



WOUTER STELWAGEN

YELLOW GALLERY November 2024 Leiden

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The night is only a temporary absence of light, of light –Benjamin Gibbard - I'm Building a Fire

Wouter Stelwagen's photographic work is a poignant exploration of the intricate relationship between nature and human intervention. His images illustrate the fragile, often skewed balance between humanity and the natural world. Urban landscapes and man-made structures frequently emerge in his work as forces that suppress and encroach upon nature. Yet, Stelwagen subtly reveals that nature is not entirely subdued; in some of his photographs, trees and grasses are seen breaking through these human-made barriers, symbolizing the relentless power of nature reclaiming its territory over time.

Though Stelwagen's work avoids overt environmental activism, it unmistakably raises critical questions about human dominance and our impact on the planet. The disruption caused by human activity is rendered palpable in his imagery. His work treads the fine line between documentation and poetic vision, inviting the viewer to contemplate our place in—and influence on—the natural world.

In his series *Approach*, conceived just before the COVID-19 crisis, Stelwagen masterfully intertwines this theme with contemporary events. The series captures the estrangement and dissociation induced by air travel's impact on the natural atmosphere. Nocturnal landscapes are pierced by streaks of light, created by approaching aircraft, captured through an extended exposure time. These images are not only visually striking but also carry deep symbolic weight. The light trails evoke a sense of alienation, forming patterns that are simultaneously familiar and yet utterly foreign.

These photographs provoke thought: What is approaching us? Is it a threat, an impending disaster, or is there a glimmer of hope in these mysterious lights? The pandemic, largely spread through increased air travel and tourism, upended the world. As humanity retreated indoors to contain the virus, billions were funneled into the aviation industry to keep it afloat. The *Approach* series encapsulates this paradoxical moment in history with remarkable precision, where the visual beauty of the images stands in stark contrast to the underlying critical questions of globalization, mobility, and our treatment of nature.

Wouter Stelwagen offers a powerful reflection on the world we inhabit, without prescribing direct answers. Instead, he invites us to ponder the relationship between humanity and nature, the marks we leave behind, and the future that awaits us. His work resonates long after viewing, like a visual poetry that confronts us with our own vulnerability and responsibility in this world.



Wouter Stelwagen on location

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Approach (Bakkum)

c-print

75 x 100 cm | 29,53 x 39,37 in.





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Approach (Assendelf)

c-print

75 x 100 cm | 29,53 x 39,37 in.





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Approach (Assendelft)

c-print

75 x 100 cm | 29,53 x 39,37 in.





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Approach (Spaarndam)

c-print

75 x 100 cm | 29,53 x 39,37 in.





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Approach (Bakkum)

c-print

75 x 100 cm | 29,53 x 39,37 in.





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Approach (Castricum)

c-print

75 x 100 cm | 29,53 x 39,37 in.





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Approach (Oude Meer)

c-print

75 x 100 cm | 29,53 x 39,37 in.





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Approach (Heemskerk)

c-print

75 x 100 cm | 29,53 x 39,37 in.





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Approach (Nieuw-Vennep)
c-print
75 x 100 cm | 29,53 x 39,37 in.





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BIOGRAPHY

Wouter Stelwagen graduated from The Gerrit Rietveld Academy for fine Arts in Amsterdam. The focus of his work has been the urban landscape in the broadest sense of the word. In his projects he explores the boundary of the 'natural' and the 'cultural' world. He tries to reduce the manmade into alienated objects which can be explored and investigated, like individual portraits. His work has been exhibited internationally in galleries, museums and art festivals.

Recent exhibitions include: Republiek Gallery, Amsterdam (NL), Galerie Caroline O'Brien, Amsterdam (NL), SBK, Amsterdam (NL), Seelevel Gallery, Amsterdam (NL), Unseen, Amsterdam (NL), Gallery 825 (VS), Contemporary Ruhr Essen, Essen (GE), Het Wilde weten, Rotterdam (NL), Galerie van Zoetendaal, Amsterdam (NL)
Collections: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fries Museum



GALLERY INFORMATION

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Opening times:

By appointment

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