



# SUSPENDED HISTORIES

Museum Van Loon

Born

1966 PEKANBARU, INDONESIA

Lives/Works

AMSTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS

## FIONA TAN

*Nele/Nellie (2013)*

Fiona Tan (1966, Pekanbaru, Indonesia, lives and works in Amsterdam) is internationally acclaimed for her work comprising film and video installations, photographs and drawings. What characterises her often touching and intensely human work is the great attention to detail, the highly professional editing of image and sound and the close relationship that exists between the work and its environment. Tan first rose to prominence in the late 1990s with her work made from archival film, in which she criticizes the colonial past. This theme has broadened over time to a more general exploration of time and history and our place in it. Her work has been described as poetic as well as subversive. She is especially interested in the way one person looks at another. How do we represent ourselves and what mechanisms determine how we interpret the representation of others?

Many of Tan's works consider the construction of identity and history. The themes of travel, memory and the course of time are often explored. The relevance of her work lies in Tan's ability to establish connections between different times and places. This was also prominently the case in the two-part installation *Disorient*, with which Tan represented the Netherlands at the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009. The role that Venice played as a link between two continents inspired Tan to make *Disorient*; the book *The Travels* by the 13th-century Venetian explorer Marco Polo, were the points of departure. But *Disorient* not only pointed to the unilateral and biased representation of the East by the West but also to the current global economy and its downsides.

Tan made a special video installation for *Suspended Histories* which transports the viewer to a very different time and place. *Nele/Nellie* is inspired by the life of Cornelia van Rijn,

Rembrandt's illegitimate daughter, who at the age of sixteen emigrated to Batavia (present-day Jakarta). Through the character of Cornelia and the way Tan recreates her biography, aspects of Tan's oeuvre come together: a person's place in a particular era and geography and the allusion to an 'exotic' Far East. Little is known about Cornelia's life; no portraits of her are known to exist. But this omission from the history books was for the artist an opportunity to give her imagination free reign. With this unsettling work Tan offers a touching homage to a forgotten woman, whose 'suspended history' becomes activated again.

Fiona Tan studied at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie and at the Rijksakademie voor Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam. Since her graduation in 1997, Tan has had prominent solo exhibitions at the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich, Germany (2007); the Musée d'Art Contemporain in Montreal, Canada (2005); the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles (2005); the New Museum for Contemporary Art in New York (2004); the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago (2004); Museum De Pont in Tilburg, the Netherlands (2003); the Akademie der Künste in Berlin (2003) and the Kunstverein in Hamburg, Germany (2000). Tan participated in Documenta 11 in Kassel, Germany (2002) and in the Biennales of São Paulo (2010), Venice (2001 and 2009), Sydney (2006), Istanbul (2003), Berlin (2001) and Shanghai (2000). Her work has been included in numerous collections, including those of the Tate Modern London, Centre Pompidou Paris, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Neue Nationalgalerie Berlin and Museum De Pont Tilburg.

Fiona Tan, *Nele/Nellie*,  
2013, HD installation, Courtesy the artist  
and Frith Street Gallery, London





Photography  
top: Michiel van Nieuwkerk  
below: Fiona Tan

Fiona Tan  
video still from  
*Nelle/Nellie*  
2013, HD installation,  
courtesy the artist and  
Frith Street Gallery,  
London





