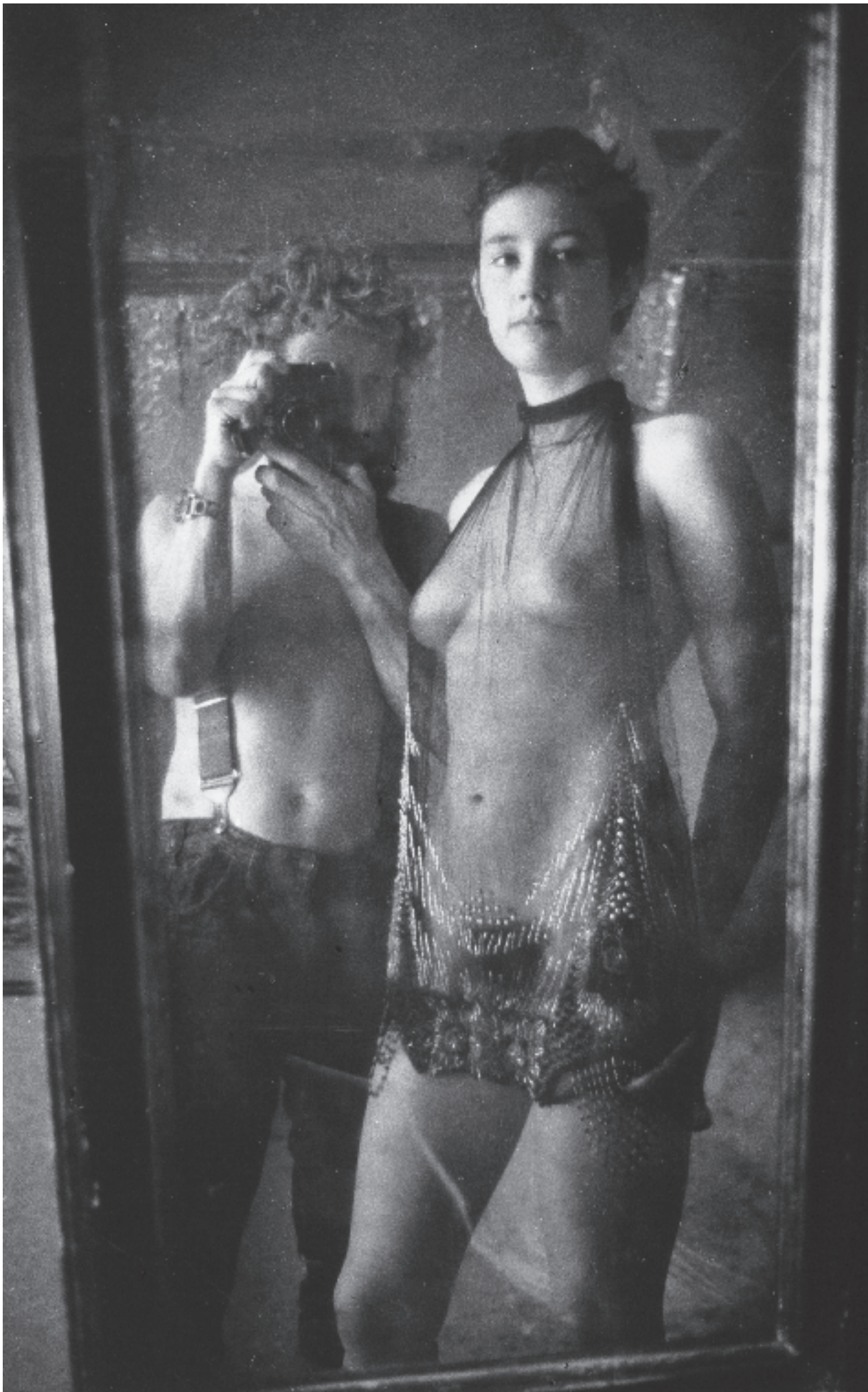


ED VAN DER ELSKEN

CAMERA IN LOVE

PRESTEL
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Self-portrait with Anneke Hilhorst, Edam, c. 1973. Courtesy Ed van der Elsken Estate

