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## **Operation Market Garden**

**twee culturen op  
 één kussen...  
 self-Constructive  
 with Lilith Love**

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# self-CONSTRUCTIVE with Lilith Love

*Dutch selfie queen  
Lilith Love, initiates  
the national selfie  
exhibition.*



More than 500 people replied when Dutch photographer Lilith Love, born 1964 in Sevenum, asked people to send in their best selfie. Some even sent in more than one. In total about 570 selfies were received. They are shown at the exhibition 'self-CONSTRUCTIVE', along 28 large self-portraits by Lilith.

The opening of the exhibition 'self-CONSTRUCTIVE' was on September 26. Between 250 and 300 people attended the opening.

Earlier, the photos were placed on a Facebook page and people could comment and/or 'like' them. The 8 photographs with the most likes were enlarged for the exhibition. One of these winning works was selected by Lilith and printed on the huge banner displayed on the facade of the building where the exhibition is held. On Saturday, October the 11<sup>th</sup> a meet and greet was organised and everyone was invited to meet Lilith.





### Selfie Queen

Lilith Love is the Dutch Selfie Queen. She can't even remember when she received that title. It just happened and has been called that ever since.

March 2014 was pronounced the Month of Photography and Dutch broadcasting company AVRO organised a selfie competition. About 3000 people sent in their favourite selfie. Lilith's work 'Singer' was selected as the winner of the Public Award. Her work 'Mystifier' became second, selected by a professional jury. The finals were broadcasted on television during the program Opium Night.

It all started when Lilith Love, born as Henriette van Gasteren, quit her job as a secretary (1983-2000), after the birth of her third child she chose to be a full time mum.

"Being a full time mother gave me the time to think about my life and where I wanted it to go."

In between looking after husband and children Lilith wrote an erotic cookbook. One of the stories has been published. Then someone gave Lilith a second-hand webcam.

Lilith thought; "AHA, now I can make my own pictures to illustrate my stories. With a Kodak compact camera I started making self-portraits using mirrors. When I was a secretary I knew I was creative, but while working as a photographer I discovered that I am very expressive too." In 2006 Lilith bought a Nikon.

"Someone gave me a remote shutter release. From there I knew, I could create anything I wanted to." And that's what she did. She created countless numbers of self portraits and the public started to appreciate her work.

For her major project; 'A house is not a home', she made self-portraits in her own house. But after a few years she wanted to expand her working space. She asked people in Limburg if she could use their homes to take photographs. 70 people reacted and invited her into their homes. Some even gave her the key to their house, to be able to work there while they were not home.

"This blind trust of people in me is so heart warming", Lilith says.

Lilith Love's work is inspired by her daily life as a housewife, her catholic background, but also music. Many of her portraits carry the title of a well known song





Singer © Lilith Love

like: A house is not a home, Take these broken wings, Mrs Boombastic and Smooth operator.

Five of her photographs are exhibited as part of the collection in the Museum Van Bommel Van Dam in Venlo. One self-portrait is hanging on the wall near the entrance of a hospital in Heerlen. The Limburg's Museum in Venlo owns and exhibits four self-portraits. Museum Ikob in Eupen, Belgium has one of Lilith's self-portraits in its collection.

Even though making self portraits is her main objective, Lilith also keeps an open mind to create other works of art.

She organises life master classes where she teaches people how to create their best self-portrait. She shows people her little secrets in working with the camera. People from all ages, from 3 to 93, participate and they all have a great time. The result of one of these master classes is a group portrait, which includes Lilith. This photograph is hanging on the wall of the Valuas College in Venlo.

In 2011, she was asked to take some photographs of a young woman with Lyme's disease, named Risja. Lilith says: 'Risja was a beautiful young woman dreaming to become an artist. But she was paralysed and bedridden, because of Lyme's disease.'

Lilith was intrigued by Risja and decided to make this their project, two strong women.

