

Presentation Barbara Jean  
December 1, 2011, Podium 0950, Rotterdam

Fine that all of you are here.

**Past PresentFuture**  
**PresentFuturePast**

Interrelated – through one another, back and forth. And the **Here and Now.** \*

The Column and The Steps. The Steps and The Column. (outside – a stone's throwaway) at a splendid, spatial location the column **On** and the steps **In** and **Hidden Underneath** the Maas dyke, the Maas Boulevard – which is the entrance to the exciting city Rotterdam – an Active/Reflective sculpture together.

As Dutch as can be – the outside view – wide – panorama – clouds, light above water – poetic – *a bend in the river* – towards the inside an almost classic, Green, Green grass field, intimate and familiar.

It looks as if the location – the empty stones (platform) and the existing steps – latent for years – were waiting for something, perhaps without knowing it.

**Future:** \*\*

Because images speak for themselves, I'll begin by telling something about myself.

My name is Barbara Jean Helmes, and I introduce myself as Barbara Jean,  
Artist name. Who I am.

I was born in California, raised in Minnesota. There I studied fine arts at the University of Minnesota, then via New York and to further accomplish myself in the arts in old Europa I traveled around there – to see in reality what I had studied during my education – not only works of art in Museums but to experience the encompassing life from which things and inspiration spring, - the culture, surroundings, atmosphere - history and I wished to pursue a post academic study at an appropriate place. Madrid was my first so called 'destination', in search of color – but Madrid taught me to see monumentality. Holland taught me to see colors and nuances. The combination of my line subtleties and monumentality – the gesture – is to be found reoccurring in my work – however large or small the 'life-size' may be.

The choice for my continued study came down to Amsterdam or Florence. I was accepted immediately in Amsterdam but after a summer in Florence I was so enraptured with the Renaissance city that I wanted to stay there forever. In the autumn I decided to take leave of Amsterdam and the Rijksakademie. But destiny decided otherwise. On the first day of my return to Amsterdam there were news reports of gigantic floods in Florence. That changed things radically and I began my study there. In the Christmas vacation I returned to Florence to scrape (eliminate mud) from costly books in the antique City library along with students from everywhere.

It was ironic that I escaped a flood in a high and dry country such as Italy, by staying in a under water polder country.

Since then I've been back and forth several times Holland - America and vice versa – in fact in 1968 I was a passenger on the SS Nieuw Amsterdam. \*\*\* An exciting trip, not only was it the last the transatlantic voyage of the Holland – America Line but the American Elections were going on, Richard Nixon vs. Hubert Humphrey. Turning Point. Also Exciting in more respects. A Dramatic departure at 12 o'clock midnight, spotlights – at long last after a hectic period however thanks to Willem Sandberg it was possible.

And **then**, due to a motor defect the ship stopped within the territorial waters of Holland for 12 hours. What an anticlimax – in limbo.

You are part of that where you came from – part of that and where you're headed – unknown. The 'In-between' situation – can be found in my work.

I'm still here – as an 'idiosyncratic archeologist' – as once effectively characterized by a Dutch art critic.

My artistic search involves hitting the core, "going to the bones" and 'steps' the search for the higher, the physical means to reach that. Writing is a means to develop the higher in the mind. There is a driving force, a burning desire – passion – to go to the source – such as in an oil project whereby I spent much of my time in airplanes high in the sky when in fact it was about an invisible, hidden source under the ground. The wish to go the magma.

**Past: \*\*\*\***

Now another image, other steps, 'The Wittgenstein Steps' in Vienna.

Vienna not accidental. Location is the Burggarten 'hidden' in the center of Vienna.

There I was invited by Agora and made installations (3 years, 3 installations). This installation is based on 'Mene, Mene, Tekel Ufrasin' from the bible which means "weighed, weighed, counted and found wanting", a leitmotif in my work throughout the years.

**Back to the Future: \*\*\*\*\***

Concerning the Stately Stairs: functional, symbolic, spiritual, aesthetic and dignified – all o.k. but especially Communication is of the utmost importance – because there are illegible engraved inscriptions from various languages and Thus is 'illegible' – is the total *equally accessible* and *equally inaccessible* for everyone. As clear as daylight.

To end with a text (of mine) about a series of drawings based on Scheherazade, 'One Thousand and One Nights': in English, I assume, hope that that doesn't present a problem.

*A Story about Story Telling. A Story within which are several stories, each one, in itself about story telling. Truly it is a matter of life and death. The function: to make a man see the things before his eyes by holding up another thing to view.*

*The simplest of truths: a life belongs only to the person who lives it; life will claim the living: to live is to let live.*

*The story begins with the end. Speak or die. And for as long as you can go on speaking you will not die. The story begins with death. To speak is to live.*

Barbara Jean

PowerPoint images:

- \* panorama view
- \*\* Stately Stairs
- \*\*\* Holland-America Line ship
- \*\*\*\* 'The Wittgenstein Steps' Vienna
- \*\*\*\*\* Stately Stairs