7	Preface Beatrix Ruf Marta Gili
9	Biography
21	“Collecting my kind of people” Hripsimé Visser
31	Photographing as a Need Nan Goldin
33	Under, Outside and Between: The Elusive Art of Ed van der Elsken David Company
41	Of Photographers and People Valérie Jouve
43	“An artist has got to catch life completely, basically” Ed van der Elsken: Between Film and Life Susan Aasman
53	“Aha, one of my people” Paulien Oltheten
55	#EdvanderElsken Colin van Heezik
63	Paris
89	Love on the Left Bank
121	Bagara
143	Jazz
157	Sweet Life
191	Amsterdam
227	Eye Love You
245	Japan
279	Image Captions
283	Bibliography, Filmography, Exhibitions
287	Photo Credits

Preface

Ed van der Elsken (1925–1990) once described himself as a hunter. A photographer who seduced and challenged his prey, and struck at just the right moment. But he was more than that. He was also a man who would have liked to have transplanted a camera into his head to permanently record the world around him; a photographer who staged and directed his images of “real life” using technique and composition. He was, in the words of curator Hripsimé Visser, “a child of his times: sombre in the 1950s, rebellious in the 1960s, liberated in the 1970s, reflective in the 1980s. A strong character who unscrupulously threw himself into the fray and, in his film *Bye*, the moving account of his terminal illness, had the courage to strike out on new paths right to the very end.”

Since his death in 1990 a number of exhibitions in both the Netherlands and abroad have been devoted to the work of Ed van der Elsken, and his books and films have been the subjects of academic study. For example, over the past couple of decades students at Leiden University have analysed four of his photobooks. The republication of some of his books has also prompted renewed interest in his work, and the Nederlands Fotomuseum’s ongoing project to restore his slides has contributed to a reappraisal and growing appreciation of his lesser-known colour photography. So van der Elsken’s work is still firmly in the spotlight.

Maybe his work appeals to so many people today because our relationship with the camera has changed so radically over the past decade. Ed van der Elsken said “Show who you are”, and, as Colin van Heezik so expertly argues in his essay in this catalogue, that one small phrase is the key to his work: “He showed who he was and who others were. It is also the bridge to our times. In the age of the selfie, we all want to show who we are, think we are, hope we are – and we look at van der Elsken’s work with new eyes.”

Camera in Love is the most comprehensive retrospective of Ed van der Elsken’s

work in twenty-five years, presented by the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and the Jeu de Paume in Paris. After Amsterdam and Paris, the exhibition will travel to the Fundación Mapfre in Madrid. The exhibition focuses on van der Elsken’s unique qualities as a photographer, film-maker and producer of books, and on his experiments with different forms of presentation. Van der Elsken loved experimenting, not only in his photographs, books and films but also in his remarkable exhibitions and the audiovisuals he made from the 1970s onwards.

The catalogue presents a superb overview of Ed van der Elsken’s photographs, films and books. Each of the essays considers a different aspect of his work. Hripsimé Visser explores how he worked, revealing his obsession with technique and composition. David Company shows how van der Elsken’s photographs, books and films cross boundaries between genres and media. Susan Asman investigates his experimental television documentaries, and Colin van Heezik analyses our fascination with van der Elsken’s photographs in the age of the selfie. Van der Elsken’s work also inspires today’s artists. Nan Goldin, Valerie Jouve and Paulien Oltheten each present a tribute to his work.

When organizing such a large exhibition one always relies on the support, goodwill and trust of many parties. Our special thanks go first of all to Anneke Hilhorst, Ed van der Elsken’s widow, and her husband Han Hogeland for their generous support for the exhibition and publication, ranging from sharing information to loaning material from Anneke Hilhorst’s personal collection. The exhibition would not have come about without the input of our partners, Leiden University (Special Collections) and the Nederlands Fotomuseum in Rotterdam. Many of the items on display come from their collections. The archives and knowledge of the Nederlands Fotomuseum were a vital source of documentation and slides. We thank EYE Filmmuseum, the VPRO and the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision for providing fragments of

films by van der Elsken. We also extend our thanks to the NOS/NTR for permission to show the documentary by Jan Bosdriesz, and to the private collectors in Amsterdam and Edam who have also made some unique material available for the exhibition.

