



It was as if it were predestined. In the plane from Schiphol to Zandvoort, the photographer Risk Hazekamp (The Hague, 1972) sat next to a Surinamese Dutchman, Jimmy, who worked in addiction care. Interesting of course, but it wasn't the junkie angst that interested Hazekamp. What she found much more fascinating was what Jimmy said about the woman in Suriname who had two children by him and whom he looks after financially. That woman now lives with another woman, with whom she has a lesbian relationship. And not only that, Jimmy – like Hazekamp – had read the work of the Surinamese professor of Gender Studies in Utrecht, Gloria Wekker, who has published widely about gender roles and the multiple ways of describing the mental and physical 'me', and has broken away from the rigid subdivision of people into male and female.

'Mati work'

Wekker also studied what is known as 'mati work' in Suriname: the sexual, spiritual and emotional bonds between women, which far transcend a straightforward lesbian relationship. "An older woman shows you the way and you look after each other. Or it may be a group of women who have children and live in a different social format, which we do not have at all. Almost like a commune," explains Hazekamp, who wanted to use the concept of mati work for her project in Suriname. In short: Wakker, mati work, Jimmy's wife – it all came together perfectly in that Boeing 747 to Paramaribo. Hazekamp talked with Jimmy all the way,

Risk Hazekamp

for nine hours. "I listened to everything he had to say. It was wonderful. I was just fated to be sat next to that man in that plane." Hazekamp defines herself as a 'visual artist who uses the medium of photography, without computers being involved'. She plays with the cliché images and generalisations about masculinity and femininity that we are bombarded with every day in commercials, films, the media, our debates, and the way the outside world treats us: "All those subdivisions, all that normative thinking – it wears me out and it is restrictive. I really like it when someone rocks the boat a bit. Even if it's only in my head."

Her work also contains an important degree of art history. The photo on the front of her catalogue *Liberté pour tous*, for instance – a self-portrait as 'a woman with a stubbly beard and bound breasts' – is a reference not only to gender, but the use of light and colour also refers to Rembrandt, whereas the title is linked to Paris '88, the situationists and the (unfinished) sexual revolution. It is about recognition and you realise that the same time that something is not right. "That twist is very important," says Hazekamp.

She also likes playing around with cinema and film heroes. James Dean, the actor with the sunken cheeks who died young and not only personified teenage rebellion but also became a gay icon, turns up regularly in her work. "That fascination is because of what he represents and the myth around it, and the fact that he died so young, and that everyone can understand him. James Dean represents Hollywood, the American dream, a kind of insanity. All sorts of stuff is written about him and projected onto him, but he was of course just an adolescent."

She works with models sporadically, but Hazekamp prefers to use the timer and photograph herself, entirely alone, in all sorts of outfits and poses. When she does that, she gets absorbed in a kind of mantra: press the button, run, pose, ten, nine, eight – zero, click. Back to the camera. Press the button, run, pose, ten, nine, eight – zero, click.

Precisely what will be on the image is always a bit of a gamble. "I'm used to dropping down to some very odd levels in my mind, to achieve the concentration of a method actor, so that you almost create an illusion that you are something or are doing something. Repeating the same actions gets you into a strange state. At a given moment, you forget to think about layouts and everything that is in your head, the lighting, all those technical things. You're only busy running back and forth. You end up in a sort of trance, and that's very good for me. That's how I do my best work."

Despite that very open discussion with Jimmy, Suriname turned out to be a difficult project. Firstly, there was the highly charged history and the lack of knowledge. "It's scandalous that we learn so little about it at school. Absurd. If I compare it with the Second World War, anyway – I know all that backwards. But what you're told about the entire history of the Netherlands is pretty scanty, really. I felt kind of guilty about that the whole time, as if something had gone badly wrong. I was very aware of that." She wandered around in Paramaribo and took pictures, good pictures, but nothing that went to the heart of it all. The landscape didn't work either. The rainforest was impressive, but she is better at dealing with vast empty spaces. "That feeling of emptiness is there in the rainforest, but not visually. Because you're right in there. I couldn't get a handle on that landscape."

We walk to her ArtRops artwork *Let Them Talk*, which there is a digital print of on a wall in her studio. It is a typical Hazekamp self-portrait: Risk with a faded Lois denim jacket, huge eyelashes, white face makeup and a hat made of folded newspaper, against a deep purple cloth as the background. The photo was not taken in Suriname but in New Mexico, where she was an artist in residence for a while. "That doesn't matter. It's in your head, it doesn't matter where you are. It has to sink in first. I needed a lot of time to process everything from Suriname and know what I want to say, and what was important and what wasn't."



She is prepared to explain it a little. The folded newspaper hat (with news of the murder of the Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn) is closest to the original idea of mati work. That is based on the traditional Surinamese cloth, the *angiaa*. "You can fold it in all kinds of ways, and that lets you make a statement. For example, you can say 'meet me at the corner of the street'. This one says 'let them talk'. It's quite an aggressive message. And it was also my guiding principle: let them talk." The purple background fits in too with the theme of liberated women. "The Creole tradition sees women as becoming more interesting as they get older – a kind of pride. I think that's really beautiful, because the attitude here in the Netherlands to aging is utterly different. There it's called *bigi jari* and they celebrate getting older. Colours are associated with that, and purple is for fifty. Then you get the traditional clothing in purple." She will not reveal any more. The mask, Fortuyn's murder, the eyelashes, the open jacket and a glimpse of the breasts, the side-burns... all elements of a refined photographic statement. "I love that: one item that screams out to the viewer. And then go away and think about it..." she says, smiling.

