

Marike Schuurman

In *The Embarrassment of Riches* (1987) the English historian Simon Schama produced a standard work on the culture of the Netherlands during the seventeenth century, the 'Golden Age'. A central theme of his book is the conflict between the wealth of the Dutch and their mores. Schama notes how foreign visitors of the time were already confused and astonished by the huge gap between appearance and reality in Dutch society. Both of these aspects have continued to this day: Dutch realism is still partly a fake realism, and Dutch mores are still suffused with a peculiarly stubborn form of Calvinism. You mustn't display your wealth, if you stick your head above the parapet you'll get it chopped off, and 'acting normal is acting quite crazy enough'. The famed Dutch tolerance – there are many historical examples – is primarily a repressive tolerance.

One of the moments in which mentality and reality collide is that when a Dutch person gets into his car. Now he has to go about in public with one of his most costly possessions. As in other countries, the car is a status symbol and an extension of personal identity, but Dutch people seem to take this to the extreme. You mess with my car and you're messing with me. The Dutch seem to drive around virtually exclusively in new cars. There are millions of them and they seem to be permanently stuck, virtually without exception, all washed and polished to a sparkle, in traffic jams.

Visual artist Marike Schuurman (b.1964) is interested in how people deal with limited space, a typically Dutch subject. In her photo and video work she focuses on everyday situations and events, such as the series of photographs of a street where various people wedge themselves through a hole in a wall.

In the hilarious video work *Moving Still*, shot from the window of her own apartment, Schuurman films, in one long take, a couple's grimly determined efforts to park their car in front of their house. The parking space is big enough, but they can't seem to manoeuvre into it. The man, at the wheel while his wife stands outside and gives him directions, is never satisfied with the room in front and in back and on the side of his proud possession. Passing traffic makes it all the more difficult. Finally they give up and drive back to the parking space nearby where the car was before – another one of those very rare parking spaces left in the country. With her sharp gift of observation, Schuurman shows us how rich everyday reality is in simple stories that can easily expand into metaphorical narratives.

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head of exhibitions at the Netherlands Fotomuseum in Rotterdam and special professor of photography at the Erasmus University Rotterdam.

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