The staff of the Stedelijk Museum and Jeu de Paume have worked hard to ensure the best possible presentation of Ed van der Elsken's work. We would like to thank Hripsimé Visser, curator of photography at the Stedelijk and of this exhibition, and Manique Hendriks, trainee curator at the Stedelijk, who have devoted so much enthusiasm and knowledge to this project, in collaboration with Jeu de Paume. We also thank the teams at our museums who have helped produce this exhibition. The publication would not have been possible without the inspiring and informative contributions of our guest authors. The extraordinary images have been presented to their best advantage thanks to the outstanding graphic design by Mevis & Van Deursen.

The Stedelijk Museum would also like to thank the foundation Paradox for collaborating on the presentation of the audiovisual *Tokyo Symphony* and the former Leiden University students Tamara Berghmans, Sophie Crabbé, Daphne Hogeweg and Frank Ortman for their research on Ed van der Elsken's books. We are particularly grateful to Amsterdam City Council and the foundations, donors and friends for their vital support, and to the museum's sponsors for their generous contributions. We also thank the Supervisory Board for their continuous support and trust.

The Jeu de Paume remains indebted to its funders whose invaluable and ongoing support allows us to continue making such important exhibitions: the French Ministry of Culture and Communication, and Neuflyze OBC and the Manufacture Jaeger-LeCoultre in Paris, its principal partners.

Beatrix Ruf
Director, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam

Marta Gili
Director, Jeu de Paume, Paris

Biography

1925 Ed van der Elsken is born in Amsterdam on 10 March 1925. A year later his mother Huberta Johanna Gijsberdina Pardoel and father Eduard van der Elsken and their three children move to Betondorp, a newly built garden suburb on the outskirts of Amsterdam. It is here that Ed van der Elsken spends his youth.



Childhood photo of Ed van der Elsken, c. 1930

1942 The Netherlands is invaded by the German army on 10 May 1940. In January 1942 all Dutch men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three are ordered to report to the Nederlandsche Arbeidsdienst (Dutch Labour Service) for unarmed military service. Van der Elsken is also called up, but he succeeds in having himself declared unfit for service by adding a substance to his urine sample that makes him appear to be diabetic.

1943 Van der Elsken decides to become a sculptor and attends the Institute for Applied Art on Gabriel Metsustraat in Amsterdam. However, under a renewed threat of labour conscription, he is forced to go into hiding in Bergeijk, Noord Brabant. When the southern Netherlands is liberated by the allies in 1944 he goes to work as an interpreter at Eindhoven airfield. Shortly afterwards he volunteers for the mine clearance service and goes to Belgium where he is trained to dismantle explosives.

1944 During the last winter of the occupation the northern Netherlands suffers huge shortages of food and fuel. Twenty thousand people die as a result.

A group of photographers, including Emmy Andriess, Cas Oorthuys, Carel Blazer and Ad Windig, document the impact of the "hunger winter" and the occupation in Amsterdam. They are referred to as De Ondergedoken Camera (The Underground Camera). The same group establishes the photography section of the Gebonden Kunsten federatie (Association of Practitioners of the Applied Arts, or GKf) in 1945.

1945–47 After van der Elsken is discharged from the army he moves back to his parents' home in Amsterdam. He is exempted from military service because of his war volunteer status.

Weegee's (1899–1968) Naked City (1945) is published and features black-and-white photographs of the dark side of New York – accidents, murders, arrests, house fires – in the 1930s and 1940s. The book makes a great impression on van der Elsken.

Willem Sandberg is appointed director of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam in 1945. He manages to raise the museum's profile with his experimental and progressive policies. Sandberg will later buy work from Ed van der Elsken for the museum's collection and award him several commissions.



Sandberg, l'homme qui dit oui, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1964

Van der Elsken wants to become a projectionist and enrolls at the evening trade school, Avondambachtsschool, in Amsterdam in order to obtain an electrician's qualification. He changes his mind, however, and decides to become a photographer. He takes a correspondence course at the Fotovakschool college of photography in The Hague but fails the exam. Ed van der Elsken also works at De Arbeiderspers publishing house, where as a technical proofreader he is responsible for checking galleys.

Van der Elsken moves to Admiralengracht in Amsterdam. He takes photographs in the streets using his father's 9x12-inch plate camera. In order to save up for his own Rolleicord camera he works for village photographer Jan Brouwer in Wormerveer, assists photographer Louis van Beurden, and works for a time at Nico Zomer's studio.

