



My studio is in the West Port of Amsterdam, at the end of Mainhavenweg, the “main harbor way”. Industrial building, in between two oil refineries which extend as far as the eye can see, canals lined with huge hangers, punctuated by chimneys, cranes, containers. Day and night, tankers follow one another, emptying their contents into labyrinth pipes, before dark liquid is dumped into trucks. A shy vegetation, classified as weeds, has found a way to extract itself from earth, on thin banks that concrete has not yet covered. Odors of exhaust gasses, wet asphalt, crude oil fill the air, tinged with screeching of buoys against ship hulls, metallic collisions of containers, reversing sirens of forklifts, rare fog horns of tankers. Plastic wastes and iridescent slicks of motor oil float on water. A folkloric image of the Netherlands, a logical continuation of bucolic windmills drying up ever-green polders. This is where I work, this is where *they* live.

Encounter began with a poop. An ordinary canid poop, quite small, brown verging on black, already dry, placed in the middle of a concrete slab, raising the excrement about ten centimeters, pedestal for shit. Common clue, I would have paid little attention, but the environment prompted me to be more curious: I had given up foresting myself in this terraformed country, where natural spaces are designed by engineers. Netherlanders extended their land on their own land, endogenous colonialism. Critic victory of straight line on swamps. Landscape domestication pushed to its climax. But here this shit lays in front of me. The wild revealing itself where I no longer expected it.

Looking for more, I find: remains of food, wings still linked by a layer of dried flesh, scattered feathers, bleached skulls, nickel-plated fish bones. I decipher pawprints in the thin sandbank, subtle then obvious. I discover breaches in the concrete, cracks extending into basements of the building. I suspect: fox.

First attempts to photograph it are in vain. Bad settings, bad placements, bad timing. It only takes one chance alignment for them to reveal themselves: two foxes, true masters of the place. I look for clues of life each time I enter in the territory. New vestiges of feast, new evidences of assault on bird, new hole dug to bury corpse or flush out mouse. One grey day, I see on the ground a fluorescent yellow plastic disk on which two parallel feces have been dropped. What is the message? This is where we can meet: odoriferous and visual markings to engage conversation. Scientific journals inform me: tendency to choose vertical objects, prominent in location or in height to better catch the attention of their peers. Platforms to leave pheromone messages. I make a concrete tree, communication relay to pee on. It fails. Camera films: approaching the pylon, sniffing, then leaving, disinterested. Trunk is not singular enough to receive the messenger fluid. It will host the trail camera, evolving into a tree endowed with vision.

On the path that runs along walls of the building, sand printed with many fox tracks, I install a motion detector. Cable runs for twenty meters to a red light bulb in my studio. In the warehouse, light signal informs: passage of canids. I don't go out to come face to face with them, but glowing brings a comforting presence in lonely moments of winter emptiness.

January, exhibition in the premises without the agreement of the owner. He will know: territory full of CCTV cameras. Two days later, flags in the colors of the company float in the sky to remind us: hegemony of the lord on his land. Halyards against poles flap in the air, I worry about the effect of flags' noise on foxes.

Then came Eunice with its uprooting gusts. The Internet is awash with images of fallen trees, of roots revealed in broad daylight. I think about the concrete tree in front of the burrow, held by no underground ties. It ends up on the ground, in poor condition. Worse, the barrier that closed the property fell on the entrance of the tunnel. I push it lightly to clear the way to the den, without lifting it up: wind has not stopped blowing it down. Camera is no longer attached to the trunk. I think: neighboring employee stole it, passing through the very recent border opening; owner did not appreciate the voyeuristic presence of the instrument; foxes took advantage of the storm to take camera into burrow.

March, health restrictions are lifted and port hosts a level of human activity that I had not seen before. Ships swarm the quays. Tank trucks abound. Air traffic proliferates. Port is covered with new sounds, industrial atmosphere that multiplies in intensity. I wonder if the foxes settled under the shed when port life was at a low, like deers boars pumas took advantage of confined towns. Seductive hypothesis. But the environment is in fact home to significant biodiversity, with or without human life: animals classified as pests and ornithological specimens benefit from the peace offered by an environment populated by machines more than humans. Few bipeds descend from freighters or heavy goods vehicles.

