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The Sound of Time

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The Sound of Time

Reintroducing the Artist in Humanities Research

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Abstract

When founded in 1808 the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) was initially named the “Royal Institute of Sciences, Literature and Fine Arts”. At the time little distinction was made between the creative impetus of either artists or scientists for the general research endeavor (Berkel, 2008). It is only in the second half of the 19th century that such disciplinary boundaries arise, which are then emphasized throughout the 20th century (e.g. Snow 1998 [1959], cf. Bod 2014 and Cohen 2001). In 2014, as a renewed recognition of artistic work, the KNAW founded the Society of Arts, which is intended as a space to share both scientific and artistic ideas, and their potential interaction (KNAW, 2014). The Meertens Institute (an institute of the KNAW) followed this initiative. In 2018, extending its efforts to foster interdisciplinary collaboration between linguists, historians, computer scientists and collection curators, the institute hosted Elise ‘t Hart as its first “Artist in Residence” (Meertens, 2019). The specific aim was to re-introduce the creative impetus of an artist in the scientific environment. ‘t Hart initiated the project “The Sound of Time” which added a unique perspective to the large-scale digitized audio collections that have been aggregated by scholars of the Meertens Institute (Collection, 2019). ‘t Hart’s work raises methodological questions regarding the relevance of an artist’s perspective for scientific investigation and the ways scholars are used to treat resources in a scientific context. In this paper we provide tentative answers to these questions by investigating the affordances produced by the artist’s approach.

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