

# ***there, there***

**Kristoffer Ardeña, Datu Arellano, Ratu R. Saraswati, Samboleap Tol & Tintin Wulia**

**Curated by Roy Voragen**

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Out of curiosity, I did the inburgeringsexamen (compulsory entry exam to become a Dutch citizen) on my return to my hometown after a long absence. How do the designers of this exam view citizenship? What image of the Netherlands do they aim to portray? To whom? And why? And to what effect?

One set of questions seems straightforward enough; these questions test the knowledge of Dutch institutions. For example, what is the role of the king? Where to apply for government aid? How to get a referral to a specialist at a hospital? What is the difference between passief kiesrecht (the right to be elected) and actief kiesrecht (the right to elect)?

A second set of questions are about 'the' culture and identity of 'the' Dutch - how we (?) treat our neighbors and how we (?) want to be treated by neighbors - a tad provincial. For example: What to do if a neighbor is causing noise pollution? The correct answer, according to the exam designers, isn't to call the cops but to talk politely with our neighbors. Or: what treat to serve when we celebrate a newborn? Answer: beschuit met muisjes (but what if we want to serve, say, kue lapis?).

Some questions are silly; one asked to locate the province Limburg - just ask google...

The exam feels like a tinder profile minus the irony: all cozy rosy embellishments. The omissions, the erasure - No mention of constitutional rights. No mention of history and how it haunts the present (the presence of absence). No mention of the European Union. - tell a multitude of stories too, of course - what and whose stories though? Or: what desires are enjoyed by whom? What stories are erased?

Language matters - obviously - but language, even one's mother tongue, is a foreign land (meaning never stays in one place for too long) - and the language skills needed to be able to understand what answers the examiners are expecting sets the bar high (is that the veiled aim?). Then, how to go from here?

Seemingly random lines temporarily immortalized into a map - born two miles this direction and you would speak a different mother tongue, move another 17 or so miles

that way and you would kneel down to a different law... Mapping home is a complicated endeavor. Home contains multitudes. Where is home? Who is home? What could home be? Could you be here and there at home? How can we flesh out a home beyond the law and bricks & mortar? Can we move and make (a sense of) home amidst all the roaring parades and flags? How can a soft body speak without being probed? Where are a body's borders? When to translate or transgress those borders? Who gets to edit and broadcast whose stories about belonging turning into becoming?

Kristoffer Ardeña (1976; [instagram.com/kris\\_ardena](https://www.instagram.com/kris_ardena)) works in Negros Island, the Philippines, and Madrid, Spain. He experiments with various formats, ranging from readymades, photography, installation, sculpture, video, painting, performance and other projects. He experiments in painting in relation to the notion of tropicity within the Philippine context, specifically, within the framework of the island of Negros as a point of departure. He explores the poetic potentials of the exotic by using banal surfaces.

For the video performance *Yo soy (I am; 2012)* he went to Plaza de Colón in Madrid, this plaza is dedicated to Christopher Columbus - who attempted to find a passageway to the east by going west - by going the wrong way he changed the histories of many. The flag flown in Plaza de Colón is the largest Spanish flag: 14 by 21 meters from a 50 meters high flagpole. Kristoffer Ardeña attempted to mount this monumental flagpole. The artist says about this work that it is "about the impossibility of being a Spaniard, always being a foreigner in a land that I belonged to, the layers and layers of complexities one has to deal with in terms of identity, of being Spanish without being one." He adds that the work is also about being both here and there, being from both here and there.

Metro Manila-based Datu Arellano (1980; [linktr.ee/datuarellano](https://linktr.ee/datuarellano)) is a visual artist and musician, and an active member of the Anino Shadowplay Collective. Aside from exhibiting his visual works, Datu performs as an experimental musician/sound artist and he does music composition and arrangement.

For this exhibition, Datu Arellano made the work *Parse This, Flag (2022)* for which he parsed parts of a poem by Dr. José Rizal: *Mi último adiós (My Last Farewell)*, which was written just prior to his execution by firing squad on December 30, 1896 by a squad of

Filipino soldiers of the Spanish Army. This poem is mandatory reading at Filipino highschools and students have to read - and memorize - the poem in the original, colonial Spanish instead of English (the colonial language of instruction in the Philippines today), Filipino or Tagalog (or any other vernacular language spoken in the Philippine archipelago); hence, the poem is poorly understood and quickly forgotten. How would Dr. Rizal have expressed himself if he would have been alive today instead?

Ratu R. Saraswati (1990; ratusaraswati.com) uses storytelling, performance, installation and photography to engage with people as she aims to nurture relationships rich in empathy. Saras obtained her BFA from the Faculty of Art and Design, Institute of Technology Bandung, in 2013. She recently finished her residency at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam (2020-2022).

Shortly after her arrival in the Netherlands, the pandemic SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19 ensued and borders were closed and we were ordered to remain within the confines of our homes. She walked the streets of Amsterdam to find a sense of belonging. Along the way she talked with folks in the neighborhood, and photographed flowers. On one of her walks, she wanted to visit the flowers left at monument *De Schreeuw* for the murdered French teacher Samuel Paty. But when she arrived there, she encountered an anti-islamic group holding a rally amidst the flowers for Paty. She later learned this rally was to commemorate the murder of Theo van Gogh on that day in 2004. Both Van Gogh and Paty were hailed by some as defenders of freedom of expression against Islam. And Saras walked into streets that were both hostile as well as hospitable; her ambulatory conversations resulted in a book, installation and performance: *Route of Flowers*.

Dutch-born and of Khmer descent artist Samboleap Tol (1990; samboleaptol.com) dedicates her practice to the wellbeing of diasporic lives. Recently she completed the MFA programme of Rotterdam's Piet Zwart Institute, and she conducts research at Transnational Art, Identity and Nation (TrAIN) at the University of Arts London. She is most notably interested in locating where love has been dislocated, and distrust has taken its place, and conflates these with entangled postcolonial timelines. By addressing both the spirits, the living and the not yet born, she hopes to make public the importance of repatriation, feeling sorry, letting go of regrets, and unlearning and relearning to love.

In her haptic sound- and painting-installation *Dharma Songs*, she invites visitors to dip flowers in a pot of water, so as to activate voices of her friends responding to the question: "If you'll have children, would you tell them you love them, and why?"

Brisbane-, Godalming- and Gothenburg-based and Denpasar-born Tintin Wulia (1972; [linktr.ee/tintinwulia](http://linktr.ee/tintinwulia)) is an internationally practicing artist and researcher who examines the complexities of borders. She sees the world as an interconnected system – not a borderless world, but a world where entities interface with one another contiguously. Her works through video, sound, paintings, drawings, dance, texts, installation, performance, and public interventions mostly aim to activate interconnections. She represented Indonesia with a solo pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017.

The freedom we want for ourselves isn't necessarily something we want to share. This, in a nutshell, is exemplified by the visa index: those who have a Dutch passport can travel to 170 countries without the need to apply for a visa before embarking on a journey, for Indonesians this is only 83, for Filipinos 72 and for Cambodians 64 ([paspoortindex.org](http://paspoortindex.org)). *The Most International Artist in the Universe (2011)* takes on the cruelty of contingency (after all, it is not my accomplishment that I happen to be born in post-war Netherlands) and, at the very same time, Tintin imagines parallel universes where she could have a different set of rights depending on the different historical trajectories she imagines.

How to proceed? Where to go from here? Where can we go? Home?

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