

A Matter

Stroom

of Time

Thom
Puckey en het
Thorbecke
monument

ENG



Thom Puckey,
Thorbecke
monument in
The Hague
(detail), 2017
Photo: Sander
Foederer

Introduction

Purposefully enhanced

The year is 2007. Stroom is preparing the long-term programme *nu monument* ('now monument'), and adds the subtitle '*about the possibility (or impossibility) of a contemporary monument*'. At the time, we observed a growing public call for monuments, and we wondered whether contemporary art is actually able to bring forth new examples. Can it play a part in creating and maintaining collective awareness? Hasn't art become too specialised, too multifaceted, too layered – in short, too complicated to communicate a 'clear' message to a broad audience?

Around a year ago, we had the opportunity to read the *Initiatiefvoorstel* ('Draft Initiative', July 2007), in which The Hague's municipal council requested a public statue in honour of J.R. Thorbecke. We were intrigued by one, somewhat intimate, instruction: "While the initiating party has a strong appreciation for contemporary/abstract art: the statue needs to be recognisable!" Apparently contemporary art was equated with abstract work. And in contrast with this contemporary art, the author was looking for recognisability. What exactly had to be recognised, we wondered, and by whom? After all, even if Thorbecke's statue was completely true to life, only a few individuals would recognise the man by his physical appearance alone. Moreover, don't we mainly want to remember this historic statesman for his vision, his ideas, his achievements? Can these actually be represented?

Over a decade after The Hague's municipal council adopted the draft initiative, the new monument for Thorbecke by artist Thom Puckey was unveiled at Lange Voorhout. It is a juxtaposition of two pedestals, each of which supports its own tableau. Thorbecke, carved in white marble, looks out into the world from his study. It's a clear image: a recognisable portrait realised in a classical material. A fine tribute. But Puckey seems to have consciously complicated this image, because Thorbecke is flanked by an identical pedestal, which serves as the base for an office table. Seated at this table are two men, while a third woman has just settled on the table itself. They are clearly holding a meeting. This part of the monument is made from stainless steel. How does this get-together relate to Thorbecke the statesman? What connects the two scenes? The ensemble raises all sorts of questions. "Why did they erect two monuments?" one person wondered out loud. Or: "Who are those people?" Which is amusing, because they are almost entirely naturalistic representations of real-life contemporaries – exceptionally recognisable, in other words.

A unequivocal image tends to guide and predetermine the viewer's response. A complex, sculptural ensemble like this monument for Thorbecke stirs the imagination and encourages the viewer to add his or her own meaning. The artist purposefully enhances what we already think we know. Which in turn creates a sense of involvement and connection with the present.

The open and stimulating qualities of the new monument formed the direct occasion for the exhibition *A Matter of Time*. It does not answer every question, but rather offers handles for new trains of thought and new dialogue. This means that in a sense, *A Matter of Time* forms a fresh, unwritten instalment in the *nu monument* ('now monument') programme.

Arno van Roosmalen
director Stroom Den Haag



Reflecting on a Pedestal

A conversation between Ksenia Galiaeva and Thom Puckey

16 May 2017, The Hague

Ksenia Galiaeva – On the photo you see it as one monument but actually there are two.



Thom Puckey – Or three!

Left:
Thom Puckey,
Thorbecke
monument in
The Hague, 2017
Photo: Thom
Puckey

Right:
Ksenia Galiaeva
and Thom Puckey
at the Thorbecke
monument
Photo: Ksenia
Galieva

Ks – Yes, the third one is the suggestion of space, but the two you can really separate, the pedestals are made of different materials.

Th – It's maybe the first and the only time that I've used a known form in a public sculpture, the form of a monument with the idea of a pedestal and a statue on a pedestal.

Here you have one sort of hero, historical persona, and you have three normal people. My take on Thorbecke is based on what I find interesting about him, which maybe says more about me and our present times than it would specifically say about him as a historical figure. He looks like a philosopher-king, someone whose being is based on learning. He's sitting at his desk with his books and he is studying, he is preparing something. I turned him into a figure I personally find very sympathetic.

Ks – And now he is balanced with two men and a woman. The first thing I notice is the communication - you said it's like a time machine - communication between the past and the present. The characters are curious about each other, though they sit in different rooms.

Th – They don't have any eye contact themselves, they are busy, and we are the link.

Ks – But the doors are open, there is a possibility. Everything is looked at from the point of the present, and we are the connection, the medium for communication between those people.