Over a period of one and a half year, Lilith and Risja made an impressive and touching documentary about Risja's daily life. Finally the book: 'Risja, a story by Lilith', subtitled: 'This is bugging me' was published in Amsterdam:

The profit goes to Stichting TeekOnMe, founded by Risja's parents on Lilith's instigation. The money will be spent on research on Lyme's disease (teek is the Dutch word for Tick).

One photo of the documentary was awarded first prize

at the exhibition: 'Real Life', at the Dark Room Gallery in Vermont, US.

#### **Erotic**

Many of Lilith's photographs are nude and considered erotic. Her book 'Lilith', published in 2014, shows a large selection of her work. 750 copies have been printed and already 450 have been sold. But not everyone appreciates her work. 'Forgive me, Father, for...' was refused in Rolduc, Kerkrade, where the priests are educated. Other works of Lilith were refused at an exhibition in Monchengladbach, Germany. Because of all the commotion around the self-portrait, it ended on the front page of daily newspaper Spits. Many of Lilith's photographs reveal the domestic goddess in her. She spills soup on the floor and spicy noodles all over her body and kitchen bench.

Why this emphasis on food and sensuality?

"But of course," she says. "Food and sex are the basic elements of life."

That Lilith Love's photography contains a lot of nudity didn't go unnoticed by a local priest in the traditionally Catholic province of Limburg. The erotic pictures were a thorn in the flesh of the priest. Without actually ever having seen any of her works, he wrote an article in the newsletter of the local parish in which he criticised Lilith's work for being too nude, too suggestive and sometimes even more explicit.

In a reaction to this article Lilith invited the priest to come to the exhibition and have a look at her arts himself. To her big surprise and admiration he accepted the invitation. They had an interesting conversation, a diner and in the end Lilith challenged the priest to make a self-portrait with her. Again to Lilith's surprise he accepted the challenge and they created a photograph of the priest washing Lilith's feet. The photos were made in his church below the 17<sup>th</sup> century painting of Mary Magdalena drying Jesus' feet.



"It is great to see how two people from totally different worlds can create something beautiful and are able to communicate", Lilith says. "That's the message of this self-portrait."

The photos are part of Lilith's latest project which consists of self-portraits, with other people, but Lilith is playing a minor part in the pictures. There is also the photograph of a butcher, carrying Lilith over his shoulder like a piece of meat.

#### Father

Lilith Love has a warm relationship with her father. He admires her work and supports her and occasionally cooperates as a model.

In the 'Prodigal Daughter' he acts as a priest. In real life he used to be an acolyte so the clothes and the large rosary are his. At his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, Lilith made a portrait of him and herself, resting her head on his knees. The title, 'Still Life' is her father's idea.

Before she pushes the button Lilith does some serious thinking.

"Everything has to be perfect. But I do welcome the unexpected as well", she says. She only uses Photoshop to optimise her work not to get rid of wrinkles or striae. "It's who I am. A human body changes over time as we grow older. I want to show these changes as well." Her work is particularly strong in composition and light fall. Sometimes it's outright naughty, sometimes



touching, but always surprising and genius. Every photo tells its own story. The photograph 'Banquet' with a nude Lilith and a pig's head, reveres to her opinion that although a woman is made of flesh and blood, she is not just a piece of meat. She received many strong and emotional reactions to this self-portrait. Now it is on display at the museum Van Bommel Van Dam in Venlo. Lilith's photos show her beauty, but her vulnerability is for everyone to see.

"Expressing myself in the self-portraits is essential", she says. "I decide what I do and what a photograph should look like. I couldn't do this if someone else was the photographer."

"With my body I am telling my own story, otherwise it would be someone else's story. It's my diary."

Lilith shares her life with the public. At the end of her life people will know: "This was Lilith, this was her life."

'self-CONSTRUCTIVE' is open to the public from 26 September to 23 November 2014, at ECI, the Culture Factory in Roermond. Opening times Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday from 11.00am till 7.00pm, Thursday and Friday from 11.00am till 8.00pm 

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