Photographic agency Magnum Photos is established in Paris by Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Capa, George Rodger and David Seymour. This is the first agency where photographers retain ownership of their work.

1949 Van der Elsken joins the professional association GKf, which brings him into contact with Emmy Andriess, Ad Windig and Paul Huf. He is given accommodation at Ad Windig's home in return for working in the darkroom. Windig introduces him to journalist and later cinematographer Jan Vrijman (1925–1997), with whom he will later frequently collaborate. At this time he is given a few commissions, including photographing ships and cranes for the Royal Dutch Shipowners Association.

1950 Van der Elsken moves to Oudezijds Achterburgwal 64 in Amsterdam. He becomes depressed after his engagement to a fellow student is broken off. He decides to go to Paris, like many other artists, writers and poets who left for the French capital after the war, including painter Karel Appel and writers Rudy Kousbroek, Remco Campert and Simon Vinkenoog, whom van der Elsken meets in the city.



Simon Vinkenoog and Karel Appel, 1953

Kryn Taconis, the Magnum and GKI photographer, provides van der Elsken with a letter of introduction to Pierre Gassmann, director of the Pictorial Service, Magnum's photo laboratory. He is given a job there and rents a room on Rue des Martyrs in Montmartre. At the lab van der Elsken meets Hungarian photographer Áta Kandó (b. 1913), and they start a relationship. After a few months he resigns and begins photographing in the streets again. He moves to the Left Bank and makes contact with a group of young bohemians who kill their time on the streets and in the bars and cafés of Saint-Germain-des-Prés.

Some of them are involved in the Lettrist International, the group of writers, poets and philosophers led by Guy Debord. In his memoirs, which he produces in collaboration with Asger Jorn, Debord uses photos by van der Elsken as material for collages.

1953 Van der Elsken comes into contact with Edward Steichen, curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. Steichen selects eighteen photos by van der Elsken for the exhibition Postwar European Photography (1953) and one for the exhibition The Family of Man (1955). On Steichen's advice, van der Elsken starts work on a book of photos of Saint-Germain-des-Prés.



Edward Steichen and Ata Kandó, Paris, 1953

The Netherlands is hit by a severe storm on the night of 31 January. Van der Elsken is one of the photographers who takes pictures of the great flood of 1953 for the photobook De ramp (The Disaster), published by De Bezige Bij.

1954 Ata Kandó and Ed van der Elsken marry in Sèvres, just outside Paris, on 26 June.

Love on the Left Bank is published in four parts in the British magazine Picture Post and in the Dutch magazine Wereldkroniek.



Self-portrait on the street with Vali Myers, Paris, 1952

1955 Ed van der Elsken moves to Achtergracht 39 in Amsterdam, along with Ata Kandó and her three children. Karel Appel paints the walls of the children's bedrooms.



Karel Appel and one of Ata Kandó's daughters in the children's room on Achtergracht, Amsterdam, 1955

Van der Elsken's first solo exhibition, featuring sixty-two of his photographs, takes place at the Art Institute of Chicago from 10 May to 1 July. It then moves to the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis.

Youth culture is in the ascendant. Many adolescents no longer feel bound by conventional norms. They hang out in the streets, listen to jazz, dance to rock 'n' roll and watch American films. In Germany they are often referred to as *Halbstarcken* (literally "half-strongs", the German equivalent of beatniks). In the Netherlands, Jan Vrijman and van der Elsken decide to document this new youth culture. Their article "De nozems van de Nieuwendijk" in the magazine Vrij Nederland introduces the word *nozem* (used to denote a Dutch Teddy boy) to the Netherlands. They are the first example of what will later be called youth culture, assertive youngsters who hang around in the streets, often dressed in leather jackets or suit jackets, their hair greased into a quiff. Thanks to a television broadcast on his Saint-Germain-des-Prés photographs, van der Elsken meets television director Leen Timp and becomes interested in film. Shortly afterwards he makes his first 16mm film with Jan Vrijman, about CERN (Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire) in Geneva.



Three brothers outside their pub on Zeedijk, Amsterdam, 1958

Ed van der Elsken and Ata Kandó divorce on 16 September.

