

Another month has passed already, and even if the hot heat of my first instalment has been replaced by unpredictable rains and strong winds then at least the cloud formations have been impressive to watch. Summarising the last few weeks is not really very easy – it's been a mixture of out-of-town exploration, research, casual interviews with people over cups of coffee and peanut biscuits; but also friends have visited, and I've been doing the 'touristy' things I couldn't seem to justify doing on my own.

Having only limited access to those resources and materials I have in London, my work here has been developing in new and unexpected directions. Drawing has been a constant, but I have also been writing a bit and even taking some pictures, which is genuinely uncharted territory for me. The '*Surfacing*' series, which began without much expectation on my part for becoming a finished work, is becoming one of the most exciting things I've been doing, and I have been invited to present it at the [TÜYAP Art Fair](#) in Istanbul in October. There are a few artists from the Tetterode Building (home of M4) taking part, so it was partly a case of right time right place...



From the series '*Surfacing*', 2010.
(The top of the orange measure marks the sea-level)

I spent a couple of days earlier this month assisting artist [Marianne Theunissen](#) with some photographs in IJmuiden (where Amsterdam's river IJ meets the North Sea twenty miles to the West), and in the afternoons we visited the concrete bunkers and anti-tank defences that are partially buried in the dunes. The dunes are themselves worth seeing, and look ancient and wild which is unusual for Holland. Sea grasses, thistles and vine-like plants cover the

sand almost entirely, and if you can find a panorama that contains no huts or signposts or fences you have the impression you are looking down from a great height on a vast rainforested landscape.

Ijmuiden itself is fishy and industrial, the place where these wonderful dunes jut angrily up against the Corus steel plant. It feels like a half-dead town, though it's still important for the fishing industry, and it's the first sight of land for DFDS passengers from Newcastle. I liked it very much, the chimneys and smoke and activity feel absolutely right on a grey drizzly day, even if it sits in the imagination like a place simultaneously from the past and the future.

Last week was [SAIL festival](#) – the week that the tall ships come to Amsterdam from assorted locations around Europe. It happens only every 5 years, and the riverside areas both North and South were crammed with people. I ventured down there on Sunday night, after watching enormous firework displays each of the previous three nights from far away windows in different parts of the city. The sight of the river, nose to tail with boats of every size and shape was quite magical, and also quite surreal. At some points there were five lines of vessels heading in alternating directions, one behind the other. It reminded me of a puppet show perspective trick.

[Mister Motley magazine](#), which is an independent art magazine here with a nice line in text vs. pictures has put a little article about my stay on their homepage, with [a link to my blog](#). It's a good publication (even in Dutch) and it's quite a pleasure to have been asked.

People continue to be very generous with their time and energy.

Took a trip to Tilburg, which is a longer journey than I'd imagined on trains that stopped every few minutes whether at a station or not. Tilburg was the heart of the textile trade in Holland in the early 20th Century, and they have two museums there that are really worth visiting (however slow the train might be). The first is [De Pont](#), a cavernous renovated factory-turned-gallery close in stature and wide openness (and this is not such an exaggeration) to Dia Beacon in New York. Guiseppa Penone (current show) never looked so good, I'm sure. Less than 500m away on the same road is the [Audax Textile Museum](#), which is also quite magnificent. There they have three exhibition spaces, arranged around a hi-tech open-plan workshop where they operate a kind of pay-as-you-go system similar to [Metropolitan Works](#) in London. Cutting, weaving, knitting, printing, tufting and other unidentifiable processes are available for artists and craftspeople to use. The availability of these workshops (and housed as they are in an old textile factory) lends the whole place a vibrancy and productivity that makes you want to go immediately home to make something...

I have been doing a bit of outdoor swimming as well. The excellent pool off Spaarndammerdijk, behind the Westerpark, is only very slightly warmed, and for those with strong hearts it's the ideal bracing start to the day. Even if you can't manage more than 20 minutes there it's a well-spent couple of Euros. I also spent the last two days up at a beach house near Castricum aan Zee (working, obviously). If the pool was warmed too much for your liking, then the North Sea is truly bracing; as I arrived the radio announced that it would rain for 36 hours without stopping. I write this indoors, with the windows battened down.

[Parade](#), which I mentioned in the last report, turned out to be a curious affair; smaller than I think I'd imagined, I got the impression that part of its local appeal is actually in the fact that it has become a bit of an institution, and it *is* special in that it remains as one of the only travelling festivals in Europe. It seemed to be mostly a theatre festival – small 'theatre-groups' with a leaning (this year at least) towards the comic, the slapstick and the camp – all difficult to make the most of with faltering Dutch. It's quite expensive too – 30 Euros will get you in, see two half-hour performances and buy you a beer with the change.

Rotterdam, which is less than an hour away by train, is worth visiting for at least one day if you are in the Netherlands for a little while. In terms of galleries and museums there is really a lot to see, but clustered as many of them are around Witte de Withstraat, moving from one to the next is straightforward. Highlights for me were the [Architecture Institute \(NAI\)](#) and the [Witte de With Centre](#). Though you pay for exhibition entrance at both, (unless you have a [Museumscard](#),) NAI gives free access to the immaculate original 1930's Sonneveld House close-by, built in the truly Modern Style of the Dutch Nieuwe Bouwen movement. A bit further down the same street at Witte de With, presented in ten acts (two at a time) under the leitmotif 'Morality', a year-long investigation into the 'critical points of fragmentation in everyday life' is nearing a close. Acts 6 and 7, "*Remember Humanity*" and "*Of Facts and Fables*", bring a surprising group of artists together, and are richer for it, but though I enjoyed much of the work, I found it also tricky and difficult to grasp, but it could have been my tiredness...

Yawn.

David Murphy, August 2010