Th – The rooms are next door to each other, but with a hundred and whatever years between. The openings in the doorways tend to obscure more than they show. And our position, standing at the bottom – you have to walk up the steps so you raise yourself a bit up above the street level, so you become a bit monumentalised yourself. Then you walk around and you also see the underside of the tables and chairs; is that unusual in a monument?

Ks – When we walked here I saw a statue of a horseman; I always look at the bellies of horses in monuments. You look from the same perspective at this table; it has four legs, and someone is sitting on it.

Th – I never thought of that comparison with my tables. The female figure sitting on the table could be a figure sitting side-saddle. Horse bellies compared to undersides of tables, neither of which are particularly interesting, are they?



Ksenia Galiaeva,
Untitled, 2011,
analogue colour
photograph
Photo: courtesy
the artist

Ks – Bellies are the vulnerable parts, even with furniture. The horses usually have one leg up in the air. Your table and chair do the same. I often make photos from a lying-down position. In the summer house I am usually just lying somewhere under a tree. For my recent series of a window with clouds I have to lie under the table.

Th – Like the view of a child?

Ks – Yes, or a lazy, grounded view.

Th – When I look at the photographs of your parents it's like a child's vision of parents. Parents become quite monumental. I spent a lot of time as a child under tables, playing indoors, and I think that that childhood vision of things occurring under tables – when I look at the monument I still see that. I always think in front of your photographs that I am

not just a passive viewer. They encourage an active eye, an active brain. The fact that I mirror one of the pedestals gives something of a reflective possibility to the on-looker: they are encouraged to reflect, literally. Maybe this is the link, intuitively the reason I chose some works to put into the exhibition and left out others.

Ks – I think it is the kind of monument that encourages you to look well, to walk around it to understand what is happening.

Th – Where your photos are to my mind successful is when the normality of the situation is elevated so it becomes significant. There is something comparable – between the normality of the scene and the significance of the scene – nothing special about three people talking around a table - but there's something elevated into significance.

Ks – I am trying to influence my own memory through the photos, maybe that's why simple actions become significant. I am sort of making a memory for the future how I want to remember things.

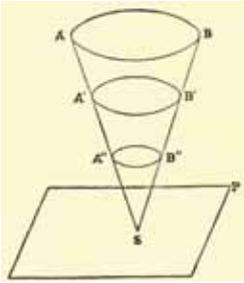
Th – With my monument you can apply exactly the same words - I am making a memory for the future. I think of a Tarkovsky film *The Mirror*. Often when he is looking back into memory, a figure turns to look at you. I would love to imagine that that was also through a doorway or window. I like that Thorbecke is turning around because he notices that you are looking at him.

Ks – I like that, looking at each other through time and that every memory is in the present.

Thom Puckey,
Thorbecke
monument in
The Hague,
2017
Photo: Sander
Foederer



Henri Bergson (1859-1941), cone of 'time duration'



(Thom and I, we both use a cone as a motif in our works. For me, Henri Bergson's cone of 'time duration' is a clear image of memory and experience constantly seeping through into the present. I suggest explaining this in more detail, but Thom thinks people should go and look

it up themselves - to trigger the active reader, I guess).

Th – It is very interesting to explain this to students that according to Bergson memory is stored in time. And that seems to be a very inspiring and mystifying thing. It is not stored in your brain, your brain is only an instrument which can rediscover it again in time. The double cone for me is still an area where I am sitting on the seashore and the whole ocean is in front of me. W.B. Yeats used the spirals inside of double cones as a model for universal history but also human psychology. And it's also immediately apparent with optics - light shining through a lens is brought almost to a point and then out again so you get a double cone.

Ks – It has the shape of an hour-glass so it actually shows what you wanted to say, memory stored in time?

Th – You knew that all along but it only occurred to me a day ago. The hourglass is a bit fatter than the cone.

Ks – More hips.



Thom Puckey,
*Establishing the
Double Cone
(D.E.) 02, 2016*
Analogue photo,
on barite photo
paper
50 x 50 cm
Courtesy Gallery
Annie Gentils,
Antwerp

Th – You made me remember something: Oskar Schlemmer turns a female figure into a conjunction between two cones. The upper one is the shoulders and the breast, then you have the skirt. And for me the double cone is like the making abstract of a little boy's vision of a female figure, of wonder that this thing, not like me, could exist.

The doubling of the doorway in the monument is a different type of doubling than the cone because it's two openings next to each other. This has been in my mind for years and comes from Duchamp's door, which is like two doorways with a door between them. When one door is shut the other one is open, like an unsolvable riddle.



