

Xavier Ribas (b. 1960, Barcelona) lives and works in Brighton and Barcelona.

After a study of social anthropology at the University of Barcelona, he studied documentary photography at the Newport School of Art and Design in the UK (1993). Prior to creating the video installation *Greenhouse* in the Netherlands, he produced photographic series on changing landscapes, usually in the periphery of big cities like Madrid, Brussels, London, Marseille and Berlin. In these he paid particular attention to what he calls the suburbanization of corporations: the emergence of new architectural environments on the outskirts of large cities that shape the logistics of the economic activities of large corporations.

Xavier Ribas came to the Netherlands as part of an international exchange project among museums and universities in five countries (the International Photography Research Network, Changing Faces Commission No. 2, with the theme 'Work'). He photographed industrial estates near Amsterdam and Hoofddorp, but he was also fascinated by Dutch greenhouse agriculture. He was familiar with the greenhouses in the vicinity of his hometown of Barcelona, which work in close cooperation with Dutch flower growers.

Ribas was stunned by the enormous scale of the greenhouses in the Netherlands. In Medemblik, about 70 km north of Amsterdam, he found a large-scale greenhouse complex being built by contractors for the agricultural company Agriport, based in the neighbouring province of Friesland. One of these greenhouses is 800 m long and covers an area of more than 250,000 m². He understood that if he wanted to produce a work about the changing landscape of the Netherlands and the changing work within it, this was the greenhouse he had to choose.

The construction of this greenhouse requires the acquisition of several properties belonging to farmers who live in the vicinity. The farmers are paid a visit by an

Agriport employee, who politely asks the farmers to contact the agricultural company if they are thinking of moving. At the moment, a few farmhouses are still to be found alongside Agriport's building complex, but they will most likely eventually be bought up and torn down.

Ribas decided that the gargantuan dimensions of Agriport's greenhouses could best be made palpable through the use of video. His video installation *Greenhouse* consists of three components. One large video projection shows a continuous, unedited, travelling shot from one end to the other of the greenhouse under construction. The speed of the movement of the camera is comparable to a slow steady pace of walking. The length of the shot makes us feel the gigantic size of the Agriport greenhouse: the 'walk' from one end of the greenhouse to the other takes us around 20 minutes! On a small screen, we see a couple, Lenie and Reinier Muller. They are one of the three families who sold their land to Agriport. Through headphones, we hear them talk about their memories of the place: the landscape when Mr Muller's family arrived in the polder in the 1930s, a wooden house they lived in when the German soldiers flooded the polder in the Second World War, the strawberries in the garden, a party on a Sunday afternoon. Xavier Ribas lets their voices accompany us in our 'walk' past the greenhouse. He has the Mullers' story act as an aperture to the past of the place, while we contemplate the making of its future. The third element in the installation is a projected text by the artist about *Greenhouse* and its background.

Greenhouse shows us the transition of a landscape and the process of the scaling-up of Dutch agriculture. The video makes us experience this through the feeling of the size of the greenhouse in the first projection, and the opportunity of having the Mullers tell their story in the second screen. The layering of the installation makes the viewer simultaneously experience the contemplation of both past and future.

Triple-projection
video installation
2007

pp. 269-279
Stills from *Greenhouse*
2007
21'45" looping / 23'04" looping /
text slide projection, with sound

Print Room Collection, Leiden
University Library

Xavier Ribas

Greenhouse