Johan van der Keuken's Wij zijn 17 (We Are 17, 1955) is published, a photobook featuring portraits of hesitant, insecure adolescents. Van der Elsken meets the young photographer shortly beforehand and is very taken with his work.

1956 Van der Elsken's first solo exhibition in the Netherlands, in the company canteen at Steendrukkerij De Jong & Co in Hilversum, is inaugurated by Jan Vrijman. It mainly includes work from his Paris period.

Van der Elsken moves to Koningsstraat 5, close to Nieuwmarkt in Amsterdam.

Love on the Left Bank is published in Dutch, English and German.

National television is launched in the Netherlands on 2 October 1951. Broadcasting company VARA transmits a programme about Love on the Left Bank.



First television broadcast on Love on the Left Bank, 1 March 1955, Venster, AVRO

The Family of Man opens at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. The exhibition, curated by Edward Steichen and previously seen at the MoMA in New York, consists of some 500 photographs by 273 photographers from sixty-eight different countries.

Elvis Presley has his first number one hit with "Heartbreak Hotel". His famous slicked-back hair and quiff are sported by young rock 'n' roll fans everywhere now, not just nozems. Ed van der Elsken makes grateful use of the new fashion as a subject for his photographs.

The Hungarian uprising begins on 23 October. Soviet tanks roll into Budapest to suppress the protests. Van der Elsken photographs the Dutch protests against the Soviet invasion.



Demonstration against the Soviet invasion of Hungary, Amsterdam, 1956

In December van der Elsken leaves for the Oubangui-Chari region, later Central Africa, on the border between Congo and French Equatorial Africa, to take photographs on commission for publishers De Bezige Bij.



Ed in Oubangui-Chari, 1957

1957 Van der Elsken stays in Oubangui-Chari until March.

Ed van der Elsken and Gerda van der Veen marry on 25 September.

The Dutch CoBrA painter Karel Appel travels regularly to New York from 1957 onwards, producing paintings inspired by jazz, the "barbarian anti-music" as he himself calls it. He also makes his own *musique barbare*, experimenting in a sound studio. Appel paints portraits of jazz musicians Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis and John Coltrane. Ed van der Elsken and Jan Vrijman will make a film about Karel Appel in the early 1960s.

1958 Van der Elsken's Bagara, a photobook chronicling his trip through Central Africa, is published in German, Afrikaans, French and English.

Van der Elsken receives the Africa Explorer's Award for the best book on Africa.

The Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam starts a photography collection. In its first round of purchases, the museum acquires a selection of van der Elsken's photographs from Love on the Left Bank and the series on French Equatorial Africa.



Ed van der Elsken at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, mid- to late 1950s. Photo: Cas Oorthuys

1959 Ed van der Elsken publishes Jazz, a photo-book based on reportages made between 1955 and 1959 at large jazz concerts in the Netherlands, particularly the night-time concerts at Amsterdam's Concertgebouw.



Ed in Mexico, 1960. Photo: Gerda van der Veen

Ed van der Elsken and Gerda van der Veen leave for a fourteen-month round-the-world trip. They travel to West and South Africa, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, Mexico and the United States. To pay for the trip, in addition to photo-reportages van der Elsken makes travel-ogues for television and a commissioned film on Dutch shipping companies entitled Van varen (About Sailing), which he completes in 1961.



Zengakuren communist student demonstration, Tokyo, 1959

1960 Members of Zengakuren, a communist/anarchist student organization, demonstrate in Japan in the early 1960s. They protest among other things against the American occupation of Vietnam. Van der Elsken photographs their demonstrations in Japan.

Ed van der Elsken and Gerda van der Veen return from their world trip; their ship docks in Rotterdam.



Home again after their round-the-world trip, Amsterdam, 1960

1961 Disappointed at his failure to get the book about his global travels published, van der Elsken turns his back on photography

14 Ed van der Elsken

and starts making more films. In 1961 he makes De Appel-iep (The Appel Elm), a short film about a tree stump Karel Appel painted in his studio and that is placed in Amsterdam's Vondelpark, and Karel Appel, componist (Karel Appel, Composer).



Museum visitors viewing La veuve du coureur (The Rider's Widow) by Robert Müller at Bewogen beweging, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1961

On his own initiative he makes the film Bewogen beweging (Moving Motion) featuring the innovative exhibition of kinetic art at the Stedelijk Museum, including work by Jean Tinguely. He also makes a series of photographs of the exhibition.