Ks – Does this have to do with linearity?

Left:
Marcel
Duchamp, *Door*
11 rue Larrey,
1927

Right:
5 Huizen 5
Steden - Thom
Puckey. *Het
huis in Arnhem*
(detail)
Aluminum and
charcoal, 1983
Photo: Thom
Puckey

Th – This almost metaphysical feeling, two adjacent rooms where things can occur in both of them, next to each other, but not aware of each other. In the first sequence of the Antonioni film *The Eclipse*, you see the woman framed in one doorway and in the back the man framed in another doorway. They have completely lost each other, even though they are living together - very intense use of this basic filming technique of framing.

Ks – I use this framing trick too, as indication for different stories within one image, the parallel worlds next to each other. It is also a reference to the medium of photography, narrowing the vision, a lens you look through and everything it leaves out of frame. Non-linearity for me is a possibility of a parallel history. That's why I describe my work as autobiographical

fiction; one chooses to make a story linear in retrospect, but actually my head doesn't work like that – too many things are happening at the same time even if I am not consciously aware of it.

Th – Exactly – here we are talking about two narratives, maybe three, if you include yourself, which are taking place on the pedestals of this monument. There's the narrative in the past of Thorbecke, and what I call the narrative in the future - these three figures tensely engaged with each other. They are in adjacent rooms but not aware of each other, the past is like a room which

Thom Puckey,
Thorbecke
monument in
The Hague
(detail), 2017
Photo: Thom
Puckey



Thom Puckey,
Pride is Pride,
Doubt is the Fall,
1985
wood, cement
Collection: Rijks-
dienst voor het
Cultureel erfgoed
(Cultural Heritage
Agency of the
Netherlands)

is adjacent to the future; I don't think Bergson even recognises such a thing as the present.

Ks – So Bergson wouldn't recognise us?

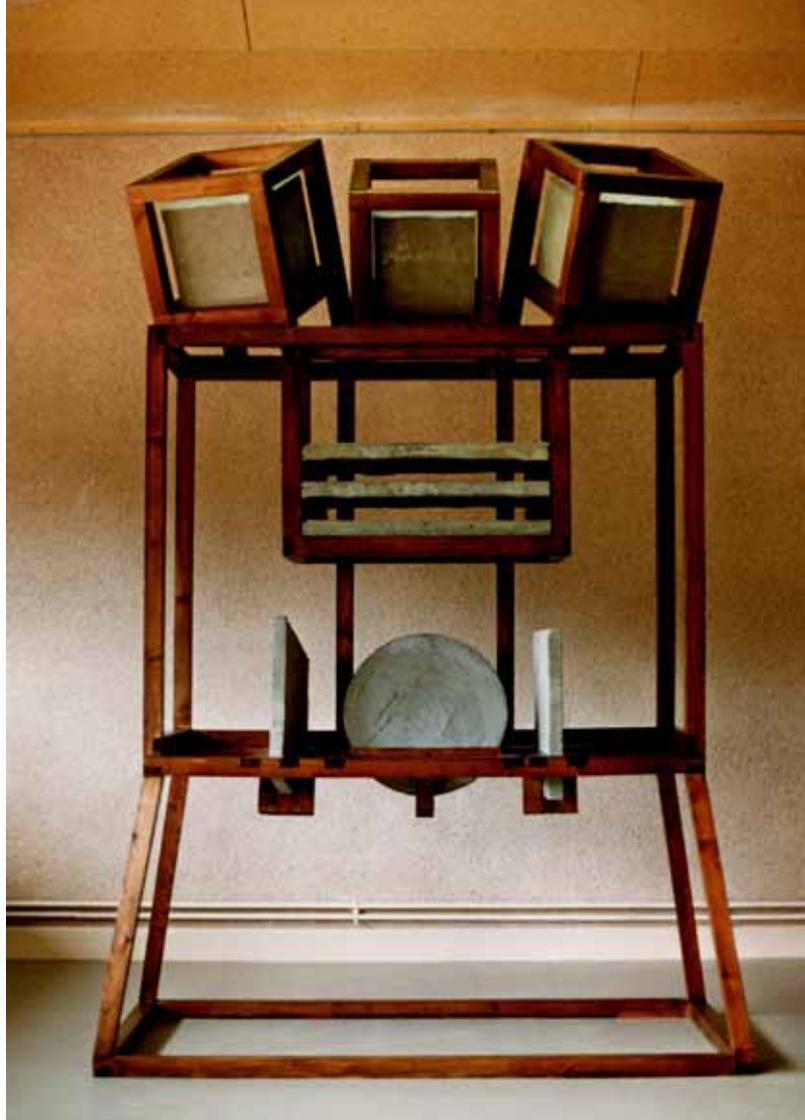
Th – I'm thinking now of the image of the point of the cone, skating along.

