation DeepL

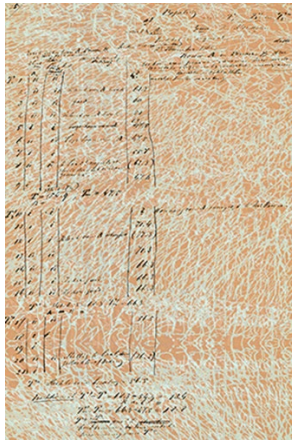
'Cyberpunk Eye', 145 x145cm, print on brushed aluminium

The University of Nijmegen is renowned, among other things, for its Psychological Laboratory, which took shape even before WW2 under the leadership of Prof F.J.Th. Rutten. In the so-called Nijmegen conception of psychology, art and science, inspiration, keen observation and experimental testing went together, so not Freudians but rather Behaviorists. (Unconscious is asleep. Measuring is knowing.) The laboratory included a nursery where behaviour of growing children was observed in the spirit of Maria Montessori. F.C. Donders, first and foremost an ophthalmologist, was also a person of measurement and observation. He developed instruments for taking eye measurements around 1860 and corresponded about them with the physician and physicist Hermann von Helmholz, a scientific titan. In this panel, a photograph of an instrument to determine the position of the eye axis has been used as a blueprint. The observing eye with colourful iris is guiding design principle in the Maria Montessori building. It is impossible to imagine the conditions and world in which these scientists did their work. The era of Mary Shelley, Darwin, Jules Verne is also the inspiration for Cyber Punk, a post modern, hyper techno romantic interpretation of the 19th century, art with a coppery edge.



'Clara', 145 x145cm, print on brushed aluminium

One measure of a person's social standing is to look at how many handshakes the person is away from, say, Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel or the Queen of pop Byoncé. Radboud University is extremely intertwined with the rest of the world. Studying is both a privilege and arguably emancipating for all involved.
The print 'Clara' pays homage to such a 'hand shake'. Donder's son-in-law Theodor Engelmann is married to his only daughter Maria. The family shares a passion for music; they all play different instruments. Brahm's is a family friend. Maria dies in childbirth at a very young age when giving birth to twins Paula and Frans. Four years later, Theodor remarried Emma Vick (stage name Emma Brandes), renowned concert pianist and pupil of Clara Wieck-Schumann. Donders made many trips around Europe with his grandchildren, they visited Louis Pasteur. Theodor becomes his successor in Utrecht.



***'Test sheet'**, 95 x 145cm, print on brushed aluminium*

"To distinguish for the face red or white, for the ear the sound of o or i, for the skin between two places, foot or groin, and in connection therewith to choose between two signals."
"Timing can give insight into the mental process and the brain.

Impulse
In 1865, Fransiscus Donders was one of the first scientists to conduct research on impulse processing by the brain. He was interested in reaction speed and noted the time elapsed between administering a stimulus and responding to it. What is striking about the research is how his experience as a musician and music lover helped shape the research. Even the way he wrote down the results has something of a score to it. On this test sheet, we see in columns how a sound is indicated and the time it takes for a test subject to repeat the same sound.
Music is sound organised in time and space. How quickly can the body respond to an indication in a score, respond to sensory input, the prompting of fellow musicians. How does the body function as an extension of an instrument? It seems as if playing a musical instrument has served as a template for conducting research experiments.

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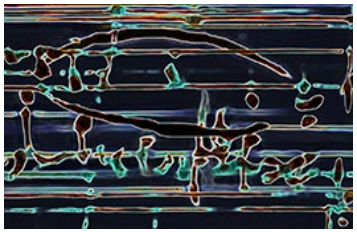
'Characters in Gold Ochre', 95 x 145 cm, print on brushed aluminum

Asemic Writing / L'écriture automatique / Visual Poetry

Early in his career, Frans Huisman experimented with forms of writing. He developed 'anthropomorphic writing' as a way of describing dance and theatre scenes. It is a writing that appears to consist of human figurations but on closer inspection is a depiction of diversity in organic appearances. Writing has become drawing and vice versa. Designing writing systems in which reading codes are suggested leaves room for readers to invent their own mysterious stories.
Various definitions now exist for this approach, of which Asemic Writing is the most recent. Asemic Writing is a wordless open semantic form of writing. The word Asemic means "without specific semantic content", or "without the smallest unit of meaning". The open and free form creates a meaning vacuum that the reader has to fill in and interpret for themselves."

