



# EXPERIMENTS

# ON BIRDS

*Experiment on bird orientation and their interpretation* refers to an article from German ornithologist Gustav Kramer published in Ibis in 1952. In his pioneering paper, Kramer demonstrates how birds use the sun as a compass to orientate themselves, mimicking their mythological archetype Icarus. Seven years after the publication, Kramer tragically met his death at a bottom of a cliff, putting an end to his climbing journey in Calabria where he was searching for rock pigeons. Many questions about avian orientation remain unanswered nowadays and this sad story could be seen as one of Jean de La Fontaine's moralistic fables of the 17th century. Only in this case the moral lesson remains to be found.

The display shown at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten tells the story of the artist's year-long research into birds and traditional games. *The thorn birds* performance documents his journey in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region, where the artist befriended Freddy Vallin, a pigeon fancier whose everyday routine he followed, focusing on the relationship that linked the birds to their owner as an experience of time, space and death. The ethnographical talk recounts the pigeon racing protocol, relying on the ability of the bird to come back home when released from places it had never before encountered. The performance progressively slides into a poetic evocation of the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur by turning the world into an endless labyrinth.

*About Dutch landscape* also proposes a ritualistic relation to space. The video features a group of fierljeppen jumpers from Friesland, repetitively "flying over" a canal by climbing up a tilting pole like gymnasts. The practice is believed to have originated from farmers who used poles to leap over small water drainage channels to access

different plots of land. The sport consists of a long jump where the movement turns into an aberration of its origin. By placing the camera on top of the pole, the artist bends and distorts the image of the archetypal Dutch landscape.

As with the fierljeppen pole for farmers, the shadows of workers' tools from northern France are also present in the exhibition. The audience is invited to throw "javelots" at large wooden cubes, giant darts from medieval origins that became very successful in the end of the 19th century until the end to the 1960s in the coal mining community. The tip of the dart resembles closely the tip of the tool used by miners to pierce underground walls and place dynamite inside. The feathered objects strangely seem to belong more to a remote savage tribe, as if throwing the ancestral dart becomes a new ritual that allows the players to connect with an "interior indian" as the artist says, a stranger from the past at the crossroads of Perceval the Welshman and the grunting ape from *2001: a space odyssey*.

The love parade of the bowerbird, as told in a scientific article from *BBC Nature* and seen on a wall drawing, illustrates the artist's interior animal world. Male bowerbirds create optical illusions to attract their females arranging items in their bowers to create "forced perspectives" and appear bigger than they actually are. They also build structures and decorate them with sticks and brightly coloured objects in an attempt to attract a mate. The behaviour of the bowerbird could be paralleled with the display of the artist, where he parades in front of a desired audience. As for the unfortunate Kramer, the moral is still to be found. But the journey through the endless labyrinths continues.

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# ORIENTATION AND THEIR INTERPRETATION

A PRESENTATION BY ERIC GIRAUDET DE BOUDEMANGE

