

**Group exhibition that reflects on the culture  
of the heart of the United States**

03/10/08 – 25/01/09

**3/10/08 - 25/1/09**



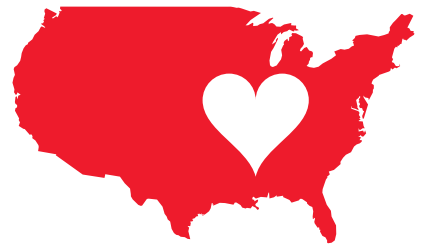
**HEART  
LAND**

The *Heartland* exhibition opens in the Van Abbemuseum on 3 October 2008. It forms part of the interdisciplinary project Heartland, which takes place in Eindhoven in collaboration with the Muziekcentrum Eindhoven. The group exhibition presents new and existing work by artists from America and Europe, among them Jeremiah Day, Kerry James Marshall, Dan Peterman, Julika Rudelius and Wilhelm Sasnal. The works of the selected artists give a subtle picture of a part of the United States that is relatively unknown in Europe: the Heartland. The exhibition has been compiled by curators from the Van Abbemuseum and the Smart Museum of Art in Chicago, who have undertaken several research trips during which their understanding of the Heartland region was changed through contact with local art scenes and experience of the region on the ground. They have selected work by artists who live in the region—some for decades, some as newcomers—as well as work by artists who live elsewhere, such as the three artists in residence. The varied positions represented within the curatorial collaboration and the selection of artists yields a view of the area from an American perspective as well as from a European one. In 2009, the exhibition will travel to the Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago, where it will appear in a modified form.

The aim of the exhibition is to form a more subtle picture of the part of the United States that the Van Abbemuseum defines as the new Heartland. Geographically, the exhibition follows the Mississippi river from the extreme south to the north, taking in an area that extends from New Orleans up to Minneapolis in the west and Detroit in the east. Although not all the artists actually live in the Heartland, this region forms the basis of their work, in the sense that they engage with its rich history, cultural diversity and current themes. The exhibition includes work by about 25 artists and artists' initiatives. The final choice will be made later this summer, but the initial selection includes work by the artists named below.

There are several reasons why the Van Abbemuseum decided to focus on the art and culture of the central and southern states of the USA. Firstly, the selected works form a valuable complement to the exhibition history of the Van Abbemuseum. Most of the work exhibited in the museum from the 1960s onwards came from the American East Coast, while from the 1990s onwards the attention shifted to Los Angeles and the West Coast. We wanted to find out what was happening in between. Secondly, this exhibition exemplifies the direct relation between art and society, and the ongoing artistic debate that may arise as a result, given the crucial role that the region plays in the US presidential elections. The exhibition also addresses the need to rethink old-fashioned definitions of cultural centers and peripheries. The location of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, outside the Randstad (the region where most of the big cities in the Netherlands are located, such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht, and The Hague), parallels the location of the Heartland between the dominant American East and West Coasts.

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## Participating artists

The exhibition starts by giving an impression of the Mississippi and of the rich history and influence of the area's cultural and social developments. The journey through the Heartland begins with a series of photographs by Alec Soth selected from his book *Sleeping by the Mississippi* (2004), which is the result of a five-year journey along the banks of the river. The artist Wilhelm Sasnal presents a music video in which a number of bands rehearse a song based on *The River* (1938) by Pare Lorentz; this book examined the industrialization of the impoverished Mississippi region, then regarded as essential, and the mismanagement of its natural resources that led to the disastrous floods of 1937. The New Kinomatographic Union made a film in 1995 called *What America Needs – An Interior Expedition*, in which they travelled in stages down the Mississippi, interviewing local residents; most of the interviewees described their region as a 'forgotten area'. In *Map* (1969-2005), Peter Friedl challenges the customary and authorized geographical representations of US history.

The architectural installation *Shotgun House* and a series of drawings, titled *The Great Republic of New Orleans*, by Marjetica Potrč will occupy a central place in the group exhibition, as well as work by Matthew Day Jackson, an artist from New York City who frequently visits the Heartland region. His sculptures, photographs, installations and drawings re-enact cruel episodes from North-American history. One room in the old building will be dedicated to *Mitotes* by Greely Myatt, sculptures made of different kinds of handle such as those of a hoe, a spade, or a baseball bat. Carol Jackson cuts her images and texts out in leather and ornaments them with paint, glitter and other materials. She draws on the iconography and typography of signboards, posters, 20th century manifestos and epic literature. Kerry James Marshall shows work from his famous

ongoing project *Rhythm Mastr*, in which the main themes are racial tensions, the civil rights movement, Afro-American traditions and communal solidarity in the 21st century. Deb Sokolow will create a new large-scale wall drawing at the museum; the subject will be a trip from Chicago to Eindhoven made in response to a spam e-mail. Juan Chavez will depict the urban atmosphere of Chicago in his installation and drawing *Drawing on LSD*. Dan Peterman, who works in Chicago, will create a new work based on a journey he intends to undertake by canoe, foot and bicycle from his home city to the Mississippi and along one of its major tributaries, the Illinois River.

The middle gallery of the exhibition will be dedicated to independent, mostly unsubsidized cultural organizations and artists' platforms which are representative of the lively artistic discourse that prevails in and around Chicago, and of the unique intercultural dialogue of the southern Heartland. The layout of this section will be provided by Design 99, an agency for experimental design and contemporary architecture from Detroit.

### Artists in residence

Prior to the exhibition, three artists, whose normal location is in the Netherlands, travelled to the Heartland to become an artist in residence there. Otto Berchem went to Memphis, Tennessee, where he lived and worked for three months. Jeremiah Day recently returned from Alabama, where, in the 1960s, the now largely forgotten Lowndes County Freedom Organization inspired the activists who would later form the Black Panther movement. Julika Rudelius is currently making a film about young, ambitious political science students from the Heartland who aspire to a career in the United States political landscape. She meets these students, as well as campaign organizers, spokespersons and professors, in Chicago and in Washington D.C.

### Curators

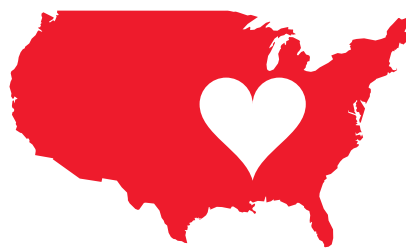
The curators of the exhibition are:

- Charles Esche, director of the Van Abbemuseum
- Kerstin Niemann, research curator, Van Abbemuseum
- Stephanie Smith, director of collections and exhibitions, and curator of contemporary art, Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago

### Publicaties

On the weblog <http://heartland.vanabbe.nl>, the curators and other people involved in the project are reporting on their study trips, studio visits and meetings with project partners and cultural activists. The interviews, photographs and essays reveal how they and other guest contributors approach their research and arrive at choices. For the opening in Eindhoven, a magazine will be issued, containing the programme, a general introduction to the project, a look back at the research process, information about the artists and musicians involved and short texts by various authors about artistic practice and the music world. The opening of the exhibition at the Smart Museum of Art in Chicago in 2009 will be accompanied by the publication of a critical reader, with texts by academics, musicians, artists and critics of music and art.

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#### Partners Heartland

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