



# Introduction

The book *De Vergelding* (2013) (the reckoning) by Dutch author Jan Brokken deals with the massacre that was perpetrated in 1944 by German soldiers in the Dutch village of Rhooen and the impact the war has had on the local community. The German newspaper *Die Welt* wrote that Brokken, in his internationally acclaimed book, cleared nothing up, but “managed something more important: showing us the war from the inside out and describing the consequences of the destruction that continues until well beyond the end of the war (...). The thought that with his work he could discover the ‘truth’, is parted with by Brokken at the very beginning of the book (...) when he tells us that the war is over only when people have told everything. Meaning: never.”

In 1995, thousands of Muslims were taken from an enclave in the town of Srebrenica in former Yugoslavia, under the eyes of Dutch soldiers of the UN peacekeeping mission installed to offer protection. An astounding number, more than 8,000 boys and men, were later murdered.

This year, this tragic event is commemorated extensively. Partly because so much has not been cleared up, there is sadness, resentment, frustration and anxiety among survivors and relatives, those involved and those responsible. Here too is a trauma that will never pass.

## *A Crushed Image (20 years after Srebrenica)*

22 March - 12 April 2015

Opening: Saturday 21 March, 17 hrs

Work on cover: Peter Koole, *United in loss*, 2010-2011 (left side of diptych)

Photo: Peter Hilz | letter design: Autobahn

Stroom Den Haag presents the exhibition *A Crushed Image (20 years after Srebrenica)* as part of its longer running program *See You in The Hague*. This exhibition brings together the painting series *The Balkan Paintings* by Rotterdam artist Peter Koole with mostly new work by Jason File, artist and prosecutor at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague. Both try to fathom 'Srebrenica'.

Peter Koole commits as it were, psycho-analysis on Dutch society. How have we dealt with the trauma of Srebrenica? Our media, our politicians? What role does our national character play in this? Our religion, our language? His series culminates in the poignant diptych *United in loss* dealing with collective experience of loss. Central to the diptych is July 11, 2010, the day the Dutch football team lost the World Cup final with 1-0 from Spain and 775 identified victims of the massacre at Srebrenica were reburied.

Jason File withdraws evidence from its functional, legal status by placing it in a different context where artistic and aesthetic considerations, and not the truth, come first, and hence showing us possible meanings of this material. The material thus becomes more obscure, humane and meaningful and enriches our dealings with this historical event. And, by doing this, he brings the Yugoslavia Tribunal, which for many of us remains nothing but an abstraction, closer.

As Jason File argues in his text *Justice, Uncompressed*, the legal process that leads to truth and justice is at odds with the artistic ambitions of an artist. What can art do other than remembering an event? Or be the realisation of a monument? What can art, in other words, do? And where should art stand aside? This brochure reflects on the points of view of the artists in the exhibition.

# Justice, Uncompressed

by Jason File

A trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) resembles the process of digital image compression called “lossy” compression. When a digital photograph, or digital video is made in its highest-quality format (called RAW for photographs, for example), it captures an enormous amount of information - much more detail than the human eye can discern without magnification. Occupying much storage space when saved, and hogging bandwidth when sent, these formats are costly to keep and unwieldy to use. Unless these images will be printed on a huge scale or shown on a cinema screen, they are usually “compressed” into one of the formats with which many readers will be familiar, such as the JPEG for still images or the MP4 for video. Digital cameras will do this for you, often without asking for your permission.

Computers (and cameras) use programmed algorithms to determine what information is important to keep and what can be thrown away (hence, “lossy” for the data that is lost) during the process of compression, with the goal of generating an image that uses far less data without affecting its readability from a distance. It is only when you magnify the image and focus on a small slice that you will see the compressed image break down into blocky pixels earlier than the uncompressed image.

Jason File, *The End*, detail (from *The Hole Truth* series), 2015  
Courtesy the Zabłudowicz Collection, London

In its laws, rules, procedures, technology and practical resource constraints, an international criminal tribunal has its own compression algorithm. Under a tent, the physical remains of a victim excavated from a mass grave are converted into words and images on paper through the mediating influence of an investigator drafting a report. The report becomes a proxy for the real thing, the smell of the location, the dirt, the feel of a bone which itself stands in for the personal experience of the victim himself, now irretrievably lost. Much raw information and experience is removed in order to distill the facts that are *relevant* for the purpose of the investigation. The report is uploaded into a digital database alongside many other pieces of documentary evidence—compression within compression. Analyzing a large trove of this evidence, prosecutors must choose which events to



raise in court, and which witnesses and documents to use to prove responsibility, due to the time- and resource-impossibility of presenting every set of facts, every document, every witness. When a final judgment arrives, even as it may span many hundreds or even thousands of pages, the account of a particular massacre in a village may have been reduced to a few paragraphs containing the most relevant details proven in court, when viewed according to a given legal standard.

To be clear, this is not a critique of the ICTY's ability to arrive at judgments that inspire confidence in their outcome or process. Rather, it is an observation that every such process involves discarding information according to a given set of criteria due to the incessant march of time. This is not unique to the ICTY. Every court does this. Indeed, every *human* does this. As I sit here typing these words, and you are there reading these words, both of our attentions are more or less occupied. We may dismiss vast quantities of data from our peripheral vision or surroundings—the empty cup still sitting on the desk, the feel of our clothes on us, that person continuing to read over there—that would otherwise overwhelm us, unless we deem the sensory input sufficiently important to distract us from what we are doing. We necessarily, and intuitively, compress our own experience.

