



# DigiLabAiR 2023 ON SOCIAL INCLUSION

## On Social Inclusion

The United Nations defines an inclusive society as “overriding differences of race, gender, class, generation, and geography, and ensures equal opportunities for all to achieve full potential in life, regardless of origin.” With the DigiLabAir stipulations limiting the geographic scope of potential residents to the Netherlands, this topic is an excellent opportunity to investigate into the meaning and actual levels of integration, equality, tolerance, solidarity and security that a wealthy, developed, predominantly white society offers. Awareness for the necessity for social inclusion certainly is manifest, but in how far is social inclusion actually practiced by the government and the general population? And on what levels does social in- or exclusion really take place? In what terms can we think about it beyond issues such as racism, misogyny, homophobia, or any form of discrimination and marginalization based on age, ethnicity, religion or gender? Does social in- or exclusion only apply to inter-social, inter-racial, or inter-cultural issues/differences, or can, for example, also personal histories lead to the erection of barriers?

The artworks produced during the residencies invite us to consider these questions and indeed show us the various levels on which social exclusion can occur, which range from global and socio-political to intra-social to personal.

In her *Mare Nostrum*, Chantal Spapens negotiates the eternal promise of Europe as a projection screen of hopes for belonging, for a sense of safety and unity and an improvement of one's life conditions. As her work shows, however, that promise is fleeting, and those following Europe's siren call and actually reaching its borders, often experience sensations of alienation, disillusionment, and discrimination instead of the better new life they had hoped for.

Noli Kat's *The Struggle for Visibility*, on the other hand, highlights a form of intra-social exclusion that no society, no matter how wealthy or privileged, has overcome: its forceful exclusion of disabled bodies and minds. As much as the Dutch society is praising itself for (and indeed striving towards) improving its level of inclusion of its disabled members, barriers of accessibility continue to present itself – be it on physical levels in the everyday living environment or on ideological ones such as accommodating a disabled person's needs in normative operations of, for example, cultural institutes or education programs.

Kirsten Heshusius finally speaks to us of processes of 'self-exclusion' in her *I can't be silence(d) anymore*. Telling an intimate story of her experience of an abusive relationship, she investigates how far traumatic experiences have (or have not yet) found an adequate place in public discourse. What is more, the work reminds us that those suffering through abuse – emotional or physical – often struggle with coming to terms with their history, which leads them to push themselves to the margins and establish barriers when a sharing of emotions is simply rendered impossible.

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