FH "I have a vivid memory of the first word I learnt to write. It was the word 'tree'. (*) Just by changing the order of the letters, other meanings emerged and they represented sounds: 'Boom, bom, bomo, moob, mobo, uncle, moo, bobo', etc. Some of these sounds I could understand as words, others were nonsensical or unfamiliar and new or another language. Later, I learnt that all kinds of writing developed; warning signs, abstract representation of scenes, situations, objects (as in asian script), symbols, etc. Some are written on paper, velum, scratched in clay, carved in wood or stone or Inca style; knotted in rope. There is no clear boundary between writing and drawing; they are on the same plane.
Writing systems work only if the reader knows the reasoning behind them. When the code of a manuscript is lost or unknown to the reader, the writing becomes obscure and the content is lost or gets hidden in time. Deciphering these (often beautiful) ancient scripts is an art in itself or at least a very romantic science. Jean-François Champollion who managed to make Egyptian hieroglyphics legible is one of my heroes. What's not to like about writing? It is mysterious yet precise, it is about code and (hidden) knowledge and is a sophisticated way of telling stories. It connects people across time and space and is as diverse as languages can be. In my experience, Asemic writing is close to visual poetry, musical notation and... drawing stories!"

* a Catholic reading method titled "Veilig Leren Lezen" (beginning with the word sequence tree-rose-fish) by Martinus Mommers, monastic name: Brother Caesarius, working as associate professor in the Department of Educational Studies at the Catholic University of Nijmegen from 1966 - 1990.



'Brahms', 55 x 90cm, print on brushed aluminium

Tone
Reading ability is a miraculous and not at all a natural phenomenon. It takes many learning moments to learn to interpret written signs. In the case of phonetic writing, the brain has to rapidly assign a sound value to a series of scribbles and turn them into a word. At some point, you no longer 'hear' that word but the scribbles take on a certain (abstract) meaning, a meaning with context, become language.
In the print 'Brahms', an excerpt from a score by the composer has been digitally edited. The result can be called a graphic score, a mode of musical notation from the early 20th century in which,-even more than usual-, an appeal is made to the interpretation ability of the person reading. Not only the indication of sound pitch but also the way the scribbles are arranged, colour, onset and thickness, are elements to work with. Observation and interpretation are the keys to reading. It gets exciting where writing tries to name or sound out the inaudible.
As a researcher, Donders was acutely aware of the fact that knowledge not only informs what you see but also guides observation at the same time. His notes are a record of how he tries to improve, sharpen himself on both fronts, -knowledge and observation-. Without an interaction between the two, no progress.

Do we ask as a first question *translation DeepL*

Frans Huisman, December 2023

'Brain Gate', 145 x145 cm, print on brushed aluminium

Network

Many techniques are used to map the brain. Of these, MRI scans down to atomic level can reveal the response to stimuli of all kinds at different locations in the brain. Developments like these meanwhile open the way to physical coupling of humans and machines. There are future visions in which (human) consciousness finds a home in a machine super-brain, detached from an organic base and thus detached from the cycle of life and death. This approach has its origins in a rational bio-medical view of the human body.

The question of what feeds our thinking and where it resides is approached differently again by disciplines such as Philosophy, Sociology and Anthropology. The incorporeal is found in the telling and transmission of stories and myths, how we arrange our social environment, interact with nature, language reflects our thinking, etc.

In the work 'Brain Gate', transparent layers of text and drawings have been digitally manipulated, superimposed and connected, like neurons interlock. Text and image are ways for people to communicate across distance in time and space *with each other. A highly sophisticated network of observations, questions, reflections and changing deliberative structures is created. The analogy with networks in nature, from brain to mycelium, is striking.

* The counter stands at 73,000 years ago with a discovery of legible cave drawings in South Africa.

About Frans Huisman

Frans Huisman (Nijmegen, 4 April 1960) graduated from the Academy of Visual Arts in Arnhem (now Artez) in 1988 after completing a doctoral degree in Medicine at the KUN (now RU) in 1984.

He has worked as a visual artist since 1988, first from Arnhem and later from Rotterdam, Boston, Schiedam and Bonn. The combination of Art and Science, working with multiple disciplines, is a constant in his work.

From visual theatre, he has progressed through location projects and multi-media installations to making sculptures, paintings, sculpture installations and drawings. His aim, then and now, is to make work in which many layers of meaning can be discovered and unexpected connections become visible.

Recent projects include Translational Imagery, in which drawings are combined with photographs and other visual material from scientific research (carried out in Germany and the USA) and a sculpture for Park de Plantage in Schiedam.

Frans Huisman is represented by Galerie Chimaera in Schiedam.

For more information see also:

www.franshuisman.eu | www.franshuisman.com | www.vof-chimaera.nl

Multipanel on brushed aluminium

The images on the nine wall panels are composed of layers of drawings and photos that have been digitally reworked. The process can be compared to building up a painting, only now layers of pixels rather than layers of paint are applied on top of each other. The image is then printed on the stable composite material alu-Dibond. This material consists of two coated aluminium sheets and a core of black polyethylene. The top aluminium sheet has a horizontally brushed finish.

This three-layer system is 3 mm thick and has a low weight. The 7-colour print cures under ultraviolet light and is then protected from sun, dirt and humidity. From an image, the white and slightly transparent parts are translated into an aluminium gloss in the printing process.

This version was chosen because the lighting conditions in the colloquium hall increase the likelihood of unwanted glare. Opposite the wall are large windows with plenty of light and a view of the garden of the Berchmanianum.