Tinelou, Ed and Gerda's first child, is born on 12 June. The name Tinelou is based on Tinguely, whom Gerda greatly admires. Van der Elsken remains in close contact with Tinguely.



Postcard from Jean Tinguely, 1962-63

1962 Van der Elsken and instrument maker Henk Meinema experiment with film equipment, developing new techniques for recording synchronous sound with a 16mm camera, in accordance with the principles of *cinéma-vérité*.



Portrait of Ed van der Elsken, 1964. Photo: Eikoh Hosoe

Willem Sandberg, director of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, asks van der Elsken to film the Dylaby exhibition, which features a "dynamic labyrinth" designed by artists, including Daniel Spoerri, Robert Rauschenberg, Niki de Saint Phalle and Jean Tinguely, through which visitors must navigate.



Entrance to Stedelijk Museum featuring work by Jean Tinguely during the Bewogen beweging exhibition, 1961

- 1963 Van der Elsken makes a film for television about Gerda's pregnancy and the birth of their son Daan Dorus on 8 May entitled Welkom in het leven, lieve kleine (Welcome to Life, Little One; approx. 36 min., broadcast on 15 January 1964).
- 1964 Van der Elsken spends a lot of his time filming; he also works as a reporter for the Algemeen Handelsblad newspaper.
- 1965–69 Amsterdam begins to feel the revolutionary atmosphere of the 1960s. The Provo movement is established in May 1965. The movement organizes happenings and engages in provocative actions against the established order. Van der Elsken is on

hand to record the unrest in the city. In 1966, for example, he photographs the riots during the wedding of Princess Beatrix and Claus von Amsberg of Germany, and the construction workers' riots in the city centre. In 1969 he photographs the student occupation of the Maagdenhuis (the administrative centre of the University of Amsterdam). He also photographs Dolle Mina, an Amsterdam-based group that campaigns for equal opportunities for men and women and the legalization of abortion in the Netherlands.



Provo demonstration against police action during the wedding of Princess Beatrix and Prince Claus, Prinsengracht, Amsterdam, 1966



Occupation of Maagdenhuis ended, Amsterdam, 21 May 1969



Activists of the Dolle Mina feminist group, Amsterdam, c. 1970

1965 Van der Elsken attends the short film festival in Oberhausen for the second time and makes a documentary about it.

1966 Ed van der Elsken's book Sweet Life is printed in Japan and published in Dutch, English, French, German, Spanish and Japanese. It is followed a year later by the four-part Wereldreis in foto's, containing photographs of his round-the-world trip.



The entrance to the exhibition Hee... zie je dat?, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1966. Photo: J. Mud

Hee... zie je dat? (Hey... Did You See That?), a solo exhibition by Ed van der Elsken, is held at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam from 8 September to 23 October. The exhibition is designed by

Wim Crowel. It takes the form of a happening: the entrance hall is covered entirely in photographs and visitors have to walk across a large picture of a naked woman to enter the galleries. In response to the exhibition van der Elsken is commissioned to produce photo-reportages for glossy magazine Avenue.

1967 Van der Elsken's first reportage for Avenue is published. It is about Cuba, and he even manages to photograph Fidel Castro. He will continue to travel and take pictures for the magazine until 1976.

1970 Van der Elsken travels with poet and biologist Dick Hillenius to Suriname, where they photograph the Akurio people for Avenue. He also travels to Moscow to produce a reportage with Nico and Anne Scheepmaker.

1971 De verliefde camera (The Infatuated Camera), an autobiographical film, is shown on Dutch television (by broadcaster VPRO) on 24 June. A year later van der Elsken receives for the film the Dutch State Prize for Film Art.

Ed van der Elsken and Gerda van der Veen separate. Van der Elsken moves to a smallholding in Edam.



Ed van der Elsken in front of his house in Edam, c. 1973. Photo: Aleksander Jalousinski

1972 Van der Elsken travels to Chile for Avenue. Later that year he goes to Italy to see Vali Myers, his one-time muse and the main character in Love on the Left Bank. In the film Death in the Port Jackson Hotel she reflects on their time in Paris.

