

**Robert Knoth & Antoinette de Jong**

*Poppy: Trails of Afghan Heroin*

as part of the *A New Display: Visual Storytelling at a Crossroads* exhibition

Curator: Iris Sikking

From the bright flower fields of Afghanistan to the concrete jungle of London, *Poppy* traces the international path of heroin production and distribution. Depicting the dark and complex side of globalization, *Poppy* exposes the contexts and consequences of heroin's journey from East to West, along with the addictions, conflicts, disease, crime, and poverty it leaves in its wake. The book and multimedia exhibition embody two decades' worth of reporting from Antoinette de Jong and Robert Knoth, who have covered the rise of the Taliban, American intervention after 9/11, and the recent surge in opium production.

What began in the early 1990s as a series of news assignments evolved into a personal project and close collaboration between Knoth and de Jong. Their journey begins in Afghanistan, tracks through Central Asia, the Balkans, Dubai, and Somalia, and ends in London. This modern trade route, a dark version of the ancient Silk Road, comes alive through the voices, faces, and stories of farmers, soldiers, smugglers, prisoners, bankers, prostitutes, addicts, and border guards. These stories are easily overlooked or bypassed as too complex for mainstream media; for de Jong and Knoth, however, they were key components of this in-depth investigation.

As *Poppy* evolved to illuminate the network of heroin's cultivation and distribution across the globe, it outgrew conventional and short-form journalistic formats, necessitating its own, more immersive experience. Connecting the dots between supply and demand, between those standing in Europe and the locations and conflicts that can seem so distant on news reports, the complexity and global scale of *Poppy* addresses a story that is not simple to tell, but one that matters to us all.

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The work of **Antoinette de Jong** (1964, NL) and **Robert Knoth** (1963, NL) is characterized by an autonomous, modern approach with a focus on long-term documentaries that attempt to uncover the complexity of various socioeconomic or political topics and their impact on the lives of "ordinary" individuals. In the resulting work, Knoth and de Jong seek ways to merge the hyperrealism of documentary with the abstract qualities of art and literature.

For two decades, De Jong and Knoth have covered numerous conflicts through background stories and reportages for various international media. Their projects have been exhibited worldwide; they have published a number of books and received awards from World Press Photo and the Deutscher Fotobuchpreis. They are currently working on *Tree and Soil* (launch 2016), a photography and video series of Japanese landscapes taken in the Fukushima region to explore the relationship between people and nature.

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Four-channel installation, 44 min.

Photography and text: Robert Knoth & Antoinette de Jong

Editor: Peter Claassen (Meerzicht)

Sound design: Mark Glynne (Anthill)

List of archival footage and list of funders: [www.paradox.nl/poppy](http://www.paradox.nl/poppy)

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