One could go so far as to say that the only thing that differs across fields of human endeavor is the algorithm—the criteria that determine what gets kept and what gets thrown away. Part of training ourselves to have an open mind may involve recognizing the compression algorithms we all use, sometimes arbitrarily.

The universe is full of an infinite amount of information, as is our world within it, and we are always, *always* making a selection. So what happens when we change the algorithm? In this case, what happens when we take the materials, procedures and context of an international criminal tribunal from the inside, and we consciously choose to look at them with the selection criteria of an artist instead of a lawyer?

Such a perspective-shift may enable some of these materials to transcend their original purpose as tools to bring us closer to accessing a singular objectivity in the context of truth-seeking trial machinery, and open up their potential for multiple, layered meanings and potentially broader cultural significance. The works on show in this exhibition hopefully serve to illustrate just a fraction of this potential. Take *The Earth and the Stars* drawings, for example. When investigators discovered remains of victims in mass grave sites, they created autopsy reports that detailed their findings regarding the cause of death and the condition of each set of remains. It was relevant to the investigation to preserve information related to the position of each body where it was recovered, along with other clues such as whether they had been blindfolded, bound at the wrists, etc. In order to document this information clearly, in addition to written descriptions for each report, the investigators were required to draw a pencil sketch showing the position and orientation of the body as it was originally found. This was preferable to photography due to the difficulty in distinguishing the remains of one body from another, and from natural material in the ground, using a photograph. Instead, the time spent by an investigator examining the scene from different angles made it possible to use their expert judgment to create

an accurate drawing of one set of remains that was far clearer at a glance.

Thousands of these documents exist, each one a small brick in the massive foundation of proof of atrocities, precisely the type of evidence that may be "compressed" into a single footnote in a judgment. As an artist, however, I found these drawings individually to be highly compelling. They assign rare, testimonial properties to drawing. Here, finally, I had found evidence in defense of the human eye and hand against their supposedly all-seeing mechanical counterpart. Yet they differ according to the investigator in fascinating, personal ways. Islands of imagery in a sea of textual documentation, they are also - of course - heartbreaking in what they permit us to imagine.

I saw potential for these drawings to speak again in a new way, perhaps to be revived. Allowing them to match the scale of that which they were describing might help us to remember that they reflect an iconic trace of the form occupied by one, specific soul formerly walking the earth with us, made of the same material as us, as the drawing, as the earth, as the stars.



### **The Hole Truth, 2015**

Series of 12 original works titled:

**The End - Next Time - Wild Metal - Code Map - Fix Facts - Stop - Vague Day - Empty Mark - The Void - Uncharted Territory - White Noise - Dead Radio**

At the center of each of the twelve A4-sized works in *The Hole Truth* series lies a single piece of circular paper hole-punch waste generated by the hole-punching function of printers at the ICTY used to create ring binders of evidence presented at trial. Each work therefore corresponds with a specific piece of paper in an evidence or document binder at the Tribunal. After noticing that one punched hole had randomly isolated the words “the end”, the artist, with assistants, combed through thousands of additional pieces of hole-punch waste to identify and preserve additional examples of text or images extracted by this process.

Each work includes heavy canvas placed under tension in a way that not only engages with the history of painting, but also may suggest the locations where physical evidence uncovered at investigation sites was transformed into documentary evidence in reports. Some of the first excavations of mass graves in Bosnia & Herzegovina took place under circus tents, which were the only means available at the time to shield the sites from bad weather. The placement of raised areas under the canvas and the paper circle correspond to incident locations or mass grave sites as indicated on maps used at the ICTY.

Jason File, *The End*, (from the *The Hole Truth* series), 2015  
Courtesy the Zabłudowicz Collection, London



### Erasing a Classified Military Document, 2013

This video (duration 1 min. 39 sec.) documents a performance by the artist using an industrial shredding machine to destroy the material form of an institutional military secret. Termed by the artist as a “readymade performance,” this work employs and repurposes a real and consequential event, mining it for aesthetic and critical content. The title of the work connects it to a history of artists who have used destruction as a creative gesture, including Robert Rauschenberg’s *Erased De Kooning Drawing* (1953).



Jason File, *Erasing a Classified Military Document*, 2013, video stills



## The Earth and the Stars, 2015

Each image in this series of wall drawings is a life-sized enlargement of a forensic investigator's drawing from an ICTY autopsy report pertaining to the recovery in situ of an individual's remains from a massgrave site in the former Yugoslavia. The title of the series is inspired by the proverb, possibly of Serbian origin: "Be humble for you are made of earth. Be noble for you are made of stars."

Jason File, *The Earth and the Stars*, 2015



## Colofon

### *A Crushed Image (20 years after Srebrenica)*

Texts: Olphaert den Otter, Arno van Roosmalen, Jason File, Peter Koole

Translations: Willem Kramer (text Olphaert den Otter), Willem Groenewegen (texts in paintings Peter Koole), Stroom Den Haag  
Photography: Peter Hilz (work Peter Koole), Jason File  
Basic guide design: Thonik

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The exhibition is made possible in part by The City of The Hague.



This exhibition is part of the Stroom program *See You in The Hague* (2013-2016), a multifaceted narrative about the ambitions and reality of The Hague as International City of Peace and Justice.

[www.seeyouinthehague.nl](http://www.seeyouinthehague.nl)  
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DISCLAIMER: Artwork, text or any other expression by Jason File in relation to this art exhibition is made strictly in his personal capacity as an artist. It is not endorsed by, and does not necessarily reflect the views of, the United Nations, the ICTY or the Office of the Prosecutor.

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