One day, smell of decaying flesh floats in the atmosphere. I panic: imagine tragedy. With the tip of my nose, I search for the source, sniff the grass, sniff the different entrances to the galleries, squat down, gaze up. I see nothing. At the edge of the water, among the rocks that form the bank, a tan form stands out, lying. I run and stop in front of a gutted orange plastic container. Yet, the smell lingers, occupying my nasal septum and my mind. Next day, foxes appear on the trail cam screen: relief.

I make new pylons to establish communication again. Fox lesson in manners: particular taste for fluorescent yellow – to be confirmed. Trunks and stumps are placed, ready to receive messages. Reconstitution of a meager forest of cut trees in acrylic resin. Vertical supports aren't used, while low platforms show signs of approval. On the fluorescent surface, a tawny stain informs me of the deposit of fluid. I bend down on all fours and inhale the message: a powerful and fresh smell, wooded, almost floral, acid, slightly ammoniacal. I do not master urine language, yet. I introduce myself, *\*pschit\** on a fluorescent trunk. No answer. I try not to make mistakes, so that my messages are not misinterpreted. If for canids, marking = territoriality, then I must not provoke a conflict. We share the same territory. *I come in peace*. One day, I discover: an enormous turd deposited in front of the burrow's entrance, ostentatious sign. Is it a threat? Imprints of soles that surround it confirm its human origin. I hasten to make it disappear before night falls. They might already know, but I can limit the damage. Following night, they are still here. I hope they don't believe I am the author.

On one of the new trunks, I install a video surveillance camera, arboreal extension and camouflage strategy intended to hide from the human gaze more than canine. A second tree accommodates an infrared projector, a third tree accommodates a WiFi terminal. Live image is broadcasted on my phone. Screen casts grey light of night vision, faintly illuminating my face in the darkness of my bedroom. Those I'm waiting for don't show up. One night: I hear barking picked up by microphone, distorted by satellite stream, filtered by telephone speaker. I prick up my ears. Barking again. Source is offscreen, I can't turn my head. I stare at the screen until late. Nothing. Every night, same ride: I'm not over there, over there is here. From my bed, I scan the landscape. One night: in the background, behind the trunks, two eyes. They reflect invisible light and only two shiny globes float on the black background. Their body stands out from the shadows, a stealthy creature that already no longer exists. One night: pawsteps approach, a white silhouette appears from behind, sniffs the trunk, disappears between trees. One night: eyes twinkle, come trotting closer, disappear, eclipsed by the framing. Suddenly, the fox's head fills the screen, its oversized muzzle against the webcam lens. They know. I notice only one individual, always, never two. I worry the pair becomes odd: death or abandonment? I hope: May, potential litter, female may come out less often. I'm waiting for the couple's return to the screen. I'm waiting for more than two.

One night: night vision dream, shades of grey. Two foxes approach, babies in their mouths, staring at the camera, staring at me behind the camera, laying little ones on the ground and pushing them towards the lens until their eyes stick to the screen the interior surface of my closed eyelid they scrutinize the camera, they probe my eye, same organ, cornea against cornea, our tear fluids merge, collision of retinal black holes absorbed by the darkness of blind spots, blinking, I wake up. On my phone, no news.

*Update:*

*June: still no puppies. What are they waiting for? Will they come? What if they were only one?*

*Graduation day, foxes' participation: at Mainhavenweg 17, camera on foxe's territory, connected to computer 10km away from here, in a parking lot, computer connected to smoke machine, smoke machine connected to bottle with smoke fluid + synthetic fox urine. Red neons light the room, connected to computer. When, at Mainhavenweg 17, fox passes in front of the camera: red neons turn off – full darkness, smoke machine turns on, smelling fog fills the room, red light turns on, acid cloud slowly driven away from the room by parking ventilation – spreads in the whole space. Installation activated sometimes by daylight, mainly by night – early morning, liquid in the bottle has lessened. No live video, only: acrid smell in the air.*

*One day: incomprehension. Text message from Mainhavenweg 17's human landlord: 48h to leave the space. Resin trees are packed, cables are disconnected, camera is turned off. I leave, hidden from human eyes in tall grass: one fluorescent stump, their favorite. I don't know how to write a farewell letter with my piss.*