Ks – Exactly, like a pen on paper. Things just floooow out.

Th – It has no choice, there is nothing else to do except that, right?

Ksenia Gالياeva

Galia Gالياeva (Pskov, Russia 1976) lives and works in Amsterdam and Antwerp. She moved to the Netherlands to study at the Academie voor Kunst & Vormgeving 's Hertogenbosch, and received her MFA at Post St. Joost, Breda. She works as an artist/photographer, writes essays and teaches photography at Willem de Kooning Academy in Rotterdam. She showed her work in many group and solo exhibitions abroad and in the Netherlands and her photographs are in the collection of the Fries Museum in Leeuwarden and the Nederlandse Bank. She is represented by Ellen de Bruijne Projects in Amsterdam.
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Thom Puckey, *True Light*, 1987-88
Mixed materials
1300 x 300 x 200 cm
Photos: Victor Nieuwenhuis and Thom Puckey. Courtesy Gallery Annie Gentils,
Antwerp



Thom Puckey, *Report from the Childrens' Club*, 1987
Mixed materials
217 x 80 x 284 cm
Collection: Narcisse Tordoier, Antwerp



Thom Puckey, *Spinoza*, 1988
Mixed materials
210 x 200 x 122 cm
Photo: Thom Puckey. Courtesy Gallery Annie Gentils, Antwerp



Thom Puckey, *Treachery*,
2013
Statuario marmble, lens
122,5 x 64 x 165 cm
Photos: Gert-Jan van
Rooij. Courtesy
Gallery Annie Gentils,
Antwerp





H.A. Leenhoff,
Thorbecke
statue in Amster-
dam, circa 1876
Photo: Thom
Puckey

Statues of Thorbecke, *a matter of time*

'Imagination and ideals also have their place in politics'
J.R. Thorbecke

by Jan Drentje

Upon Thorbecke's death in 1872, friend and foe alike almost immediately put him on a pedestal. As the leader of a third Cabinet bearing his name, he had died with his boots on, calm and without a hint of uncertainty. He was an upstanding man, who knew that he had *'truth and justice'* on his side.

People no longer talked about the tensions that continued to be created by Thorbecke's unwavering political positions since his maiden speech in the House of Representatives in 1840. Without the Liberal upheavals that spread across Europe in 1848, Thorbecke would never have had the opportunity to realise his constitutional ideas. And without the willingness to compromise of other men like the Hague lawyer Dirk Donker Curtius, the revision of the Dutch constitution would have grinded to a halt. The professor and politician Thorbecke was methodical in his approach. The King was politically side-lined: henceforth, the directly-elected parliament (which was still based on census suffrage) would have the final say on all matters of government. There had to be a strict separation of public and private affairs. This amounted to a break with the Netherlands' traditional oligarchical political culture, the 'time-honoured Dutch habits' of favouritism and an aversion to centralised government. As such, Thorbecke continued in the vein of

the bourgeois movement of the Patriot Period and the constitutional experiments of the Batavian Republic and the French occupation (1795-1813), as well as completing the process of centralisation of the Dutch state. A new balance was brought to public governance at the national, provincial and municipal levels – The Constitution also balanced public governance at the national, provincial and municipal levels – creating a decentralised unitary state that to this day is referred to as the *House of Thorbecke*.

This all contributed to the posthumous image of Thorbecke as a brilliant statesman: the man who had responded to the call of his age and taken timely action. And this is also how he viewed himself: *For many years, I have pursued a modest and steady line of inquiry, until I concluded that a reform was necessary, and I took action in this spirit at the earliest occasion.* Thorbecke became a national hero, although this actually diverted attention from the close relationship between his academic and political record and the pan-European Liberal movement.

The statesman

Shortly after Thorbecke's funeral in The Hague, a committee was set up to raise funds for a statue in his honour. This soon resulted in a budget of 50,000 guilders. But there were still those who didn't want to keep running into Thorbecke at the Binnenhof – even after the fellow had died. Ultimately, the initiative of The Hague's municipal council was blocked by the conservative Minister Heemskerck.

