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### Giving a Rotterdam: ArtReview goes Dutch

Posted by [artreview.com](#) on 10 February 2010 at 2:45pm in [First View](#)

#### View Reviews

By [Oliver Basciano](#)

Go to Rotterdam, they said. See what's there, they said. In places, though, it seems that the last people to have had this idea were the Luftwaffe. So bar a few solo architectural highlights (Koolhaas has his base in Rotterdam, after all) and the endless tracts of concrete and car parks, there isn't much left for the rest of us. That said, it wasn't all misery: there was some good art. The city has two main institutional spaces, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen and Witte de With, both of which really punch above their location in terms of exhibition programming. To coincide with the Art Rotterdam fair (the primary purpose of ArtReview's trip), the former opened an extensive retrospective of Carsten Höller in its largest gallery, alongside its labyrinth of small stately rooms housing masters of Dutch painting; and the latter staged a four-day, round-the-clock film and video marathon.

Art fairs will always be like speed dating: a quick glance and it's time to move on. It was either an act of brilliant irony or great foolishness, then, that many of the galleries participating in Art Rotterdam brought along artists who specifically concentrated on forms of looking and depth. Either way, it's to be applauded. Irene Kopelman for example, whose work was shown on Amsterdam gallery Motive's stand, takes observation and replication to its extreme but logical conclusion in *Reconstructing Time* (2005), a work consisting of four museum vitrines, two of which displayed exact replications of a specific genus of fossils in porcelain and the other two of which contained small intricate line drawings documenting minute fossils as seen through a microscope. They cast the act of looking into the scientific, taxonomical arena, balancing it with the detailed eye of drawing. Obsessive detailing was also on display in three works by Richard Forster at MOT International. Drawn in almost (but happily not quite) photorealist style, *Hackney High Rise*, *Hackney III*, and *Ostalgie I and II* (all 2009) went beyond the formal subjects of a London housing block and the patterns of old East German product design, supplanting them with a study of found form and geometrics. Paul Housley and Stephan Balkenhol shared a stand at Amsterdam's Galerie Akinci, and though formally similar in their paint style (though Balkenhol's medium is wood-carved sculpture), it was Housley's diminutive oil works that drew. Housley, like Forster, puts subject matter on a back burner; though he references Dutch and French historical painting, his focus is on an immersive, textured layering of paint. Small paintings were the highlight at Liverpool's Ceri Hand Gallery, too. Henny Aclouque's miniatures, depicting various methods of suicide in the place of the romantic imagery typical to the format, remarkably managed to divorce themselves from their gruesome subject matter, revealing painting's historical lineage and symbolism as Aclouque's primary concern here.



Henny Aclouque, *Ovation 3*, 2009, Mixed Media on Canvas, Courtesy the artist and Ceri Hand Gallery

Away from the booths and into the one Rotterdam street not designed to the shade of grey, I present myself at Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, though by now I've missed the official midmorning preview of the Höller exhibition (a bar + a toothless barwoman + a painter and a recently up-stick-ed London gallerist as drinking buddies = groggy morning after). A quick bit of suasion aimed at the curator, though, and I'm in: the vast space sparsely filled with slickly realised works by the serious Belgian is mine alone. It's a bit greatest-hits – and what else is there to say? You either like oversize sculptural mushrooms, a gently swinging giant's mobile of caged canaries and aluminium curving corridors of progressively narrowing proportions, or you don't. Such playfulness is of course wrapped up in some earnest faff about dividing and redividing the exhibition space and works in two. Höller I think becomes more interesting when he leaves such spatial concerns and turns to human action and direction, as evidenced in his 2005 *Flicker Films*, strobed footage of different African dance performances, also shown.