1973 Ed van der Elsken and Gerda van der Veen divorce on 25 June. He meets Anneke

Hilhorst while she is hitchhiking, and shortly afterwards she moves in with him on the farm in Edam.



Self-portrait with Anneke Hilhorst, Edam, c. 1973

Van der Elsken starts experimenting with Super 8 film.

1974 Margriet magazine invites van der Elsken and editor Peter Lichtenauer to travel to Bangladesh to produce a reportage on the disasters that have hit the country. Van der Elsken also makes his first synchronous audio slideshow during this trip, recording sound while taking the shots for the slides. The audiovisual is broadcast on television and plays a key role in the fundraising effort for Bangladesh.

1975 Van der Elsken continues to experiment with audio slideshows. Some of them are broadcast on television. Van der Elsken also opens a gallery in his home to sell his photographs.

1976 Development organization Memisa commissions him to make a film about the "Third World". He and Anneke Hilhorst travel to Pakistan, Thailand, Borneo, Bangladesh, India, Malawi, Madagascar, Brazil, Haiti and the Solomon Islands. The resulting film, Het is niet mis wat zij doen (What They're Doing Is a Good Thing) is broadcast by AVRO in January 1978.

1977 Eye Love You is published. The basic theme of this full-colour publication is love between a man and a woman, which is the same all over the world. That same year, the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam exhibits the slideshow of the same name.

1978 Hallo! Een nieuwe Ed van der Elsken (Hello! A New Ed van der Elsken) is published. The book juxtaposes photos which in some way have an associative relationship, interspersing them with a number of double-page images.

1979 Amsterdam! Oude foto's 1947-1970 is published. Van der Elsken selects images from his archives showing the lively streets of Amsterdam in the period from 1947 to 1970.

Ed van der Elsken and Anneke Hilhorst's son Johnny is born on 7 July.

1980 Avonturen op het land (Adventures in the Countryside). Van der Elsken makes both a film and a book, in colour and black and white, about his life in the countryside near Edam. The film is broadcast by VPRO on 30 March 1980.



Hippies, Edam, c. 1969

Ed van der Elsken and Pieter Boersma are awarded the Rijksmuseum's annual documentary photographic commission. The subject is broadcasting in the Netherlands.

1981 Second part of the film Welkom in het leven, lieve kleine (Welcome to Life, Little One; approx. 80 min., broadcast by VPRO on 24 January 1982), featuring his children as they grow up.

Parijs! Foto's 1950–1954, published by Bert Bakker of Amsterdam, is based on a selection from his archive of photographs from his Paris period.

1982 Een fotograaf filmt Amsterdam (My Amsterdam, literally "A Photographer Films Amsterdam"; approx. 57 min., broadcast by VPRO on 29 June 1983) is a filmic portrait of Amsterdam and its residents.



Ed van der Elsken in his Mini Moke, Amsterdam, 1977.
Photo: Fred Vijver

1983 "Ed's Amsterdam" column in Het Parool newspaper.

The Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam buys 177 original vintage prints from Love on the Left Bank.

Leiden University purchases the original copies of the book Sweet Life for its print collection.

1984 Ed van der Elsken marries Anneke Hilhorst on 8 March.

La Grande Parade, director Edy de Wilde's final exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum

Amsterdam. Van der Elsken takes pictures of the artists, which he will publish shortly afterwards in a book entitled Are You Famous?

1985 Elsken: Paris 1950–1954 is published by Libroport Co. Ltd of Tokyo.



The 491 photo group preparing the ELSKEN exhibition, Tokyo, 1986

1986 Major exhibition in Tokyo, Japan: San-geruman-de pure no koi (L'Amour à Saint-Germain-des-Prés). Van der Elsken visits Japan, where he has many fans, numerous times in the 1980s.

Exhibition at the Institut Néerlandais, Paris: Une histoire d'amour à Saint-Germain-des-Prés.

1987 Van der Elsken receives a grant from the Dutch Ministry of Welfare, Health and Culture to produce a photobook on Japan.

1988 Jazz 1955–1959.61 published by Libroport Co. Ltd. of Tokyo.

The photobook De ontdekking van Japan (The Discovery of Japan) is published by the Fragment publishing house in Amsterdam. After fifteen trips to Japan van der Elsken selects photos that highlight his fascination for the Land of the Rising Sun, with its mix of traditional values and customs and a lifestyle influenced by Western capitalism.