That is why the monument to the statesman who transcended party politics eventually materialised in Amsterdam, in 1876, in the shape of a statue by sculp-

tor H.A. Leenhoff: a dignified, earnest Thorbecke, his right hand resting on a book of law. In the view of some contemporaries, this image reflected his *'great mind, steely resolve, organising talent'*. Had Thorbecke only ever been a *'stern, uncompromising'* fellow? The cantata sung during the statue's unveiling refers to the tension his close friends sensed between emotion and reason when Thorbecke spoke *'heart to heart'*: a *'crust of ice, concealing the most comforting fire'*.

The Romantic philosopher

Regardless of the restraint Thorbecke showed in his public appearances, his political career testifies to tremendous dedication. We can gain a good understanding of Thorbecke's inner world from the letters he wrote during his 1820-1824 tour of various university towns in Germany, the heartland of Romantic *Dichter und Denker* in that period. He made a close study of the German post-Kantian philosophy, which initially centred on a radical subjectification of the thought process. Which value could religion, politics, science and history possibly have, if all thoughts and feelings are subjective? Thorbecke went through an existential, Romantic crisis: *'My reason has been unseated and the balance between the various capacities of my mind has been disturbed'*. He discovered his inner emotional life, fell in love and feared losing control over himself.

The only place where he could find peace was music – particularly performances of Mozart's work. In art, form and content briefly became one, restoring the harmony between reason and emotion. He saw art as an expression of humanity's creative powers; its genius. This Romantic philosophy of art enabled Thorbecke to overcome his crisis. Nature and mankind, feeling and reasoning were all part of a single, interconnected



Hans Bayens,
Thorbecke
statue in Zwolle,
1992
Photo: Wikimedia
Commons

whole that continued to develop in creative terms. Humanity shaped the flow of history, and was directly connected, through its creative powers, to the divine origin of everything. And this is also how Thorbecke came to view history itself: a process through which our times are shaped. Which laws does this evolutionary process adhere to? The promotion of liberty and well-being called for legislation that was adapted to the times and could furthermore direct future developments. In a Europe defined by the effects of the French Revolution, the phenomenon of the Constitution eventually took centre stage. How should the development of central states relate to the modern freedoms of the citizenry? How can political demagoguery, chaos and bloodshed be avoided? This required careful design. The institutional structuring of the state too was a work of art.

The politician

The state as a work of art came to occupy a central place in Thorbecke's activities as a professor. His inaugural lecture in Leiden in 1835 dealt with the Constitution. This not only resulted in the scholarly publication *Notes to the Constitution* (1839) but also in the *Trial Revision of the Constitution* (1840), which marked the start of Thorbecke's – frequently dominant – involvement in Dutch politics.

The image of the passionate politician was given shape in a new statue by Hans Bayens unveiled in 1992 in Zwolle. A number of citizens of this town who were concerned about the quality of our public governance had set up a Thorbecke foundation. Thorbecke's intellect and decisiveness could still serve as a source of inspiration. But what would Thorbecke have made of our times? In 1998, a play by the famous Volkskrant

journalist Jan Blokker, *The Consultation*, was staged in Zwolle during a symposium about the future of Europe. In the play, Thorbecke in heaven offered his counsel to the Dutch Cabinet. And Jan Blokker offered his opinion on our present-day state institutions. Shouldn't mayors be elected directly – as Thorbecke had already wanted – and shouldn't we abolish the Senate? Wasn't our legacy of 1848 in need of a major overhaul?

The architect

Precisely this aspect – the way in which our democratic state is given shape in our own times – is expressed in a new monument for Thorbecke by Thom Puckey, which was unveiled on 11 February 2017 at Lange Voorhout. Finally, Thorbecke has been given a lasting tribute in The Hague. It isn't an example of classical statuary, but rather two loosely-connected scenes. Thorbecke – in marble – is shown seated at his desk, turning to look at us – or is he looking at 'het Torentje'? His perspective on the structuring of the Dutch state was based on a close study of European history. In his view, the course of history pointed toward 'general citizenship of the state': a further development of individualism. This is reflected in the second scene: an informal meeting between two men and a woman, who is sitting on the table itself. One couldn't think of a more democratic image. But how do we actually give shape to our common interest in our own times? How can we renew our national democracy when across Europe, we are becoming increasingly dependent on one another? The artist has put 'democracy around the table' up on a pedestal, but one of the table legs sticks out over the edge, hanging in thin air. How precarious is our own position today, in the 21st century? It's up to the viewer to find a connection between the two scenes.