Van der Elsken receives the David Roëll Prize for lifetime achievement.

Having been commissioned by Japanese publisher Orion Literary Agency, van der Elsken starts work on a book about Korea.

On his return to the Netherlands he is informed that he is terminally ill.

1989 Van der Elsken documents the progress of his illness in his film Bye (approx. 108 min.).

1990 In March van der Elsken receives the Capi-Lux Alblas Award.

He makes his last recordings for Bye in June.

Ed van der Elsken dies on 28 December. He is buried at the Grote Kerk in Edam.

Bye is broadcast a month after his death, on 27 January 1991.



Ed van der Elsken in his sickbed, Edam, 1990.
Photo: Anneke Hilhorst



Chez Moineau, Rue du Four, Paris, 1953

"Collecting my kind of people"

Hripsimé Visser

"Always I have been designing equipment to 'catch life as completely as possible'. My ideal would have been to have a tiny camera built inside my head with a lens sticking out and recording 'artistically' twenty four hours a day. I am coming rather close now with lightweight video equipment (I have not yet had my head operation.) And now, while I am sixty-one years old, comes the doubt about this recording everything all the time. And I may go back to the way in which I worked in the beginning: walking the streets with one little camera, three rolls of film, no assignments, collecting my kind of people."¹ This is Ed van der Elsken: a man with an urgent desire to grasp life, a generous dose of humour, plagued by healthy doubts, experiencing a slight sense of nostalgia as he looks back on the beginning of his career. Above all, however, he was a man obsessed by technique. Techniques which allowed him to "catch life", which gave him autonomy and which he could use to amass his "own" special collection. All his equipment served that one purpose.

"Collecting my kind of people": this statement reaffirms the predominant image of van der Elsken's work as an egodocument. Not only did he often film and photograph himself, his family and those around him, he also sought in other people, in the many countries he travelled to, the properties he attributed to himself, which he identified with, chief among them being authenticity and pride. In his early work he observed people on the street cautiously, from a distance. Yet he soon developed a strategy, a way of working, that he described using the somewhat aggressively masculine metaphor of the "hunt". But although he was certainly neither modest nor wary in his work, his cameras were far from deadly weapons and his pictures were generally the result of an interaction. It is no coincidence that one of his books is called *Eye Love You* (1977), and one of his films *De*

verliefde camera (The Infatuated Camera, 1971). On the street, he set his sights on people he thought were beautiful or unusual, and he challenged them with a glance, a witty comment, a gesture. To van der Elsken, contact was an essential prerequisite for a picture. What he then did with his "catch" was at least as important, and related to another aspect of technique he loved: montage. Ed van der Elsken not only made photos and films that still appeal to us today, he above all created dramatic, funny and moving narratives – books, films and slide shows/audiovisuals – in which images are linked in exciting and dynamic ways. During preliminary research for this exhibition it became clear to me once more how important technique and montage were for Ed van der Elsken, and above all how freely, individually and experimentally he used them. He created strong images that are unmistakably of their time, and yet also timeless. Some of his books are almost iconic. His films have been rediscovered in the past couple of decades, and his audiovisuals restored. His work is dynamic and open, quint-essentially twentieth century and yet as topical as the day it was made.

Staged

Ed van der Elsken's career spanned more than forty years. It began in his birthplace, Amsterdam, in the late 1940s, but really got going in Paris in summer 1950. "Ed van der Elsken, 12 Rue Guisarde Paris, idées photos" he once scrawled on a tatty Rhodia notepad.² It most probably dates from 1951. The young photographer had been in Paris for a while, like many other Dutch artists who had been drawn to the metropolis in their desire to escape the narrow-minded gloom of post-war Holland. He resigned his job with the Pictorial Service photo laboratory, where he had spent six months printing work by Magnum photographers like

- 1 Ed van der Elsken, typed letter to Colin Naylor, 2 April 1986. Ed van der Elsken Archive, Nederlands Fotomuseum, Rotterdam, inv. no. 029000365 (Cor 21).
- 2 Rhodia notepad, undated (1951?). Ed van der Elsken Archive, Nederlands Fotomuseum, Rotterdam, inv. no. 029000375 (Doc 1).