My personal interpretation: how do new generations connect to the heritage of the 19th century – a time when European scholars like Thorbecke laid the foundations for today's democracies?

A work of art that has its own story. A statue of the political thinker Thorbecke, and a fine expression of his ideal: *'Everything I have written for over a quarter-century is intended to take action or inspire action.'* And our times too call for the creation of new shapes: *'Each age, each generation is filled with its own ideal, but it remains to be seen to which extent this ideal is recognised and realised.'* It is no coincidence that the viewer encounters his or her mirror image on the stainless steel pedestal that supports the second scene. This makes the viewer part of the statue's story. The ball is in the court of the viewer, as an active citizen of the state.

Jan Drentje (1962), Ph.D. University of Amsterdam *Thorbecke, een filosoof in de politiek* (2004), publishes on political and intellectual history in both scientific and popular magazines and newspapers. He serves as Rector of a school for adult education, where he also teaches philosophy. Drentje is a researcher of political history at the Ernst Kossmann Institute, University of Groningen, and board member of the Thorbecke Foundation.

Thom Puckey

Biography

Thom Puckey (Crayford, England, 1948) moved to the Netherlands in 1979, and since then his work as an artist has evolved from performances, installations and abstract/optical sculptures, through to sculptures in bronze and marble, strongly referring to 19th century realism. In addition to all this, he has carried out many works for the public space, including the imposing 'Vesalius Sculpture' in Terneuzen from 2007, and this year the Thorbecke Monument in The Hague. Since 2002 Puckey has been working on an extensive series of nudes often with weapons as attributes, which begin as life-sized versions in clay, are then cast in plaster, and are finally carved in Italy in white marble. He works long and intensively with the live model, something he deems essential to his practice. Recently, the place of the female nude in his work has been changing: the figure/person has become less of a central subject, and more someone who is demonstrating the intangible qualities of light and time. As a result of this, analogue studio photography has been gaining increasing importance in his oeuvre. Light in his photography has the simultaneous role of source, subject, and recorder of duration and moment, this through the use of fundamental analogue techniques.

Thom Puckey's work is to be found in the collections of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, MMKA Arnhem, MUHKA Antwerp, Museum Beelden aan Zee Scheveningen, Museo Centro Luigi Pecci Prato,

the Caldic Collection and many other public and private collections.

In 1989/90 Puckey was given a large retrospective exhibition of his work from the 1980s in the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, and in 2013 a solo exhibition in the Municipal Museum 's-Hertogenbosch. Further to this he has done many other solo exhibitions in numerous institutions in Europe and America, including Zeno X Gallery Antwerp, Shedhalle Zurich, De Vleeshal Middelburg, Greenberg Wilson Gallery New York, Galleria Carini Firenze, Museo Centro Luigi Pecci, Prato. He has also participated in many important group exhibitions, including Documenta 6, *Alles und Noch Viel Mehr* Kunstmuseum Bern, *Een Grote Activiteit* Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Aperto 88* XLIII Biennale di Venezia, *Het Grote Gedicht* Nieuwe Kerk The Hague, *De Steen Vliegt* Institute Neerlandais Paris, *Entr'acte* Palazzo Albiroli Bologna, *The Uncanny* Tate Liverpool, *Das Unheimliche* Museum of Modern Art Vienna, *Territoria* Centro Arte Pecci Prato (curator: Thom Puckey), *Gwangju Biennale 2010* Gwangju South Korea, *The Artefactum Years* MuHKA Antwerp, *Silence Out Loud* (curator Joost Zwagerman) Museum Kranenburgh, Bergen.

Thom Puckey has been a tutor at several art academies in the Netherlands including the Rijksakademie Amsterdam and AKV St Joost 's-Hertogenbosch. In 1986 he was awarded the Sandberg Prize for Fine Art by the City of Amsterdam.

Thom Puckey is represented throughout Europe by Gallery Annie Gentils, Antwerp.

Colophon

A Matter of Time. Thom Puckey and the Thorbecke monument

Texts: Arno van Roosmalen,
Ksenia Galiaeva, Thom Puckey,
Jan Drentje
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Basic guide design: Thonik

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Stroom School

Parallel to the exhibition, a programme of additional activities will be taking place. On 24 June and 15 July there will be guided tours (*Wandelen met Maup*) to the Thorbecke monument and other locations that have a relation with Thorbecke. Start at 14:00 hrs at Stroom. Check the website and social media for up-to-date information..

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Den Haag

Thom Puckey,
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Photo: Sander
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